

Geography and Paradoxography in Apollonius' *Argonautica*

In narrating the Argonauts' escape from Colchis, Apollonius adopts an account proposed by the early 4th century geographer Timagetus. The scholia on Apollonius' *Argonautica* reveal that the route of the Argonauts was a matter of much geographic speculation (e.g. Scholia ad 4.257-62b and 4.282-291b). While the list of opinions presented in the scholia does not suggest true consensus concerning the route, the comments imply that traditionally, the Argonauts somehow sailed via the Ocean — precisely how the Argonauts entered the Ocean was a matter of debate. Yet, Timagetus is singled out as the only author who suggests that route by which Apollonius' Argonauts sail (οὐδεις δὲ ἱστορεῖ διὰ τούτου τοὺς Ἀργοναύτας εἰσπεπλευκέναι... ἔξω Τιμαγήτου). Apollonius' decision represents a deliberate departure from a traditional mythological narrative which was already well established at the very beginnings of Greek literature as suggested by references in Homer and Hesiod. This paper explores the method that Apollonius of Rhodes uses to integrate the geographical accounts embedded in traditional literary narratives with the increasing geographical knowledge of the Hellenistic Age. I argue that by focusing on the use and manipulation of sources, poetic and otherwise, Apollonius reinforces the paradoxographical elements of geography which his contemporary Eratosthenes attempts to minimize through his attention to mathematics and the exploratory reports of the period.

I begin with Harder's assertion that the *Argonautica* blends the scholarly interests of the day with the "fabulous" and fantastic geography typical of epic such as the *Odyssey* (1994 16) as well as Hunter's observation that the *Odyssey* "taught for all time how geographic and cultural maps could never be totally distinct entities" (1995 13). While Harder and Hunter both rightly point to the *Odyssey* as a point of origin for geographical writings that explore both topography

and cultural practices, this paper attempts to contextualize the geographic and ethnographic elements of the *Argonautica* within the Hellenistic world's expanding geographical knowledge and awareness of the *oikoumene*. The influence of Callimachus on Apollonius is evident from Apollonius' preoccupation with aitia, some of which can be demonstrably traced back to Callimachus' *Aetia* (fr. 7c-21d in Harder 2012 = fr. 9-21 Pfeiffer, Harder 2012 139-153). While it has been argued that aitia in the *Argonautica* contribute to the “historicity” of the mythological narrative, this paper asserts that the efficacy of Apollonius' literary technique depends on Callimachean influence on the paradoxographical impulse found in historical and geographical writings alike.

Apollonius' treatment of geography within the context of a mythological narrative in turn influences the development of subsequent geographical writings. We see a persistence of paradoxographical interests despite the enhanced experience of the *oikoumene* which arises during the Hellenistic Age through military conquest and commercial exploration. Eratosthenes serves as an interesting counterpoint to the use of geography and ethnography by Apollonius. Eratosthenes, who followed Apollonius as Librarian in Alexandria, and who Roller describes as a protégé of Callimachus (2010 10), rejected the antiquarian and paradoxographical elements found in Callimachus' work and that of his contemporaries (Fraser 1972 525). This is expressed most clearly in Eratosthenes' argument against the use of Homer as a geographic authority on the grounds of his role as a poet. Our knowledge of this argument, however, depends on Strabo, who although ordinarily standing in agreement with Eratosthenes, rejected the Eratosthenes' argument. Nearly two centuries later the use of poets as traditional sources of geographic information persists as Strabo points out the existence of numerous signs of the Argonautic expedition (1.2.39). Strabo's τεκμήρια, however, depends on Apollonius' aitia which the scholia

suggest depend on a variety of other sources, often local historians.

Early Greek literature exhibits strong geographical interests, yet the relegation of descriptions of fabulous cultural practices and geographic features to poetic genres fails to recognize the role of paradoxography in Greek history and geography. Callimachus' interest in marvels and curiosities found not only in his poetic works such as the *Aetia* but in his prose works such as his *Collection of Marvels* influences authors of poetry and prose alike. Apollonius' use of geographical sources such as Timagetus in his geographical narrative and the local historians supporting his aitia demonstrate the convoluted relationship between traditional and contemporary developments concerning geographical knowledge. Teasing out complexities such as these contributes to an explanation of the persistence of fabulous descriptions of the *oikoumene* in an age of advancing scientific knowledge.

Works Cited

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