

Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica* as a Supplement to the *Aeneid*

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When Propertius foresaw the birth of something greater than the *Iliad* (Prop. 2.34.65–6), he was not only expressing his personal appreciation for Virgil's anticipated heroic epic, but also the expectations of a whole era for the creation of a national epic which, alongside its other aims, would also satisfy both the need and the demand for the enhancement of Roman pride vis-à-vis Greek culture. The appearance of the *Aeneid* met all of the above expectations and, as a result, jumped immediately to the top of the literary canon, sealing the fate of the course of the Roman epic, as well as of later Latin literature in general. Inevitably, the presence of such a cornerstone of epic poetry constituted a constant challenge and source of anxiety for later epic poets, who attempted to find a poetic outlet whilst bearing the awareness of their epigonic status. In many of his works, especially in his seminal *The Epic Successors of Virgil: A Study in the Dynamics of a Tradition*, Philip Hardie has convincingly demonstrated that the post-Virgilian epic poets imitate the *Aeneid* in a complex way that allows them to rewrite, comment upon and interpret their sources.¹ Thus, Ovid is measured against his predecessor, stripping of heroic grandeur his *Metamorphoses*, a poem that refuses any clear genre classification, although it meets many of the external criteria for an heroic epic (e.g. length, hexameter verse, mythological material) and has been considered an anti-epic or mock epic.² Lucan deconstructs Virgil's political vision and transforms his *De Bello Civili* into an anti-*Aeneid* reversing many of the archetypal episodes.³ The epic poets of the Flavian period (Silius Italicus, Statius, Valerius Flaccus) do not follow Lucan's revolutionary approach and return to the Virgilian model with greater respect, attempting to

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¹ Hardie (1989) and (1993); see also Dietrich (2004) esp. 1.

² Cf. Galinsky (1975) 41; Farrell (1992) 235–40; Harrison (2002) 87–9. For the *Metamorphoses* as the first anti-*Aeneid*, see Hardie (1990).

³ See e.g. Narducci (1979) and (2002) esp. 75–87; Casali (2011).

achieve originality by more imaginative means. It is such a case that will claim our attention in this paper. More specifically, we shall examine how Valerius Flaccus is in dialogue with the *Aeneid* in his own epic in conjunction with his own poetic ambitions and how, with this very dialogue, he pays homage to his predecessor, while all the while complementing his model in a way that reveals remarkable creativity. Thus, as I shall try to demonstrate in due course, in his *Argonautica* Valerius Flaccus treats some episodes in a way that could be interpreted as a commentary on relevant passages of Virgil's *Aeneid*. More particularly, I shall focus on passages which are presented as prequels to the *Aeneid* and I shall argue that this is a strategy that allows Valerius to safeguard his originality and at the same time reinforces his suggestion (with metaliterary implications) that Argo is the first ship.

As a *genus grande* or *magnum* in subject and scale, epic was a reasonable starting point and a source of inspiration for many later writers who sought their material in themes already treated or alluded to in such long poems. This is especially evident in Greco-Roman epic, since in many cases a later epicist builds his poem as a continuation of a previous epic through prequels, sequels, and retellings. Having cited Aristotle's *Poetics* 1456a12, where epic is called *polymythos*, i.e. a genre "replete with stories", Robert Simms, in his introduction to a volume that explores "the variety of ways that heroic epic narratives have been continued in the Greco-Roman and western classical traditions through prequels, sequels, and retellings", eloquently notes: "Epic is capable of containing several stories, a feature that facilitates an extensive 'additive' program, such that the enterprise itself is prone to incompleteness and indefiniteness".⁴

As I shall argue, Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica* is an interesting case of such serialisation of epic, since although it retells a myth already treated by at least two predecessors (Apollonius Rhodius and Varro Atacinus), at the same time it fills in gaps of the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid*, epics that treat different subjects, and presents itself as a prequel to them.⁵ As is known, in his incomplete work of eight books, the Flavian poet explores his subject, the myth of the Argonauts, using as his main model Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica*; Virgilian overtones, however, abound in the work, and the poet often approaches his subject through the lens of Virgil's *Aeneid*,⁶ thus connecting it with the poem of his Roman epic predecessor. These overtones in the Valerian epic are apparent on the level not only of diction, but also of structure. For example, the Roman *Argonautica* is divided into two halves, of which the first describes

⁴ Simms (2018) 1. See also Hinds (1998) esp. 91–122 and cf. the notion of "future reflexive" described by Barchiesi (1993).

⁵ Thus, it seems that Valerius takes up the famous phrase of *Odyssey* 12.70, Ἀργὼ πᾶσι μέλουσα ("the Argo is known to everyone"), for which see Harrison (2017) 240.

⁶ See e.g. Hardie (1989) esp. 5–9; Korn (1991); Schimann (1998); Baier (2001) 45–59; Liberman (2003²) xxxii–xlvi; Clare (2004); Galli (2007) 19–23; Zissos (2008) esp. xxxiv–xxxvi; Ganiban (2014); Nordera (2016); Nelis (2020). For a brief review of the recent bibliography on this subject, see Manuwald (2014) 87–90.

the sea voyage and the second the military adventures, just like in the *Aeneid*, while in both epics the second proem is not placed exactly at the start of the second half, as in Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica*, but a little later (*Aen.* 7.37–45; Val. Fl. 5.217–24).⁷ Furthermore, whereas Apollonius begins his poem with the god Phoebus (Ἀρχόμενος σέο, Φοῖβε: “Beginning with you, Phoebus”, Ap. Rhod. 1.1), Valerius postpones the invocation to the god to line 1.5 (*Phoebe, mone*: “Phoebus, be you my guide”), thus evoking the *Aeneid*, where the Muse occurs after the proem, in *Aen.* 1.8: *Musa, mihi causas memora* (“Tell me, O Muse, the cause”).⁸

Moreover, the fact that Valerius is well versed in the *Aeneid* and can interpret it exceptionally well is obvious both from the creative application in his work of some of the concepts, allegories and connections that are found throughout Virgil's epic, as well as from the skilful manner in which he attempts to complete his predecessor's epic, despite the thematic difference of the two works. As we shall see in due course, this attempt at a complementary work moves primarily in the direction of the development of themes or elements that would logically precede the *Aeneid*'s descriptions, leading to the paradox that the later work is presented as a forerunner of Virgil's epic.

Other scholars have also suggested similar views: for example, Michael von Albrecht sees Valerius' poem “as a prelude to Roman history”,⁹ while Alain Deremetz interprets it as “a meta- and an archi-epic potentially encompassing all the others”.¹⁰ Building on these views, I investigate indicative cases of Valerius' attempt to present his work not only as a prelude to Roman history but also as a prequel to the *Aeneid*, and I include this attempt in his broader literary programme that aims at suggesting his poem's status as the first in a long serial. I comment on the multiple ways Valerius fulfils this aim, and examine various consequences this poetic strategy has for the character and the originality of his *Argonautica*, as it allows him to revivify a hackneyed myth. I suggest that the Flavian poet does what Virgil had already done with Apollonius' *Argonautica*, and I argue that by commenting on, interpreting or

⁷ See e.g. Taliervo (1992) 11–15; Manuwald (2015) 18; Davis (2020) 3.

⁸ See, for instance, Davis (1989) 46. All translations of Virgil, Valerius Flaccus, Lucan, Horace, Homer and Statius are from the Loeb Classical Library (slightly revised).

⁹ Albrecht (1997) 941, who succinctly notes: “Valerius tried to interpret the myth of the Argonauts as a prelude to Roman history, as a piece of an ‘Old Testament’ foreshadowing Greco-Roman culture. Thus he was led to measure the myth of the Argonauts against the *Aeneid*. What is important is not ‘imitation’ as such but the act of referring a mythical subject matter to the Roman empire and creating a new continuity in both space and time. As if in a ‘stage on the stage’, the Argonauts are viewed as a link in a development leading to Rome. Rather than a mere arsenal of epic technique, the *Aeneid* in the hands of Valerius became an instrument of integrating Greek myth into a contemporary and Roman view of history”.

¹⁰ Deremetz (2014) 61–2: “Although Valerius' epic is chronologically an Aristotelian τέλος, it presents itself as an ἀρχή, and at this point we should recall the fact that the first word of the poem is *prima*, a word announcing its inaugural value. In fact, more than a single epic, the *Argonautica* is presented as *the* epic among epics, at the same time a meta- and an archi-epic potentially encompassing all the others. Valerius thus presents the *Argonautica* in relation to the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid* by means of a device that Barchiesi has called ‘allusion in the future tense’ [Barchiesi (1993)], as if it were the ‘late proto-text’ [Zissos (2008) xli]”; cf. Mac Góráin (2015) 250–1.

correcting Virgil's poem Valerius serves as an early ancient scholiast on the *Aeneid*, while in some cases he implicitly provides alternative histories to his predecessor's narratives. Finally, I discuss possible political reflections in this poetic strategy.

