

## WHY IS VALERIUS FLACCUS A QUINDECIMVIR?

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'Valerius Flaccus knows how to write with elegant precision' – R. Syme, *Tacitus* (Oxford, 1958), 89.

Val. Fl. 1.1-21:

Prima deum magnis canimus freta pervia natis  
fatidicamque ratem, Scythici quae Phasidis oras  
ausa sequi mediosque inter iuga concita cursus  
rumpere, flammifero tandem consedit Olympo.  
**Phoebe, mone, si Cymaeae mihi conscia vatis** 5  
**stat casta cortina domo, si laurea digna**  
**fronte viret.** tuque o, pelagi cui maior aperti  
fama, Caledonius postquam tua carbasa vexit  
oceanus Phrygios prius indignatus Iulos,  
eripe me populis et habenti nubila terrae, 10  
sancte pater, veterumque fave veneranda canenti  
facta virum. versam proles tua pandet Idumen  
(namque potest), Solymo ac nigrantem pulvere fratrem  
spargentemque faces et in omni turre furentem.  
ille tibi cultusque deum delubraque genti 15  
instituet, cum iam, genitor, lucebis ab omni  
parte poli; neque enim Tyriis Cynosura carinis  
certior aut Graeis Helice servanda magistris,  
si tu signa dabis, sed te duce Graecia mittet  
et Sidon Nilusque rates. nunc nostra serenus 20  
orsa iuves, haec ut Latias vox impleat urbes.

My song is of the straits first navigated by the mighty sons of gods, of the prophetic ship that dared to seek the shores of Scythian Phasis, that burst unswerving through the clashing rocks, to sink at length to rest in the starry firmament.

**Phoebus, be thou my guide, if there stands in a pure home the tripod that shares the secrets of the Cymaeian prophetess, if the green laurel lies on a worthy brow.** And thou too, that didst win still greater glory for opening up the sea, after the Caledonian ocean had borne thy sails, the ocean that of yore would not brook the Phrygian Iulii, do thou, holy sire, raise me above the nations and the cloud-wrapped earth, and be favourable unto me as I hymn the wondrous deeds of old time heroes. Thy son shall tell of the overthrow of Idume—for well he can—of his brother foul with the dust of Solyma, as he hurls the brands and spreads havoc in every tower. In thy honour shall he ordain sacred rites and shall raise temples to his house, what time thou, Sire, shinest all over the sky; for if thy star guides then Cynosura shall not be a surer beacon to Tyrian ships, nor Helice, whom Grecian helmsmen must watch, but beneath thy guidance Greece and Sidon and Nile shall send forth their fleets. Look kindly now on me and aid my essay, that the sound of my voice may fill the cities of Latium. (J.H. Mozley, 1934 Loeb edition).

**Quindecimviral signals in Val. Fl. 1.5-7:** N. Heinsius, *C. Valeri Flacci Argonauticon Libri VIII* (Amsterdam, 1680), ad loc.; G.B. Pius, *Gai Valeri Flacci Argonauticon Libri Octo* (Bologna, 1519), ad loc.; P. Boyancé, 'La science d'un quindécimvir au I<sup>er</sup> siècle après J.-C.', *REL* 42 (1964), 334-46 = *Études su la religion romaine* (Rome, 1972), 347-58. Accepted, with a degree of caution, by A.J. Kleywegt, *Valerius Flaccus, Argonautica Book I: A Commentary* (Leiden, 2005), 11. By contrast, F. Spaltenstein, *Commentaire des Argonautica de Valerius Flaccus (livres I et 2)* (Brussels, 2002), 26-8, rejects any connection between these lines and the quindecimvirate; cf. J.J. Newman, *The Classical Epic Tradition* (Madison, 1986), 221.

**Tripods:** Wissowa, op. cit., 500; Boyancé op. cit. The tripod, as a reference to the quindecimvirate, appears on Roman coinage in 65 BC; cf. M.H. Crawford, *Roman Republican Coinage* (Cambridge, 1974), 439 (no. 411).

**Varro on the origins of the *libri Sibyllini*:** Lactant. *Div.Inst.* 1.6.10-11. On the *libri Sibyllini*, see H.W. Parke, *Sibyls and Sibylline Prophecy in Classical Antiquity* (London, 1988), 136-51.

