

Sailing the High(er) Seas: Manilius's Celestial Traces in Valerius Flaccus's *Argonautica*

The Argo's voyage is commonly seen as a world-shaping voyage, opening maritime barriers and leaving traces of its passage in ritual and physical space from furthest east to furthest west (e.g., Williams, Hunter, Clare, Thalmann); but its traces are also visible in the heavens, particularly as the constellation of the catasterized Argo, a topic which has received some limited treatment in scholarship (e.g., Murray on Apollonius Rhodius; Castelletti and Krasne on Valerius Flaccus). Therefore, while scholars have long recognized various parallels between Valerius Flaccus's Argo, the poem, and the metaphorical ship of state (e.g., Davis, Stover, Krasne, Slaney), in this paper, I look at several unnoticed ways in which Valerius also extends the sidereal and cosmic resonances of the Argo's voyage—and his writing thereon—by inscribing the heavens onto his own text, focusing on his use of allusions to Manilius to activate this reading.

At the outset of the Argo's voyage, Valerius adapts a line of Apollonius with a high level of precision: *στράπτε δ' ὑπ' ἡελίῳ φλογὶ εἴκελα νηὸς ἰούσης / τεύχεα* (A.R.1.544-45) becomes *claraque vela oculis percussa que sole secuntur / scuta virum* (V.F.1.495-96). In Apollonius's epic, this line is followed immediately by a simile which compares the Argo's wake to a path across a field (A.R.1.546-7; Valerius, however, omits the simile and immediately makes the Argo disappear into the horizon's vanishing point between sea and sky (V.F.1.496-97). I demonstrate that a broader set of interlocking allusions encourages us to look from Valerius's text to Manilius's description of the Milky Way, where in a series of possible aetiologies for the galactic cloud, he adapts and translates Apollonius's path simile (*Astr.*1.703-6; *Astr.*1.705 = A.R.1.546)—and underscores that borrowing by adding a simile comparing the heavenly path to a ship's wake (*Astr.*1.708-12)—in a passage that also has a significant metapoetic and programmatic orientation (Bielsa i Mialet, Glauthier). Given that the Argo's constellation sits directly *on* the Milky Way, we can see in both Manilius's text and Valerius's allusions to it an additional, implicit aetiology for the path of stars. Accordingly, I propose, Valerius's implicit supplementation of his own text with a key passage of Manilius's cosmic construction (Schindler 234) helps to align the poetic and physical constructions of their two cosmoses and to bolster the Argo's importance within it.

An earlier—and equally crucial—engagement with Manilius comes in the *Argonautica*'s four-line proem, well-recognized as a site of programmatic intertextuality (e.g., Davis, Barchiesi, Zissos, Deremetz). I demonstrate that Valerius additionally structures this proem so as to compress the entirety of Manilius's epic within its four lines. Most significant here for the question of text-as-cosmos is Valerius's appropriation of a phrase from Manilius's own programmatic discourse on didactic instruction (*Astr.*2.740-87), which likens both poetic composition and didactic instruction to the building of a city (Landolfi 1990, Schindler 252-72). Valerius's *mediosque ... cursus / rumpere* (V.F.1.3-4), used of the Argo's own voyage breaking through the Clashing Rocks, strikingly reformulates *ne medios rumpat cursus* (*Astr.*2.783), a phrase with which Manilius asserts the necessity of sufficient *mise en place* prior to urban construction/advanced didactic instruction. The potential implications of this reformulation for Valerius's (incomplete) epic aside, I argue that one more immediate and more relevant effect is to simultaneously link Valerius's construction of his own poem with Manilius's process of didactic discourse and his repeated image of text as city (Landolfi 1991, Kyriakidis).

Accordingly, we can see Valerius using allusions to programmatic passages of Manilius to link his text and its construction not just with the Argo's "poetic voyage" (cf. Davis, Stover, Krasne), but with the well-established tropes of cosmos as city and text as cosmos. The

repercussions of Manilius's centrality and influence are extensive; here, I conclude by exploring just the potential for *ekpyrosis* that is perennially incipient in Manilius's heavens (e.g., Lowe, Habinek) and, I argue, a fate looming over Valerius's poetic cosmos and its real-life political analogue.

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