As the sea voyage and the important role of the ship are dominant themes in Valerius' epic poem, the poet skilfully exploits the established presence of similar metaphors in ancient literary criticism, where poetic endeavour is likened to a sea voyage, the ship is a frequent allegory for the poem, and the open seas are often symbolic of the epic genre.¹¹ Within this context, many of the sea images found in Valerius' work allow for poetological interpretations and could be read as auto-referential comments.¹² Consequently, at a metapoetic level, Valerius' frequent suggestion that the Argo was the first ship¹³ reflects his intention to establish the primacy and novelty of his poem and implies its originality. One of the means by which this aim is fulfilled is the artful crafting of episodes as prequels to the *Aeneid*.

This strategy of Valerius is evident already in the proem, which starts with the word *prima* and underlines the fact that the sea voyage described in this epic poem is the first in the history of the human race (1.1–4):

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.

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.

It is clear that Valerius' proem resonates with echoes of the *Aeneid*'s proem; cf. e.g. *prima* ~ *primus*, *canimus* ~ *cano* (a verb that receives two objects in both proems), *oras* ~ *oris*, the common use of a relative clause (*quae Phasidis ...* ~ *qui primus ...*), *Scythici ... Phasidis* ~ *Troiae* (in both cases with the postponement of the relative pronoun), *Olympo* ~ *Romae* (at the very end):¹⁴

¹¹ On this allegory, see especially Harrison (2007).

¹² Indicative of this is the *ecphrasis* of the Argo's construction (1.121–9), described by Valerius in a way that reveals aspects of the aesthetic principles operative in his epic project as well as the generic enrichment of the *Argonautica*. See Stover (2010); Tzounakas (2012).

¹³ See, for instance, Davis (1989); Hershkowitz (1998) 35–8; Mac Góráin (2015) 250–1. Of course, Catullus 64 (another part of the epic tradition) must play a role here.

¹⁴ On the various echoes and allusions in Val. Fl. 1.1–4, see Lefèvre (1971) 11–16; Davis (1989); Spaltenstein (2002) 23–6; Kleywegt (2005) 5–10; Zissos (2008) 71–9; Deremetz (2014) 52–4.

ascendancy of the West with the arrival of Greek dominance (1.542–3, 551–4),¹⁶ which, however, shall have an end,¹⁷ thus mirroring the Roman conquest of Greece and the East as seen in *Aeneid* 1 and 6; he also presents (1.546–54) causes that led to conflict between Greece and Asia (e.g. the seizing of the golden fleece, the abduction of Medea, the abduction of Helen and the Trojan War). With this choice Valerius ensures that Jupiter’s prophecy in the *Aeneid* is placed within a greater context, that the Διὸς βουλή (“will of Zeus”, *Iliad* 1.5) as well as the choice of *immota fata* is more fully presented, that a sense of historical continuity is established and that Aeneas’ adventures are better interpreted, occurring, as they do, during a period when the grandeur of his generation was yet to be predicted. At the same time, events are given a causal connection, as the expedition of the Argonauts and the abduction of Medea are placed within the greater context of the conflict between Greece and the East,¹⁸ with the predestined dominance of the former, later episodes of which are the abduction of Helen, the Trojan War, and the adventures of Aeneas.

This conception and, more generally, Valerius’ skilful attempt to present his work as a prequel to the *Aeneid* in the context of a predetermined unfolding of events,¹⁹ is reinforced by the apt portrayal of Medea as a character in the rest of his epic. Of special interest is the case of the exceptionally evocative connection of Medea and Helen in 8.395–9, which appears to be moving in the direction of Jupiter’s prophecy:

¹⁶ Valerius’ *adcelerat sed summa dies* (“But now her last day is hastening on”, 1.542), which predicts the fall of Asia, skilfully anticipates *Aen.* 2.324, *venit summa dies*, where it is stated that the time of Troy is over, a phrase that reappears in Lucan (7.195) in relation to the battle of Pharsalus; see Barnes (1981) 360; Spaltenstein (2002) 219; Zissos (2008) 316–17; Stover (2012) 33–7; Ganiban (2014) 257.

¹⁷ At Val. Fl. 1.555–6, *hinc Danaum de fine sedet gentesque fovebo | mox alias* (“Thereafter am I resolved upon the end of the Danai, and shortly will take other nations into my care”), the Flavian poet presents the end of the Greek supremacy in words that easily recall Jupiter’s prediction of Rome’s everlasting empire at *Aen.* 1.279–82: *imperium sine fine dedi. quin aspera Iuno, | quae mare nunc terrasque metu caelumque fatigat, | consilia in melius referet, mecumque fovebit | Romanos rerum dominos gentemque togatam* (“but [I] have given empire without end. Spiteful Juno, who now in her fear troubles sea and earth and sky, shall change to better counsels and with me cherish the Romans, lords of the world, and the nation of the toga”); cf. Barich (1982) 135; Zissos (2008) 321. On the process of the *translatio imperii* described by both poets, see also Bernstein (2016) 405–6. On Jupiter’s *Weltenplan*, see Adamietz (1976) 21–4; Schubert (1984) 22–44; Feeney (1991) 318–34; Wacht (1991); Manuwald (2004); Stover (2012) 27–77; Bernstein (2014) 159–61; Ganiban (2014).

¹⁸ This thought echoes the start of Herodotus (1.1–5) and gives the passage a historiographical dimension: see e.g. Zissos (2002) 85–7 and (2008) 314–15, 318–19; Bernstein (2014) 160. Herodotus, however, begins with Io, then speaks about Europa, and only then introduces Medea and Helen. Thus, it is possible that Valerius’ mention of Io in Book 4 has something to do with her figuring as the first victim of the East-West feud in Herodotus; cf. Clauss (2014) 103.

¹⁹ Cf. also Val. Fl. 2.570–3, *namque bis Herculeis deberi Pergama telis | audierat. Priami sed quis iam avertere regnis | fata queat? manet immotis nox Dorica lustris | et genus Aeneadum et Troiae melioris honores* (“for he had heard that twice must Troy fall victim to the shafts of Hercules. But who now can change the destiny of Priam’s kingdom? Fixed in the unstirred ages stands the night of the Dorians, the race of the Aeneadae and the glories of a better Troy”), where the fall of Troy and, as Harper Smith (1987) 245 notes, “all the events of the *Aeneid*” are recalled and foreshadowed.

by extension, literary – developments, whilst, on the other hand, he is indirectly justifying his choice of the particular subject for his epic work, as he is presenting it as having great historic implications that extend as far as the works of Virgil and Lucan.

The fact that the daughter of Aeetes is depicted in a way that sometimes recalls the *Aeneid's* Dido is a topic which has already caught the attention of scholars²⁴ and I do not think it needs to be further discussed at present. It would suffice to mention the description of Medea as *regina* (7.444, 8.47), which recalls the term frequently used to describe the Carthaginian queen in the *Aeneid* (cf. e.g. *Aen.* 4.1), or her characterisation as *infelix* (6.490, 7.296, 371), the exact adjective often used to describe Dido in the *Aeneid* (cf. e.g. *Aen.* 1.712, 749, 4.68, 450, 529, 596).²⁵ It is worth noting, however, that this connection contributes to the portrayal of the *Argonautica* as a prelude to the *Aeneid*, and this not only because the separation of Aeneas and Dido and the latter's curses foreshadow another war between continents modelled on the wars that were started by Medea.

When Valerius describes the arrival of a hero in a foreign country, the assistance he receives from a woman and the love affair that ensues between them, he of course has in his mind the Virgilian description of the hospitality Dido extends to Aeneas and their own romantic adventure. Thus, just like in his model, Valerius describes Jason as *hospes* (e.g. 6.676; 7.1, 13, 68, 80),²⁶ the help he received from a foreign queen is described as a benefaction (7.501; cf. *Aen.* 4.335), and, overall, he meticulously highlights a multitude of similarities between the two stories. In this way, given his decision to explore a subject which mythologically precedes the Trojan expedition and the myth of Aeneas, Valerius attempts to establish the theme of the epic hero's romantic adventure with a foreign queen, so that the affair between Aeneas and Dido is shown to be not a model, but a repetition of the affair between Jason and Medea. Of course, given Virgil's exploitation of Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica*, in the *Aeneid* also this affair is, to a certain extent, a repetition.

