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Apollonius' *Argonautica:*
Euphemus, a Clod and a Tripod*

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In the *Argonautica* of Apollonius Rhodius, the Argonauts had all but
reached home by their most circuitous return route from Colchis, when
Argo was driven by a fierce storm towards the African coast, and, after a
portage of nine days and nights carrying *Argo* across land, they finally found
themselves surrounded by the shoals of the Tritonian lagoon (IV. 1537 ff.).
Orpheus suggested that they should take out the tripod which Apollo had
given Jason, and offer it as a gift to the gods of the land, who might
consequently be induced to help them. At once, the god Triton, son of
Poseidon, appeared before them in the disguise of a young man called
Eurypylus, a native of Libya. He offered them a clod of his country's earth,
which Euphemus gladly received on the Argonauts' behalf. Euphemus
explained their plight, and Triton / Eurypylus directed them how to avoid
the dangerous shoals and escape the confines of the lagoon. They embarked
and rowed the ship towards the sea, as Triton / Eurypylus disappeared
beneath the waves, tripod and all. But the Argonauts felt warmth in their
hearts, for, at last, one of the gods had come to them, and helped them.
Jason immediately sacrificed a sheep on board, and this time Triton appeared
in his true divine form, and hauled *Argo* well out to sea.

A few days later, after Medea's triumph over the bronze giant Talos (IV.
1638 ff.)[1] and Apollo's help in guiding the Argonauts through pitch
darkness at sea by the light of his golden bow (IV. 1694 ff.),[2] Euphemus had
a dream which he succeeded in remembering (IV. 1731 ff.). In the dream, he
was holding to his breast the clod that he had received from Triton, and he
was suckling it with milk. The clod suddenly turned into a virgin, and he

[1] Possibly inspired in Apollonius' mind by the "Colossus of Rhodes" statue.
[2] Possibly another contemporary allusion by Apollonius, this time to the great Pharos
lighthouse.

passionately made love to her. She said she was a daughter of Triton and
Libya, and the nurse of Euphemus' children. She told Euphemus to give her
a home with Nereus' daughters near Anaphe, and, in time, she would
welcome Euphemus' descendants. When Jason heard the details, he
remembered a prophecy of Apollo's, and told Euphemus that he should
throw the clod into the sea, and from there grew the island of Calliste.
Euphemus' descendants (the poet explains) first lived in Lemnos, until they
were driven from their homes by the Tyrrhenians.[3] They emigrated to
Sparta, and, later, from there to Calliste under the leadership of Theras, who
named the island Thera after himself.[4]

What factors induced Apollonius to recount this episode, and what
method of selectivity did he use to create his version?

Pindar (*Pyth.* 4) also recounts the meeting at the Tritonian lagoon
between Triton / Eurypylus and Euphemus, who, on receiving the clod from
the former, even overshadows Jason in importance at this particular time.
But, in the Pindaric version, the clod is accidentally washed overboard one
night at sea, and Medea makes the prophecy at Thera (*Argo*'s next port of
call) that Euphemus will lie with foreign women (i.e. the women of
Lemnos, named by Pindar at v. 252), and his descendants[5] will eventually
emigrate, via Sparta, to colonize Calliste (Thera). Furthermore, descendants
of the colonists at Calliste will in turn settle in Libya and found Cyrene
(*Pyth.* 4. 13–69 and 251–62). If, Medea continues, Euphemus had placed
the clod safely in the holy cave at Taenarus,[6] the Euphemidae would have
ruled Libya within four generations from then, but, now that the clod was
lost, they must wait until the seventeenth generation. Pindar makes no
mention of the tripod.

The fullest extant version of the tripod story is to be found in
Herodotus (IV. 179). The story concerns *Argo* after she was built beneath
Mount Pelion, but *before* she sailed to Colchis. Jason put on board a
hecatomb and a bronze tripod intending to sail round the Peloponnese to
Delphi; but sailing round Cape Malea he was driven by a storm off course
to Libya. He found himself aground in the shallows of Lake Tritonis. Here
the god, Triton, son of Poseidon, came to him and offered help in return for

[3] For a discussion of the Tyrsenoi, Etruscans and Tyrrhenians in Lemnos, see J. Boardman,
The Greeks Overseas (London 1980), pp. 85–86 and 272, n. 211. The reader may also refer to
Johannes Friedrich, *Kleinasiatische Sprachdenkmäler* (Berlin 1932), pp. 143–45. 13: "Die Stele
von Lemnos."

