

## Jason, Pallas and Domitian in Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica*

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### Jason's Tutelary Goddess?

Minerva is at the very heart of things in Valerius' epic. As far as we can tell this was deliberate; Apollonius' earlier version of the same legend, by contrast, consistently foregrounds Apollo. Minerva's appearances, however, change as Valerius' epic unfolds. The goddess is particularly prominent in the second half of the poem. I will argue that this is the result of the influence of the enthusiasm of the emperor Domitian for this Olympian divinity. Minerva's role changes in other, more subtle, ways. Initially protector of Jason she comes to withdraw her approval from the hero—markedly so in Books 7–8. This no doubt is one result of a myth in which Jason seldom fares well. But more still is involved. Valerius, by appealing to the Argonautic legend, seeks a mythic, heroic prototype for the Roman emperor and his empire (much as Virgil does with the Aeneas legend). Valerius' optimistic equation was ill chosen, for Jason was too ambiguous a hero for such an analogic function. Minerva's growing disapproval registers this. Myth, therefore, unexpectedly undermines the imperial paradigm. But so did real life. Can any optimistic rendering of Roman history be sustained during Domitian's principate?

### Minerva in Two Argonautic Versions

In Valerius Flaccus' version Minerva is given a very prominent role.<sup>1</sup> When one compares the two adaptations, it is as if, in Valerius, Minerva has

<sup>1</sup> The following works are cited henceforth by author's name and date of publication: M. A. Davis, "Ratis avdax: Valerius Flaccus' Bold Ship," *Ramus* 18 (1989) 46–73; D. C. Feeney, *The Gods in Epic: Poets and Critics of the Classical Tradition* (Oxford 1991); J.-L. Girard, "Domitien et Minerve: Une prédilection impériale," in *ANRW* II.17.1 (1981) 233–45; B. W. Jones, *The Emperor Domitian* (London 1992); R. A. Pitcher, "The Emperor and his Virtues: The Qualities of Domitian," *Antichthon* 24 (1990) 86–95; J. Strand, *Notes on Valerius Flaccus' Argonautica*, *Studia Graeca et Latina Gothoburgensia* 31 (Göteborg 1972); P. Toohey, *Reading Epic: An Introduction to the Ancient Narratives* (London 1992). My thanks for assistance to Brian Jones and Roger Pitcher.

replaced Apollo as a tutelary deity of the Argonautic expedition.<sup>2</sup> The applications of Minerva within the Roman rewriting are varied. Pallas, a force for "good" and for social order,<sup>3</sup> is a figure easily to be assimilated with Venus of the *Aeneid*: so 5. 651 ff. (reminiscent of Venus and Jupiter in *Aeneid* 1) and 5. 617 ff. (as Virgil's Juno complains to Jupiter of Venus, so Mars complains to Jupiter of Pallas). She is frequently designated as builder (with Argus) of the Argo and is often associated with the ship itself (1. 92–95, 126, 457, 4. 542–43, 5. 206, 294–95, 8. 292); on occasion she acts as the tutelary deity of the Argo (1. 215, 2. 49 ff., 8. 203; compare the function of the Dodonan oak at 1. 302 ff. and 5. 65 f.). At times she can be seen in company with Juno, usually trying to protect Jason, the Argo, or the Argonauts as a group (1. 73–74, 87–88, 530, 642–44; cf. 3. 88, 489, 4. 542–43, 554–55, 670 ff., 5. 183, 280 ff.). At other times she will exercise this protective role on her own.<sup>4</sup> It comes as little surprise, therefore, that Minerva and Jason sometimes develop an almost symbiotic relationship,<sup>5</sup> an association which is extended, no doubt ironically, even to Medea (7. 482, 8. 203, 462). Such is Minerva's intimacy with Jason and his companions that she, as *Pallas invita*, is even allowed to register disapproval of her favourite's actions (so 8. 203 and 224 [cf. 8. 243 and 247]; compare 3. 88, discussed below; I have omitted one example from this catalogue which appears at 6. 740 ff., where Pallas protects Perses from fear of Jupiter).