The same objective also seems to be achieved during the episode of the Argonauts' visit to Lemnos and Jason's affair with Hypsipyle.²⁷ The banquet held by Hypsipyle for the

²⁴ Cf., for instance, Wright (1998) 54–123; Hershkowitz (1998) 99–100.

²⁵ See e.g. Hershkowitz (1998) 99; Wijsman (2000) 192; Bernstein (2008) 35 with n. 24; Davis (2020) 15–16. In my view, especially interesting and revealing is the case of *Aen.* 4.78–9, *Iliacosque iterum demens audire labores | exposcit pendetque iterum narrantis ab ore* (“again in her madness craves to hear the sorrows of Ilium and again hangs on the speaker's lips”) and Val. Fl. 7.12–13, *quos ego cur iterum demens iterumque recordor | tam magno discreta mari?* (“What madness makes me recall it again and yet again, though oceans lie between us?”) (a parallel already mentioned by Hershkowitz [1998] 99 n. 246 and Davis [2020] 96), given the possible metaliterary function of the words *iterum* and *recordor*.

²⁶ Cf. Davis (2020) 16.

²⁷ For the influence of Virgil's Dido on Valerius' Hypsipyle, see e.g. Hershkowitz (1998) 138–46; Dietrich (2004) *passim*; Heerink (2020) 194–6; cf. also Zissos (2017).

Hypsipyle's pregnancy, which is not found in Apollonius Rhodius where the fruit of the affair exists only in the realm of possibility and wishful thinking (1.904–9),²⁹ the Flavian epic poet offers a reasonable explanation for the mild reaction of the Lemnian queen to the departure of her lover and confirms Dido's case with a relevant example.³⁰ Thus, the impression is given that Valerius skilfully complements the Virgilian passage, letting it be implied that Dido could have followed the particular hypothetical thought process with Hypsipyle's stance in mind, the latter preceding her. Within this context, maybe the use of the word *memor* in 2.422 and of *prima* in the next line is no coincidence: while the first is a common *topos* in scenes depicting the parting of lovers³¹ and recalls a similar plea in Apollonius Rhodius' narrative (*μνῶεο*, 1.896), it also appears to facilitate Valerius' effort to lend his passage a quality of literary memory³² and to imply the need for one to keep Hypsipyle's plea in mind when attempting to interpret similar situations, such as Dido's. The second word seems to favour such an interpretation even more, as it implies the chronological precedence of the episode in Lemnos and skilfully reinforces the impression that it should be read as the prototype on which all similar episodes are based, such as the one featuring Medea later on in the *Argonautica*, or Dido in the *Aeneid*. The reference to the sword in both episodes is also of great interest, leading to suggestive comparisons: while in Valerius' description Hypsipyle gives Jason her father's sword to take with him on his military campaigns and add to his weapons, in Virgil's *Aeneid* it is Aeneas who gives his sword to Dido, who turns it on herself to take her own life.³³ On a semantic level, Hypsipyle's action carries symbolism of continuity and future potential, while Dido's signifies the sense of an ending and a suicide from Greek tragedy (famously imitating Ajax to kill herself with a donated Trojan sword).

As is logical, in Valerius' attempt to present his epic as a prequel to the *Aeneid* the use of the adjective *primus* in conjunction with his Virgilian intertext is extremely important. Thus, for example, having given his work the appearance of chronological precedence in relation to the *Aeneid* and having asserted the causal connection of the Argonautic expedition with later events, Valerius portrays Aeetes as regarding the arrival of Phrixus at Colchis, and the

²⁹ For a comparison between Apollonius' and Valerius' version, see e.g. Church (1911) esp. 78–9; Poortvliet (1991) 230; Hershkovitz (1998) 144; Spaltenstein (2002) 425–6; Clare (2004) 144; Zissos (2017) 217–18.

³⁰ It is worth noting that a similar idea also occurs at Val. Fl. 3.316–19, where Clite, the wife of Cyzicus, believes that the existence of offspring would be a small consolation for her to elude her grief at the death of her husband. For the similarity of this passage with Hypsipyle's and Dido's words, see Manuwald (2015) 149; Zissos (2017) 223–4.

³¹ See e.g. Harper Smith (1987) 182; Poortvliet (1991) 229–30.

³² On the notion of literary memory in Latin literature, see Conte (1986); Miller (1993); Hinds (1998); Faber (2017).

³³ See Hershkovitz (1998) 143; Zissos (2017) 218.

marriage of the latter to his daughter Chalchiope, as the start of all his troubles, wishing that he had never met the Greeks (7.37–42):

tu **prima malorum**

causa mihi, tu, Phrixus gener. non te aequore mersum
 quo soror! ut **felix** nullos nunc nomine Graios
nossem ego! quis regum Pelias, quis Thessalus aut quae 40
 Graecia? quodnam hominum cerno genus? aut ubi cautes
 Cyanaeae? venit Scythicas en hospes in oras.

“You Phrixus, my son-in-law, were the prime cause of ill for me. Alas! that you were not drowned in the same sea as your sister! that so I might be happy, knowing to-day no Grecian name! Who is King Pelias, who the Thessalian, what is Greece? what race of men do I here behold? or where are the Cyanean rocks? Look! a stranger has come to Scythian shores!”

It is obvious that here Valerius has modelled his passage on *Aen.* 4.169–70,³⁴ where, following the *conubium* of Dido and Aeneas, Virgil declares: *ille dies primus leti primusque malorum | causa fuit* (“That day the first of death, the first of calamity was cause”). With his allusion to these lines, Valerius appears to be passing comment on and correcting Virgil, placing the beginning of the troubles not at the *conubium* of Dido and Aeneas but much earlier, at the wedding of Phrixus with the daughter of Aeetes. Furthermore, Aeetes’ words, and especially his statement about his happiness if he would know no Greeks by name, correspond to Dido’s words in *Aen.* 4.657–8,³⁵ where the Carthaginian queen claims that she would have been perfectly happy had the Trojan ships never reached her shores: *felix, heu! nimium felix, si litora tantum | numquam Dardaniae tetigissent nostra carinae!* (“happy, too happy, had but the Dardan keels never touched our shores!”).³⁶

We therefore observe that traits of the Virgilian Dido are not only found in Medea and Hypsipyle, but also in Aeetes. Both figures feel that their happiness was destroyed with the

³⁴ See Taliercio (1992) 86; Davis (2020) 104.

³⁵ Cf. Stadler (1993) 33–4.

³⁶ Cf. Catullus 64.171–2 (quoted by Macrobius, *Sat.* 6.1.42 and compared by him with *Aen.* 4.657–8): *Iuppiter omnipotens, utinam ne tempore primo | Cnosia Cecropiae tetigissent litora puppes* – which, in turn, refers to the beginning of Ennius’ (and Euripides’) *Medea*; through this chain of literary allusions, we come back to Colchis. And, what is more, it seems that Valerius, while writing 7.37–42, alludes also to Ennius, *Trag.* 207–9 R.² = 255–7 W. = 210–12 J.: *neve inde navis inchoandi exordium | coepisset* [which pleonastically also describes *prima malorum causa*], *quae nunc nominatur nomine | Argo* [both traits are absent from Euripides’ *Medea*]. I owe this remark to Jakub Pigoń.

arrival of a foreigner (*hospes*) at their home, are infuriated³⁷ with him, and turn against him with great hostility. In fact, Aeetes' military forces persecute Jason following the latter's flight (Val. Fl. 8.259ff.), putting into practice one of the choices Dido considers following the flight of Aeneas (*Aen.* 4.544–6, 590–4). The similarities between Aeetes and Dido are further reinforced by the fact that both refer to Jason and Aeneas respectively as *hospes*, a characterisation used to refer to Phrixus when Medea asks her sister Chalciopie about him in Val. Fl. 7.119–20: *quaerit, ut Aeaëis hospes consederit oris | Phrixus, ut aligeri Circen rapuere dracones* ("asks her how Phrixus came from abroad to settle in the Aeaeian land, how Circe was borne away by winged serpents"). The strong presence of the term *hospes* in Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica* and the fact that it is used to refer both to Jason and to his kinsman Phrixus facilitate an intertextual dialogue with the *Aeneid* and a comparison of these figures to Aeneas. In the light, however, of the emphasis Valerius places on the chronological precedence of the events he is describing, the parallel examination of the two epics leads to a new reading of Dido's words in *Aen.* 4.10, *quis novus hic nostris successit sedibus hospes* ("Who is this new guest who has entered our home?"), as the presence of the adjective *novus* in this line allows the Flavian poet to allude to his own work as a prequel and the *hospites* he describes as precursors of Aeneas, thus making Virgil's narrative appear as a repetition of an earlier story. Perhaps Valerius' reinterpretation is also facilitated by *successit*, which further reinforces the sense of succession.