[4] *Scholia Ap. Rh.*, IV. 1750 (C. Wendel, *Scholia in Apollonium Rhodium Vetera* [repr.
Berlin 1958], p. 327).

[5] According to *Sch. Pind. ad Pyth.* 4. 455b (A. B. Drachmann, *Scholia Vetera in Pindari
Carmina* II [Leipzig 1910], p. 161), Euphemus lay with Lamache, who subsequently gave birth
to a daughter, Leucophane. These, the scholiast continues, were the ancestors of Aristoteles
(Battus), from whom king Arcesilas IV of Cyrene was descended. Pindar had dedicated *Pyth.* 4
(and 5) to Arcesilas.

[6] Taenarus was Euphemus' home, and he had a wife there, Laonome, sister of Heracles,
daughter of Amphitryon and Alcmene; see *Sch. Pind. ad Pyth.* 4. 79b (Drach. II, p. 108).

the tripod. The tripod being duly handed over, Triton declared that the descendant of the Argonauts who acquired the tripod would found thereabouts one hundred Greek cities.

This tale has nothing whatsoever to do with the original Argonautic saga. In the earliest tradition, *Argo* goes straight to the Pontus after the launching. The story belongs to the later seventh century B.C. when the Greeks were colonizing the Libyan coast.[7] Cretans were concerned in this colonization,[8] and the tripod tale in Herodotus finds its origin in the *Argonautica* of Epimenides the Cretan. There can be little doubt that the story of the tripod was an innovation of Epimenides[9] to establish a Cretan connection with the epic Argonauts, both through the Cretan colonization links with Libya, and by his taking *Argo* directly to Libya past Crete.[10]

Pindar's ode is dedicated to king Arcesilas IV of Cyrene, and it is in his honor that the lyric poet has related both the king himself and his subjects to their remotest ancestors the Argonauts. Pindar's unique transfer of the Argonauts' visit to Lemnos from the outward journey to the return is a literary device he uses to emphasize the close link between the Argonauts' union with the Lemnian women and the foundation of Cyrene. Pindar must have gleaned his knowledge of Cyrene's foundation-myth from prominent Cyrenaeans themselves.[11] The first founders of Cyrenaica must have been as eager as the early settlers of the Black Sea region to connect their genealogy with that of the epic Argonauts. This they achieved by linking the mention of Lemnos in the *Iliad*[12] with the history of the Euphemidae and the events in Lacedaemon and Thera. No doubt they also took advantage of Euphemus' inclusion in a catalogue of *Argo*'s crew by Hesiod. Hesiod is the type of cataloguing poet who most probably included a list of the Argonauts in his work. That he did is suggested by the scholiast to Apollonius:

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[7] Boardman, *op. cit.*, pp. 154 ff.

[8] Cf. the Cyrenaean version of the foundation of Cyrene in Herodotus IV. 154 ff. For Cretan settlers in Cyrene, see Herod. IV. 161. 3.

[9] This seems a most reasonable assumption when one considers that Herodotus says nothing of *Argo* as continuing her voyage to Delphi without the tripod. This suggests that the holder of the tripod does *not* require the sanction of Delphi for success in his enterprise. The relevance of this suggestion becomes clear when one remembers that the fragments of Epimenides show vehement hostility towards Delphi's claims. For a discussion of this Epimenidean antagonism with Delphi, see G. L. Huxley, *Greek Epic Poetry* (London 1969), pp. 81–82.

[10] Cf. the Argonauts' visit to Crete (and encounter with Talos) immediately after they have left Libya in Apollonius' poem (IV. 1636–93).

[11] We know, for instance, that Pindar had met Arcesilas' brother-in-law Carrhotus at Delphi (*Sch. Pind. ad Pyth.* 5. 34 [Drach. II, pp. 175–76]). Carrhotus had asked Pindar to compose two odes in honor of his chariot victory at the Pythian Games. As an Aegid Pindar was related to the royal family of Cyrene and could treat them as equals; see C. M. Bowra, *Pindar* (Oxford 1964), p. 138. We know, too, that, shortly before his meeting with Carrhotus, Pindar had entertained Damophilus at Thebes (*Pyth.* 4. 299). For further details about Damophilus at Cyrene and Thebes, see Bowra, *op. cit.*, pp. 137 ff.