By comparison the applications of Pallas Athena within Apollonius' version are not as varied.<sup>6</sup> Pallas predictably is designated as builder of the Argo (with Argus) and as patron of the expedition (so 1. 19, 109–11, 226, 551, 2. 613, 1187, 3. 340, 4. 583). She also acts as protector of the Argo and the Argonauts throughout the Clashing Rocks episode (see 2. 537, 598, 602, 612). As in Valerius she is a protector and patron of Jason, either with Hera (thus the beginning of Book 3, where Athena, Hera, then Aphrodite plot Medea's passion, or Book 4, where Hera and Athena anxiously watch the progress of the Argo through the Wandering Rocks: 4. 959), or alone (thus 1. 300, 721, 768) and, once in the epic, seems to be curiously

<sup>2</sup> Lawall, *YCS* 19 (1966) 157, believes that the "three great gods" of Apollonius are Zeus, Aphrodite and Apollo. In Valerius they are Jupiter, Juno and Minerva (cf. Suet. *Dom.* 4. 1–3). On Valerius' gods (and Apollonius'), see Feeney 1991.

<sup>3</sup> Thus 4. 238 (she helps Jupiter against Typhoeus) and 7. 622–24 (note that Jason is also associated with Hercules here). Worth mentioning here are those occasions on which Pallas is pictured with the aegis (thus associating her with Jupiter): 3. 87–89, 4. 670 ff., 5. 287, 652, 6. 173–76, 396–98.

<sup>4</sup> So 6. 173 (cf. 175) and throughout the battle with the Sarmatians, 6. 609 (goddess and hero are almost symbiotic: *nec sua Crethiden latuit dea*), 7. 482 (the *virgo* could be Medea or Pallas), 8. 203.

<sup>5</sup> 6. 609 (*nec sua Crethiden latuit dea*), 7. 622–24 (Jason is compared to Hercules who is, with Pallas, fighting the Lemaeon Hydra; contrast 7. 467–68 and 509–10); cf. 8. 230.

<sup>6</sup> Three instances where her role seems conventional are 1. 629 (patron of women's domestic duties), 3. 1183–84 (she provides the serpent's teeth to Aectes and to Cadmus), 4. 1309–11 (the nymphs of the Tritonian Lake cared for Athena after her birth).

assimilated with the hero (so the temple of Jasonian Athena, alluded to at 1. 960). Pallas, as should be evident, exhibits none of the moral significance occasionally evident in Valerius, nor does she exhibit the same vacillation of attitude towards Jason.

### Minerva's Appearances

As Valerius' narrative unfolds (particularly from Book 5 onwards), not only does Pallas enter the epic with more frequency, but her appearances are more varied, more complex and more riddling. Valerius seems to take much more notice of this goddess and to accord her a more privileged role in the second half of his *Argonautica*. Furthermore, the intimate relationship between Minerva and Jason begins to change. As the goddess becomes more prominent she displays more and more reservations towards her favourite. It is as if Minerva becomes a moral barometer for the worth of Valerius' Jason.

Let us look first at the frequency with which Minerva appears in the *Argonautica*. In Book 1 I notice eight references to Minerva (73–74, 87–88, 92–95, 126, 215, 457, 530, 642–44), two in Book 2 (49, 53), two in Book 3 (88, 489), five in Book 4 (238, 542–43, 554–55, 670 ff., 682 ff.), seven in Book 5 (183, 206, 280 ff., 293–95, 344–45, 618 ff., 651 ff.), in Book 6 Minerva is to be understood as present in the thick of the action throughout most of its battle (she is named at 6. 173 ff., 396–98, 408, 609, 740), in Book 7 there are two, possibly three, references (442, 482 [*virgo* in this line refers to Medea, but it could also apply to Minerva], 624), while in Book 8 there are four (203, 224, 292, 462). Closer examination of the occurrences indicates that the first extended appearance of Minerva within the poem comes late in Book 4, at 4. 670 ff. This is an unavoidable episode. Here Pallas helps the Argo through the Clashing Rocks and on into the Black Sea (Apollonius 2. 537 ff. also acknowledges Pallas' help). We could stress this point. All but one of the previous nominations of Athena refer to her obliquely, and in that one exception (1. 530, this is the *concilium deorum* at the end of Book 1), although Pallas is on stage, it is Juno who does the talking. After the Clashing Rocks we see and hear more of Minerva. In Book 5 (280 ff.) we watch Pallas and Juno conversing; we hear her speak again in the *concilium deorum* at the end of this book. In Book 6 she receives what is perhaps her most vigorous depiction. Here she is physically present throughout much of the battle with Perses. She even intervenes to save him. Minerva fades somewhat in Book 7, but this is perhaps the result of the authorial absorption in the tryst with Medea. But, in the abbreviated Book 8, her presence begins again to dominate.

