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The Argonauts on Mount Dindymon

Dionysiac Cult and Hellenistic Ideology in Apollonius of Rhodes

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Abstract

This article explores the foundation of Cybele's cult by the Argonauts on Mount Dindymon as narrated by Apollonius of Rhodes in Book 1 of the *Argonautica*. It will be maintained that the differences between the ritual described by the poet and the cultic practice attested to in the tradition can be explained as a reference to the myth of Dionysus' purification in Phrygia, which was also staged in the Grand Procession of Ptolemy II. In particular, the presence of a Dionysiac sub-pattern will be detected in the mention of the vine used for carving the statue of Cybele, which has no parallel in other sources concerning the goddess and which is linked to Dionysus in other Hellenistic poems about cult statues. It will be claimed that the reference to the Dionysiac myth may hide a political message connected with Ptolemaic imperialist ambition in Anatolia and Greece in the 3rd century BC.

Keywords

Dionysus – Rhea/Cybele – Apollonius of Rhodes – Ptolemaic Alexandria – cultic practice

1 Introduction

At the end of Book 1 of Apollonius of Rhodes' *Argonautica*, the Argonauts ascend Mount Dindymon near Cyzicus, in Northern Anatolia, for a purificatory rite in honour of Cybele/Rhea.¹ After carving a cult statue from a local tree, crowning themselves with oak branches, and performing a war-dance around the idol, they receive miraculous signs suggesting that the goddess is favourably disposed towards them:

ἔσκε δέ τι στιβαρὸν στύπος ἀμπέλου ἔντροφον ὕλη,
 πρόχην γεράνδρουν· τὸ μὲν ἔκταμον, ὄφρα πέλοιτο
 δαίμονος οὐρείης ἱερὸν βρέτας, ἔξεσε δ' Ἄργος
 εὐκόσμως· καὶ δὴ μιν ἐπ' ὀκριόνετι κολωνῶ 1120
 ἴδρυσαν φηγοῖσιν ἐπηρεφές ἀκροτάτησιν,
 αἶ ῥά τε πασῶν πανυπέρταται ἐρρίζωνται.
 βωμὸν δ' αὐ χέραδος παρενήνεον· ἀμφὶ δὲ φύλλοις
 στεψάμενοι δρυῖνοισι θηηπολῆς ἐμέλοντο,
 Μητέρα Δινδυμῖν πολυπότνιαν ἀγκαλέοντες ... 1125
 πολλὰ δὲ τήν γε λιτῆσιν ἀποστρέψαι ἐριώλας
 Αἰσονίδης γουνάζετ' ἐπιλείβων ἱεροῖσιν
 αἰθομένοις· ἄμυδις δὲ νέοι Ὀρφῆος ἀνωγῆ
 σκαίροντες βηταρμὸν ἐνόπλιον εἰλίσσοντο 1135
 καὶ σάκεα ξιφέεσσιν ἐπέκτυπον ...
 ἢ δὲ που εὐαγέεσσιν ἐπὶ φρένα θῆκε θυγαλῆς 1140
 ἀνταίη δαίμων, τὰ δ' εἰκότα σήματ' ἔγεντο.
 δένδρεα μὲν καρπὸν χέον ἄσπετον, ἀμφὶ δὲ ποσσὶν
 αὐτομάτη φύε γαῖα τερείνης ἄνθεα ποίης·
 θῆρες δ' εἰλυοὺς τε κατὰ ξυλόχους τε λιπόντες
 οὐρησιν σαίνοντες ἐπήλυθον. ἢ δὲ καὶ ἄλλο 1145
 θῆκε τέρας· ἐπεὶ οὐ τι παροίτερον ὕδατι νᾶε
 Δίνδυμον, ἀλλὰ σφιν τότε ἀνέβραχε διψάδος αὐτως
 ἐκ κορυφῆς ἄλληκτον· Ἴησονίην δ' ἐνέπουσι
 κεῖνο ποτὸν Κρήνην περιναίεται ἄνδρες ὀπίσσω.²

1 On the episode of Cyzicus and Mount Dindymon see van Krevelen 1954; Kehl 1991; Cozzoli 2012; Schaaf 2014, 70-97. The episode is also present in the *Orphic Argonautica* 601-628: see Vian 1987, 116-119. For the syncretism between Cybele, Rhea, and Demeter, see Burkert 1987, 112-113 and Roller 1999, 169-177.

