

Herodotean Reception in *The Argonautica* of Apollonius Rhodius

This paper seeks to discuss the reception of the prose tradition, particularly, Herodotus' *Histories* in *The Argonautica* of Apollonius' of Rhodes. In his ethnography of Egypt Herodotus describes the Egyptians as having instituted customs and laws contrary for the most part to those of the rest of mankind (ἀ πολλὰ πάντα ἔμπαλιν τοῖσι ἄλλοισι ἀνθρώποισι ἐστήσαντο ἥθεά τε καὶ νόμους Hdt. 2.35. 2).” According to him, the Egyptians ease their bowels indoors, and eat outdoors in the streets, explaining that things unseemly but necessary should be done alone in private, things not unseemly should be done openly. (εὐμαρείῃ χρέωνται ἐν τοῖσι οἴκοισι, ἐσθίουσι δὲ ἔξω ἐν τῇσι ὁδοῖσι ἐπιλέγοντες ὥς τὰ μὲν αἰσχρὰ ἀναγκαῖα δὲ ἐν ἀποκρύφῳ ἐστὶ ποιέειν χρεόν, τὰ δὲ μὴ αἰσχρὰ ἀναφανδόν. Hdt. 2.35. 3).

Apollonius says a similar thing about the Mossynoikoi, that they have strange laws and customs. “Everything that is right for us to do openly, either in public or in the market place, they carry out at home. Everything we perform indoors, they do outdoors, without censure, in the middle of the streets.” (ἄλλοιῃ δὲ δίκη καὶ θέσμια τοῖσι τέτυκται. ὅσσα μὲν ἀμφοδῆι ῥέζειν θέμις ἢ ἐνὶ δήμῳ ἢ ἀγορῇ, τάδε πάντα δόμοις ἐνὶ μηχανόωνται· ὅσσα δ' ἐνὶ μεγάροις πεπονήμεθα, κείνα θύραζε ἀψεγέως μέσσησιν ἐνὶ ῥέζουσιν ἀγυιαῖς. (Apollon 2. 1018-1022)

Although it has been acknowledged that Apollonius' epic *The Argonautica* shows traces of influence of earlier traditions, the tendency has been to focus mostly on the poetic tradition. Scholars talk about the influences of poets from Homer to Callimachus who was a contemporary of Apollonius. Understandably, the comparison between *The Argonautica* and works by other poets such as Homer and Callimachus makes sense

because of the poetic milieu in which they are all situated. In the case of Apollonius so much has been focused on it as an epic genre, and many also see the theme of *nostos* reflected in *The Odyssey* being played out in the return of the Argonauts back to the land of Cholchis.

Oswyn Murray long ago pointed out that Hellenistic poets also extensively made use of the prose tradition. Herodotus occupies a great position in this tradition. The debt of Hellenistic poets in general to the prose tradition has not been fully discussed. The relationship of Apollonius' *Argonautica* to the prose tradition, in particular, is yet to be fully explored. Recently, scholars have started discussing the influence of the prose tradition in some poets. In her 2011 dissertation Robin Greene discusses Callimachus' use and adaptation of Herodotus' *Histories*. James Clauss (2012) discusses different passages in Apollonius' *Argonautica* that parallel events in Xenophon's *Anabasis*. This paper would discuss the extensive use of Herodotus' *Histories* in *The Argonautica*. There appears to have been a reception of Herodotus' *Histories* in the ethnography and geography of Apollonius' epic. In Herodotus' *Histories* Books 2 and 4 are known as his ethnography of Egypt and Scythia respectively. From the text cited above it could be seen that Apollonius in discussing the custom of the Mossynoikoi easily reflects the contrast that Herodotus makes in the case of Egyptians/Scythians and the rest of the *oikoumene*. Yet reading further one would notice that Herodotus' description of the Amazons, Ethiopians, and others is reflected in the ethnography of different peoples such as the Amazons, Chalybes, Tibarenians and others that Apollonius says the Argonauts met on their journey.