

ARGO: THE FIRST SHIP?

An influential tradition (see Schol. Euripides, *Med.* 1.1 and Catullus 64 *init.*)¹) was that Argo was the first ship, and hence often a symbol of primal sin. Yet, in his *Argonautica* (2. 1095) Apollonius of Rhodes has the sons of Phrixus on a ship²):

Κολχίδα νῆ' ἐπιβάντες, ἔν' ἄσπετον ὄλβον ἄρωνται:

1) Although of the variant readings for the crucial eleventh line of Cat. 64 ms O gives us *proram* for *prima* and ms GR *primam*; *Amphitritem* seems to have been the reading of the lost ms V, and *Amphitrite* is a correction found in O. Cp., too, Ovid, *Met.* 6. 719–21; *Am.* 1. 15. 21–2, and 2. 11. 1–6. See also H. Herter, *RhM* 91, 1942, 244 ff. For an overview of the problem see Jessen, *Argo*, *RE* II 1 (1895) 721 ff. (who suggests *inter alia* that Argo may have been the first large military ship).

2) The Phrixids were escaping from King Aeetes and making their way to Orchomenus to claim their patrimony when they were shipwrecked off the island of Ares. Their ship was just one vessel belonging to a *complete* Colchian fleet.

that is to say they were on a ship anterior to Argo. He also has Ariadne on a ship anterior to Argo (3. 1000)³):

ἀλλ' ἡ μὲν καὶ νηός, ἐπεὶ χόλον εὖνασε Μίνως,
σὺν τῷ ἐφεζομένῃ πάτρην λίπε.

At no stage in his narrative does Apollonius state that Argo was the first ship. Indeed, the poet gives us a different impression in his description of Argo's launch. The following lines, for example,

Αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ δμῶεσσιν ἐπαρτέα πάντ' ἐτέτυκτο
ὅσσα περ ἐντύνονται ἴεπαρτέα ἐνδοθι νῆες,
εὔτ' ἂν ἄγῃ χρεὸς ἀνδρᾶς ὑπεῖρ ἄλα ναυτίλλεσθαι ... (1. 234–6)

and

Ἄλλα μὲν, ὅσα τε νηὶ ἐφοπλίσσασθαι ἔοικεν,
πάντα μάλ' εὖ κατὰ κόσμον ἐπαρτέα κείται ἰούσιν (1. 332–3)

presuppose a tradition of seafaring. At lines 560–2 we are told that Argo is in the expert hands of Tiphys:

φραδοσύνῃ μήτι τε δαΐφρονος Ἀγνιάδαο
Τίφυος, ὃς δ' ἐνὶ χερσὶν εὐξοα τεχνηέντως
πηδάλι' ἀμφιέπεσκ', ὄφρ' ἔμπεδον ἐξιθύνου:

who has been described at lines 106–8 as

ἔσθλός μὲν ὀρινόμενον προδαῖναι
κῦμ' ἁλὸς εὐρείης, ἔσθλός δ' ἀνέμοιο θυέλλας,
καὶ πλόον ἠελίῳ τε καὶ ἀστέρι τεκμήρασθαι.

Clearly, Tiphys, master mariner, had sailed on ships anterior to Argo. According to Apollonius, at least two other crew members, Erginus and Ancaeus, have had previous shipboard experience. Apollonius says of them at lines 188–9:

ἴστορε δ' ἄμφω
ἡμὲν ναυτιλίας ἡδ' ἄρεος εὐχετόωντο.

Consider also the poet's boast at lines 113–4:

τῷ καὶ πασάων προφερεστάτῃ ἔπλετο νηῶν
ὅσαι ὑπ' εἰρεσίῃσιν ἐπειρήσαντο θαλάσσης.

3) So too Catullus 64, 52 ff. In Apollonius, Jason in trying to persuade Medea to help him tells her how Ariadne had helped Theseus and had *sailed* off with him.