2 A.R. 1.1117-1125; 1132-1136; 1140-1149. Translation by Hunter 1993b.

And near it they heaped an altar of small stones, and wreathed their brows with oak leaves and paid heed to sacrifice, invoking the mother of Dindymon, most venerable. And with many prayers did Aeson's son beseech the goddess to turn aside the stormy blasts as he poured libations on the blazing sacrifice; and at the same time by command of Orpheus the youths trod a measure dancing in full armour, and clashed with their swords on their shields ... And the gracious goddess, I ween, inclined her heart to pious sacrifices; and favourable signs appeared. The trees shed abundant fruit, and round their feet the earth of its own accord put forth flowers from the tender grass. And the beasts of the wild wood left their lairs and thickets and came up fawning on them with their tails. And she caused yet another marvel: for hitherto there was no flow of water on Dindymon, but then for them an unceasing stream gushed forth from the thirsty peak just as it was, and the dwellers around in after times called that stream, the spring of Jason.

The passage is clearly aetiological in intent. By describing the construction of an idol, the performance of a complex ritual, and the manifestation of extraordinary consequences, the poet is accounting for the establishment of the Greek cult of Cybele in Anatolia, the goddess' region of provenance. There are, however, some difficulties with this interpretation. It is noteworthy, in fact, that the representation of Cybele's cult departs quite remarkably from its standard form in Hellenistic Cyzicus, which consisted of nocturnal rites illuminated by torches.³ This is all the more relevant for the *Argonautica* given that this kind of ceremony had been already attested to by Herodotus and that the temple of the Idaean Mother in the same city was considered by Hellenistic historical sources to be an Argonautic foundation, which is evidence for the role played by the heroes in the establishment of the ritual itself in Cyzicus.⁴ The fact that Apollonius did not provide an aetiological explanation of the cult as known in his day and departed from this well-documented pattern is thought-provoking.

3 Vermaseren 1977, 81-87 and 110-112; Bremmer 1984, 278; Roller 1999, 149-151.

4 Hdt. 4.76: the Scythian Anacharsis attends the festival of the Great Mother in Cyzicus and decides to perform the nocturnal rite of worship in his homeland as well; for a commentary see Asheri 2007, 636-637 *ad loc.* Neanthes of Cyzicus *FGrH* 84 F 39 (= Str. 1.2.32): πρὸς γὰρ Νεάνθη τὸν Κυζικηνὸν φιλοτιμοτέρως ἀντιλέγων εἰπόντα ὅτι οἱ Ἀργοναῦται πλεόντες εἰς Φάσιν τὸν ὑφ' Ὀμήρου καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ὁμολογούμενον πλοῦν ἰδρύσαντο τὰ τῆς Ἰδαίας μητρὸς ἱερά περὶ Κύζικον ('For [*scil.* Demetrios of Skepsis], too eagerly speaking against Neanthes of Kyzikos, who had said that the Argonauts established a sanctuary of the Idaean Mother near Kyzikos when they were sailing to Phasis, on the voyage which Homer and others agree they made'; translation by Baron 2016). For the attestations of Cybele's cult in Cyzicus see Vermaseren 1987, 91-99.

This paper suggests that the text's apparent originality, which is evident in this and other significant details, may be explained by drawing attention to a possible Dionysiac sub-pattern. The acknowledgment of a Dionysus-related myth in the background of this section would not only account for the peculiarities of the ritual depicted here, but also offer a new key for the interpretation of this aetiology, in which the manipulation of historical and geographical notions encompasses a broader cultural message on the political relationship between Ptolemaic Egypt and Greece.⁵

2 Dionysus' Purification

The story of the Argonauts at Cyzicus was a traditional part of Argo's voyage towards the East, and several versions of the story seem to have been familiar in Apollonius' time, as the conflicting testimonies of Demetrius of Skepsis and Neanthes of Cyzicus demonstrate.⁶ Accordingly, modern scholars have argued that the poet, characteristically, fused details from a variety of traditions, some of which involved the worship of deities other than Rhea/Cybele. In the introduction to the Argonauts' ascent of the mountain, for instance, the powers of the goddess are described by the seer Mopsos in a way that is clearly indebted to the representation of Hecate in Hesiod.⁷ The picture of the warriors dancing around an archaic statue under an oak tree probably hints at the cultic dance of the Amazons depicted in Callimachus' *Hymn to Artemis*, as clear lexical allusions suggest.⁸ The blending of religious traditions in this passage is further confirmed by the presence of similar rites held on the mountains near Solmissos, close to Mount Dindymon, where young men, even in Strabo's day, honoured the goddess Cybele with lavish garments, while the Kouretes

5 For the construction of cultural memories by means of allusive narratives see the work of Assmann 2011, in particular chap. 3 for the connections between cultural identity and politics. For the relationship between Apollonius and contemporary history see Mori 2008 and, more recently, Morrison 2020 and Phillips 2020.

