

BOOK REVIEW

Valerius Flaccus: Argonautica, Book III. Edited with commentary by GESINE MANUWALD. Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2015. Pp.x+286. Paperback, \$39.99. ISBN 978-1-107-69726-3

Long on the outskirts of the Classical canon, Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica* has, in the last three decades, benefited from renewed interest in Flavian epic and emerged as lively new ground for study. The publication of numerous articles, a *Brill's Companion*, and a remarkable number of commentaries (21 since 1980), has significantly advanced the field. In the midst of this wave of scholarship, however, Book 3 has been largely overlooked. Manuwald's new text with commentary fills this signal gap.

In keeping with the Cambridge Greek and Latin Series, Manuwald brings the *Argonautica* to a wider audience, with a commentary aimed at graduate and advanced undergraduate students as well as specialists. One of the volume's most valuable features, therefore, is its presentation of the *Argonautica* as an archetype of Flavian epic: both commentary and poem offer an accessible and engaging entry point into the field as a whole.

As Manuwald notes, Book 3 particularly lends itself to this project, and she convincingly presents it as a distillation of the poem's main themes. Two principal episodes may be read separately or together: the Argonauts' night-battle in Cyzicus, in which they are tragically blown back to friendly shores and unwittingly attack their hosts, and the rape of Hylas in Mysia, which precipitates Hercules' departure from the expedition. These two sequences exemplify Valerius' distinctive engagement with, and revision of, traditional material, principally from Apollonius Rhodius and Virgil. Both episodes, furthermore, illuminate key issues for the *Argonautica's* interpretation—its representation of the gods and fate, and its characterization of the protagonist Jason. Both introduction and commentary keep these issues to the fore throughout the volume.

The introduction comprises four sections, on poet, poem, Book 3, and text. It begins with a survey of the scant historical evidence for Valerius and summarizes

the much-disputed question of the *Argonautica's* date of composition. This debate centers on whether Valerius was working primarily under Vespasian, whom he addresses in the proem, or Domitian, who completed the *Templum gentis Flaviae* to which Valerius may refer at *Arg.* 1.15-6. Manuwald wisely does not offer a definitive answer, but rather—and more importantly—explains its interpretive significance—how the *Argonautica's* possible Roman points of reference (e.g. its frequent criticism of tyrant figures) may be read as commenting on contemporary society. She shows how the theme of the Argo's opening of the seas unifies the poem and informs its historical relevance to the Flavian political program. Addressing the poem's intended length and degree of completeness, she summarizes the structural evidence for an original eight books, with the final half-book either incomplete at the time of the poet's death or lost at an early stage of transmission. The text largely agrees with Liberman's (1997); textual problems and emendations are thoughtfully and thoroughly discussed.

Highlights of Manuwald's introduction are her discussion of Valerius' interaction with his poetic models (Section 2.6, and *passim*) and a detailed outline of Book 3 (Section 3.1). She well shows the correspondences between Book 3's two episodes and emphasizes their indebtedness to Virgilian models; the text will thereby be readily accessible to students familiar with the *Aeneid*. This approach likewise addresses one of the *Argonautica's* most distinctive features: its pervasive system of multi-level and multi-genre allusion. Valerius' language and narrative are notoriously elliptical, regularly relying on allusion to supply information and meaning. This poetic technique not only resists straightforward interpretation, but is also partially responsible for the traditional dismissal of Valerius as derivative—a highly Virgilian 'successor of Virgil'. Manuwald's focus on engagement rather than imitation demonstrates how this quality produces richness rather than sterility, and so introduces the poem on its own terms.

The introduction draws on Manuwald's prior scholarship, identifying the knowledge gap between men and gods as a key element of Valerius' response to the literary tradition and to contemporary Stoic doctrine (Sections 2.4, 2.5). Without access to a divine plan, not only Jason but the reader as well is left uncertain as to the significance of his actions. This interpretation informs the discussion of the place that Valerius' Jason occupies within a literary tradition that frequently questions his heroic status in comparison to (e.g.) Hercules or *pious Aeneas*. Book 3 is particularly apt for this inquiry. Jason's remorse after

inadvertently killing his host Cyzicus, and his distress over whether the crew should leave Hercules behind in Mysia, act as litmus tests of his heroic character.

The commentary itself is structured by the two principal episodes (Cyzicus, 1–461, and Hylas, 481–740) and an interlude (the rowing contest). Each section begins with a detailed introduction to its content, major themes, and relevant bibliography. For teachers, a particularly attractive feature of the commentary is the frequent explanation of how discrete sections fit together in structure and theme, which helps the student to move beyond the minutiae of grammar. Detailed explanations of mythological and literary references will provide a welcome starting-point for discussion. Some notes seem oriented more to the undergraduate than the graduate student and pay far more, perhaps inordinate, attention to references to Virgil than those to Apollonius, who most often is noted as a point of contrast.

While the interpretive angle of Manuwald's commentary will not surprise those familiar with her scholarship on Valerius, this is by no means a limiting factor. The volume is an engaging introduction to the *Argonautica*, which offers in-depth philological analysis while setting the poem in its literary and historical contexts.

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