The tenor of these verses speaks for itself. We may safely conclude that Apollonius did not represent Argo as the first ship. But was Apollonius being creatively selective? Was he rejecting a long established literary tradition?⁴⁾

In the light of these questions the scholiast makes an interesting remark⁵⁾: ὁ μὲν Ἀπολλώνιος καλεῖ τὴν Ἀργὴν ἀπὸ Ἀργου τοῦ κατασκευάσαντος, Φερεκύδης (FGrHist 3 F 106) δὲ ἀπὸ Ἀργου τοῦ Φοῖβου υἱοῦ. ταύτην δὲ λέγουσι πρώτην ναῦν γεγενῆσθαι. ἄλλοι δὲ λέγουσιν, <ὅτι> Δαναὸς διωκόμενος ὑπὸ Αἰγύπτου <τὴν> πρώτην κατεσκεύασε, ὅθεν καὶ Δαναΐς ἐκλήθη.

Herodotus mentions Danaus' voyage in his *Histories*, and Aeschylus and Euripides mention the ship. The story is well attested in early Greek literature. We know of an early anonymous epic, the *Danaïs*⁶⁾, which was closely followed by Aeschylus in a tetralogy⁷⁾. Both "Hesiod" and Hecataeus of Miletus refer to Da-

4) A. S. Pease (Cicero: De Natura Deorum [Cambridge Mass. 1955] 2. 89.) sees lines 316–22 of the fourth book of the *Argonautica* as an allusion by Apollonius to a tradition, which the poet himself has discarded, that Argo was the first ship (followed by R. L. Hunter, Apollonius of Rhodes, *Argonautica* Book III [Cambridge 1989] 340–6, p. 136; and noted by P. Händel, Beobachtungen zur epischen Technik des Apollonios Rhodios [Munich 1954] 58; H. Fränkel, Noten zu den Argonautika des Apollonios Rhodios [Munich 1968] 477; E. Livrea, Apollonii Rhodii Argonauticon: Liber IV [Florence 1973] 105, *ad loc.* 317; and F. Vian, Apollonios de Rhodes, Argonautiques chant 3 [Paris 1981] 83 n. 4). Pease is actually commenting on a Ciceronian quotation from Accius' *Medea* (N.D. 2. 89–90; see also R. F. Thomas, Catullus 64: Polemics in Poetic References, *AJP* 103, 1982, 159), where, Pease believes, Accius is portraying Argo as the first ship. Pease is undoubtedly right when he says that Accius is here drawing upon the Apollonian passage, but there is little conviction of an allusion by Apollonius to a first ship tradition, even allowing for Hellenistic innuendo. The emphasis, surely, is on how the local shepherds are cast into an instant state of trepidation by their first sight of ships, in this case those of the Colchians: οὐ γὰρ πῶ ἀλίας γε πάρος ποθὶ νῆας ἴδοντο (319). Pease seems to me to stretch a point too far when he argues that Apollonius' use of the plural forms νηῶν (317) and νῆας (319) was unintentional, that the poet was really referring to Argo rather than to the Colchian ships, and that therefore Apollonius was alluding to a first ship tradition. The fear of shepherds at the first sight of ships is a common motif in Hellenistic poetry, as Fränkel and Livrea show (*ibid.*). And, besides, Cicero, surely, is simply comparing on the one hand a philosopher's first view of the world and his concomitant complexity as to its true nature and on the other a shepherd's first view of a ship and his similar accompanying puzzlement: *ille apud Accium pastor qui navem numquam ante vidisset...*

5) Sch. Ap. Rh. 1. 4e. pp. 7–8 Wendel.

6) Danaïs T and FF 1–3, p. 141 Davies. See also G. L. Huxley, Greek Epic Poetry (London 1969) 35, and M. L. West, The Hesiodic Catalogue of Women (Oxford 1985) 151.