*Nec sua Crethiden latuit dea*: Minerva in Books 1–6

Frequency may be offset by the variety and complexity of the types of reference. In the first four books the appearances of Minerva are moderately straightforward. She is usually the builder of the Argo (1. 126, 457, 4. 542–43), its protector (1. 215, 2. 49 ff.), or the protector and patron of Jason (1. 73–74, 87–88, 530, 642–44, 3. 489, 4. 542–43, 554–55, 670 ff.). I notice only two references which are in any way out of the ordinary. The first of these is at 3. 88. The confused Minyae are cutting a swathe through the unfortunate forces of Cyzicus. The Argonauts are so powerful that not even the aegis-bearing Pallas could resist them (3. 87–89: *horrens / stat manus, aegisono quam nec fera pectore virgo / dispulerit*). Do these lines suggest an understandable disapproval of the Argonauts on Pallas' part? The second reference comes at 4. 238. Here Minerva (compared to Pollux boxing the villain Amycus) represents a force which will vindicate the "moral" and social order—she is imagined fighting the rebel Typhoeus.

The timbre of the allusions to Minerva becomes more complex in Books 5–6. Most notable is the appearance of Minerva at the end of Book 5. Here, within the *concilium deorum*, she vigorously defends against Mars the position of the Argonauts to her father Jupiter. The scene of course picks up that ending Book 1, but, more importantly, it inevitably echoes that scene of *Aeneid* 1 where Venus argues Aeneas' case and that of the Aeneadae to Jupiter.<sup>7</sup> That comparison emphasizes the connection of Jason with Aeneas and of Venus with Minerva. As Aeneas was an imperial prototype, so too must Jason be. Whether this is for Vespasian, Titus, or Domitian does not matter terribly at this point. We witness in Jason a generic imperial prototype.

The vividness and the complexity of this allusion to Minerva is amply matched in Book 6. I have already stressed how prominent a role she plays here—she participates vigorously in the battle between the forces of Aeetes and Perses. At one point her identification with Jason seems to extend beyond her role as protector almost to the point of near symbiosis (6. 609: *nec sua Crethiden latuit dea*).

*Pallas invita*: Minerva in Books 7–8

There remain Books 7 and 8. In Book 7 the frequency of Minerva's appearances is diminished. But their type does seem to differ from those of Books 1–6. Though still Jason's protector (7. 442) she also represents, like

<sup>7</sup> J. Adamietz, *Zur Komposition der "Argonautica" des Valerius Flaccus*, *Zetemata* 67 (Munich 1976) 80, notes the parallel with Book 1 but, following Schetter (*Philol.* 103 [1959] 308), believes that the divine gathering here is based on *Aeneid* 10. 1–117.

Hercules *alexikakos*, the moral order (7. 624).<sup>8</sup> There is also a most peculiar identification between Medea and Pallas. At 7. 482 Medea sarcastically remarks *servatum pudeat nec virginis arte?* The *virgo* to whom she refers is herself. But, in light of later lines such as 8. 462–63 (where Medea is another Pallas: *interque ingentia Graium / nomina Palladia virgo stet altera prora*) it is difficult not to understand the *virgo* as Jason's usual protector, Pallas. What is the force of this strange identification? The portrait of Jason in this book is beginning to show cracks. The more he becomes involved with the malevolent Medea the more Valerius seems uncertain of his moral worth. Jason can be the upright Herculean hero of 7. 622–24. But he can also be the hero who at 7. 467–68 accepts from Medea the helmet of Discordia, who at 7. 498 ff. can forswear himself and who at 7. 509–10 can earn the enmity of the Fury for his *periuria*: *audiit atque simul meritis periuria poenis / despondet questus semper Furor ultus amantis*. The ambiguity of Valerius towards Jason is reflected in the ambiguity of the portrait of Pallas.