6 Demetrius of Skepsis F 50 Gaede; Neanthes of Cyzicus *FGrH* 84 F 39. For a commentary see Baron 2016 *ad loc.*

7 A.R. 1.1098-1102; Hes. *Th.* 426-428; see Kehl 1991.

8 A.R. 1.1132-1136; Call. *Dian.* 237-242. See Bornmann 1968 *ad loc.*; for the *πυρρίχη* as a dance related to Artemis see Ceccarelli 1998 *passim*. It should also be noted that in Callimachus the Amazons dance around a *βρέτας* put under an oak tree (Call. *Dian.* 238-239; for the textual problem concerning the oak see Ruggeri 2017), as it is in A.R. 1.1132. For the relationship between Callimachus and Apollonius see Hunter 2015, 21-25; other references in Köhnken 2008.

performed what are only known from ancient sources as ‘mystic sacrifices’.⁹ One may also include the distinct Dionysiac features visible in the exuberant reaction of plants and animals to the sacrifice, in particular the springing forth of fountains and the taming of wild beasts, which are elements connected with the cult of Demeter/Cybele from the 5th century onwards.¹⁰ The presence of a Dionysiac nuance, however, seems to emerge from other details as well, considering that historical sources report that the connection between Dionysus, Cybele, purification rites and the Anatolian territory was particularly strong in Ptolemaic Alexandria.

In Callixenus’ description of the celebrated Dionysiac πομπή, a substantial part of Ptolemy II’s Grand Procession held in Alexandria in 278 BC, it is reported that the tableaux representing the god’s deeds from his birth to his triumphal return to Greece were crowned by a pageant illustrating a lesser-known myth concerning his encounter with Cybele:

Ἐξῆς ἐπὶ τετρακύκλου Διόνυσος περὶ τὸν τῆς Ῥέας βωμὸν καταπεφευγώς, ὅτε ὑπὸ Ἥρας ἐδιώκετο, στέφανον ἔχων χρυσοῦν, Πριάπου αὐτῷ παρεστῶτος, ἐστεφανωμένου χρυσῷ κισσίνῳ. Τὸ δὲ τῆς Ἥρας ἄγαλμα στεφάνην εἶχε χρυσήν.¹¹

Next in a four-wheeled cart appeared Dionysus, having fled to the Altar of Rhea when he was pursued by Hera; Dionysus had a golden crown, and Priapus stood beside him crowned with a golden ivy crown. The statue of Hera had a golden *stephanē*.

As Ellen Rice points out in her commentary to Callixenus’ fragment on the procession, a more detailed version of the same story is preserved in the *Library* attributed to Apollodorus where it takes the form of an aetiological explanation for the cultic similarities between the two deities:

Διόνυσος δὲ εὐρετῆς ἀμπέλου γενόμενος, Ἥρας μανίαν αὐτῷ ἐμβαλούσης περιπλανᾶται Αἴγυπτόν τε καὶ Συρίαν. καὶ τὸ μὲν πρῶτον Πρωτεὺς αὐτὸν

9 Str. 14.1.20. Discussion by Schaaf 2014, 95-96.

10 E. Ba. 699-702 (the Maenads and the wild beasts) and 704-711 (drawing of waters from the rock), with Dodds 1944, 163-164 *ad loc.* and Sanders 1977. Euripides is particularly careful in tracing the contacts between Dionysus, the Great Mother, and the Phrygian land: see Ba. 78-88, with the commentary of Di Benedetto 2004, 300-302 *ad v.* 80; see also Hel. 1353-1358 with Allan 2008 *ad loc.* For the syncretism between Dionysus and Rhea-Cybele see Vian 1974, 103 n. 1; Musti 1986, 108; Roller 1999, 176.

11 Callixenus, *FGrH* 627 F 2.194-200 = Ath. 5.202A. Translation by Rice 1983. For the Grand Procession see Fraser 1972, 1, 193-207; Rice 1983; Keyser 2014.

ὑποδέχεται βασιλεὺς Αἰγυπτίων, αὐθις δὲ εἰς Κύβελα τῆς Φρυγίας ἀφικνεῖται, κάκει καθαρθεὶς ὑπὸ Ῥέας καὶ τὰς τελετὰς ἐκμαθὼν, καὶ λαβὼν παρ' ἐκείνης τὴν στολὴν, ἐπὶ Ἰνδοῦς διὰ τῆς Θράκης ἠπείγετο.¹²

Dionysus discovered the vine, and being driven mad by Hera he roamed about Egypt and Syria. At first he was received by Proteus, king of Egypt, but afterwards he arrived at Cybela in Phrygia. And there, after he had been purified by Rhea and learned the rites of initiation, he received from her the costume and hastened through Thrace against the Indians.