As a rule, any reference to a mythological character that is also mentioned in the *Aeneid* is exploited by Valerius, thus highlighting the chronological precedence of his own narrative in relation to the narrative time of Virgil's epic. As we shall see, an important part in this is played by the use of time adverbs. At the same time, the parallel examination of the relevant passages sheds further light on, and often allows for a reinterpretation of, the two texts.

An interesting case is that of the sea-storm at Val. Fl. 1.574–692, where the Flavian epic poet reworks his Virgilian model from *Aen.* 1.50–156.³⁸ In particular, especially when describing the island of Aeolus and the incarceration of the winds, Valerius, once again, appropriates Virgilian material, but through apposite time adverbs he implies the temporal priority of his own sea-storm and gives the prehistory of Virgil's account at *Aen.* 1.52–63:

hic vasto rex Aeolus antro
luctantis ventos tempestatesque sonoras
imperio premit ac vinclis et carcere frenat.

³⁷ Cf. Aeetes' and Dido's *ira* in Val. Fl. 7.34 and *Aen.* 4.532, 564 respectively.

³⁸ On this Valerian episode and its models, see e.g. Spaltenstein (2002) 228–62; Kleywegt (2005) 339–402; Zissos (2005); Galli (2007) 302–55; Zissos (2008) xxxv, 328–67 with a rich bibliography.

illi indignantes magno cum murmure montis 55
 circum claustra fremunt; celsa sedet Aeolus arce
 sceptrum tenens, mollitque animos et temperat iras;
 ni faciat, maria ac terras caelumque profundum
 quippe ferant rapidi secum verrantque per auras.
 sed pater omnipotens speluncis abdidit atris, 60
 hoc metuens, molemque et montis insuper altos
 imposuit regemque dedit, qui foedere certo
 et premere et laxas sciret dare iussus habenas.

Here in his vast cavern, Aeolus, their king, keeps under his sway and with prison bonds curbs the struggling winds and the roaring gales. They, to the mountain's mighty moans, chafe blustering around the barriers. In his lofty citadel sits Aeolus, sceptre in hand, taming their passions and soothing their rage; did he not so, they would surely bear off with them in wild flight seas and lands and the vault of heaven, sweeping them through space. But, fearful of this, the father omnipotent hid them in gloomy caverns, and over them piled high mountain masses and gave them a king who, under fixed covenant, should be skilled to tighten and loosen the reins at command.

In Virgil's passage we read that Jupiter appointed Aeolus as the king of the struggling winds, who has them imprisoned in his vast cavern in order to avoid a cosmic disorder. Valerius follows this account (sometimes with striking verbal similarities even in the same metrical *sedes*: cf. e.g. *vinclis et carcere, regemque dedit*),³⁹ but at the same time he supplements his model by adding events from the period before Aeolus' appointment as the king of the winds and by giving examples of cosmic disorder before the winds had been brought under control (Val. Fl. 1.584–607):

has nimbi ventique domos et naufraga servat 585
 tempestas; hinc in terras latumque profundum
 est iter, hinc **olim** soliti miscere polumque
 infelixque fretum (**neque** enim **tunc** Aeolus illis
 rector erat, Libya cum rumperet advena Calpen
 Oceanus, cum flens Siculos Oenotria fines

³⁹ See Zissos (2005) 87 and (2008) 335, 338.

perderet et mediis intrarent montibus undae), 590
 intonuit donec pavidis ex aethere ventis
 omnipotens regemque dedit, quem iussa vereri
 saeva cohors: in monte chalybs iterataque muris
 saxa domant Euros. cum iam cohibere frementum
 ora nequit, rex tunc aditus et claustra refringit 595
 ipse volens placatque data fera murmura porta.
 nuntius hunc solio Boreas proturbat ab alto.
 'Pangaea quod ab arce nefas' ait, 'Aeole, vidi!
 Graia novam ferro molem commenta iuventus
 pergit et ingenti gaudens domat aequora velo, 600
 nec mihi libertas imis freta tollere harenis,
 qualis eram **nondum** vinclis et carcere clausus
 hinc animi structaeque viris fiducia puppis,
 quod Borean sub rege vident. da mergere Graios
 insanamque ratem: nil me mea pignora tangunt. 605
 tantum hominum compesce minas, dum litora iuxta
 Thessala **necdum** aliae viderunt carbasa terrae.'

...the latter is the home of squalls and winds and shipwrecking storms; from here they pass to the lands and over the wide ocean, from here in bygone days would they spread turmoil in the heavens and in the disastrous sea – for at that time no Aeolus was their master, when the intruding sea broke Calpe off from Libya, when Oenotria to her sorrow lost the lands of Sicily and the waters burst into the heart of the mountains – until the All-powerful thundered from the sky upon the trembling blasts and appointed them a king, whom the fierce band were bidden to revere: iron and a twofold wall of rocks quell the East winds within the mountain. When this king can no longer curb their roaring mouths, then of his own will he unbars the doors and by granting egress lulls their savage complaints. Boreas now with these tidings drives him from his lofty throne: "Ah! what monstrous deed, Aeolus, have I spied from the heights of Pangaeus! Grecian heroes have devised a strange engine with the axe, and now go forward triumphing joyously over the seas with a huge sail, nor have I power of myself to stir up the sea from its sandy depths, as I had or ever I was fettered and imprisoned. This it is that gives them courage and confidence in the vessel they have built, that they see Boreas ruled by a king. Grant me to

overwhelm the Greeks with their mad bark: the thought of my children moves me not, only do you quench these threats of mortal man, while still the shores of Thessaly and as yet no other lands have seen their sails.”

In this way Valerius elaborates on Virgil’s conditional sentence in *Aen.* 1.58–9 by indicating what had already happened in a previous era in such a case (Val. Fl. 1.586–94), and thus he confirms Virgil’s statement. Moreover, Boreas’ reference to Argo as *novam ... molem* at 1.599, where *novam* “speaks to Argo’s strangeness to Boreas as first ship”,⁴⁰ and his plea to Aeolus to destroy the ship, and by extension to quench the threat of the seafaring, when the ship is still near Thessaly and as yet no other lands have seen it (1.606–7), underline the temporal priority of Valerius’ narrative and further contribute to his attempt to present his work as prequel to the *Aeneid*.

At times Valerius’ attempt to present his poem as a supplement to the *Aeneid* is achieved when he develops a theme in depth which in the *Aeneid* has only been mentioned briefly and in passing, and which precedes the events mentioned in the latter work. Let us take a look at a characteristic example: when Dido wonders whether or not she should join Aeneas as he flees to Italy, she holds back, considering the deception of Laomedon’s race: *nescis, heu! perditam, necdum | Laomedontae sentis periuria gentis?* (“Ah! lost one, do you not yet understand nor perceive the treason of Laomedon’s race?”, *Aen.* 4.541–2). Valerius highlights Laomedon’s perfidy skilfully. The Flavian poet introduces in his epic the episode of Hercules’ rescue of Hesione, and of the reward he is due to receive from her father Laomedon, even though it is a subject that does not feature in his main model, Apollonius Rhodius’ *Argonautica*. Describing, later, Hercules’ encounter with Laomedon and the latter’s intention not only to deceive the hero, but to murder him unscrupulously in his sleep so as to avoid fulfilling his promises to him (Val. Fl. 2.550–78), the poet draws attention to Laomedon’s perfidy and treacherousness and thus offers proof of the Trojans’ *periuria*. Reading this description in conjunction with Dido’s words above, the reader feels that he is learning aspects of the story that are absent from Virgil’s account which better support the mythological allusion of the Virgilian heroine. By shedding light on the particular event, Valerius expertly implies that Dido (and any reader of the *Aeneid*) cannot, indeed, ignore Laomedon’s *periuria* and thus gives, retrospectively, characteristics of an Alexandrian footnote to *nescis* and the question of the Virgilian passage.

What is also interesting in this framework is that Valerius’ episode of the rescue of Hesione gives the prehistory of Virgil’s lines at *Aen.* 8.154–9, where Evander informs Aeneas that he had met Anchises and Priam when they visited Hesione in her realm in Salamis:

⁴⁰ Zissos (2008) 337.

ut te, fortissime Teucrum,
accipio **agnoscoque** libens! ut verba parentis 155
et vocem Anchisae magni vultumque **recordor!**
nam **memini** Hesionae visentem regna sororis
Laomedontiaden Priamum Salamina petentem
protinus Arcadiae gelidos invisere finis.

“Bravest of the Teucrians, how gladly I receive and recognise you! How I recall your father’s words, and the voice and features of great Anchises! For I remember how Priam, Laomedon’s son, when on his way to Salamis he came to see the realm of his sister Hesion, passed on to visit Arcadia’s cold borders.”