Minerva's depiction in Book 8 is comparable to that of Book 7. She is, at 8. 292, the builder of the Argo and, at 8. 203, its tutelary deity. But several of the references to her in this book partake of an equivocality which is wholly out of spirit with the sentiment behind lines such as 6. 609 (*nec sua Crethiden latuit dea*). Medea is, as we have already seen, curiously, even ironically, associated with Minerva at 8. 462–63. To these lines we might add 8. 202–03 (*puppe procul summa vigilis post terga magistri / haeserat auratae genibus Medea Minervae*). Minerva's enthusiasm for Medea as wife of her favourite Jason is made quite clear at 8. 224–25 (*ipse autem invitae iam Pallados erigere aras / incipit Idaliae numen nec spernere divae*). Pallas is *invitae* because of her disapproval of the marriage. She knows, as does the Furor (compare 7. 509–10), what the outcome of this marriage will be. Her disapproval is made even more plain when the marriage is celebrated. The omen from Pallas' altar is a bad one (8. 247–49: *sed neque se pingues tum candida flamma per auras / explicuit nec tura videt concordia Mopsus / promissam nec stare fidem, breve tempus amorum*). It is within the context of Pallas' unwillingness that we ought to read again lines 8. 202–03 (quoted above). Here Medea clings weeping to a gilded image of Minerva, longing for surety and security. The lines are poignant in their ambivalence. The golden image suggests at once the golden fleece and Jason (identified so often with Medea and now with the fleece). Medea clings, as it were, to both in the hope of a salvation which we know will be false: Jason and his fleece will betray her. But she is also literally clinging to Minerva who, as we know, disapproves utterly of her.

<sup>8</sup> Here are the lines (7. 622–24) in question (Jason is fighting the earth-born warriors): *nec magis aut illis aut illis milibus ultra / sufficit, ad dirae quam cum Tiryntius Hydrae / agmina Palladios defessus respicit ignes*. Jason, like Hercules, is an *alexikakos* (8. 230) who in his turn relies on Minerva's suggestion of fire to counter the Lemaeon hydra.

No doubt Valerius, like Minerva, does strongly disapprove of Medea (see, amongst other passages, 4. 13–14, 5. 219–20, 329–99). But, I suggest, the vision presented in 8. 203 is at odds with this ideology. It is impossible, I suggest, not to sympathize with Medea in 8. 203. And with sympathy comes insidiously a disapproval of the hero who has placed her in this state. As I stated above, in Books 7 and 8 the cracks begin to show in the Valerian ideology which Jason embodies. And it is the representation of Minerva—to return to the main point of this paragraph—which highlights this change.

#### Domitian's Enthusiasm for Minerva

Why does Minerva become more prominent in the second half of Valerius' epic? I take the increasing prominence of Minerva in the final books of the *Argonautica* to reflect an enthusiastic real-life association between Domitian—under whose reign these books were written—and Minerva.<sup>9</sup> That Domitian was an ardent devotee of this goddess is well known. That this homage is reflected in contemporary poetry is also well known. It is my suggestion that this respect is visible in the increasingly important role the goddess plays in the second half of Valerius' poem.

Domitian's regard for and identification with Minerva has been often documented (Girard 1981, Jones 1992: 99–100). I will rehearse here only a few of the better-known links between emperor and goddess. As the Julio-Claudians linked themselves with Venus, so did Domitian link himself and his Sabine Flavian dynasty (in the Sabine region the cult had considerable history) with Minerva.<sup>10</sup> Philostratus tells us (*VA* 7. 24) that Domitian claimed to have been a son of Minerva. Perhaps that is why he kept a shrine to her in his bedroom (Suet. *Dom.* 15. 2). Domitian linked the goddess with a number of public buildings—in the Forum Nervae or Forum Transitorium he established a temple to Minerva's honour; there seems also to have been one in Augustus' Forum; there was a temple to Minerva Chalcidicia in the Campus Martius; and, perhaps, an Atrium Minervae in the Curia (Girard 1981). There are a number of reliefs depicting Minerva with Domitian, such as that from the Palazzo della Cancelleria (reproduced as fig. 3 by Girard 1981). Minerva featured regularly on his coins (Jones 1992: 100). This emperor also celebrated an annual festival for the goddess at his Alban villa and seems to have founded a college of priests for her worship (Suet. *Dom.* 4. 3–4). She even appeared to him just before his death (Suet. *Dom.* 15. 2).

<sup>9</sup> I have derived great benefit from R. Pitcher, "Domitian and Minerva: Martial's Imperial Mythmaking" (unpublished paper) and *Patrons and Friends in the "Epigrams" of Martial* (diss. Melbourne University 1980) 98, 119.

<sup>10</sup> Girard 1981: 240, citing K. Scott, *The Imperial Cult under the Flavians* (Stuttgart 1936) 186.