7) Huxley, *op. cit.* p. 34 (with n. 2).

naus' immigratory voyage into Greece from Egypt⁸). Herodotus specifically mentions Danaus' voyage at 2.91: τὸν γὰρ Δαναὸν καὶ τὸν Λυγκέα ἐόντας Χερμίας ἐκπλῶσαι ἐς τὴν Ἑλλάδα. On three other occasions (2.171; 2.182; 7.94) Herodotus refers to the Danaid journey; at 2.182 he records the ship's call at Lindus in Rhodes *en route* from Egypt to Greece. Aeschylus mentions the voyage at the beginning of the second⁹) play in his Danaid tetralogy (Danaus' daughters, who sailed with him, are speaking):

Ζεὺς μὲν ἀφίκτωρ ἐπίδοι προφρόνως
στόλον ἡμέτερον νάιον ἀρθέντ'
ἀπὸ προστομίων λεπτοψαμάτων
Νείλου (Suppl. 1–4).

And, with ships anterior to Argo in mind¹⁰), one notes also the mention by Aeschylus, in the same play, of Aegyptus' sons' fleet which pursued the Danaids (Aegyptus' sons speak here):
ξὺν ὄχῳ ταχυήρει / πέμψατε πόντονδ' (Suppl. 32–3).

In Aeschylus' *Suppliants* (928) Aegyptus does not sail with his sons; and on this point Aeschylus is agreeing with Hecataeus¹¹), who doubted that Aegyptus had as many as fifty, or even twenty, sons, but did not doubt that both the Danaids and the sons of Aegyptus made voyages of emigration or pursuit from Egypt to Argos. Euripides, however, states that most people say that Aegyptus did sail with his sons, as the following fragment shows us¹²):

Αἴγυπτος, ὥς ὁ πλεῖστος ἔσπαρται λόγος,
ξὺν παισὶ πεντήκοντα ναυτίλῳ πλάτῃ
Ἄργος κατασχών.

Here, Euripides is in agreement with Phrynichus: Φρύνιχος δὲ ὁ τραγικός φησι σὺν (fort. ἐν) Αἰγυπτίοις τὸν Αἴγυπτον ἡκεῖν εἰς Ἄργος¹³). So, the story was related in early Greek tragedy as well as in epic.

8) See FF 127–8 M–W; also Huxley *ibid*.

9) Cp. W. Rösler, *RhM* 136 (1993) 7 ff.

10) There is, incidentally, no extant literary evidence to suggest that the Greeks ever thought of the kind of ark used by Deucalion and Pyrrha as the first ship ever; indeed, this is not mentioned at all in extant Greek literature. Cp. Pindar, *Ol.* 9.42.

11) *FGrHist* 1 F 19; also Huxley *ibid*.

12) F 846 Nauck.

13) Two of Phrynichus' dramas were entitled *Aegyptii* and *Danaides*, and

In the first book (133–8) of his *Argonautica* Apollonius names Nauplius¹⁴) as one of the crew, and gives his genealogy. Nauplius, according to Apollonius, was the great-great-grandson of an earlier Nauplius, ὃς περὶ πάντας ἐκαίνυτο ναυτιλίῃσιν. This earlier Nauplius, Apollonius tells us, was the son of Poseidon and Amymone, daughter of king Danaus himself. According to Pausanias (4.35.2), “The Nauplians were Egyptians at an earlier period who arrived in the Argolid with Danaus’ fleet and were settled three generations later by Amymone’s son Nauplius in Nauplia”¹⁵). Theon of Alexandria¹⁶) says that the ancient Greeks credited this Nauplius with having invented the art of steering by the Great Bear constellation.

F. Vian and R. L. Hunter think that Euripides may have thought of Argo as the first ship at Androm. 865¹⁷):

Φθιάδος ἐκ γᾶς
κυνόπτερος ὄρνις εἶθ’ εἶην,
ἦ πευκᾶεν
σκάφος, ἃ διὰ κυανέας ἐπέρασεν ἄκτᾶς
πρωτόπλοος πλάτα.

But, equally, these verses can be interpreted as meaning that Argo was the first (Greek) ship to pass into the Black Sea. If we accept the theory that Homer adopted various elements from the original Argonautic saga into his *Odyssey*, and that his Πλαγκταί, Κυάνεαι and Συμπληγάδες (or Συνδρομάδες) were one and the same pheno-

they probably formed part of a trilogy; see Nauck p. 720, Huxley op. cit. 35, and G. Norwood, *Greek Tragedy* (London 1920) 6–7.