To these texts one may add another piece of evidence drawn from the ancient scholia to the *Iliad*:

Οὐδὲ γὰρ οὐδὲ Δρύαντος υἱὸς κρατερὸς Λυκόοργος.] Διόνυσος, ὁ Διὸς καὶ Σεμέλης παῖς, ἐν Κυβέλοις τῆς Φρυγίας ὑπὸ τῆς Ῥέας τυχῶν καθαρμῶν, καὶ διαθεὶς τὰς τελετὰς, καὶ λαβὼν παρὰ τῆς θεᾶς τὴν διασκευὴν, ἀνὰ πᾶσαν ἐφέρετο τὴν γῆν χορευῶν, καὶ τιμῶν τυγχάνων προηγείτο πάντων ἀνθρώπων.... Τῆς ἱστορίας πολλοὶ ἐμνήσθησαν, προηγουμένως δὲ ὁ τὴν Εὐρωπῖαν πεποικῶς Εὐμηλος.¹³

IN FACT, NOT EVEN THE STRONG LYCURGUS, SON OF DRYAS] Dionysus the son of Zeus and Semele, having received purification from Rhea at Mt. Kybela in Phrygia and been taught the rites and acquired all the paraphernalia from the goddess, roamed all over the world, dancing and receiving honours, and all the people followed him ... [*The scholiast then continues with the story of Dionysus and Lycurgus*] Many authors refer to the story, and in first instance Eumelus, the author of the *Europa*.

The combination of the three testimonies shows that in early Hellenistic Alexandria the myth concerning an expiatory ritual performed by Dionysus in honour of Rhea/Cybele was well-known (and even performed during an important public event). In particular, the texts of the *Library* and of the scholia add relevant information about the chronological and geographical context of the story which, it is said, occurred quite early in the god's biography, as

12 Ps.-Apollod. *Bibliotheca* 3.5.1. Translation by Frazer 1921. See Rice 1983, 100; a commentary in Scarpi 1996, 551-552.

13 *Sch. D ad Il.* 6.131 = Eumel. F 11 B. Translation by West 2003, slightly modified. See West 2002, 126-128, with discussion of previous scholarship; Tsagalis 2017, 141-144, with a synoptic discussion of the scholium and the passage from the *Library*.

his purification from Hera's anger predated his military campaign against the Indians and the meeting with his opponent Lycurgus. It also had a precise spatial collocation, since to receive Rhea's absolution, the god had to reach 'the Kybela of Phrygia'. At first sight, it may be unclear what is meant by this formulation. Rice takes the noun as "a garbled reference to the association between the goddesses", i.e., between Rhea and Cybele, respectively her European and Asian versions.¹⁴ If this were the correct interpretation, however, the specification 'of Phrygia' would seem misplaced, as it would privilege just one instantiation of the goddess over the other (the Asian over the European form). The word would make better sense if understood as 'the Kybela mountains', i.e. the plural form of the noun τὸ Κύβελον (*scil.* ὄρος), which is mentioned by Diodorus Siculus as a mountain range where the infant Cybele was reared.¹⁵ The site was vaguely located by ancient authors as being somewhere in Phrygia, between mainland Anatolia and the Propontis on the Bosphorus, like Mount Dindymon itself, placed by the ancients either near Pessinous, in central Anatolia, or on the border between Lydia and Phrygia, or in proximity to Cyzicus, which is the place chosen by Apollonius.¹⁶ The geographical fluctuations of the Kybela mountains show that they were probably nothing more than a toponym loosely indicating the mountain ranges in Northern Anatolia connected with the cult of the Great Mother, including the equally nebulous Mount Dindymon.¹⁷

The story of the god's purification on the Kybela mountains, however, was not only the subject of the specialized writings on cults and rituals quoted above. The text of the scholium makes it possible to trace its echoes in ancient literature. According to this testimony, epic tradition was already acquainted with a purificatory rite to Rhea incorporating Dionysiac elements. In fact, after summarising the most important events in the Dionysiac legend, the ancient commentator further specifies that the story was told, among others, by the archaic poet Eumelus in his lost poem, the *Europa*.¹⁸ Of course, the question arises as to whether Eumelus explored all the material cited by the scholium or only a part of it, and, in this case, whether the episode of the Kybela mountains was included in Eumelus' narrative or not. Although complete certainty on

14 Rice 1983, 100.

15 D.S. 3.58. The place is also mentioned by Str. 12.5.1-3, Ov. *Fast.* 4.363-364, Hsch. s.v. Κύβελαι, without further geographical specifications. See also Roller 1999, 66-68, and Munn 2006, 74 n. 77.

16 Str. 12.5.3 (Pessinous); Hdt. 1.80, Str. 13.4.5 (near the river Hermos). On the various locations on Mount Dindymon see Jessen 1903.

17 See Blakely 2015 *ad* Alex. Pol. *FGHist* 273 F 12, who discusses the vague locations of Dindymon and Kybela together.

