

Stephanie West (Oxford)

### LYCOPHRON'S ARGONAUTICA

It is not hard to think of reasons for the appeal of the Argonautic legend to Hellenistic poets, though the relative importance of the various factors involved might differ for every poet. Certainly the theme, both romantic and heroic, offered vast scope for creative antiquarianism, intertextual virtuosity, and the display of geographical erudition. Though the story was already old when the *Odyssey* was composed (12. 69-72; cf. *Iliad* 7. 467-9; 21. 40-1; 23. 747), for a connected narrative we depend on Apollonius whose *Argonautica* provides the basis for the accounts offered in our handbooks. The relationship between his treatment and Callimachus' Argonautic allusions has received plenty of attention, but the deployment of this material in Lycophron's *Alexandra* tends to be overlooked. This neglect partly results from the long-standing controversy about the date and place of the poet of the *Alexandra*, a topic which has dominated discussion of the poem for the last two centuries; the current revival of interest is most welcome.<sup>1</sup>

Uncertainty about the poet's identity does not, so far as I can see, directly affect my discussion of his use of Argonautic matter. But it may be helpful to state at the outset my position. I take the view that the *Alexandra*'s composer is to be identified with the Lycophron who organized the texts of comedy for the Alexandrian library and was the contemporary of Apollonius and Callimachus. Passages which have been thought to indicate a later date are, I believe, interpolated.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> The other reason why the *Alexandra* suffers from neglect is an exaggerated reputation for obscurity. The excellent edition by Valeria Gigante Lanzara (*Licofrone, Alessandra; introduzione, traduzione e note* (BUR Classici Greci e Latini, Milan, 2000) makes the poem much more accessible. Also very welcome is the new edition of the scholia etc. by P. L. M. Leone (*Scholia vetera et paraphrases in Lycophronis Alexandram*, Galatina, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> I have discussed these questions in more detail elsewhere: see 'Notes on the text of Lycophron', *CQ* 33, 1983, 114-35; 'Lycophron Italicised', *JHS* 104, 1984, 127-51.

Within the framework of a prophecy of the Trojan War and its aftermath, a dramatic monologue presented as a report to Priam by a servant instructed to watch over Cassandra as Paris leaves Troy for Sparta, Lycophron contrives to incorporate an immense range of other legendary material. Cassandra's distinctive perspective gives a new twist to familiar matter. In this riddling style well-known persons are not given their normal names – thus Cassandra herself, sister to Paris/Alexandros, is Alexandra – and in accordance with the familiar convention of oracles and prophecy the main figures are often referred to by animal symbolism. The relevance of the story of the Argonauts to the Trojan War becomes apparent when we realise that Cassandra adopts the notion attributed by Herodotus to Persian storytellers or chroniclers (*logioi*<sup>3</sup> 1.3; cf. *Alex.* 1362-5 (quoted below)) that the idea of abducting a Greek woman recommended itself to Paris because he saw that Greeks had taken Medea from Colchis without suffering any penalty.

Lycophron is highly selective in his allusions to this legend. We may assume that he attached importance to the arrangement of this material, and so I shall follow the order in which he treats it. His first reference comes early, and rather unexpectedly, when Achilles is described (174-5) as 'the prospective husband of the stranger-frenzied Kytaiian woman' (τὸν μελλόνυμφον εὐνέτην Κυταιικῆς τῆς ξεινοβάκχης). *Ξεινοβάκχη* occurs nowhere else; a lot of story is packed into this compound. Medea's union with Achilles in the Elysian fields is first attested in Ibycus (*PMGF* 291) and Simonides (*PMG* 558)<sup>4</sup>. Lycophron alludes to it again (798) when, in crossword-puzzle style, he refers to Telegonus, Odysseus' son by Circe, Medea's aunt, as cousin of Achilles' wife (Ἀχιλλέως δάμαρτος ἀπτανέψιος).<sup>5</sup> *Kyta/Kytaia* first appears as the principal city of Colchis in Hellenistic poetry (cf. 1312; Callim. *F* 7. 25; A.R.2. 399,<sup>6</sup> 1094; 3.288-9; Euphorion 14.3<sup>7</sup>); it is an obvious guess that it was at or near modern Kutaisi, and it is pleasing to note that excavation of this ancient site has revealed the remains of substantial buildings dated to the seventh and sixth centuries.<sup>8</sup> We

<sup>3</sup> A difficult term to translate.