## Flattering Domitian through Minerva: Martial

Domitian's devotion to Minerva is reflected in contemporary poetry (e.g. Statius, *Silv.* 1. 1. 37–38), particularly that of Martial.<sup>11</sup> Martial often adverts to the closeness between the emperor and his votive goddess. For example, in Poem 8. 1. 4 Minerva is termed *Pallas Caesariana* and in 9. 3. 10 she is said to act for Domitian (*Pallada praetereo? res agit illa tuas*). In 6. 10 the identification is almost too familiar. Here Martial is attempting to cadge money. Pallas responds for Domitian (also confused with Jupiter): *sic ego: sic breviter posita mihi Gorgone Pallas: / "quae nondum data sunt, stulte, negata putas?"* (6. 10. 11–12). This close identification is also expressed in three poems to which I will return. Poems 7. 1, 7. 2 and 14. 179 all refer to Domitian's cuirass, on which was depicted Minerva holding the Gorgon's head.

Minerva was traditionally associated with wisdom and often with poetry. So, it seems, was the emperor Domitian (see Pitcher 1990). Poetry, Minerva and Domitian are blended in 5. 5, where one Sextus, perhaps librarian on the Palatine, is addressed as a devotee of Minerva (5. 5. 1: *Sexte, Palatinae cultor facunde Minervae*) and as one who has inside knowledge of the presumably poetic abilities of the emperor (5. 5. 2: *ingenio frueris qui propiore dei*). The association between poetry, Minerva and the emperor is notably evident in the instance of the Alban festival. In 4. 1. 5 (*hic colat Albano Tritonida multus in auro*) and at 5. 1. 1 (*hoc tibi, Palladiae seu collibus uteris Albae*) Martial refers to the poetic contests for Minerva which were held annually at his Alban villa. Poem 9. 23 specifically celebrates one Carus, a victor at the Alban contest (9. 23. 1–2: *O cui virgineo flavescere contigit auro, / dic, ubi Palladium sit tibi, Care, decus*). Carus had been so successful that Domitian—Martial says Minerva—also awarded him a bust of himself (9. 24. 5–6). Poetry contests for Minerva were not confined to the Alban festival. They were also held at the quinquennial Capitoline games. Martial refers to these in the same context as the Alban festival at 4. 1. 6: *perque manus tantas plurima quercus eat*.

Poetry could be confused with politics. The reference in 5. 2. 8, a dedication poem for the fifth book, states that Domitian (here Germanicus) and the chaste Minerva (*Cecropia puella*) could read his verse without embarrassment (5. 2. 5–8: *lascivos lege quattuor libellos: / quintus cum domino liber iocatur, / quem Germanicus ore non rubenti / coram Cecropia legat puella*). Minerva, like Diana, was well known for her chastity.

<sup>11</sup> Citations of Minerva within Martial which I have located (not all of them) are: as Minerva she appears at 1. 39. 3, 76. 5, 102. 2, 4. 23. 7, 5. 5. 1, 40. 1, 6. 64. 16, 7. 1. 1, 32. 3, 10. 20. 14, 14. 179. 1; as Pallas at 6. 10. 11, 7. 28. 3, 8. 1, 4. 9. 24. 5, 12. 98. 3, 9. 3. 10 (Pallada); as *virgo* 6. 10. 9, 14. 179; as *puella* at 5. 2. 8; forms of the adjective *palladius* are used at 5. 1. 2, 8. 50. 14, 9. 23. 2; as Tritonia at 4. 1. 5.

Domitian, if not personally chaste, made some attempt to reform his countrymen through moral legislation (again, see Pitcher 1990). That in part is the force of 5. 2. 5–8. It also helps us understand 8. 1. 3–4: *nuda recede Venus; non est tuus iste libellus: / tu mihi, tu Pallas Caesariana, veni*. In this poem the Julio-Claudian Venus, a symbol for sexual wantonness, has been cast out from the more pure state of this Minerva-worshipping Flavian emperor. Such ideological humbug is also at the root of 5. 40 (*pinxisti Venerem, colis, Artemidore, Minervam: / et miraris, opus displicuisse tuum?*; cf. 1. 102). Here one Artemidorus, erstwhile devotee of Minerva, is perplexed that his depiction of Venus has not gained the favour presumably of the emperor and his circles.