18 On this poem see Lecomte 1998; West 2001; Bernabé 2010; Tsagalis 2017, 132-136.

this matter is impossible, there is reason to believe that the *Europia* reported this event. The particular structure of this edifying scholium, in fact, recalls the work of the Mythographus Homericus, whose accurate annotations are often drawn from a single source, usually mentioned at the end of the summary.¹⁹ If this is the case, it can be assumed that the rare myth of Dionysus on the Kybela mountains was indeed narrated (in its first and probably most memorable occurrence) by Eumelus. Such an element is not irrelevant to this analysis: the works attributed to him, with their focus on Corinth and its myths, were an early authority on Medea, and they were certainly present in Apollonius' mind as one of the sources for the story of his heroine.²⁰ In conclusion, the testimony from Callixenus, the *Library* and the scholia to the *Iliad* shows the popularity in Ptolemaic Alexandria of a myth concerning a purificatory rite performed by Dionysus for Rhea/Cybele held on top of a mountain in Northern Anatolia (the same pattern followed in Apollonius' innovative version of the Argonautic story). One could therefore wonder whether Apollonius had this myth in mind when so conspicuously dissociating his version of the Argonautic episode from the Classical and Hellenistic tradition.

3 Rhea's Cult Statue

This view may be corroborated by a peculiar detail in Apollonius' passage: Rhea's wooden statue. The description of the carving of this cult idol is meticulously drawn by the narrator, as the careful word choice in this passage suggests. The vine stump is described as γεράνδρυσον, 'extremely old', a word here used in the rarer adjectival form, since as a noun it means per se 'old tree'.²¹ Furthermore, Argos is said to have worked εὐκόσμως, which is somewhat curious given the extempore character of the carving. All of this should make readers aware that a remarkable object is being described. In fact, on closer examination, an odd detail emerges. Surprisingly, Rhea's statue is made from a 'sturdy stump of vine' and not out of an oak tree, as would sound natural, given Rhea's frequent association with the latter and the abundance of oak trees on

19 On the Mythographus Homericus see Montanari 1995 and van Rossum-Steenbeek 1998, ch. 3. This point was kindly brought to my attention by Stefano Vecchiato.

20 On Apollonius' use of Eumelus in his epic see Burkert 2009.

21 See the examples in LSJ s.v. γεράνδρυσον: Ph. 2.437, Plu. *Mor.* 796b. As the use in Thphr. *HP* 2.7.2.4 shows, the adjective can refer to an old tree which gives birth to a new offspring: the sense in Apollonius, therefore, is not pejorative but rather underlines the venerable age of the plant.

the mountain.²² Instead, as is well-known, the vine is traditionally linked with Dionysus.²³ The importance of this feature should not be overlooked, as is clear from a quick survey of the literary and archaeological traditions concerning this statue.

The Argonautic cult statue of Rhea was a famous artefact in Antiquity, but the information available about it dates mainly from the Imperial period. In later testimony by Zosimus, a statue of the Great Mother—allegedly built by Jason and the Argonauts—was transferred from the sanctuary of Pessinous (near one of the possible ancient locations of Mount Dindymon) to Constantinople.²⁴ If, however, the statue mentioned by Zosimus is the same cultic memorial recalled by Pausanias in his account of this sanctuary, it has nothing to do with the work portrayed by Apollonius, since the one known to Pausanias was a lavish ivory and gold artefact.²⁵ Rhea's cultic memorial is instead clearly described by the poet as if it were a primitive *xoanon* of the goddess.²⁶ Nonetheless, it is striking that the statue referred to by Apollonius does not fit into Cybele's cultic tradition. As stated before, this goddess is frequently connected with oak trees (as the scholia to the *Argonautica* acknowledge), but not to the vine.²⁷ Accordingly, while many rocky *xoana* of the Great Mother are reported to be typical of Asia Minor, no statue of her made of vine wood is known to exist.²⁸ The only two cases in which a vine statue of Cybele is mentioned occur in poetic contexts clearly inspired by Apollonius' version of the myth. In Propertius, the statue of Cybele on Dindymon is said to be

22 Zybert 2012, 377, drawing on the testimony of Apollod. *FGrH* 244 F 92 (quoted by Σ A.R. 1.1124): δρυῖνοισιν] εἰκότως· ἡ γὰρ δρυς ἱερὰ τῆς Ῥέας, ὡς φησιν Ἀπολλόδωρος ἐν τρίτῳ Περὶ θεῶν.—δρυῖνοις δὲ αὐτοῦς φησι (sc. Ἀπολλώνιος) στέφεσθαι διὰ τὸ μεμερίσθαι τῇ θεῷ τὸ δένδρον τοῦτο διὰ τὸ καὶ πρὸς στέγας καὶ πρὸς τροφὴν πρῶτον χρησιμεῦσαι ('This is appropriate: in fact, the oak is sacred to Rhea, as Apollodoros says in the third book of *On the Gods*. Apollonius says that the Argonauts crown themselves with oak branches because this tree is allotted to the goddess, and this in turn is due to the fact that in ancient times it was useful both for building and for nutrition'; translation by the author). The commentary by Williams 2018 *ad loc.* does not mention the presence of the vine in this episode.