14) This Nauplius is usually associated with Nauplius the Wrecker. The Wrecker was so-called because he lured many of the Greek ships returning from Troy onto the rocks of the Euboean coastline by lighting false beacons. He held the Greeks responsible for the murder of his son Palamedes. See Euripides, *Helen* 766 ff. and 1126 ff. The story was clearly well known to the Hellenistic audience at Alexandria, see Lycophron *Alex.* 384 ff., 1093 ff., 1217 ff. Cp. also Valerius Flaccus, *Arg.* 1.370–2.

15) Archaeology tells us that Nauplia was one of the main centres of Mycenaean civilisation in the Argolid which was settled c. 1600 B. C. (Late Helladic 1). Another such settlement was Lerna, and, interestingly, Apollonius calls the earlier Nauplius’ grandson Lernus (1.135).

16) A distinguished philosopher and mathematician of the fourth century A.D., who was the last known member of the Alexandrian Museum and the author of commentaries on Aratus, Euclid and Ptolemy. The oldest and best ms of Aratus (Marcianus 476 = M) represents the recension of Theon, who makes his comments concerning Nauplius at line 27 of the *Phaenomena*.

17) F. Vian, op. cit. vol. 1 (1974) 55 n. 3; Hunter, op. cit. 340–6, p. 136.

menon which lay at the entrance to the Black Sea¹⁸), then the Homeric mention of Argo at Od. 12 (69–70):

οἷη δὴ κείνη γε παρέπλω ποντοπόρος νηῦς
 ἄργῳ πασιμέλουσα, παρ' Αἰήταο πλέουσα¹⁹)

suggests the celebration of an event more suited to the latter interpretation of the Euripidean verses quoted above than to the former one suggested by Vian and Hunter. This apparent tradition that Argo's voyage symbolises the first Greek exploratory expedition into the Black Sea is again reflected in the opening lines of Euripides' *Medea*:

Εἴθ' ὦφελ' ἄργους μὴ διαπτάσθαι σάφους
 Κόλχων ἐς αἶαν κυανέας Συμπληγάδας,
 μηδ' ἐν νάπαισι Πηλίου πεσεῖν ποτε
 τμηθεῖσα πεύκη, μηδ' ἐρετμῶσαι χέρας
 ἀνδρῶν ἀριστέων, οἳ τὸ πάγχρυσον δέρας
 Πελῖα μετῆλθον.

In his thirteenth *Idyll* Theocritus writes (21–24):

σὺν δ' αὐτῷ κατέβαιναν Ὑλας εὐεδρον ἐς Ἄργῳ,
 ὅτις κυανεῶν οὐχ ἄψατο συνδρομάδων ναῦς,
 ἀλλὰ διεξάιξε βαθὺν δ' εἰσέδραμε Φᾶσιν,
 αἰετὸς ὧς, μέγα λαῖτμα, ἄφ' οὗ τότε χοιράδες ἔσταν.

Quite clearly, in his introduction of Argo to his audience Theocritus mentions her most celebrated exploit and attribute. We know this because Theocritus' epithetic statement has absolutely no bearing on the tale which he is about to tell. Let us remember that the latter consideration also applies to the references in the *Odyssey* and in both the *Andromache* and *Medea* of Euripides. Clearly, therefore, Theocritus knew that his audience would instantly recognise the feat for which Argo was renowned. Here, surely, we

18) See Herodotus, Hist. 4.85; Simonides F 22 D–K; Euripides, I. T. 241, 421. See also K. Meuli, *Odyssee und Argonautika* (Berlin 1921) passim, and D. Page, *The Homeric Odyssey* (Oxford 1955) 2.