### Valerius, Martial, Minerva and Domitian

Where does all of this leave us with Valerius and his Jason and his Minerva? Passages such as these certainly hint at an ideological underpinning of the presence of Minerva in Valerius' *Argonautica*. They certainly make more comprehensible the displacement of Apollo, who had occupied Minerva's role in Apollonius' *Argonautica*. But it is possible that the link between Martial's and Valerius' Pallas may be made more explicit. There exists one striking passage within Martial which, in its association of Minerva and Domitian, may well have a direct parallel within the Valerian epic. The poem to which I am referring is 7. 1. It runs as follows:

Accipe belligerae crudum thoraca Minervae,  
 ipsa Medusaeae quem timet ira comae.  
 Dum vacat, haec, Caesar, poterit lorica vocari:  
 pectore cum sacro sederit, aegis erit.

This little poem, introducing Martial's seventh book (dated by Friedländer to December 92 C.E.), addresses Domitian (the *Caesar* of line 3) and refers to a cuirass used by him during his campaign of that year against the Sarmatians. It progresses in two stages. In the first (1–2) it is suggested that Domitian is a figure of such martial capability that he could terrify the Medusa depicted on the cuirass itself. In the second stage (3–4) the cuirass is identified with Zeus' aegis, which was often worn by and associated with Minerva. Martial states that this cuirass, when not in use, is merely a *lorica* (a leather cuirass). When in use (when it has been placed on Domitian's *sacrum pectus*) it becomes the aegis of Minerva. Domitian himself, that is to say, becomes the very embodiment of Minerva. The impenetrability of this cuirass is referred to again in poems 7. 2 and 14. 179. In the latter Minerva's association with Domitian is made even more plain (*Dic mihi, virgo ferox, cum sit tibi cassis et hasta, / quare non habeas aegida. "Caesar habet."*).

What connection does Martial's Poem 7. 1 have with Valerius? Minerva, as we have already seen, plays a very prominent role within the



sixth book of the *Argonautica*. She appears in this book, furthermore, armed with the aegis: *at circa Aesoniden Danaum manus ipsaque Pallas / aegide terrifica, quam nec dea lassat habendo / nec pater horrentem colubris vultuque tremendam / Gorgoneo* (6. 173–76; see 3. 87–89, 4. 670 ff., 5. 287, 652, 6. 396–98). Presumably she remains so armed throughout this book, in which she is ranged, alongside the Argonauts and the forces of Aeetes, against, amongst others, the Sarmatians. Now it is well known that Domitian campaigned against the Sarmatians in 88 and/or in 92 C.E. Martial's Poem 7. 1 and its strong, suggestive parallel to *Argonautica* 6 may suggest a shared occasion. Let me repeat the parallel. Here we witness a goddess known to be linked with Domitian and a goddess, at that, armed with a weapon which, in another contemporary poetic context, had also been linked with Domitian and his campaign of 92 C.E. That *Argonautica* 6 contains a scarcely veiled reference to Domitian's campaigns of 92 C.E. against the Sarmatians is a hard claim to dismiss.

The case for identifying the events of *Argonautica* 6 with Domitian's campaign against the Sarmatians of 92 C.E. has often been made.<sup>12</sup> It has been questioned (Strand 1972: 23–35). The grounds are the connection of Book 6 with the proem of Book 1. Syme felt that Book 6 offered evidence that this proem was written for Domitian. Recent authorities insist that it is addressed to Vespasian (Feeney 1991: 334 and Strand 1972: 23–35). Book 6, therefore, is better directed towards the addressee of the proem of Book 1. But to force the connection between the proem and Book 6 is unnecessary. While the proem to Book 1 may well refer to Vespasian, there is no reason why Domitian and his devotion for Minerva could not have coloured Book 6. (Revision and internal cohesion of referents in an incomplete poem is not at issue.) Martial offers particularly strong evidence as to why this may be the case.

Why then does Minerva become more prominent in the second half of Valerius' epic? Books 5–8, I contend, were composed during the reign of Domitian. The increased prominence and the greater complexity of reference to Minerva is dictated by imperial enthusiasm. If it is correct to see Vespasian behind the proem to Book 1, then we are to imagine that the first four books were composed at a more leisurely rate during his reign (69–79 C.E.), that of Titus (79–81) and the early years of Domitian (81–96). Valerius was dead, at the latest, by 95. He may, therefore, have composed the final three and a half books of the *Argonautica* at haste (by his standards) in the final four or five years of his life.