[12] *Il.* VII. 467–71; XXI. 40–41; XXIII. 746–47.

οὔτε Ὅμηρος οὔτε Ἡσίοδος οὔτε Φερεκύδης (3 Fr. 110 J)
λέγουσι τὸν Ἴφικλον συμπεπλευκέναι Ἀργοναύταις.[13]

By introducing the Taenarus element in Medea's prophecy at Thera, Pindar cleverly explains why Libya was not colonized earlier by Greeks. Wishing to compose a story in *Pythian* 4 with the emphasis on Thera and on the genealogy of the Euphemidae, he quite naturally selected Euphemus himself as the link he required.[14] Euphemus, he knew, was a *bona fide* member of the original crew of *Argo*. Pindar had a Hesiodic catalogue of the crew before him, as indeed, I believe, did Apollonius.

We also know that Hesiod mentioned the parentage of Euphemus, saying that he was the son of Poseidon and of Mekionike:

ἢ οἵη Ὑρίῃ πυκινόφρων Μηκιονίκη,
ἢ τέκεν Εὔφημον γαιηόχωι Ἐννοσιγαίωι . . .

This Eoee of Mekionike appeared in the *Great Eoeae*.[15] A scholiast's report that Hesiod brought the Argonauts to Libya[16] can most likely be ascribed to the Mekionike-Eoce. The Libya episode must have been a Cyrenaean addition to the Argonautic legend. For why should Hesiod originally have concerned himself about Libya in an Argonautic context at all? We know that Eugammon, a sixth-century Cyrenaean epic poet, said that Odysseus and Penelope had a son Arcesilas.[17] This was an obvious attempt to claim a Cyrenaean role in the heroic cycle. It is probable that the Libyan episode was invented by a poet of the same school.[18] It would seem likely that Pindar used the Mekionike-Eoee, which had accepted the Cyrenaean mythology, as a vital source for *Pythian* 4; and here too Pindar found the clod story.

That the clod story is not a Pindaric innovation can be borne out by the fact that Eumelus of Corinth appeared to use a similar scenario when telling his version of the Corinthian foundation-myth. It seems that, according to Eumelus, the mythical founder of the city Aletes (*i.e.* "the Wanderer," signifying Corinth's foundation by invaders) first consulted the oracle at Dodona and then went ahead with Zeus' blessing. The proverb δέχεται καὶ βῶλον Ἀλήτης, scanning as the last part of a hexameter, is definitely

[13] *Sch. Ap. Rh.* I.45–47a, p. 10 Wendel = R. Merkelbach and M. L. West, *Fragmenta Hesiodea* (Oxford 1967), fr. 63, p. 40.

[14] The scholia debate (*Sch. Pind. ad Pyth.* 4.306, [Drach. II, pp. 138–39], and 455 d, e, [II, p. 161]) why Euphemus and not another member of the crew–Periclymenus, for example, the other son of Poseidon mentioned in *Pyth.* 4. 175–received the clod. The simple answer is that Pindar must select Euphemus for the sake of Arcesilas his descendant.

[15] Fr. 253, p. 124 Merkelbach-West = *Sch.Pind. ad Pyth.* 4. 36c (Drach. II, p. 102). But see also fr. 241 note (p. 118 M-W).

[16] Fr. 241, p. 118 M-W = *Sch. Ap. Rh.* IV. 259, pp. 273–74 Wendel = fr. 65, p. 35 in B. Wyss, *Antimachi Colophonii Reliquiae* (repr. Berlin 1974).

[17] See Huxley, *op. cit.* (above, note 9), pp. 168–71.

[18] Cf. M. L. West, *The Hesiodic Catalogue of Women* (Oxford 1985), pp. 86–87.

associated with this story, and is most likely a fragment of Eumelus.[19]
Possibly, then, Eumelus also found inspiration for his clod story in the
Mekionike-Eoee.