23 For Dionysus and vine see Kourakou-Dragona 2015, *passim*.

24 Zos. 2.31.2-3. On this testimony see Margutti 2012; see also Vian 1974, 103 n. 1.

25 Paus. 8.46.4; see Roller 1999, 204.

26 A commentary to this description in Donohue 1988, 43-46.

27 Zybert 2012, 377, citing the above-mentioned testimony of Apollod. *FGrH* 244 F 92 and the study of Langdon 1914, 43, claims that the vine is sacred to Rhea as well. Nonetheless, Apollodoros only mentions the oak in connection with Rhea (what is known from other sources, too: see Vian 1974, 103 n. 3), while Langdon is concerned only with Anatolian goddesses of fertility prior to the Greek presence in Asia Minor, which are not completely identifiable with Rhea.

28 Paus. 3.22.4, 5.13.17 (see Roller 1999, 200).

'made of vine', but the poem is part of a diptych meant as an explicit homage to Apollonius, with several allusions to the first book of his poem.²⁹ In the episode of the *Orphic Argonautica* corresponding to Apollonius' description of the ascent of Mount Dindymon, the text in all the manuscripts says that the statue is made from a trunk of fir intertwined with branches of dry vine, but even so an influence of the Hellenistic model is clear.³⁰ In sum, the connection between Rhea's statue and the vine seems to be Apollonius' innovation in the mythical texture of the episode.

The scholia to this passage further indicate that ancient scholars were equally perplexed by this detail:

καὶ Εὐφορίων δὲ ἐκ τούτου κινηθεὶς τὸ ξόανον τῆς μητρὸς τῶν θεῶν φησιν ἀμπέ-
λινον εἶναι, διὰ τὸ τὴν ἄμπελον ἴσως ἱερὰν εἶναι τῆς Ῥέας.³¹

Euphorion too, taking inspiration from this passage, says that the *xoanon* of the Mother of the Gods was made out of vine, because of the fact that the vine is probably sacred to Rhea.

The peculiar structure of this scholium is an indication of the difficulty the ancient commentator had in finding a parallel for the presence of the vine in this episode. In fact, instead of quoting a persuasive authority for Apollonius' account, the scholiast hesitantly infers the existence of a related tradition

29 Prop. 3.22.3: *Dindymis et sacra fabricata e vite Cybebe* ('Cybebe, goddess of Dindymon, made from wood of the sacred vine', translation by Heyworth and Morwood 2011) where *fabricata e vite* is Haupt's conjecture for the MSS' reading *fabricata inventa* (see discussion in Fedeli 1985, 631-633). For Apollonius' influence see Heyworth and Morwood 2011, 88: "Like 3.21 this poem [3.22] draws on Apollonius' *Argonautica*". The Cyzicus episode in Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica* (3.362-458) does not involve Rhea/Cybele at all: see Manuwald 1999.

30 *Orph. A.* 607-608: ὅς κε ταυφλοίου ἐλάτης ἀμφιπλεκῆς ἔρνος | ἀμπέλου αὐαλέης ὄξει ἀπέκερσε σιδήρω ('[Argos] cut down with his sharp iron the sprout of the tall fir intertwined with dry vine'; translation by the author). For ἀμφιπλεκῆς in the sense of 'intertwined' see LSJ s.v. ἀμφίπλεκτος. Vian 1987, 118 follows Hermann in changing ταυφλοίου ἐλάτης into the dative, so it is the vine (from which the statue is carved) that is intertwined with the fir, in accordance with what is read in Apollonius. It seems unlikely that a vine intertwined to a fir would be thick enough to be the base for a statue, but at the same time ἀμφιπλεκῆς would fit better with the dative. At any rate 1) if the MSS' reading is retained, the passage attests to a different tradition, in which the statue is made of fir; 2) if Hermann's conjecture is accepted, the text of the *Orphic Argonautica* is plausibly a variation on the Hellenistic model.