<sup>4</sup> Sch. A.R. 4. 814-5: ὅτι δὲ Ἀχιλλεὺς εἰς τὸ Ἥλύσιον πεδίον παραγεγόμενος ἔγημε Μήδειαν πρῶτος Ἴβυκος εἶρηκε, μεθ' ὃν Σιμωνίδης.

<sup>5</sup> We should probably see Lycophron's influence in Dosiadas' reference to this unlikely marriage (*Bomos* 3 (*Collectanea Alexandrina*, p. 175)); see further A. S. Hollis, 'Some poetic connections of Lycophron's *Alexandra*' in P. J. Finglass, C. Collard, and N. J. Richardson (eds.), *Hesperos. Studies in Ancient Greek Poetry presented to M. L. West on his seventieth birthday*, Oxford, 2007, 276-93 (282-3).

<sup>6</sup> See Vian's note ad loc.

<sup>7</sup> The adjective appealed to Propertius (1.1.24; 2.4.7).

<sup>8</sup> For a convenient summary see O. D. Lordkipanidze, 'Recent discoveries in the field of classical archaeology in Georgia', *Ancient Civilizations from Scythia to Siberia* 1 (1994), 127 = 68 (142-3); see further O. Lanchava, *The Archaeology of Kutaisi*, Kutaisi, 2007, (English summary) 184-8.

can only speculate as to the reason why this toponym became so popular in the Hellenistic period. *μελλόνυμφος* is generally used of girls, prospective brides; its application to Achilles heightens the feeling (if it can be heightened) of something uncomfortable about this union. The passage well exemplifies an important feature of Lycophron's narrative style, that its erudite obscurity is much more conspicuous when he is dealing with relatively well known material.

The greater part of Cassandra's prophecy concerns not the Trojan War itself but what follows, the various fates of the survivors scattered round the Mediterranean. Diomedes is thus drawn into the periphery of Argonautic legend when we hear that he will be venerated as a god for slaying the serpent which preyed upon the Phaeacians, i.e. in Corcyra (630-2):

θεὸς δὲ πολλοῖς αἰπὺς αὐδηθήσεται,  
 ὅσοι παρ' Ἰοῦς γράωνον οἰκοῦνται πέδον  
 δράκοντα τὸν φθείραντα Φαίακας κτανῶν.

Like Apollonius (4.145-61) Lycophron follows a version of the story first attested in Antimachus (F63 Wyss, from the scholia to A.R. 4.156-66) according to which the serpent guarding the fleece was not killed by Jason but merely sedated by Medea's drugs, and thus was able to leave Colchis in furious pursuit of its lost treasure. The creature's persecution of the Phaeacians makes particularly good sense if we bear in mind Apollonius' location in Corcyra of the marriage of Jason and Medea and their use of the fleece for their marriage bed (4.1141-3). Tradition varied about the place of their marriage; Antimachus set it by the Phasis (F 64); in his choice of Corcyra Apollonius followed Timaeus (*FGrH* 566 F 87; cf. Sch. A.R. 4.1153-4). This episode concludes a long section of legends relating to Diomedes in the west, mainly linked with south Italy, and one of the most attractive parts of the poem.<sup>9</sup>

Cassandra's account of Menelaus' postwar travels similarly ends with a reference to the Argonauts' homeward journey (871-6), to their stop in western Sicily where they erected a shrine in honour of Heracles and left a reminder of an unusual period of rest and recreation, strangely coloured pebbles on the beach being interpreted as lumps of oily mud which they scraped off their bodies after sporting contexts (*ἀποστλεγγίσματα*).<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> See further P. M. Fraser in S. Hornblower (ed.), *Greek Historiography*, Oxford, 1994, 182-4, M. Giangiulio, "Come colosso sulla spiaggia": Diomede in Daunia", in L. Braccisi et al. (eds.), *Studi sulla grecità di occidente, Hesperia* 21, Rome, 2006, 49-66.