Interestingly, Pindar retains the oracular element by telling the clod part
of his story through Medea's prophecy at Thera. Apollonius also retains
this particular element when he makes Jason recall a prophecy of Apollo's
and, in the light of this, instruct Euphemus as to what he should do with
the clod. The reasons for this Apollonian variation will be discussed below.
But the Aletes story does suggest that the telling of the clod story in the
form of a prophecy was not entirely Pindar's own invention, as M. L. West
has recently claimed.[20]

Some scholars[21] have argued that Pindar could not have used the
Mekionike-Eoee, since the lyric poet says Euphemus is the son of Poseidon
and *Europa* (*Pythian* 4. 45). But this does not necessarily preclude the
Mekionike-Eoee from having been Pindar's source. Despite his regular
adherence to his Hesiodic source, Pindar was not averse to departing from
the original in the occasional detail where it suited his context. R.W.B.
Burton demonstrates quite clearly how Pindar in his third *Pythian,* telling
the story of Coronis, is at variance with Hesiod for his own artistic
purposes.[22]

Why, then, the genealogical change in *Pythian* 4? Perhaps a clue can
be found in the scholiast's remarks on Pindar's reason for calling Thera
"holy" at lines 6–7:

ἱερὰν νᾶσον τὴν Θήραν οὐχ ἁπλῶς ὀνομάζει, ἀλλ' ὅτι
Κάδμος κατὰ ζήτησιν Εὐρώπης τῆς ἀδελφῆς στελλόμενος
προσορμισθεὶς τῇ νήσῳ ἀνέκτισε Ποσειδῶνος καὶ 'Αθηνᾶς
ἱερὸν αὐτόθι, ὡς ἱστορεῖ Θεόφραστος (Θεόχρηστος?).[23]

Here we find a connection between Poseidon, Europa and Thera, the colony
of the Euphemidae. As in *Pythian* 3, Pindar surely has changed a detail of

[19] Cf. J. B. Salmon, *Wealthy Corinth* (Oxford 1984), p. 38.

[20] West, *op. cit.,* pp. 86–87. West is right, however, in remarking that a similar technique of
presenting the story in the form of a prophecy appears in *Pyth.* 9. But the scholiast on the ninth
Pythian states ἀπὸ δὲ 'Ηοίας 'Ησιόδου τὴν ἱστορίαν ἔλαβεν ὁ Πίνδαρος (*Sch.Pind. ad
Pyth* 9. 6a [Drach. II, p. 221] = fr. 215, p. 109, M-W).

[21] Cf. C. Robert, *Die griechische Heldensage* 3, l. p. 859.

[22] R.W.B. Burton (*Pindar's Pythian Odes—Essays in Interpretation* [Oxford 1962], pp. 83–
84) compares details of *Pyth.* 3 with a fragment of the *Eoeae* (fr. 123 Rzach = fr. 60, p. 39 M-
W = *Sch. Pind. ad Pyth.* 3. 52b and 3. 14 [Drach. II, pp.70–71, and 65]), and shows three
differences: (i) the wedding-feast for Ischys and Coronis is a public affair in Hesiod, but
Coronis, according to Pindar, does not wait for such festivities, thus emphasizing her sinful
passion; (ii) Ischys is a Thessalian like Coronis in Hesiod, but, in Pindar, he is a stranger from
Arcadia, a distant land, thus making her offense even worse; (iii) in Hesiod, a raven tells Apollo
the news, whereas, in Pindar, Apollo simply knows what she has done, Pindar thus "advertising
the omniscience and infallibility of the Delphic god."

[23] *Sch. Pind. ad Pyth.* 4.10f (Drach. II, p. 98).

his Hesiodic source, this time to bind more closely together the links between the Euphemidae and their descendants at Cyrene, the Battiads.

Apollonius follows Pindar in naming Euphemus' parents as Poseidon and Europa (I. 179–81) probably for much the same reason as Pindar. Apollonius' original reason for including the Libyan episode must have been because of Euphemus' links with the African continent. This particular Argonaut had a special place in the hearts of the Alexandrians, and his omission from the piece would not have passed muster with Apollonius' audience.[24]

However, there was no need for Apollonius to place emphasis on Cyrene itself. So, unlike Pindar, Apollonius left the Lemnos visit in its traditional position on the outward journey, and ignored the Taenarus element completely.