19) In the original version of the tale the Argonauts probably returned by the same route as they sailed out; cp. Herodorus FGrHist 31 F 10 = Sch. Ap. Rh. 4. 257–62b, p. 273 Wendel. Some may argue that in Euripides' *Andromache* πρῶτό-πλοος means "on her maiden voyage", which is its sense in both Homer's *Odyssey* (8.35) and Euripides' *Helen* (1531), but this only enhances the impression that Argo's fame rested on her being the first (Greek) ship to enter the Black Sea. Cp. Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*: "We were the first / That ever burst / Into that silent sea."

have a more accurate reflection of the Hellenistic viewpoint on Argo's claim to fame than that which is suggested by the words of Eratosthenes (Cat. 35). Eratosthenes is the first Greek writer, so far as we know, to have referred to Argo as the first ship: Αὕτη διὰ τὴν Ἀθηναίων ἐν τοῖς ἄστροις ἐτάχθη – πρώτη γὰρ αὕτη ναὺς κατεσκευάσθη, φωνήεσσα δὲ γενομένη πρώτη τὸ πέλαγος διεῖλεν ἄβατον ὄν – ἔν' ἣ τοῖς ἐπιγινόμενοις παράδειγμα σαφέστατον. Eratosthenes may well have introduced this idea because he felt that Argo's Black Sea reputation was too inadequate a reason for her subsequent commitment to the stars, a main feature of his composition as the title of his work suggests²⁰). Aratus of Soli, whose *Phaenomena* must have greatly influenced Eratosthenes' *Catasterismoi*, and who based his poem on the star catalogues of Eudoxus of Cnidus, does *not* refer to Argo as the first ship²¹). To claim, as C. Segal does²²), that the opinion expressed by Eratosthenes represents a general viewpoint of Hellenistic authors is much too ambitious. Callimachus (h. 4.43) speaks of the existence of human sailors even before the birth of Apollo²³). And Dionysius Scytobrachion, who com-

20) The second πρώτη suggests a version sufficient in itself. One even wonders whether πρώτη γὰρ αὕτη ναὺς κατεσκευάσθη could be an interpolation.

21) Instead, Aratus twice uses the phrase πολυτερέος Ἀργούς (lines 604, 686). Interestingly, in an attempt to explain this epithet, the scholiast says: Κατηστερίσθη δὲ αὕτη διὰ τὴν Ἀθηναίων, ὅτι πρώτη ναὺς ἐδεῖχθη παρ' αὐτῆς. But the scholiast may well have been influenced by Eratosthenes' remarks, and this scholion does not appear at all in the best MSS of Aratus. (For the oldest and best ms of Aratus see n. 18 above. The second best Vaticanus 1307 (= V) is generally believed to have been derived from M or from the archetype of M).

22) C. Segal, Pindar's Mythmaking – The Fourth Pythian Ode (Princeton 1986) 100.

23) I am reminded of this by Professor Frederick Williams, who kindly sent me a typescript of his recent Groningen paper "Callimachus and the Supranormal" (now published: *Hellenistica Groningana*: Vol. I. Callimachus, 217–26), where he also mentions the ships in H. Hom. 7 (Dionysus and the pirates). If these latter were Pelasgian, as is generally accepted (Allen-Halliday 381 n. 8), they too would have been anterior to Argo. And in H. Hom. 3 (392 ff.) Apollo encounters a Cretan ship on its way to (Nestorian) Pylos from Minoan Cnossus. By his context the writer localises the home of the cult of Apollo Delphinus in Crete. It is uncertain whether the author of the hymn is correct in making Crete the cult's first home, but if he is, then the tale is likely to be older than that of Argo. – It is interesting to note that in Callimachus' *Hecale* we find Theseus' father Aegeus living with Medea. This is the situation when the young hero first arrives in Athens after his growth to manhood in Troezen, and it is, therefore, *prior* to his Cretan voyage to King Minos. This, of course, would mean that Theseus' Cretan voyage and his affair with Ariadne post-dated Argo's sailing. But it still does not mean that Argo was the first ship. Nor does it confirm that Medea's presence at Athens was ever part of the *Theseid*, which is unlikely. Philochorus was the first writer to mention *Hecale* and