<sup>10</sup> It is puzzling that this item of geological antiquarianism is elsewhere (e.g. A.R. 4. 654-8; *Mir. Ausc.* 105; Strabo 5.2.6) associated with Elba; some scholars have argued that Lycophron must really mean Elba here, but such an interpretation is strained. See further L. Pearson, 'Myth and

Κάμψας Γονοῦσάν τ' ἠδὲ Σικανῶν πλάκας,  
καὶ θηροχλαίνου σηκὸν ὠμηστοῦ λύκου,  
ὄν Κρηθέως ἄμναμος ὀρμίσσας σκάφος  
ἔδειμε πεντήκοντα σὺν ναυηγέταις.  
κρόκαι δὲ Μινυῶν εὐλιπῆ στελγίσματα  
τηροῦσιν, ἄλμης οὐδὲ φοιβάζει κλύδων  
οὐδ' ὄμβρία σμήχουσα δηναῖον νιφάς.

The shipwreck of other Greek survivors on the North African coast near Taucheira (later Arsinoe) brings a reference to the Argonautic antecedents of Greek colonisation (881-96):

Μόψον Τιταιρώνειον ἔνθα ναυβάται  
θανόντα ταρχύσαντο τυμβείαν θ' ὑπερ  
κρηπίδ' ἀνεστήλωσαν Ἀργίου δορὸς  
κλασθὲν πέτευρον, νερτέρων κειμήλιον,  
Αὔσιγδα Κινύφειος ἦι τέγγων ῥόος  
νασμοῖς λιπαίνει. τῶι δὲ Νηρέως γόνωι  
Τρίτῳι Κολχίς ὤπασεν δάνος γυνή  
χρυσῶι πλατύν κρατῆρα κεκροτημένον,  
δείξαντι πλωτῆν οἶμον, ἦι διὰ στενῶν  
μύρμων ἐνήσει Τιφύς ἄθραυστον σκάφος.  
Γραικοὺς δὲ χώρας τουτάκις λαβεῖν κράτη  
θαλασσόπαις διμορφος αὐδάξεν<sup>11</sup> θεός,  
ὅταν παλίμπουν δῶρον ἄγραυλος λεῶς  
Ἕλλην' ὀρέξει νοσφίσσας πάτρας Λίβυς.  
εὐχὰς δὲ δειμαίνοντες Ἀσβύσται κτέαρ  
κρύψουσ' ἄφαντον ἐν χθονὸς νεירוῖς μυχοῖς.

The death and burial of Mopsos (881-6) are related in a more leisurely fashion by Apollonius (4.1502-36); Cassandra takes the opportunity to display her mastery of precise topographical detail, an important element in a prophet's peculiar insight.<sup>12</sup>

What follows (886-96) is very clearly based on a tradition reported by Herodotus (4.179), who introduces the legend with the cautious phrase "Ἔστι

*archaeologia* in Italy and Sicily – Timaeus and his predecessors', *YCS* 24, 1975, 171-95, esp. 177-181.

<sup>11</sup> Wilamowitz's conjecture (*Hellenistische Dichtung*, Berlin, 1924, 2. 173 n.1); αὐδάξει codd. The predominance of futures in Cassandra's discourse made such an error very easy; Scheer corrected similar corruptions at 845 and 1350. The future ἐνήσει (890) represents the tense of Triton's instructions in direct speech.

<sup>12</sup> Thus Calchas guided the Greeks to Troy ἦν διὰ μαντοσύνην (*Il.* 1. 71-2); compare Prometheus' geographical guidance to Io in the *Prometheus Vincitus* (705-41, 788-815).