31 Σ A.R. 1.1117 = Euph. F 125 Powell = F 137 Acosta-Hughes and Cusset. Translation by the author.

by pointing out the presence of the same feature in a later writer, who was, according to the scholiast, directly under Apollonius' influence. The argument does not seem linear, and it is not out of place to imagine that the presence of the vine in the *Argonautica* was felt to be novel and problematic (as the ζήτημα of the scholium itself attests) and that the commentator, despite all the evidence at his disposal, was in no better position than modern scholars to identify Apollonius' sources. He probably did not find any authority for a particular connection between Rhea and the vine, thus resorting to a patent autoschediasm. The vine, it can be argued, was an innovation by Apollonius in the mythical frame of the episode, which apparently appealed to later authors, such as Euphorion. Even this poet, who had a keen interest in Dionysiac matters (as his fragmentary poem *Dionysus* attests to), found no other source for the connection between Rhea and the vine than the passage of Apollonius, an author whom he often referred to as a model.³²

The most remarkable evidence for a connection between statues, the vine, and Dionysus, however, comes from contemporary Hellenistic poetry. In the fourth book of his *Aetia*, Callimachus devoted an elegy to a Samian statue representing the goddess Hera with a plant of vine creeping around her hair and a lion's skin lying at her feet. Although only the first line of the poem is extant, the content of this composition is summarised by the commentary known as the *Milan Diegesis*:

“Ἡρῆ τῆ Σαμίῃ περὶ μὲν τρίχας ἄμπελος ἔρπει.” λέγεται ὡς τῆ Σαμίαι Ἡραὶ περιέρπει τὰς τρίχας ἄμπελος, πρὸς δ' ἐδάφει λεοντὴ βέβληται, ὡς λάφυρα τῶν Διὸς νόθων παίδων, Ἡρακλέους καὶ Διονύσου.³³

“A vine creeps around the hair of Hera at Samos”: It is said that a vine creeps around the hair of the Samian Hera, and on the ground a lion's skin is thrown, like the spoils of the bastard sons of Zeus, Heracles and Dionysus.

32 See commentary in van Groningen 1977, 216, who specifies: “Il ne ressort pas avec certitude de cette remarque [that the vine is sacred to Rhea] qu'Euphorion lui-même a donné cette explication ou y a fait allusion”. See also Acosta-Hughes and Cusset 2012, 198-199 nn. 232-234. Scholars are persuaded that it was Euphorion who was inspired by Apollonius and not *vice versa*: see the comments in Magnelli 2002, 31-34. On Euphorion's *Dionysus* see Livrea 1995.

33 Call. F 101 and 101a Harder; for a commentary see Harder 2012, vol. 2, 767-770 and Manakidou 1993, 222-225. Translation by Harder 2012.

The curious accessories adorning the statue attracted the attention of the erudite poet, who considered them a homage to the goddess by her two stepsons and rivals, Dionysus and Heracles. What is relevant for the present analysis is that, according to the *Diegesis*, Callimachus' poem explicitly explained the symbolism concerning the vine in relationship with a cult statue as a clear Dionysiac reference. Although the Samian simulacrum of Hera was not made of vine as the Argonautic statue of Cybele was, the elegy shows that the presence of the vine in connection with a cult statue might be explained in Hellenistic literary texts as a reference to Dionysus.³⁴ As for Apollonius, it is plausible to assume that he resorted to the symbolical code offered by the vine to suggest a comparison between both expiatory rituals to Rhea, the one by the Argonauts and the more ancient one by Dionysus. This would explain the poet's striking departure from the canonical form of the ritual founded by the Argonauts as it is narrated in historical sources and the otherwise unattested presence of the vine in connection to Rhea/Cybele.

4 Conclusions

To conclude, one could legitimately speculate on the reason why the author was interested in recalling this myth at this point of the narrative. Although full certainty is impossible, some elements in the *Argonautica* and other sources highlight the presence of a plausible pattern. A clue for understanding the relevance of this part of Dionysus' biography to Apollonius' readers may be found in the above-mentioned Grand Procession, a crucial event for Ptolemaic Alexandria's self-representation and a catalyst of myths of political and ideological importance for Ptolemaic Egypt.³⁵ It is then reasonable to imagine that the story of Dionysus in Phrygia was assumed to convey a hidden message regarding the dynamics of power between Ptolemaic Egypt and the rest of the Greek world, as is the case for other allegories and myths featuring in the parade.³⁶ This interpretation is reinforced by the prominent collocation of the myth in the sequence of tableaux, where the one with Dionysus and Rhea is

34 That this interpretation of vegetal symbolism as a reference to specific deities in connection with statues was current is also exemplified by later testimony by Tertullian (*De corona* 7.4 Fontaine = Call. F 101b Harder) who, after citing the vine in Callimachus's *aition*, describes another simulacrum of Hera in Argos with the same characteristics and interprets them in the same way as Callimachus: see Però 2014.