**Apollo and the *XVviri*:** Liv. 10.8.2; Obseq. 47; Tib. 2.5.1. On the poetic implications of locating the Sibylline books on the Palatine, see J.F. Miller, *Apollo, Augustus, and the Poets* (Cambridge, 2009), 234-47.

**Valerius really was a *XVvir*:** J. Rüpke, *Römische Priester in der Antike: ein biographisches Lexikon* (Stuttgart, 2007), 222-3 (he is by no means unique).

**Lines five through seven ‘*l’unica autorappresentazione del poeta in tutto il poema*’:** A. Barchiesi, ‘Genealogie letterarie nell’epica imperiale: fondamentalismo e ironia’, in E.A. Schmidt, F. Paschoud, & C. Wick (edd.), *L’histoire littéraire immanente dans la poésie latine* (Geneva, 2001), 315-54 (quotation from p. 327).

**Valerius’ autobiographical move ‘ruptures the usual anonymity of the epic narrative voice’:** A. Zissos, *Valerius Flaccus’ Argonautica, Book One: A Commentary* (Oxford, 2008), 81.

**Apollonius, Apollo, and the scholiasts:** Barchiesi, op. cit.

Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 1-4:

Ἀρχόμενος σέο, Φοῖβε, παλαιγενέων κλέα φωτῶν  
μνήσομαι, οἳ Πόντοιο κατὰ στόμα καὶ διὰ πέτρας  
Κυανέας βασιλῆος ἐφημοσύνη Πελῖαιο  
χρῦσειον μετὰ κῶας ἐύζυγον ἤλασαν Ἀργῶ.

Beginning with you, Phoebus, I shall recall the famous deeds of men born long ago, who, at the command of King Pelias, sailed the well-benched Argo through the mouth of the Black Sea and between the Cyanean rocks to fetch the golden fleece. (W.H. Race, 2008 Loeb edition).

**The poet becomes ‘*una sorta di “agente” di Apollo a Rome*’:** Barchiesi, op. cit., 326-8 (quotation from p. 327); Barchiesi takes this as Valerius’ response to the critical tradition (preserved in the scholia) attached to the opening of Apollonius’ epic; cf. also D. Galli, ‘Valerio Flacco (*Argon.* I) e gli scolii ad Apollonio Rodio: proposte’, *Hermes* 135 (2007), 98-104.

**Valerius takes on his quindecimviral pose ‘for reasons of literary authority’, installing himself in the role of ‘poet-as-priest and making Apollo a twofold patron deity’:** Zissos, op. cit., xiv and 80.

**Resurrecting the *vates*:** T. Stover, *Epic and Empire in Vespasianic Rome: A New Reading of Valerius Flaccus’ Argonautica* (Oxford, 2012), 151-79. On Lucan’s ‘fractured voice’, see J. Masters, *Poetry and Civil War in Lucan’s Bellum Civile* (Cambridge, 1992), 87-90; J.J. O’Hara, *Inconsistency in Roman Epic: Studies in Catullus, Lucretius, Vergil, Ovid and Lucan* (Cambridge, 2007), 131-9.

**The quindecimvirate signals the theme of divine communication in the *Argonautica*:** G. Manuwald, ‘Divine Messages and Human Actions in the *Argonautica*’, in A. Augoustakis (ed.), *Ritual and Religion in Flavian Epic* (Oxford, 2013), 35-7. Manuwald agrees with Zissos that Valerius’ quindecimviral pose underlines the poet’s relationship to Apollo.

**History and activities of the *XVviri*:** G. Wissowa, *Religion und Kultus der Römer* (Munich, 1912), 534-49; K. Latte, *Römische Religionsgeschichte* (Munich, 1960), 397-8; G. Radke, *RE* 24.1114-48; G.J. Szemler, *The Priests of the Roman Republic: A Study of Interactions between Priesthoods and Magistracies* (Brussels, 1972), 21-46, 157-66; J. Linderski, ‘Quindecimviri sacris faciundis’, *Brill’s New Pauly* 12 (Leiden, 2008), 346-7 (with further literature): originally composed of two members, this college was later (in 367 B.C.) expanded to ten members and, by the time of Sulla, to fifteen.