δὲ καὶ ὄδε λόγος λεγόμενος.<sup>13</sup> In this narrative the Argo, on its maiden voyage from Iolkos, was driven south while attempting to round Cape Malea<sup>14</sup> en route for Delphi, and got into difficulties in the shallows of Lake Tritonis. Triton appeared to Jason and his company, and demanded a tripod which they had on board (presumably intended as a gift for Apollo, though Herodotus does not say so), undertaking to show them how to get clear. Jason handed over the tripod, which the god set in his own sanctuary, prophesying that when it was reclaimed by one of the Argonauts' descendants, a hundred Greek settlements would be founded around his lake. The natives, on hearing this, hid the tripod. (Presumably we should infer that Jason now abandoned his plan to go to Delphi, and set sail for Colchis). In Lycophron juxtaposition with the death of Mopsos and the presence of Medea imply that the episode is set on the homeward voyage, like its counterpart in Pindar's *Pythian* 4. The presence of Tiphys may surprise us; in Apollonius the helmsman Tiphys died on the outward journey, among the Mariandyni, and his place was taken by Ancaeus (2. 851-68); this became the canonical version of his fate,<sup>15</sup> and Lycophron is rebuked in the scholia for carelessness. The Herodotean tripod is replaced by a golden mixing bowl. As a symbol of ownership it is far less suitable than the tripod,<sup>16</sup> but the legal symbolism very likely escaped Lycophron and his readers, living as they did under a Hellenistic bureaucracy which documented conveyancing and possession of real estate with appropriate paperwork. Lycophron comes closer to Herodotus in the latter part of the passage; κρύψουσι (896) straightforwardly echoes Herodotus' κρύψαι. With the foundation of Berenice (Benghazi) what Herodotus reports as an unfulfilled prophecy (or rather, a prophecy still to be fulfilled) took on a new significance.<sup>17</sup>

Greek settlement on the Illyrian coast is located by reference to Colchian settlement at Pola (1021-6), said to have been founded by an unsuccessful search-party who opted for exile rather than return to face the wrath of Medea's formidable father:

<sup>13</sup> George Huxley's suggestion (*Greek Epic Poetry from Eumelos to Panyassis*, London, 1969, 81) that this episode comes from Epimenides' version of the Argonautica is extremely speculative.

<sup>14</sup> A mischance familiar from the *Odyssey* (3. 286 ff., 4. 514 ff., 9. 80 ff., 19. 186 f.). The Corcyraeans explained their non-appearance at Salamis by the difficulty of rounding C. Malea (7.168).

<sup>15</sup> See Vian's note on A.R.2. 854.

<sup>16</sup> See further N. Strosetzki, 'Antike Rechtssymbole', *Hermes* 86, 1958, 1-17.

<sup>17</sup> Though the general sense of this passage seems clear, there are several textual problems; Wilamowitz, *HD* 2.173 n.1, is excellent on diagnosis, but does not provide a complete cure; see also Maas, *Kleine Schriften*, Munich, 1927, 108-9.

Κράθις δὲ γείτων ἠδὲ Μυλάκων ὄροις  
 χῶρος<sup>18</sup> συνοίκους δέξεται Κόλχων Πόλαις,  
 μαστήρας οὖς θυγατρὸς ἔστειλεν βαρὺς  
 Αἴας Κορίνθου τ' ἀρχός, Εἰδυίας πόσις,  
 τὴν νυμφαγωγὸν ἐκκυνηγετῶν τρόπιν,  
 οἳ πρὸς βαθεῖ νάσσαντο Διζήρου πόρωι.

This invites comparison with Callimachus F 11 (Pfeiffer = 13 Massimilla):

οἱ μὲν ἐπ' Ἰλλυρικοῖο πόρου σχάσαντες ἐρετμά  
 λᾶα πάρα Ξανθῆς Ἀρμονίης ὄφιος  
 ἄστυρον ἐκτίσαντο, τό κεν Ἐφυγάδων τῖς ἐνίσποι  
 Γραικός, ἀτὰρ κείνων γλῶσσι ὀνόμηγε Ἐπόλας'.<sup>19</sup>

It is very likely that F 10 (Pfeiffer = 12 Massimilla) comes from the same context: *μαστύος ἄλλ' ὄτ' ἔκαμνον ἀλητύι*. This part of the Argonautic legend is relatively unfamiliar, and the guidance offered by Apollonius' continuous narrative is most welcome (cf. 4.507ff.).