Once again, the Flavian poet develops a theme briefly mentioned in the *Aeneid* and adds what preceded its account. The accumulation of words that point to memory in Virgil’s passage (*agnosco, recordor, memini*)⁴¹ seems to be adroitly exploited by Valerius, who complements his predecessor’s story with what is missing from it and thus implicitly reminds Virgil’s readers of what they should remember in order to better understand Virgil’s mythological allusion.

At other times, Valerius’ attempt to offer a work that can complement the *Aeneid* is much more complex and is based on his ability to identify some of the connections Virgil makes in his epic and to reinforce them using additional material so as to support (or ‘correct’) them more effectively. A good example of this, which shows that Valerius was an assiduous reader and interpreter of Virgil’s work, can be found in the way the poet sometimes portrays Hercules in his epic. As is well known, even though explicit references to Hercules in the *Aeneid* do not abound (the most extensive is Evander’s description of the Hercules and Cacus episode in 8.193–267 and the song performed by the Salii priests in Hercules’ honour directly afterward, in 8.285–305), his implicit presence in the work is extremely important and can be found in many other instances.⁴² Juno’s hostility towards Aeneas, for example, which is predominant throughout, from the proem to the very last book of the epic, brings to mind the well-known hostility Juno felt towards Hercules, which is explicitly mentioned in 8.288ff.; Aeneas’ *katabasis* into the Underworld does not only recall Odysseus’ *katabasis* in

⁴¹ Cf. Fratantuono and Smith (2018) 280–2.

⁴² Galinsky (1972) 131–49 remains a seminal work on this subject; other useful resources include Gilmartin (1968); Zarker (1972); Feeney (1986); Newman (2002); Secci (2013); Miller (2014); Loar (2017). For Hercules’ explicit or implicit presence in Virgilian and post-Virgilian epic, especially as regards the centrality of the beast–man–god series in Roman epic, see also Hardie (1993) 65–71.

the famous *Nekyia* of the *Odyssey*, but also that of Hercules which is commemorated in the hymn of the Salii (8.296–7), while it is also mentioned by Aeneas himself (6.122–3). Another parallel is drawn between Aeneas' transfer to Evander's humble home and Hercules' earlier visit to the same abode. The emphasis on Aeneas' *labores* constitutes a further connection between Aeneas and Hercules and the latter's own Labours.⁴³ Thus, we observe that Virgil intends to present Hercules as one of his models for his portrayal of Aeneas, despite the fact that he does not fail to highlight the differences between the two heroes.⁴⁴

Apart from its contribution to the depiction of Aeneas' character, however, Hercules' persona deftly facilitates the desired depiction of Augustus in the *Aeneid*. At this point it should be noted that, as Mark Antony claimed that he was a descendant of Hercules, the connection between Augustus and the mythical hero, at least during the time around the battle of Actium, could not easily constitute a direct strategic aim and deserved special attention; however, when Mark Antony's image had begun to fade, Augustus began increasingly to exploit the multiple positive qualities associated with Hercules, such as his service to mankind which had been saved from the monsters, and his apotheosis.⁴⁵

Let us consider some interesting passages. During his laudatory presentation by Anchises in the Underworld (*Aen.* 6.788–807), the Roman emperor is compared to Hercules, whom he appears to surpass in the distance he travelled. Thus, the comparison is favourable for Augustus as he is shown to be better than Hercules (6.801–3):

nec vero Alcides tantum telluris obivit,
fixerit acripedem cervam licet, aut Erymanthi
pacarit nemora et Lernam tremefecerit arcu.

Not even Hercules traversed so much of earth's extent, though he pierced the stag of brazen foot, quieted the woods of Erymanthus, and made Lerna tremble at his bow.

The choice of the verb *pacarit* ("quieted") in 6.803 facilitates the allusion to the *Pax Romana* and to Augustus' achievements, while the reference to the monsters of which Hercules rid the world is often interpreted as an allegorical allusion to Augustus' victories against the

⁴³ See e.g. Galinsky (1972) 132–5.

⁴⁴ Cf. Gilmartin (1968); Putnam (1995) 256–7.

⁴⁵ See Zarker (1972) 35–6. For Augustus 'appropriating' Hercules from Mark Antony, cf. also Galinsky (1996) 222–4.

barbarians.⁴⁶ Moreover, the choice of Atlas in the reference to the expansion of the Roman Empire during Augustus' reign a few lines earlier (*iacet extra sidera tellus, | extra anni solisque vias, ubi caelifer Atlas | axem umero torquet stellis ardentibus aptum*: "to a land which lies beyond our stars, beyond the path of year and sun, where sky-bearing Atlas wheels on his shoulders the blazing star-studded sphere", 6.795–7) also recalls Hercules, as the specific toponym is strongly associated with him in the myth of the homonymous Titan holding up the world, hinted at by *umero* ("on his shoulders"). An attempt at connecting Hercules with both Aeneas and Augustus can also be found in the eighth book,⁴⁷ in the depiction of the battle of Actium on Aeneas' shield. Here, the dolphins which are described at the beginning of this particular episode (8.671–4) bring to mind the dolphins depicted on Hercules' shield in the pseudo-Hesiodic *Aspis* (207–15),⁴⁸ which together with the description of Achilles' shield in the *Iliad* constituted one of Virgil's main models in this instance.

Valerius seems to be aware of Virgil's intention to present Aeneas and Augustus as Hercules figures and, as Hercules has an extensive and significant presence in the myth the poet is exploring,⁴⁹ he carefully presents him in a way that reinforces these Virgilian connections. For example, starting from the very first book, Valerius shows Juno's hostility towards Hercules (1.111–19; cf. also 3.510–20), even though he makes it clear that it is aimed specifically at Hercules and not the rest of the Argonautic expedition, providing an equivalent for Juno's hatred of Aeneas and her speeches in the *Aeneid* (cf. *Aen.* 1.37–49, 7.331–40).⁵⁰ Juno's intention to send a storm against Hercules in the event that he boarded the *Argo* alone, without the other Argonauts (Val. Fl. 1.113–16), further reinforces the similarities between the two scenes, as the statement recalls the storm brought upon Aeneas by the goddess in the first book of the *Aeneid* (*Aen.* 1.34–156). Moreover, the term *magnanimus* that characterises Hercules in the first book of Valerius' *Argonautica* (*magnanimus spectat pharetras et inutile robur | Amphitryoniades*: "Amphitryon's great-hearted son gazes on his quivers and his oak-club, useless now", 1.634–5) strengthens his association with Aeneas even more, as the latter is also described with the same term in the first book of the *Aeneid*

⁴⁶ Cf. Gilmartin (1968) 47 n. 20; Galinsky (1972) 136.

⁴⁷ Book 8 is crucial for building connections between Hercules, Aeneas and Augustus. For example, Aeneas pays Evander a visit on August 12 (the annual ceremony at the Ara Maxima, a shrine in honour of Hercules) – which was also the day of Octavian's arrival in Rome in 29 BC before beginning his triple triumph on the following day: see e.g. Miller (2014) 457; Loar (2017) 45–6.

⁴⁸ Cf. Fratantuono and Smith (2018) 691.

⁴⁹ For Hercules' presence in Valerius' *Argonautica*, see the bibliography discussed by Manuwald (2014) 61; cf. also Heerink (2015) 113–43; Manuwald (2021).

⁵⁰ For Juno's speeches in the *Aeneid* as Valerius' model here, see e.g. Adamietz (1976) 9–10; Eigler (1988) 32–9; Kleywegt (2005) 81; Galli (2007) 102–4; Zissos (2002) 76–7 and (2008) 145–9 with a relevant bibliography, who also notes (146) "a metaliterary sense of repetition" in the words *solitos* and *novat* at Val. Fl. 1.112: *solitosque novat Saturnia questus* ("and [Juno] breaks again into her old complainings").

(*sublimemque feres ad sidera caeli | magnanimum Aenean*: “and great-souled Aeneas you will raise on high to the starry heaven”, *Aen.* 1.259–60).

Regarding Valerius’ intention to present Hercules as Augustus’ precursor⁵¹ according to the Virgilian model, let us take a look at the episode of Hesione and, more specifically, the fight between the demigod and the monster which has threatened to devour Laomedon’s daughter, an episode which, as mentioned earlier, does not feature in the narrative of Apollonius Rhodius. Even though it is the equivalent episode in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (11.194–220) and the episode of Perseus and Andromeda in the *Metamorphoses* (4.663–764) or in Manilius’ *Astronomica* (5.538–618) that should be considered to be Valerius’ main models in this instance,⁵² Virgilian undertones are still present. Scholars have already laconically referred to the similarities between Valerius’ passage and both the episode of Laocoon and the snakes that attack him (*Aen.* 2.199–227)⁵³ and that of the fight between Hercules and Cacus (*Aen.* 8.193–267).⁵⁴ Of special interest for the purposes of this paper are certain similarities between Hercules’ fight with the sea monster and the Virgilian description of the battle of Actium on Aeneas’ shield. These similarities lead us to consider the fact that, just like Virgil in the *Aeneid* portrays Augustus as another Hercules, so Valerius in his *Argonautica* portrays Hercules as a precursor of Augustus, thus giving his narrative characteristics of a prequel to the *Aeneid*.

