

## REVIEW

### HERODOTEAN INTERTEXTS IN APOLLONIUS RHODIUS

Andrew D. Morrison, *Apollonius Rhodius, Herodotus and Historiography*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. Pp. xii + 244. Hardback, £75.00/\$99.99. ISBN 978-1-108-69798-9.

With his monograph on Apollonius' *Argonautica* and its debt to Herodotus' *Histories*, Andrew Morrison—author of monographs on the narrator in archaic and Hellenistic poetry as well as on Pindar's Sicilian victory odes—makes an important contribution to our understanding of the intricate intertextuality of one of the key texts of Hellenistic poetry.

As Morrison explains in the introduction, his focus is on Apollonius' use of Herodotean historiography as a mode of discourse, in terms of the construction of narrative, the presentation of characters, the authorisation of the narrative, as well as the explanation of events. Morrison's approach is based on the distinction, introduced by Gian Biagio Conte, between the use of a text as '*modello-codice*'—i.e., as representative of a certain genre or type, such as historiography—and '*modello-esemplare*'—i.e., a specific passage is used as a model on which a later passage is based. Throughout his study, this distinction serves Morrison as a useful model for analysing the use Apollonius makes of Herodotus as representative of the genre of historiography, as the model for specific scenes, or often both at the same time.

Morrison sets the scene for his study by outlining Herodotus' influence on Hellenistic historiography, as well as the wider intellectual context of the period. As the testimony of later authors such as Dionysius of Halicarnassus (in *On Thucydides*) and Lucian (in *How to Write History*) shows, Herodotus was regarded in ancient critical discourse as an author that had a crucial, transformative effect on the genre as a whole, both through his Panhellenic, rather than local, perspective and through the artistry of his writing. In both respects, Morrison argues, Herodotus had a formative influence on Apollonius. In addition, and in contrast to Thucydides, Herodotus also became important for Apollonius through his association with the writing of history about the more distant past and through his ethnographic descriptions of non-Greek peoples.

In Chapter 2, Morrison focuses on the role played by Herodotus in Apollonius' construction of narrative authority. The chapter begins with an

intriguing analysis of the opening lines of the *Argonautica* and their similarities with historiographical discourse, which convincingly shows that ‘the explicit telling of a tale from its beginning ... in order to record the *kleos* of men of the past ... recalls the dual interest of Herodotus in preserving *kleos* and investigating the beginning of the war, its *αἰτίη*’ (46). Further comparison between the narrative voices of Herodotus, the Homeric Odysseus, and Apollonius leads Morrison to conclude that Apollonius transforms the relationship between epic and historiographical authority by presenting his audience with a narrator who ‘attempts to employ signs in a manner in some ways reminiscent of Herodotus, but for a very different kind of narrative, and with far less competence and reliability’ (52). The insecurity and unreliability of the Apollonian narrator remain a key theme throughout this chapter, including in the discussion of dual explanations (54–7), in which Apollonius resembles Herodotus yet without the historian’s ability to assess the different explanations that are being offered.

Similarly, the Apollonian narrator keeps foregrounding his reading of ‘signs’, *σήματα*, while repeatedly also drawing attention to the danger of misreading these signs and to his insecurities in interpreting them, quite in contrast to Herodotus, the ‘master of signs’. Also, both in terms of the construction of the narrator’s control and authority and the role played by the Muses, ‘epic and historiographical modes for constructing authority are ... simultaneously combined and undercut’ (71). With respect to the portrayal of the minds and intentions of his characters, but also the participation of the gods, Apollonius combines the omniscience of the Homeric narrator with the pose of inference and uncertainty found in Herodotus, which, Morrison argues, ‘destabilises the distinction between historical and fictional epic’ and complicates the Apollonian narrator’s authority (80). Finally, Morrison turns to the presence of ethnographic discourse in the *Argonautica*, which, as he successfully shows, combines epic diction with elements of Herodotean ethnographic discourse. Overall, Morrison concludes, the marked presence of Herodotean elements in Apollonius’ epic complicates the authority of the Apollonian narrator and suggests problems in the connection of the narrative past and the author’s present.

The focus of Chapter 3 is the explanation of the past and the connections that exist between past and present. Morrison takes as his starting point Barbara Kowalzig’s distinction between historical and mythical aetia and sets the scene for this chapter by very briefly considering ‘the wider Hellenistic context for connecting past with present’ (103). Somewhat curiously, no mention is made of Callimachus: while it is undoubtedly true that there are, as Morrison acknowledges, clear ‘tendencies, observable both within and outside Hellenistic literature, towards attempts to connect mythic and historical figures with the contemporary Hellenistic world’ (104), his brief survey fails

to acknowledge the striking prominence of aetia—on an unprecedented scale—in two major authors of the period. Examining aetia such as those of Idmon’s tomb (A.R. 2.835–50) and the island of Thera (4.1731–64), Morrison concludes that Apollonian aetia exhibit clear features of historical (as found in Herodotus) rather than mythical aetiology. Morrison speaks of ‘distorting elements characteristic of historiography’ (110) that enter Apollonius’ aetia and allow him to foreground the contingency and uncertainty of connections between past and present. This raises the question of the extent to which Apollonius’ characters can function as straightforward analogues of, and *exempla* for, contemporary Hellenistic figures. Similarly, there are clear affinities between Herodotus and Apollonius in the latter’s explanation of the motivation and action of his characters, which sets the *Argonautica* apart from Homeric poetry. In Apollonius, there is considerable uncertainty in the move from motivation to action, which undermines the possibility of universalising about human behaviour.