35 For the concept of 'self-representation' in Ptolemaic Alexandria see Weber 1993, 56-74.

36 See for instance the presence of a statue representing Corinth near the one of Ptolemy (*FGHist* 627 F 2.33 [202D]); see Keyser 2014 *ad loc.*

immediately followed by that of Alexander the Great and Ptolemy.³⁷ The connection between the Phrygian Dionysus and the rulers of Egypt, apparently a loose one, could be explained if this episode acted as a connection between the mythical chain of events represented in the Procession and the historical frame of the Macedonian and Egyptian monarchs. The Dionysiac *πομπή* staged the conquest of the oriental part of the world by the Greeks, with the episode of Dionysus in Phrygia representing the last obstacle before the god's triumphant voyage to Asia and Greece. After this event, which alluded to the conclusion of Dionysus' mythical parable, the Procession continued with the parade of the legitimate successors of the god, Alexander and Ptolemy. Thus, the mythical past merged into the future: as the episode of the Kybela mountains paved the way for Dionysus' conquests, the Grand Procession was the symbolic prelude to the Ptolemies' future success in the Greek world.

This interpretation is enhanced if one considers the role played by the intertwining of contemporary history and geography in the Cybele episode of the *Argonautica*. The whole narrative concerning the Argonauts at Mount Dindymon focuses on the importance of mythical geography as a medium to understand contemporary history, a literary device familiar to modern studies on Apollonius.³⁸ It is in this episode, in fact, that geography is explicitly thematised in the poem for the first time. On top of Mount Dindymon the heroes ascend in order 'to see with their eyes the ways of that sea [the Euxine Pontus]' (A.R. 1.985), i.e., to discover the conformation of the territory they are going to explore. Moreover, from its first appearance, geography is closely linked to contemporary history, and, in particular, to the political and ideological connections between Asia Minor and Egypt via Alexander the Great. Among the other features visible to the Argonauts from above the mountain, the Aisepos river and the plain of Adrasteia are also mentioned. The latter, an otherwise quite anonymous spot, was ennobled in the early Hellenistic age by the battle of the Granicus, Alexander's first pitched battle in Asia and the starting point for his eastern campaign.³⁹ It is not by chance, therefore, that

37 The sentence on Alexander and Ptolemy opens with an anacoluthon, and this seems to hint at the presence of a lacuna. It is nonetheless likely that the mentions of Alexander and Ptolemy followed directly that of the episode with Rhea: see commentary in Rice 1983, 102; Keyser 2014 *ad F* 2.33 (202D).

38 On the importance of geography as an instrument to manipulate time and myth in the *Argonautica* see Meyer 2008; Thalmann 2011; Klooster 2011, esp. 18-21 and 2013 (p. 168: "This project of combining earlier poetical/scientific geographies in the *Argonautica* is ... also part of what one could call Apollonius' ideological or panegyric agenda: he shows that all previous Greek traditions converge in his own work"); see also Klooster 2014.

39 A.R. 1.1111-1116. Apollonius' passage clearly rephrases Call. F 299 Pf. = *Hec.* 116 H. (an invocation to Nemesis: see Hollis 2009, 301-303), but here the isolated apostrophe in

the place in which geography makes its entrance in the poem is, on the one hand, the starting point of the Argonauts' eastern journey and the beginning of Alexander's conquest of Persia and India, and, on the other hand, Dionysus' last stop before his triumphant campaign and the prelude of Ptolemaic access to Greece.⁴⁰ Hellenistic geography and history, the poem seems to suggest, start from here, and here they have to return in order to further progress in the future. From this perspective, Apollonius' allusions to Dionysiac myths in this episode might have underlined the relevance of a geographically and historically crucial part of Anatolia for the Alexandrian world. Even though in Apollonius' lifetime the Grand Procession was long past, and Ptolemaic interest in Greece and Anatolia was closer to the realm of imagination than to reality, that region still had a relevant place in Alexandria's cultural memories. Ptolemaic imperial ambitions continued to echo along the coast of Asia Minor, and the Dionysiac ideology to which they were closely connected was far from being dead. Although history and geography cannot be altered or affected by a mere literary work like the *Argonautica*, cultural constructions, such as the mythical figure of the Hellenistic Dionysus, can survive through a work of art, where the complex entanglements of mythical past and historical future are turned into a timeless present.

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Callimachus is turned into a proper description of the visible landscape. The Granicus plain had already been mentioned in passing by Antimachus (F 131 Matthews), but it was also a matter of erudite speculation for Callisthenes, Alexander's official historian (*FGrH* 124 F 28; see Pearson 1960, 40). For the 'spatial' features of this episode see Clare 2002, 71-74; Thalmann 2011, 1-8. The Argonauts were Alexander's primary model for his geographical explorations, according to Eratosthenes (Str. 11.5.5; see Bosworth 1995, vol. 2, 210-213 for a commentary).

40 For the relationship between Hellenistic Anatolia and Ptolemaic Egypt see Sartre 1995, 32-33; Marquaille 2008.

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