So far Lycophron's references to Argonautic legend have concerned events after the *Argo* left Colchis. We hear of the earlier part of the story when Cassandra moves (1283ff.) to the antecedents of the intercontinental vendetta within which, following Herodotus (1.1-4), she contextualizes the Trojan War, and later the Persian War. Altercation between Greeks and Asiatics is seen as the governing pattern of history. The series of unfriendly contacts between East and West starts with the abduction of Io from Argos by Phoenician traders (1291-5); thus *Argo* loses the distinction of being the first ship and the Argonauts are no longer represented as the first sailors. The first round in the feud was initiated by easterners, provoking retaliation from Cretans who not only, as in Herodotus, kidnapped Europa but also established a colony under Teukros in the Troad. This might have been expected to settle the matter. But the Greeks were responsible for stirring up a second round of trouble (1309-21) when 'they sent Thessalian wolves to steal for the one-sandalled chief the fleece protected by a serpent's watchful guardianship. Coming to Libyan Kytaia he lulled to sleep with drugs the four-nostrilled snake, wielded the fire-breathing bulls' curved plough, and suffered dismemberment for the cauldron. It brought him no joy to gain the ram's hide, but seizing the self-invited crow, her brother's slayer and a child-

<sup>18</sup> A strikingly prosaic and banal word for Lycophron; Scheer conjectured *χῶρας*.

<sup>19</sup> See further P. M. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, Oxford, 1972, 2. 902 n.191. This most unusual linguistic detail is tantalizing.

destroying fiend, he loaded her onto the chattering jay that sent forth a human voice from its beams of Chaonian oak, well skilled in its course'.<sup>20</sup>

Lycophron is on familiar ground as he summarizes the essentials of the Argonauts' venture, and the passage offers a fine display of his characteristic cultivation of a riddling style rich in literary allusion. When his phraseology appears impossibly obscure and tortuous we need to remember that much literature, especially poetry, familiar to the well educated in the early Hellenistic period has failed to survive. With the memorable 'single-sandalled', μονοκρήπιδι, we get a very clear reminiscence of Pindar's description of Jason's coming to Iolkos and the oracle which had warned his uncle Pelias at all costs to guard against the man with only one sandal (*P.* 4.75) (τὸν μονοκρήπιδα πάντως ἐν φυλακᾷ σχεθέμεν μεγάλοι).

The description of Aietes' city Kytaia as Libyan, i.e. African, Λιβυστίνην,<sup>21</sup> takes us back once more to Herodotus, to his account of Pharaoh Sesostris' extensive campaign of conquest (2.103-5). Returning from his victories in Scythia he left, Herodotus maintains, a contingent of his veterans at Colchis. Belief in this surprising information is encouraged by Herodotus' admission of uncertainty on a minor point:<sup>22</sup> he does not know whether the decision to leave a group at the Phasis was Sesostris' own idea or whether it came from some of the men. It must be emphasised that no Egyptian army ever went north of Syria; Herodotus has been misled by a myth of Egyptian nationalism, which hugely magnified the achievements of the pharaohs Senwosre of Dynasty 12, to surpass those of Darius; some may suspect that Herodotus has improved what he was told about Sesostris by combination with ideas of his own.<sup>23</sup> The historical context, then, in which Herodotus sets Egyptian settlement on the Phasis is thus a mirage.

<sup>20</sup> Καὶ δευτέρους ἔπεμψαν [Ατρακας λύκους ταγῶι μονοκρήπιδι κλέψοντας νάκην δρακοντοφρούρους ἐσκεπασμένην σκοπαῖς, ὅς εἰς Κύταιαν τὴν Λιβυστίνην μολῶν καὶ τὴν τετράπην ὕδρον εἰνάσας θρόνοις καὶ γυρὰ ταύρων βαστάσας πυριπιῶων ἄροτρα καὶ λέβητι δατρευθεῖς δέμας οὐκ ἀσμένως ἔμαρψεν ἔρρδου σκύλος, ἀλλ' αὐτόκλητον ἀρπάσας κεραίδα, τὴν γνωτοφόντιν καὶ τέκνων ἀλάστορα, εἰς τὴν λάληθρον κίσσαν ἠματίξασα, φθογγὴν ἐδώλων Χαοικτικῶν ἀπο βροττησιᾶν ἴεισαν, ἔμπαιον δρόμοι]. These lines belong to a section which benefited from Wilamowitz's exposition in *Hellenistische Dichtung*, Berlin, 1924, 2, 159-60.