#### Domitian as Jason and Minerva

Thus the displacement in Valerius of Apollonius' Apollo. There are, however, other conclusions which must be teased out from my argument.

<sup>12</sup> Above all by Syme, "The *Argonautica* of Valerius Flaccus," *CQ* 23 (1929) 129–37.

These concern the encomiastic and ideological basis of the *Argonautica*. Once we allow the parallel between Martial's Poem 7. 1 and *Argonautica* 6 two other crucial points become clear. The first is that a connection is to be drawn between Domitian's expeditionary forces and those of the Argonauts (conceivable assimilation of Argonauts and followers to Romans occurs at 3. 465 [?], 6. 402, 420, 7. 573). This connection may be extended one step further. Just as Jason leads the Argonauts, so does Domitian lead the Romans. The emperor, therefore, is to be conflated not just, as we have seen, with the goddess Minerva, but also with the goddess' favourite, Jason. Could any contemporary audience have missed the ideological ring of *Argonautica* 6. 609: *nec sua Crethiden latuit dea?*

How is this double identification possible? Jason should be thought of not as being the prototype for a specific emperor, but as a generic imperial prototype (Toohey 1992: 196–203). He is, as we see him in Book 1, the prototype for Vespasian, or for Titus, or for Domitian. It follows, therefore, that Jason may take on attributes or qualities of more than one emperor within this poem. Thus, I suggest, he may be associated in the earlier books with Vespasian. But, in *Argonautica* 6, his particular association may be directed towards Domitian. The aims of the *Argonautica*, therefore, extend beyond the merely encomiastic. Valerius, as is sometimes noted, is attempting to provide an ideological, mythological basis for the principate (contrast Davis 1989). His mode, as will be obvious, owes much to Virgil.

#### Valerius' Narrative Impasse

We cannot leave the argument here. There remain important interpretative and ideological conclusions which must influence one's reading of the *Argonautica*. I have suggested that Minerva's reactions to Jason act as a barometer for our estimation of his worth. I have also suggested that, particularly in Books 7 and 8, the depiction of Jason becomes increasingly unflattering and that, in direct proportion, Minerva seems to register her disapproval. There is, of course, a stark contradiction in this position. Domitian, as we have seen, comes to be identified with both goddess and hero. All is well while Minerva and Jason see eye to eye. But when they seem at odds, when Jason, one half of the imperial paradigm, begins in Books 7–8 to present an image of his real-life analogue which is hardly flattering, it is inevitable that we come to question the ideology on which the poem is built. Valerius, therefore, has inadvertently backed himself into an impossible corner—precisely in proportion to the analogical confusion and contradiction between Jason and Minerva.

Valerius' ideological signifiers have slipped off their mythological referents. Myth itself is responsible for this slippage. (The poem, therefore, unintentionally comes to challenge the very ideology which it ostensibly purports to validate.) This impasse is most evident in the incomplete conclusion. To be sure, Valerius may have died before he was able to

complete his epic—a very likely possibility given the haste, by his standards, with which he seems to have composed it.<sup>13</sup> Yet the prospect of Domitian's analogue committing the inevitable murder of Absyrtus (not to mention all of his later, dubious exploits in Iolcus and Corinth) and of his falling foul of the emperor's votive goddess Minerva may have been too much. It was one thing for Aeneas to kill Turnus—we have been prepared to accept his death by our foreknowledge of Jupiter's disapproval.<sup>14</sup> No such preparation has been offered for Absyrtus' slaughter. To witness our imperial prototype committing such a murder would be to place too great a strain on the ideological substrate of the *Argonautica*.<sup>15</sup> The ideology would implode. I wonder, therefore, if Valerius did not sense this, that myth and real life had subverted his intended design? I wonder if Valerius did not find premature silence a preferable means for ending his poem?

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<sup>13</sup> Schetter, *Philol.* 103 (1959) 297–308 and Davis 1989: 72 wonder if the ending was completed but “lost to us in the vicissitudes of transmission.”

<sup>14</sup> See Mackie, *Antichthon* 24 (1990) 79–85.

<sup>15</sup> On Jason's characterization see, amongst other, Hull, *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History* 1, ed. C. Deroux (Brussels 1979) 379–409; Lewis, *AC* 27 (1984) 91–100; Feeney 1991; and Toohey 1992.