**XVviri supervised Greek practitioners of civic cult:** It is a longstanding inference, though not a demonstrable fact (owing to the absence of positive evidence), that, after managing the introduction of Greek cults to civic religion, the XVviri thereafter supervised them: see M. Beard, J. North, and S. Price, *Religions of Rome* (Cambridge, 1988), 1.27.

**Making the foreign Roman by keeping it foreign:** D. Feeney, *Literature and Religion at Rome: Cultures, Contexts, and Beliefs* (Cambridge 1998), esp. 47-70.

**Graeco ritu in Roman religion:** J. Scheid, 'Graeco ritu: a typically Roman way of honouring the gods', *HSPH* 97 (1995), 15-31.

**Individual XVviri in action:** e.g. the exertions of C. Cato (*tr. pl.* 56) in opposing the restoration of Ptolemy Auletes to the Egyptian throne; cf. W.J. Tatum, *The Patrician Tribune: Publius Clodius Pulcher* (Chapel Hill, 1999), 200-1. It should be noted that on at least one occasion the senate rejected a formal decree of the college: *Front. Aq.* 7.4-5, discussed by M.G. Morgan, 'The Introduction of the Aqua Marcia, 144-140 BC', *Philologus* 122 (1978), 25-58, esp. 41.

**The social distinction (and civic significance) of the XVviri persisted into the empire:** M.W.F. Hoffman Lewis, *The Official Priests of Rome Under the Julio-Claudians* (Rome, 1955), 86-91; R. Syme, *Tacitus* (Oxford, 1958), 66; L. Schumacher, 'Die vier hohen römische Priesterkollegia, 69-235 n.Chr.', *ANRW* 2.16.1 (1973), 655-819, esp. 682-90 and 808-12.

**Argonautica of Varro Atacinus:** *Ov. Am.* 1.15.21; *Quint. Inst.* 10.1.87. Discussion: A.S. Hollis, *Fragments of Roman Poetry, c.60 BC – AD 20* (Oxford, 2007), 196-98; cf. E. Courtney, *The Fragmentary Latin Poets* (Oxford, 1993), 238-43. Apollonius and Latin literature: M. Fantuzzi and R. Hunter, *Tradition and Innovation in Hellenistic Poetry* (Cambridge, 2004), 465 & 477-85.

**Valerius' confidence:** T. Stover, 'Rebuilding Argo: Valerius Flaccus' Poetic Creed', *Mnemosyne* 63 (2010), 640-50, assembling instances and further bibliography.

**Claiming literary authority in Rome:** Bibliography on this point is abundant, but concise discussions of the matter, with further references, include C.O. Brink, *Horace on Poetry: The Ars Poetica* (Cambridge, 1971), 208-24; D.A. Russell, 'De Imitatione', in D. West and T. Woodman (eds.), *Creative Imitation and Latin Literature* (Cambridge, 1979), 1-16; S. Hinds, *Allusion and Intertext: Dynamics of Appropriation in Roman Poetry* (Cambridge, 1998), 123-44; M. Citrioni, 'Affermazioni di priorità e coscienza di progresso artistico nei poeti latini', in E.A. Schmidt, F. Paschoud, & C. Wick (edd.), *L'histoire littéraire immanente dans la poésie latine* (Geneva, 2001), 267-304; G.O. Hutchinson, *Greek to Latin: Frameworks and Contexts for Intertextuality* (Oxford, 2013), 25-42.

**Primus ego:** e.g. *Lucr.* 1.117-19; *Prop.* 3.1.3-4; *Hor. Carm.* 3.30.10-14; discussion in Citrioni, *op. cit.*; Hutchinson, *op. cit.*, 28. See also the texts assembled by J. Linderski, 'The Menander Inscription from Pompeii and the Expression *Primus Scripsit*', *ZPE* 159 (2007), 45-55.

**Trail blazing:** e.g. *Lucr.* 1.925-27; *Virgil, Geo.* 3.8-11; *Hor. Epist.* 1.19.21-34. Callimachean origin: *Aetia*, fr. 1.26 Pf., but cf. Choerilus, *SH* 317 (on which see recently K.A. MacFarlane, 'Choerilus of Samos' Lament (*SH* 317) and the Revitalization of Epic', *AJPh* 130 [2009], 219-34). Triumphal references: e.g. P. Hardie, *Virgil's Aeneid: Cosmos and Imperium* (Oxford, 1986), 48-51; R.A. Thomas, *Virgil: Georgics, vol. 2: Books III-IV* (Cambridge, 1988), 36-40; K. Freudenberg, 'Solus Sapiens Liber Est: Recommissioning Lyric in *Epistles* 1', in T. Woodman and D. Feeney (eds.), *Traditions and Contexts in the Poetry of Horace* (Cambridge, 2002), 124-40, esp. 135-6, where Freudenberg observes how, in representing his literary accomplishments in the *Odes* and *Epistles*, Horace 'brings foreign customs in his wake'.