Hercules’ fight with a monster (cf. *belua*, *monstrum ingens*: “a beast, of monstrous bulk”, Val. Fl. 2.479) corresponds to the conflict between the Augustus-friendly Olympian gods and the monstrous deities of Egypt in the *Aeneid* (*omnigenumque deum monstra et latrator Anubis | contra Neptunum et Venerem contraque Minervam | tela tenent*: “Monstrous gods of every form and barking Anubis wield weapons against Neptune and Venus and against Minerva”, *Aen.* 8.698–700).⁵⁵ The emphasis given to these theriomorphic Egyptian deities is also evident in other texts that mention Augustus’ rhetoric before the battle of Actium, and appears to have been an important part of his propaganda.⁵⁶ Moreover, let us not forget

⁵¹ Taylor (1994) 222–6 suggests the idea that in Valerius’ *Argonautica* Hercules represents Augustus, while Jason symbolises Vespasian, and argues that “[t]he closeness of the relationship between Jason and Hercules ... can be understood to allude to Vespasian’s clear desire to model himself upon Augustus” (226). As is evident, her interpretation goes in a different direction from that discussed in my paper, as she focuses on the process of the dynastic succession: “The intention of the above discussion was to illustrate that there is a symbolic level of meaning in the *Argonautica* pertaining to dynastic succession” (228).

⁵² Cf. Frank (1971); Burck (1976); Harper Smith (1987) 193–6; Poortvliet (1991) 240–1; Stadler (1991) 183–4; Hershkowitz (1998) 72–6; Spaltenstein (2002) 432.

⁵³ Cf. Poortvliet (1991) 242; Stadler (1991) 184–6, 190; Hershkowitz (1998) 76; Spaltenstein (2002) 432.

⁵⁴ Cf. Poortvliet (1991) 242; Stadler (1991) 190; Hershkowitz (1998) 76–8.

⁵⁵ Moreover, it is worth noting that in Book 8 *monstrum* is used twice in reference to beasts defeated by Hercules (*Aen.* 8.198, 289).

⁵⁶ Cf. e.g. Dio Cassius 50.24.6 and see Tzounakas (2018) 141.

the famous description of Cleopatra as *fatale monstrum* in Horace's Cleopatra ode (*Carm.* 1.37.21)⁵⁷ or the frequent references to the Egyptians as *monstra* in Lucan's *De Bello Civili*.⁵⁸

The fact that before his confrontation with the monster Hercules prays to his father, the gods of the sea, and his weapons (*ille patrem pelagique deos suaque arma precatus | insiluit scopulo*: "But he, with a prayer to his father and the gods of the sea and his own weapons, leapt upon a rock", Val. Fl. 2.512–13) demonstrates the hero's piety,⁵⁹ further facilitating his connection with Augustus. In the depiction of the battle of Actium on Aeneas' shield, Augustus is shown to be accompanied by the gods of home and the 'mighty gods' (*hinc Augustus agens Italos in proelia Caesar | cum patribus populoque, penatibus et magnis dis | stans celsa in puppi*: "On the one side Augustus Caesar stands on the lofty stern, leading Italians to strife, with Senate and People, the Penates of the state, and all the mighty gods", *Aen.* 8.678–80); he has, among that of other gods, the support of Neptune, the god of the sea (*omnigenumque deum monstra et latrator Anubis | contra Neptunum et Venerem contraque Minervam | tela tenent*: "Monstrous gods of every form and barking Anubis wield weapons against Neptune and Venus and against Minerva", 8.698–700); also he is supported by his deified father, Julius Caesar, whose star dawns over Augustus' crest (*geminas cui tempora flammam | laeta vomunt patriumque aperitur vertice sidus*: "his auspicious brows shoot forth a double flame, and on his head dawns his father's star", 8.680–1).

Another common point is that in both narratives the confrontations described assume alarming proportions and are likened to mountains clashing. Thus, in the *Aeneid* we read *pelago credas innare revulsas | Cycladas aut montis concurrere montibus altos, | tanta mole viri turritis puppibus instant* ("you would think that the Cyclades, uprooted, were floating on the main, or that high mountains were clashing with mountains: in such huge ships the seamen attack the towered sterns", 8.691–3), while in Valerius' *Argonautica* we read *intremere Iden | inlidique putes pronasque resurgere turres* ("one would think all Ida trembled and was being dashed in pieces and that towers overthrown rose up again", 2.519–20).⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Cf. Luce (1963) 254, who notes that by describing Cleopatra as *fatale monstrum* Horace evokes the abnormal monsters of Greek mythology; underlines the similarity of this phrase with Horace, *Epist.* 2.1.11, *notaque fatali portenta labore subegit* ("and laid low with fated toil the monsters of story"), where the labours of Hercules are described; and suggests that there "Hercules is a prototype of Augustus". On the phrase *fatale monstrum*, see also, among others, Mench (1972); Simone (2019).

⁵⁸ Cf. e.g. Luc. 8.474, 548, 613.

⁵⁹ At the same time, however, the fact that he is also praying to his weapons calls to mind, disquietingly, such *contemptores divum* as Mezentius (*Aen.* 10.773–4) and Capaneus (*Theb.* 3.615–16); cf. also Aeschylus, *Septem* 529–30 (Parthenopaeus).

⁶⁰ For Homer, *Il.* 20.59–60, πάντες δ' ἔσσειοντο πόδες πολυπίδακος Ἰδης | καὶ κορυφαί, Τρώων τε πόλις καὶ νῆες Ἀχαιῶν ("All the roots of many-fountained Ida were shaken, and all her peaks, and the city of the Trojans, and the ships of the Achaeans"), as a possible model for Valerius here, see Harper Smith (1987) 225.

The potential subjunctives in both passages (*credas* and *putes*⁶¹) make the likelihood of an intentional allusion even stronger, while the same aim seems to be achieved by the use of the tower imagery (*turritis* and *turres*), also common to both passages.

During the confrontation Hercules is described in a way that also bears similarities to the way Augustus is described. More specifically, we see Hercules standing, raised high, in the middle of the sea (*stat mediis elatus aquis*: “High in the midst of the waters stands Hercules”, Val. Fl. 2.532), just as Augustus is standing, raised high on the lofty stern of his ship (*stans celsa in puppi*: “stands on the lofty stern”, *Aen.* 8.680).⁶² In Valerius’ *Argonautica*, after Hercules prevails, he walks along the safe shores triumphantly (*superabat ovanti | litora tuta gradu*: “with triumphant steps he passes across the safe shore”, 2.545–6), an image which also recalls the Virgilian passage describing Augustus’ triumph (*At Caesar, triplici invectus Romana triumpho | moenia...*: “But Caesar, entering the walls of Rome in triple triumph...”, *Aen.* 8.714–15).⁶³

The similarities between the two episodes continue in the description of the response of the others following the cessation of the confrontations, although Virgil focuses on the celebratory atmosphere that has swept over the victors (*laetitia ludisque viae plausuque fremebant; | omnibus in templis matrum chorus, omnibus arae; | ante aras terram caesi stravere iuveni*: “The streets were ringing with gladness and games and shouting; in all the temples was a band of matrons, in all were altars, and before the altars slain steers covered the ground”, *Aen.* 8.717–19), while Valerius focuses more on the reaction of those mourning for the extermination of the monster and less on those pleased with the event (*Idaeaque mater | et chorus et summis ulularunt collibus amnes. | protinus e scopulis et opaca valle resurgunt | pastores magnisque petunt clamoribus urbem*: “the Idaean mother with her votaries and the rivers from the hill-tops raise lament. Straightway the shepherds rise up from the crags and out of the shade of the valley, and with loud shouts make towards the city”, Val. Fl. 2.536–9).

However, despite the similarities of the two episodes overall, Hercules, who lays down his weapons and fights the monster with nothing but a club and rocks, much like the Cyclops Polyphemus in the *Odyssey*, is portrayed as a brutal creature, primitive,⁶⁴ skilfully reinforcing Virgil’s suggestion that Augustus was a better Hercules. Thus, once again, Valerius’ account serves as an apposite ‘commentary’ on his predecessor’s text and subtly elucidates the political implications activated there.