<sup>21</sup> The MSS. of Lycophron give Λιγυστικὴν (Ligurian) (342); Scheer restored Λιβυστίνην here from Stephanus of Byzantium, who quotes the line s.v. Κύτα.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. in narratives which we should certainly regard as unhistorical 1.1.3 (πέμπτη ... ἢ ἔκτη ἡμέρη) 30.1 (ἡμέρη τρίτη ἢ τετάρτη).

<sup>23</sup> For a very full discussion of the evolution of the legend, with references to earlier discussions see A. I. Ivantchik, 'Eine griechische Pseudo-Historie. Der Pharaos Sesostris und der skytho-ägyptische Krieg', *Historia* 48 (1999), 395-40. A. B. Lloyd's commentaries on Herodotus Book 2 are very helpful (*Herodotus Book II. Commentary 99-182* (EPRO 43, Leiden - New York - Copenhagen - Cologne, 1988) 18-26; David Asheri, Alan Lloyd, Aldo Corcella, *A Commentary on Herodotus Books I-IV*, edited by Oswyn Murray and Alfonso Moreno, Oxford, 2007, 313-6). Herodotus'

It is clear that the notion of an affinity between Colchians and Egyptians was already current, though Herodotus claims to have noticed it for himself before he heard of it from others (104.1 φαίνονται μὲν γὰρ ἔδοντες οἱ Κόλχοι Αἰγύπτιοι· νοήσας δὲ πρότερον αὐτὸς ἢ ἀκούσας ἄλλων λέγω).<sup>24</sup> When the idea occurred to him, he questioned both groups, and found that the Colchians remembered the Egyptians more than the Egyptians remembered the Colchians (ὡς δέ μοι ἐν φροντίδι ἐγένετο, εἰρόμην ἀμφοτέρους, καὶ μᾶλλον οἱ Κόλχοι ἐμμενέατο τῶν Αἰγυπτίων ἢ οἱ Αἰγύπτιοι τῶν Κόλχων). This is rather naively expressed; Herodotus aims to exclude the possibility that Egypt might have been colonised from Colchis. His manner of expression should not be taken to imply that he had been to Colchis; he could have met elsewhere people who came from that region. He now adduces further evidence, starting with physical resemblance, inasmuch as both groups are dark-skinned and woolly-haired (μελάγχροές εἰσι καὶ οὐλότριχες). If these adjectives are taken to fit the population as a whole, or at least to characterize the predominant physical type, they imply negroid characteristics. That Herodotus thought Egyptians were black is indicated by his rationalization of the foundation legend of Dodona (2.57, 2), where he interprets a mythical black dove as a kidnapped Egyptian priestess (μέλαιναν δὲ λέγοντες εἶναι τὴν πελειάδα σημαίνουσι ὅτι Αἰγυπτίη ἢ γυνὴ ἦν). Pindar thought the people of Colchis were, if not negroes, at least significantly darker skinned than Greeks (*P.* 4.212 κελευνώπεσσι Κόλχοισι), a reasonable inference on the assumption of a flat earth so long as Colchis represented the furthest east, since those who lived nearest to the sun's rising would be peculiarly exposed to its rays.<sup>25</sup> (By Herodotus' time it is the Indians for whom the sun's heat is most intense in the early morning (3.104)). Herodotus does not, however, attach overwhelming weight to this argument, since there are other peoples of similar appearance.