While the case studies that Morrison presents are certainly convincing, I found myself wondering whether the view of Apollonius as questioning the connection between past and present is really giving us the full picture. How about the very many other aetia in this work that, at least on the surface, posit a more straightforward continuity between now and then? Why does Apollonius, in dialogue with the pronounced Hellenistic interest in origins and in marked contrast with Homer, include such a large number of aetia, if he only wants to point to a gap between the past and the present?

Chapter 4 examines features of Herodotean storytelling in the *Argonautica*. It begins with an intriguing discussion of the way Herodotus’ interest in the beginnings of the conflict between Greeks and non-Greeks is figured in various contexts in the Apollonian epic as well as of the presence of the Herodotean Croesus *logos* as intertext in the *Argonautica*. Morrison also demonstrates that several key Herodotean places, such as Lemnos, Lake Tritonis, Thera, and Thessaly, play a role at crucial junctures in Apollonius’ narrative, such as the beginning, important episodes like the Argonauts’ stay on Lemnos, or the end. The focus of Chapter 5 is the way the ethnographic descriptions of different peoples in Herodotus function as vital reference-points for the representation of Greeks and non-Greeks in Apollonius. Starting from a brief sketch of what constitutes the world of the Greeks and its limits in both texts, Morrison emphasises that the Greek world inhabited by the Argonauts contrasts with the greatly expanded Greek *oikoumenē* of the Hellenistic period. Herodotus’ representation of the encounter of Greeks with non-Greeks is therefore a crucial model for Apollonius’ Argonauts and their travels within non-Greek territory, particularly since some of the places the Argonauts encounter feature prominently in the Persian War. Herodotus clearly functions as *modello-esemplare*, for instance, Apollonius’ portrayal of the Argonauts’ encounter with the inhabitants of Lemnos or Cyzicus, or with the Colchians. In particular,

Herodotus' depiction of Egyptians and Persians, along with other historiographical texts, such as Xenophon's *Anabasis*, plays an important role for Apollonius' own complex description of non-Greek peoples.

Finally, Chapter 6 is devoted to the topic of 'Kings and Leaders'. Morrison argues that Apollonius' intertextual engagement with the negative depictions of kings in historiography, in particular Herodotus and his representation of kings such as Cambyses, Darius, and Xerxes, undermines the function that the kings and leaders of the *Argonautica* are often said to have as forerunners and models for Hellenistic kingship and Ptolemaic royal ideology. The first case-study in this chapter is Apollonius' portrayal of Hypsipyle, which, Morrison argues, does reflect some of the 'real-world context' of Ptolemaic monarchy while at the same time questioning her exemplary role. I must admit that I am not convinced by Morrison's reading of Hypsipyle's act of placing her father in a chest and putting him out to sea as 'unwarranted' and 'quasi-homicidal' (185; 186); I have always read this as the only option that came to her mind for saving her father by allowing him to escape from the island. But however that might be, Morrison is certainly right to argue that Hypsipyle is not a straightforwardly positive model for Ptolemaic kingship. In the case of Jason as leader of the Argonautic expedition, as well as of Pelias and Aietes, their Herodotean intertextual background complicates their representation in Apollonius. Morrison also makes the important point that there is no straightforward identification of Greeks as positive ruler figures and non-Greeks as representatives of negative forms of kingship. The chapter ends with a very fine discussion of Apollonius' portrayal of Alcinous and his seemingly just attempts to avoid bloodshed in the conflict around Medea—in the long term, as the Herodotean intertext reminds us, leading not to peace, but indirectly to the war between Greeks and Persians, the very focus of the *Histories*.

In the Conclusion, Morrison draws together the main threads of his argument, emphasising again the way the Herodotean intertext is central in Apollonius' undermining the possibility of understanding the epic characters as analogues of and examples for Hellenistic individuals. The *Argonautica*, Morrison concludes, 'is a demonstration of the difficulty (or impossibility) of successfully providing unproblematic exemplars for any Hellenistic king (or queen) through a heroic epic' (216). While Morrison makes a very convincing case for a reading that goes against the grain of interpretations (offered, e.g., by Susan Stephens, Anatole Mori, and others) that see in the *Argonautica* a large-scale action of Ptolemaic rule, I wish that he had elaborated a bit more on this very important conclusion. Should we then regard Apollonius as actively critiquing his Hellenistic present? Is he offering any alternatives? How is he positioning himself in this regard within the larger context of Hellenistic literary culture? Especially given the pervasive presence of Herodotus in Apollonius' work, which Morrison elucidates so successfully, one might expect his work to aim for more than merely the 'problematism' of the connection

between past and present, of narrative authority or kingship. What are the (epic and/or historical) lessons that Apollonius and the *kleos* of his characters have to teach?

It is, however, a great merit of Morrison's book to have given fresh vigour to the debate around the relationship of Apollonius and contemporary Hellenistic culture and politics and to offer a new, decidedly Herodotean perspective on the *Argonautica*. This review cannot do justice to the very many fine and nuanced observations on the complex relationship between Herodotus and Apollonius and between historiography and epic that Morrison makes throughout. His book is highly recommended to scholars interested in Apollonius, in the reception of Herodotus, and in Hellenistic literature in general.

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