⁶¹ This is the conjecture of Loebach, adopted by Mozley (1934); the manuscripts read *rates*.

⁶² Cf. *Aen.* 10.261, where the same phrase is used of Aeneas, who in this very moment is raising his shield.

⁶³ Cf. also the reference to the Roman triumphs at the start of the whole *ecphrasis*, in *Aen.* 8.626–8: *Illic res Italas Romanorumque triumphos | haud vatam ignarus venturique inscius aevi | fecerat ignipotens* (“There the story of Italy and the triumphs of Rome had the Lord of Fire fashioned, not unversed in prophecy or unknowing of the age to come”).

⁶⁴ See Spaltenstein (2002) 455–6.

Let us now move on to the description of another shield in the *Aeneid*, that of Turnus,⁶⁵ on which Io is depicted transformed into a cow and elements of her myth are presented in the space of four lines (*Aen.* 7.789–92):

at levem clipeum sublatis cornibus Io
auro insignibat, iam saetis obsita, iam bos, 790
argumentum ingens, et custos virginis Argus,
caelataque amnem fundens pater Inachus urna.

But on his polished shield Io with uplifted horns was emblazoned in gold —Io, wondrous device, already covered with bristles, already a heifer—and Argus, the maiden's warder, and father Inachus pouring his stream from an embossed urn.

As is known, the same myth is presented extensively in Valerius' *Argonautica* (4.344–421), when Orpheus sings of Io as the Argonauts approach Bosphorus.⁶⁶ Thus, we observe yet again that Valerius expertly develops a theme which Virgil only briefly touches upon,⁶⁷ just like earlier with Laomedon's deception. Despite the fact that in this instance Valerius' main model is the Io episode in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (*Met.* 1.583–747), the Flavian epic poet includes significant expansions and additions (especially as regards the roles of Tisiphone and the Nile and Io's actual crossing of the Nile) (Val. Fl. 4.344–7, 4.407–21).⁶⁸

Iamque dies auraeque vocant, rursusque capessunt
aequora, qua rigidos eructat Bosphoros amnes. 345
illos, Nile, tuis nondum dea gentibus Io
transierat fluctus, unde haec data nomina ponto.

And now day and the breezes call them, and once more they take to the seas, where Bosphorus spews forth its frozen streams. These very waves Io, not yet a goddess to your folk, O Nile, had crossed, whence the strait had its name.

⁶⁵ On the shield of Turnus, see e.g. Breen (1986); Gale (1997); Horsfall (2000) 507–13.

⁶⁶ On this episode, see e.g. Albrecht (1977); Aricò (1998); Hershkowitz (1998) 68–72, 199–201; Landolfi (2002); Spaltenstein (2004) 291–309; Murgatroyd (2006) and (2009) 177–210; Gärtner (2008) 267–74; Davis (2009); Castelletti (2014) 59–67.

⁶⁷ The connection between the two texts is further supported by verbal similarities. For example, it is possible that Valerius' *celsis procul ipsa refulget | cornibus* ("with high horns she gleams afar", 4.405–6) serves to draw the reader's attention to Virgil's description of Io on Turnus' shield: *sublatis cornibus Io* ("Io with uplifted horns", *Aen.* 7.789). Moreover, the component *re-* in Valerius' *refulget* could imply repetition.

⁶⁸ See Murgatroyd (2009) 178–9.

ast Erebi virgo ditem volat aethere Memphin
 praecipere et Pharia venientem pellere terra.
 contra Nilus adest et toto gurgite torquens
 Tisiphonen agit atque imis inlidit harenis 410
 Ditis opem ac saevi clamantem numina regni;
 apparent sparsaeque faces disiectaque longe
 verbera et abruptis excussi crinibus hydri.
 nec Iovis interea cessat manus; intonat alto
 insurgens caelo genitor curamque fatetur, 415
 atque ipsa imperium Iuno pavet. haec procul Io
 spectat ab arce Phari iam divis addita iamque
 aspide cincta comas et ovanti persona sistro.
 Bosporon hinc veteres errantis nomine divae
 vulgavere; iuvet nostros nunc ipsa labores 420
 immissisque ratem sua per freta provehat Euris.

But the maid of Erebus flies through the air to rich Memphis to be beforehand and repel the new-comer from the Pharian land. But Nile withstands Tisiphone and driving her with all his eddying flood plunges her to the depths of his sandy bed, calling for help to Dis and all the powers of that cruel realm; here and there are seen her brands and whips far scattered, and the serpents shaken from her dishevelled hair. Nor meanwhile is Jove's hand idle; the Father arising thunders from high heaven and makes his anger known, and Juno herself quails before his word. All this from Pharos' height afar Io beholds, now added to the gods with snake-girt hair and loud triumphant sistrum. Hence was it that men of old spread abroad the story of Bosporus, so called from the wandering goddess; may she herself now help our toils, and sending winds to aid us urge our vessel through her own strait.

The emphasis Valerius places on the ending of Io's story, which includes her journey to Egypt, her reception by the Nile and her transformation into the goddess Isis, provides elements that are absent from the Virgilian passage and complement it in a way that also allows for interesting re-readings and re-interpretations. Thus, by acquiring connections with Egypt and Isis, Io's depiction on the shield of Turnus leads to justifiable associations and to probable connections with historical events recent for Virgil. As Io is the precursor of Egyptian Isis, Turnus is implicitly presented as the precursor of the defeated side at Actium,

as, respectively, with the depiction of the battle of Actium on the shield of Aeneas, the latter is implicitly presented as a precursor of Augustus.⁶⁹ In other words, the depictions on the shields of the two adversaries and Aeneas' victory over Turnus can be read as a prospective allegory of Augustus' victory over Mark Antony and Cleopatra, who was closely identified with the Egyptian goddess Isis.⁷⁰ Valerius' passage greatly facilitates the reinforcement of such a concept, as it portrays Io/Isis in a way that recalls Cleopatra in Virgil's *Aeneid*, but at the same time the Flavian poet rewrites and 'corrects' his model. More specifically, the personified Nile who is protecting the persecuted Io corresponds to the image of the personified Nile who is protecting the defeated Cleopatra in *Aen.* 8.711–13: *contra autem magno maerentem corpore Nilum | pandentemque sinus et tota veste vocantem | caeruleum in gremium latebrosaque flumina victos* ("while over against her was the mourning Nile, of massive body, opening wide his folds and with all his raiment welcoming the vanquished to his azure lap and sheltering streams").⁷¹ The reference to the asp in Isis' hair (*aspide cincta comas*) corresponds to the twin snakes behind Cleopatra at *Aen.* 8.697, *nequid etiam geminos a tergo respicit anguis* ("not yet does she cast back a glance at the twin snakes behind"), while the reference to Isis' sistrum (*et ovanti persona sistro*), an instrument used in devotional rituals of the goddess, corresponds to *Aen.* 8.696, *regina in mediis patrio vocat agmina sistro* ("In the midst the queen calls upon her hosts with their native sistrum"), where Cleopatra calls the troops to arms. One can thus deduce that by substantiating Io's connection with Isis and Egypt, Valerius appears to be passing comment on, and interpreting the symbolism of, the depiction on Turnus' shield and its implications in a way that foresees future events and thus, yet again, presents his work as a supplement to the *Aeneid*. However, at the same time, in the *Argonautica* there is a significant divergence: here Io's plight is presented favourably; she is an innocent victim of Juno's anger. At the end of her story, she receives strong support from Jupiter. Orpheus addresses her as a goddess and asks her to help the Argonauts in their crossing of the Bosphorus. All this is very far from Cleopatra, and thus Valerius subtly dissociates Io/Isis from the Egyptian queen.⁷² He has good reasons to do so: as Clauss astutely remarks, Isis' worship enjoyed a significant presence in Flavian Rome, as the goddess was thought to have "assisted the acquisition of imperial power by the Flavians" and her story provided a

⁶⁹ Cf. Kirichenko (2013) 84.

⁷⁰ For Cleopatra VII's representation as Isis and her title of Νέα Ἴσις, see e.g. Griffiths (1961) esp. 113.

⁷¹ Cf. Spaltenstein (2004) 307.

⁷² The fact that in Valerius' text Tisiphone is buried in the sands of the Nile, is also depicted with snakes, and calls for the help of Dis and other deities of Hades, creates a link between Egypt and the Fury which could be further exploited in the case of Cleopatra, who, in Virgil's depiction of the battle of Actium, is helped by Anubis (*Aen.* 8.698), a god related to Hades. In Latin poetry the Egyptian queen is associated not only with Isis, but also with the Fury, as we have seen in Lucan's *Latii feralis Erinys* (Luc. 10.59), discussed above. So, Valerius' account could urge his readers to see Cleopatra through Lucan's lens as a revived Fury rather than as Isis.

parallel to it.⁷³ I believe that an additional reason lies in Isis' status as a protecting goddess of navigation, which corresponds to Vespasian's similar role (1.17–21), as described by the poet in his invocation to the emperor, thus reinforcing the analogies between the two figures.