He attaches more importance to a more subtle argument: Colchians, Egyptians, and Ethiopians are the only peoples who from the outset (ἀπ' ἀρχῆς) have practised circumcision; others who follow this custom have learnt it from the Egyptians or the Colchians. Herodotus is rather given to sweeping anthropological generalizations. The phrase ἀπ' ἀρχῆς is important here. No doubt caravanserais and military service afforded

---

argumentation is well discussed by D. Fehling, *Herodotus and his 'Sources': Citation, Invention and Narrative Art* (trans. J. G. Howie, Leeds, 1989), 17-21; see also R. Thomas, *Herodotus in Context*, Cambridge, 2000, 193-4. Bergk imported an allusion to Sesostris into Hipponax F42.3, but this conjecture is extremely speculative.

<sup>24</sup> Compare his comment on 'Egypt as the gift of the Nile' (2.5.1).

<sup>25</sup> Hippocrates deserves credit for independence, since he describes the peoples of the Phasian marshes as sallow-skinned, 'as if they were suffering from jaundice' (*Aer.* 15 τὴν τε χροίην ἀχρὴν ἔχουσιν ὡσπερ ὑπὸ ἰκτέρου ἐχόμενοι).

opportunities for comparative observation (and Herodotus need not have relied here on what he had himself observed). But enquiry into national traditions about the origins of the practice would have been beset with linguistic difficulties, and we might feel some surprise that any group among whom circumcision was customary would have admitted that the practice had been adopted under foreign influence. What Herodotus appears to regard as his most cogent argument is thus intrinsically shaky. He next adverts to a similar method of manufacturing linen.<sup>26</sup> It is not clear what he has in mind, though earlier he noted that Egyptian weaving technique is quite different from the practice elsewhere (2. 35.2). Sandwiched within his note on textile production is the sweeping generalization that the whole way of life and the language of the two peoples are similar (ἡ ζόη πάσα καὶ ἡ γλῶσσα ἐμφερέης ἐστι ἀλλήλοισι). Since Herodotus knows only a few words of Egyptian (mainly for distinctively Egyptian things) he was hardly qualified to pronounce on linguistic similarity. His Colchians appear to have lost the use of script. Given the very different geography of Colchis and Egypt, it is hard to see how the way of life can have been very similar, though we may believe that the differences between either and Hellenic ways would have powerfully impressed a Greek observer.

We get the impression that Herodotus is marshalling arguments in support of a view of which he is already convinced on other grounds. We find the same story of Egyptian settlement, though Sesostris is not named, in Apollonius (4.272-81): this airy construction proved surprisingly durable.

We have seen already that Lycophron's Jason did not kill the serpent; his heroic achievement is undermined by the use of Medea's drugs. 'Four-nostrilled' (τετράπην) appears to imply two heads, a feature otherwise attested neither in literature nor in art. Both heads at one end, like the Russian imperial eagle, might look more ferocious, but one at each end would be more dangerous. Aeschylus evidently expected such a creature to be a familiar concept when he mentioned an *amphisbaina* as a possible *comparandum* for Klytaimestra (Ag. 1232-4).<sup>27</sup> But Jason's feat in controlling the fire-breathing bulls must precede his approach to the snake. The slaughter of the earthborn warriors, following Jason's subjugation of the bulls, is omitted; Cassandra is

<sup>26</sup> This idea evidently appealed to Callimachus (see F 383, 13-4 + SHF 254 (*Victoria Berenices*); F672). Cf. Strabo 11.17 (498) (from his account of Colchis): ἡ δὲ λιουργία καὶ τεθρύληται· καὶ ἔρ εἰς τοὺς ἔξω τόπους ἐπεκόμιζον, καὶ τινες βουλόμενοι συγγενείαν τινα τοῖς Κόλχοις πρὸς τοὺς Αἰγυπτίους ἐμφανίζεῖν ἀπὸ τούτων πιστοῦνται.