An important Apollonian variation from the Pindaric version appears in the poets' respective telling of the clod part of the story through a prophecy. Pindar did it through Medea's prophetic words at Thera, while Apollonius makes Jason the instrument of prophecy. This is because Apollonius is using the Libyan episode to make a very different point. The Apollonian scenario is one of reconciliation between the gods and the Argonauts. It is the end of their punitive and circuitous journey in all senses. Jason and his entire crew now know and understand their mistakes, and from the minute they set up the tripod in dedication to the gods of the land the reconciliation process begins. This is the first time since the murder of Apsyrtus that the Argonauts have treated the gods with due respect and reverence, or *themis*. When Triton appears disguised as Eurypylus, this is also the first time since the sacrilegious slaughter that one of the gods comes to the Argonauts' aid.

The tripod tale of the Cretan Epimenides was used by Apollonius only in its bare essentials, that is, the meeting at Lake Tritonis between the Argonauts and Triton, son of Poseidon, who received from them a tripod. The meeting, of course, was later recorded in the Pindaric version, but the idea of the tripod itself was one which Apollonius could, and did, use cleverly to his own advantage. It would serve as a literary device to introduce his reconciliation scenario. The god could hardly have helped the Argonauts unless they had repented in the first place. The Argonauts, by offering the tripod to the god as a mark of repentance, allowed him in turn to give them the clod as a sign of forgiveness. It will be noted that in the Epimenidean version Triton offered Jason help, *if* he would give him the tripod—a subtle but very significant difference. Triton's gift of the clod in return for the tripod, which had been duly offered and dedicated to him, forms

[24] Cf. J. F. Carspecken, "Apollonius Rhodius and the Homeric Epic," *Yale Classical Studies* 13 (1952), 35–143. Carspecken suggests (46–47) that Euphemus holds an "intentionally emphatic" position in the Apollonian catalogue of heroes because of his popularity at Alexandria.

an exchange symbolic of the interrelationship which had to exist between gods and men.

Moreover, we find a further demonstration by Apollonius of this same striking symbolism in his presentation of what I will call the Eurypylus / Triton equation. Whereas, in Pindar, the god only appears in the guise of Eurypylus, in the Apollonian version he afterwards emerges in his own true form. Apollonius is the first to portray this metamorphosis. It is only when the Argonauts see him walk into the water carrying the tripod, and totally disappear beneath the waves, tripod and all, that they realize they at last have been helped by a god. In immediate response, Jason sacrifices a sheep over the stern, and prays; whereupon the god Triton emerges from the depths in all his glory, an awe-inspiring sight, vividly described by Apollonius (IV. 1602 ff.). Once clear of the lagoon the Argonauts spent that day on shore, and built altars to Poseidon and Triton. By presenting his audience with Triton, firstly disguised as the mortal Eurypylus, and then appearing as his immortal self, Apollonius is showing clearly the close interrelationship which inevitably exists between man and the gods, something which Jason and his Argonauts have now learned to respect and to revere.

Whether Pindar was the first to equate Eurypylus (a very early king of the Cyrenaic land)[25] with the god Triton is a moot point. The scholiast says that he was.[26] But it is more likely that this obvious conflation of two separate tales appeared first in the Mekionike-Eoee. Apollonius, of course, knew the truth of the matter. However, for us, the important thing to notice is that Apollonius decided not just to maintain the Eurypylus / Triton equation but to extend the notion by the metamorphosis described above.

By reintroducing the clod story after the Talos and Apollo episodes, Apollonius makes certain that the Libyan visit with its message of reconciliation acquires great emphasis, particularly as it is also the final episode in the poem.

Pindar's invention of the clod as suddenly being washed overboard by a freak wave was irrelevant to Apollonius' purpose. So, Apollonius provided an invention of his own, namely Euphemus' dream. The dream motif suited the context of the man / god interrelationship which the poet was trying to portray. The subsequent prophecy by Jason, rather than Medea, shows Jason's return to *themis* and final reconciliation with the gods before the Argonauts arrive home.

The Libyan episode of the Argonautic saga, then, has origins and sources which are by now rather obscure to us, but the evidence we do have is more than sufficient to show us how variable and adaptable Apollonius

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[25] See *Sch. Ap. Rh.* IV. 1561 c, p. 322 Wendel = *Sch. Pind. ad Pyth.* 4. 57 (Drach. II, p. 105). Also, L. Malten, *Kyrene* (Berlin 1911), pp. 105, 114 ff., 131.

[26] *Sch. Pind. ad Pyth.* 4. 37 (Drach. II, pp. 102–03).

Rhodius was in his creative selectivity, and how he integrated this method of creative selectivity with the results of his own innovatory powers.

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