Without doubt, Valerius' decision to treat the myth of the Argonautic expedition automatically limited his scope for originality, given the antecedents of Apollonius Rhodius and Varro Atacinus. Both Statius in his *Genethliakon Lucani* and Juvenal in his first satire condemn this particular subject as tired and unoriginal.⁷⁴ At the same time, the existence of the Homeric epics, and most importantly the existence of the *Aeneid*, could not be ignored. The latter cast a heavy shadow on later epic poets and, as a result, indirect discourse with the work was inevitable. Thus, although the epic poets of the Flavian period explore different themes, they cannot but attempt to connect them somehow to the *Aeneid*. Of these poets, the only one who clearly refers to Virgil's heroic epic is Statius, who near the end of his *Thebaid* urges his poem: *nec tu divinam Aeneida tempta, | sed longe sequere et vestigia semper adora* ("and essay not the divine *Aeneid*, but ever follow her footsteps from afar in adoration", *Theb.* 12.816–17).

Silius Italicus prefers to connect his *Punica* with the *Aeneid* by giving his work features that make it appear as a sequel to Virgil's epic. Thus, he emphasises the mythical background to the Punic Wars through allusions to Virgil's Dido and connects the hatred between Carthage and Rome to the rage (*ira*) of the abandoned *regina*, making Hannibal appear as the embodiment of Dido's curses (*dirae*). What is even more interesting in Silius' case is the fact that in his eighth book (8.50–201) he describes the flight of Anna, Dido's sister, from Carthage to Italy, where she encounters Aeneas and recounts to him what befell her sister following his departure from Africa, while later the poet tells of Anna's fate in Italy, where she was worshipped as a goddess.⁷⁵ Here we have a typical example of the completion of a classical model with the addition of elements that are either foreshadowed in it through the use of allusion or are completely absent from it, and allow the later work to appear as a sequel.

Contrary to Silius, Valerius, as we have seen, chooses to present his poem as a prequel to the *Aeneid* (sometimes even to the *Iliad*). By including the *Aeneid* as one of his models, he succeeds in enriching his subject, and, despite his belatedness, adds a new dimension to the

⁷³ Claus (2016) 110–11, who concludes (111): "The inclusion of Io's story functions not merely as a reprise of Ovid's narrative of the same (*Met.* 1.588–747), it also provides a mythological parallel to the Augustan myth. Just as Juno harassed Aeneas in the *Aeneid*, in Orpheus' song Juno torments the young woman who would become a great goddess, one favouring and favoured by the Flavians, who similarly faced significant opposition on their path towards imperial domination and, in the case of Vespasian and Titus, eventual apotheosis".

⁷⁴ See Statius, *Silv.* 2.7.48–51, 77 with Newlands (2011) 235, 242, and Juvenal 1.7–13 with Braund (1996) 76–7; cf. also Martial 7.19 with Zissos (2004).

⁷⁵ Cf. also Ovid's story of Anna's flight to Italy in *Fasti* 3 and see Dietrich (2004) 2–7.

myth of the Argonauts, a myth already tired in his day. Besides, let us not forget that Virgil himself, who presented his epic poem as a sequel to the Homeric epics, enriches his work with his own skilful engagement with Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica*.⁷⁶ Consequently, the Flavian poet demonstrates that he has full command of Virgil's epic techniques and follows in the latter's footsteps when in his *Argonautica* he absorbs Virgil's *Aeneid*, just as Virgil in his *Aeneid* had absorbed Apollonius' *Argonautica*.

Moreover, Valerius finds room for new creativity by exploiting both the chronological precedence of the myth he is recounting in relation to the *Aeneid* and the idea that Argo was the first ship, an idea far more frequent in Latin than in Greek literature.⁷⁷ In this way he artfully connects episodes of his epic with Virgil's poem, provides them with additional functional value as preludes to relevant episodes in the *Aeneid* and implies the significance of his own subject matter. At the same time, he illuminates, complements, passes comment on, interprets or 'corrects' points made by his predecessor, proving himself to be a creative reader of Virgil, not a mere imitator. Accordingly, in many cases he comes across like a scholiast on the *Aeneid*, as another Servius, as he provides his readers with significant information that helps them contextualise Virgil's epic within a larger framework. What is even more interesting is that sometimes Valerius implies an alternative possible development of an episode treated by Virgil. By giving us a glimpse of an 'alternative history'⁷⁸ he suggests different scenarios that could have altered the course of Virgil's narrative and excites the imagination of the reader.

Furthermore, with his conception, he offers a plausible response to the question regarding his originality, suggesting that his poetic journey is a new one, even if he is not the first to be handling the particular myth. Much like the Argo, on her journeys, discovers the existence of earlier ships – the battered one on Lemnos, for example, on which Hypsipyle hides her fleeing father (Val. Fl. 2.285–7, 292–3) – but does not allow the discovery to undermine the sense of her daring and pioneering undertaking, so Valerius discovers the existence of earlier, relevant texts,⁷⁹ but safeguards the novelty of his own poetic endeavour through his new treatment of the subject enriched by the absorption of Virgil's epic as well as of other poems. This form of innovation adds new directions to Valerius' poetic journey and transforms it into an original one that fulfils, inter alia, the great task of providing the prehistory of all other epics and of building causal connections with them.

⁷⁶ For Apollonius Rhodius' presence in the *Aeneid*, see esp. Nelis (2001).

⁷⁷ Cf. Catullus 64, Virgil's *Eclagues* 4, Horace's *Carmen* 1.3, Ovid's *Heroides* 12, Seneca's *Medea*; and see Davis (1989) and Mac Góráin (2015).

⁷⁸ The frequent exploration of alternative histories by Tacitus, for which see e.g. O'Gorman (2006) and Ash (2007) 73, makes me think that Valerius is following a literary trend of his time.

⁷⁹ Cf. Malamud and McGuire (1993) 196–7; Mac Góráin (2015) 250–1.

Finally, Valerius' choice to present his *Argonautica* as a supplement to the *Aeneid* and his aspiration to originality could be related to the political context of his epic, which is implicitly reflected in the Argonautic expedition he describes,⁸⁰ as is suggested in the invocation to Vespasian in Val. Fl. 1.7–21. As Mac Góráin acutely observes, Valerius' rewriting of Apollonius and Virgil is attuned with Vespasian's "policy of refoundation and restoration, but in this he was preceded by Augustus."⁸¹ Going one step further, I believe that by supplementing his predecessor's epic and absorbing it into a different myth, Valerius gives a sense of continuity and change to his own literary work; this sense, in turn, is in parallel with Vespasian's policy, a policy that is also characterised by the impression of continuity and change with regard to Augustus. Thus, it is implied that although in many cases Vespasian models himself upon Augustus and the policies of the two emperors share significant similarities, the outstanding achievements of the Flavian emperor (especially his opening of the sea) are unique and unprecedented and thus their novelty deserves to be compared with that of the pioneering achievements of the Argonauts. In addition to that, it is tempting to speculate that East-West politics could also be relevant here. Valerius' literary focus on a mythological expedition to the eastern part of the world and his interest in elements that complement the *Aeneid* and give its prehistory underline the significance of the East for the empire and correspond to the Flavian eastern policy⁸² and, more generally, to the Roman imperialistic expansion in that period. At the same time, the fact that Vespasian was declared emperor while he was in the East, where he also received prophecies about his future,⁸³ highlights the symbolic role of the East even more and creates further parallels with Jason and Aeneas.

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⁸⁰ For an excellent discussion of Valerius' politics and poetics, see Stover (2012); cf. also Zissos (2009); Claus (2014); Bernstein (2014); Buckley (2018).

⁸¹ Mac Góráin (2015) 251, who cites Malamud and McGuire (1993) 197: "The Argo myth which seems at first glance to be about origins, exploration, and innovation, becomes in Valerius' hands a vehicle for exploring the endless repetitions and variations of a profoundly derivative literary world". See also Stover (2012) esp. 3, who underlines that "Valerius' epic takes us back to a new *beginning* – the sailing of the first ship, Argo – a moment characterized by the possibility of expansion into a new world of political and poetic possibilities".

⁸² On the Flavian eastern policy, see e.g. Schieber (1975); Buckley (2018) 98 with further bibliography.

⁸³ On the portents and the prophecies in connection with Vespasian, see Lattimore (1934).

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