<sup>27</sup> The (often depicted) eighth-century two-headed bull from Vani has such charm that it is tempting to wonder whether the Greeks regarded such eccentric animal physiology as characteristic of Colchis. Compare too the double caprids from the late Bronze Age (see A. Miron and W. Orthmann (eds.), *Unterwegs zum goldenen Vlies. Archäologische Funde aus Georgien*, Saarbrücken, 1995, 249).

not a fan of Jason's. The next phrase is disconcerting, 'his form butchered for the cauldron' (λέβητι δαιτρευθείς δέμας). Jason's rejuvenation by boiling was known to Pherecydes (*FGrH* 3F 113) and Simonides (*PMG* 548), and was surprisingly popular with contemporary vase-painters in the early fifth century. The procedure, familiar as a fatal episode in Pelias' tale, finds no place in Apollonius' narrative. Did Lycophron mean us to understand the purpose to be rejuvenation? Or fire-proofing? The latter would be more relevant.<sup>28</sup> Cassandra takes a poor view of *eros* in general, and her unsympathetic portrayal of Medea is not surprising. The nuances of *kerais* as the appropriate ornithological counterpart escape us; the bird is not definitely identifiable. Hesychius glosses the word with κορώνη, 'crow', but Tzetzetz describes it as 'very small', μικρότατον. The word ominously suggests κεραίζω, 'ravage, plunder', though there can hardly be any etymological connection. κίσσα, the jay, *garrulus glandarius*, is an unflattering image of the Argo; its voice may be described as 'a penetrating, raucous "skraak"'.<sup>29</sup> With ἡρματίξατο, 'loaded on, took on as ballast' we may see a reminiscence of Euripides' *Ino* F 402, 7-8 'men load their houses with brides without testing their characters' (οὐ γὰρ τῶν τρόπων πειρώμενοι νύμφας ἐς οἴκους ἐρματίζονται βρότου). Cassandra's bias is conspicuous in this unromantic summary of Jason's time at Colchis. His quest was a success story; but Cassandra emphasises that success came at a very high price.

We get a last glimpse of the Argonauts as Cassandra comes to the present, as she sees Paris initiating a renewal of the conflict between East and West 'after seeing the Pelasgians drawing the brightness of Rhyndakos' streams in foreign buckets' (ἐπεὶ Πελασγούς εἶδε Ῥυνδακοῦ ποτῶν κρώσσοισιν ὀθνείοισι βάψαντας γάνος). Rhyndakos is a Mysian river debouching in the Propontis (cf. *A.R.* 1.1165). The apparently simple εἶδε 'saw' is tricky. At first reading we might think Lycophron has made a mistake; the Argonauts belonged to the preceding generation, and Paris could not literally have witnessed their incursion. But we should take it more loosely: Paris saw, i.e. realised, what the Greeks had done.

In writing this paper I have repeatedly thought how much more difficult it would be to follow Lycophron's treatment of Argonautic legend if we had not got Apollonius. While this might not seem a compelling argument for Apollonius' priority, the obscurity of Lycophron's style appears as an engaging challenge rather than as positive perversity if we can suppose that he envisaged readers already familiar with the *Argonautica*. Moreover, Cassandra's unromantic and deflationary approach, natural enough in the girl

<sup>28</sup> Dosiadas' reference (*Bomos* 2) may again reflect Lycophron's influence (cf. n. 4).

<sup>29</sup> N. V. Dunbar, on Arph. *Birds* 1297.

who had rejected Apollo's advances, is certainly much more interesting if we can contrast it with Apollonius' handling of the material, distinguished as it is by its sympathetic treatment of Medea's love for Jason. It is often difficult to be sure how serious Lycophron is,<sup>30</sup> but we should not underestimate the poem's emphasis on the suffering entailed by heropic exploits, suffering often involuntarily incurred by people who could not balance it against the reward of future fame.<sup>31</sup> The *Alexandra* does not encourage a sentimental nostalgia for the age of heroic achievement.

---

<sup>30</sup> As with other Alexandrian poets; Gregory Hutchinson well observes (*Hellenistic Poetry*, Oxford, 1988, 11) 'Hellenistic poets commonly derive their effects and their impact from piquant combination of, or delicate hovering between, the serious and the unserious'.

<sup>31</sup> Outstandingly exemplified in the strange servitude of the Locrian maidens, who (as Lycophron presents the matter (1141-73) were paying the penalty for Ajax's sacrilegious assault on Casandra a millennium later.