posed his rationalistic *Argonautica* sometime between 270 and 220 B. C.²⁴), speaks of the Pontus at the time just before Argo's building as an inhospitable land inhabited ὑπὸ ἐθνῶν βαρβάρων καὶ παντελῶς ἀγρίων . . . , ξενοκτονούντων τῶν ἐγχωρίων τοὺς καταπλέοντας. Now, καταπλέοντας means "sailing from the high seas to the shore" and is used of deep-sea vessels²⁵). So, clearly, Dionysius does not think of Argo as the first ship either; there had been other ocean-going vessels anterior to her building. But he does think of her as something special: καὶ πρῶτον μὲν περὶ τὸ Πήλιον ναυπηγήσασθαι σκάφος, πολὺ τῷ μεγέθει καὶ τῇ λοιπῇ κατασκευῇ τὴν τότε συνήθειαν ὑπερβάλλον, διὰ τὸ σχεδίαις πλεῖν τοὺς τότε ἀνθρώπους καὶ μικροῖς παντελῶς ἀκατίοις. Argo's vast superiority over the other vessels of her day is neatly expressed by the author's use of hyperbole in σχεδίαις . . . καὶ μικροῖς παντελῶς ἀκατίοις, which is reflected, surely, in the preceding σκάφος, πολὺ . . . ὑπερβάλλον²⁶). But although very different from anything which had sailed before her, she is, plainly, not the first ship ever.

Finally, we should perhaps recall here the words of the Augustan fable-writer Phaedrus (4.7.18 f.) who lived in an age when the tradition of Argo's absolute primacy was firmly established²⁷) but whose literary models were Greek: *longe quia vetustior* (sc. *quam Argo*) *Aegaea Minos classe perdomuit freta*²⁸).

he seems to have been one of the main sources for Callimachus in his poem (A.S. Hollis, Callimachus: *Hecale* [Oxford 1990] 6 ff.) But although Plutarch names Philochorus as the source for the *Hecale* story (Thes. ch. 14 = FGrHist 328 F 109) he does not say the same for the account of Medea's relationship with Aegeus (ch. 12). The source for this particular element of the Callimachean poem seems to have been the *Aegeus* of Euripides (Hollis 139 ff.). And it does not take much imagination to suppose that this may well have been a Euripidean innovation. Sophocles also wrote an *Aegeus* (F 19–25a Radt = vol. 1, p. 16 ff. Pearson) but does not seem to have mentioned Medea at all (R. Pfeiffer F 230 p. 227 n. [a]; but see also Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood, Theseus as Son and Stepson, BICS Suppl. 40, 1979, 56–7). None of this, however, relates to Argo's absolute primacy or otherwise.

24) See J. S. Rusten, *Dionysius Scytobrachion* (Cologne 1982) 85 ff.

25) F 14 Rusten, pp. 144–5 = Diod. 4. 40–1. This, presumably, would include ships from *outside* the confines of the Black Sea. It was even more likely, therefore, that Argo was celebrated as the first *Greek* ship to enter the Pontus.

26) The possible argument that Dionysius here saw Argo as the first *real* ship, rather than emphasising Argo's superiority, cannot be taken too seriously: by Dionysius' time both σχεδία and ἀκατος (dimin. ἀκάτιον, used almost indiscriminately by Hellenistic writers) are simply "ships". Euripides refers to both terms as ποντοπόρους, or "ocean-going" (Hec. 111 and 445–6).

27) But see C. Weber, Two Chronological Contradictions in Catullus 64, TAPA 113, 1983, 263–71.

28) Professor David Konstan has pointed out to me in conversation that of ships anterior to Argo there must also have been the respective vessels of the

It would seem, therefore, that Apollonius was, after all, complying with a long established Greek literary tradition rather than rejecting it. For him, as for his Greek literary predecessors, Argo was the best and most famous of all ships (Homer's Ἀργὼ πασιμέλουσα), but she was not the first. It is most probable that Greek literary tradition represented as the first ship ever the vessel which Danaus used in his flight from Egypt to Greece. Argo was, however, the first Greek ship to enter the Black Sea, and in this she symbolises the first Greek exploratory expedition to that area.

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brothers Cadmus, Cilix and Thasus, who went in search of their sister Europa. Herodotus (2.44) recalls his own visit to a temple of Heracles on Thasos which he tells us was built by the Phoenician settlers on the island after they had *sailed* (ἐκπλώσαντες) in search of Europa five generations before Heracles the son of Amphytryon appeared in Greece.