**Hor. Epist. 1.19.21-34** (legal terminology: E. Fraenkel, *Horace* (Oxford, 1957), 341 n. 2.; *princeps* and *dux* and Roman public life: Freudenberg, *op. cit.*, 135):

Libera per vacuum posui vestigia princeps,  
non aliena meo pressi pede. qui sibi fidet,  
dux reget examen. Parios ego primus iambos  
ostendi Latio, numeros animosque secutus  
Archilochi, non res et agentia verba Lycamben.  
ac ne me foliis ideo brevioribus ornes,  
quod timui mutare modos et carminis artem,

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temperat Archilochi Musam pede mascula Sappho,  
 temperat Alcaeus, sed rebus et ordine dispar,  
 nec socerum quaerit, quem versibus oblinat atris, 30  
 nec sponsae laqueum famoso carmine nectit.  
 hunc ego, non alio dictum prius ore, Latinus  
 volgavi fidicen. iuvat immemorata ferentem  
 ingenuis oculisque legi manibusque teneri.

I was the first to plant free footsteps on a virgin soil; I walked not where others trod. Who trusts himself will lead and rule the swarm. I was the first to show to Latium the iambs of Paros, following the rhythms and spirit of Archilochus, not the themes or the words that hounded Lycambes. And lest you should crown me with a scantier wreath because I feared to change the measures and form of verse, see how manlike Sappho moulds her Muse by the rhythm of Archilochus; how Alcaeus moulds his, though in his themes and arrangement he differs, looking for no father-in-law to besmear with deadly verses, and weaving no halter for his bride with defaming rhyme. Him, never before sung by other lips, I, the lyrist of Latium, have made known. It is my joy that I bring things untold before, and am read by the eyes and held in the hands of the gently born. (Fairclough's 1926 Loeb edition.)

Hor. *Epist.* 1.19.37-42 (suffused with the language of canvassing):

Scire velis, mea cur ingratus opuscola lector  
 laudet ametque domi, premat extra limen iniquus:  
 non ego ventosae plebis suffragia venor  
 impensis cenarum et tritae munere vestis; 40  
 non ego, nobilium scriptorum auditor et ultor,  
 grammaticas ambire tribus et pulpita dignor.

Would you know why the ungrateful reader praises and loves my pieces at home, unjustly decries them abroad? I am not one to hunt for the votes of a fickle public at the cost of suppers and gifts of worn-out clothes. I am not one who, listening to noble writers and taking my revenge, deign to court the tribes of lecturing professors. (Fairclough's 1926 Loeb edition.)

*Prima in line one:* Zissos, op. cit., 71-3.

**Roman poets and (Greek) priests of the Muses:** relevant passages and critical discussion at R.G.M. Nisbet and M. Hubbard, *A Commentary on Horace: Odes I* (Oxford, 1970), 15 and 349; Hardie, op. cit., 11-22; R.G.M. Nisbet and N. Rudd, *A Commentary on Horace: Odes III* (Oxford, 2004), 8; R. Hunter, *The Shadow of Callimachus: Studies in the Reception of Hellenistic Poetry at Rome* (Cambridge, 2006), 7-8. See also Zissos, op. cit., 79-80.

**Poetic inspiration by Apollo:** too familiar to require extensive documentation; on Apollo's significance in Callimachean poetics (*Aetia*, fr. 1.21-28 Pf.; *Hy.* 2.107-112), see A. Harder, *Callimachus, Aetia: Introduction, Text, Translation, and Commentary*, vol. 2 (Oxford, 2012), 55-64. Apollo in Roman poetry: e.g., G.O. Hutchinson, *Hellenistic Poetry* (Oxford, 1988), 286-9; Miller, op. cit., with further references. Valerius' appeal to Apollo is discussed by Barchiesi, op. cit., 326-9 and Zissos, op. cit., 79-80.