

ETYMOLOGICAL WORDPLAY IN APOLLONIUS  
OF RHODES, *AENEID* 3, AND *GEORGICS* 1

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IT IS WELL KNOWN THAT Apollonius of Rhodes' *Argonautica* exercised a profound influence upon Vergil, and that Apollonius' poem makes frequent use of etymological aetiologies.<sup>1</sup> But the influence of Apollonius on Vergilian etymological wordplay is overlooked or underappreciated by most commentators. This paper will present four examples of Vergilian etymological wordplay modelled on etymological aetiologies in the *Argonautica*, all but the last from one section of *Aeneid* 3.

I

The first example is one that has been widely acknowledged. The Trojans land on the Strophades, "small islands to the West of the Peloponnese, south of Zacynthus," which "did not figure in the Aeneas legend before Vergil."<sup>2</sup>

*servatum ex undis Strophadum me litora primum  
excipiunt. Strophades Graio stant nomine dictae  
insulae Ionio in magno, quas dira Celaeno  
Harpyiaequae colunt aliae, Phineia postquam  
clausa domus mensasque metu liquere priores.* (3.209-213)

The phrase *Graio . . . nomine dictae* in 210 is an "etymological signpost," by means of which Vergil calls attention to the name Strophades.<sup>3</sup> The name is derived, as Servius notes, from the Greek στρόφη, "turning," because here the winged Argonauts Zetes and Calais "turned back" after chasing the

<sup>1</sup>On Vergil and Apollonius see Wendell Clausen, *Virgil's Aeneid and the Tradition of Hellenistic Poetry* (California 1987), and Ward W. Briggs, "Virgil and the Hellenistic Epic," *ANRW* II 32.1 (Berlin and New York 1981) 948-984 (974 on Vergil's debt to Apollonius in *Aen.* 3). On etymologizing in Apollonius see R. L. Hunter, *Apollonius of Rhodes: Argonautica Book 3* (Cambridge 1989) 36, and index s.v. "etymology," and Donald N. Levin, *Apollonius' Argonautica Re-examined* (Leiden 1971) index s.v. "aetiological & etymological lore."

<sup>2</sup>R. D. Williams, *P. Vergili Maronis liber tertius* (Oxford 1962; repr. Bristol 1981) on line 209.

<sup>3</sup>On the unnecessary or conspicuous naming construction as a "signpost" calling attention to etymologizing, see S. Shechter, "The Aition and Virgil's *Georgics*," *TAPA* 105 (1975) 346-391, James J. O'Hara, *Death and the Optimistic Prophecy in Vergil's Aeneid* (Princeton 1990) 21, and L. Rank, *Etymologiseering en Verwante Verschijnselen bij Homerus* (Assen 1951) 136-143. Robert Maltby, in a 1989 lecture at Wesleyan and other American universities, "Etymologizing in Tibullus: Some Problems of Methodology," stressed the use of the word *nomen* to call attention to etymologizing.

Harpies away from Phineus. Both the story and the etymologizing come directly from Apollonius:<sup>4</sup>

οἱ δ' ὄρκα εἷξαντες ὑπέστρεπον ἄψ' ἐπὶ νῆα  
σώσεσθαι· Στροφάδας δὲ μετακλείουσ' ἄνθρωποι  
νῆσους τοῖο ἔκητι, πάρος Πλωτὰς καλέοντες. (2.295-297)

In Apollonius μετακλείουσ' and καλέοντες serve as etymological signposts. Vergil follows Apollonius closely, merely alluding to what Apollonius had said somewhat more overtly.

II

A few lines later Vergil describes how the Harpies attack the Trojans' food, as they had been accustomed to attack the food of Phineus in the *Argonautica*. Here Vergil matches Apollonius' allusion to the etymology of the name Harpy:

at subitae horrifico lapsu de montibus adsunt  
Harpyiae et magnis quatiunt clangoribus alas  
diripiuntque dapes contactuque omnia foedant  
immundo. (3.225-228)

With the verb *diripiunt* at the start of 227 Vergil glosses the name *Harpyiae* at the start of 226, alluding to the derivation from ἀρπάζω, "snatch." It is common for Vergilian etymologizing to involve words juxtaposed at the beginning or end of consecutive lines.<sup>5</sup> For the wordplay, Vergil is clearly

<sup>4</sup>Servius on 209: *Argonautae Zethum et Calain, filios Boreae et Orithyiae, alatos iuvenes, ad pellendas harpyias miserunt: quas cum strictis gladiis persequerentur pulsas de Arcadia, pervenerunt ad insulas quae appellabantur plotae, et cum ulterius vellent tendere, ab Iride admoniti ut desisterent a Iovis canibus, suos converterunt volatus: quorum conversio, id est στροφή, nomen insulis dedit, quod Apollonius plenissime exsequitur.* Cf. G. J. M. Bartelink, *Etymologiserend bij Vergilius* (Amsterdam 1965, Mededelingen der Kon. Neder. Akad. van Wetenschappen 28.3) 56, and Williams (above, n. 2) *ad loc.*, who notes that "Vergil indicates the etymology by the words *Graio nomine dictae*, which would be pointless if they were not intended to cause the reader to reflect on the meaning of the Greek word," and that Apollonius made the derivation explicit.

Cf. too Hes. *Cat. fr.* 156 M-W (from the scholia to Apollonius), Val. Fla. 4.512-513 *iamque et ad Ionii metas atque intima tendunt / saxa; vocat magni Strophades nunc insula Ponti*, and Apollod. 1.9.21.

Williams notes (with disapproval) that some have seen in the word *stant* at Aen. 3.210 an allusion to the former name *Plotae*, "Floating Islands." Such an allusion would be modelled on Callim. *Hymn* 4.36-54, where the name of the floating island Asterie is changed to Delos when after the birth of Apollo the island becomes rooted and no longer "obscure" (ἄδηλος).

<sup>5</sup>Cf. *Ecl.* 3.109-110, *G.* 3.343-345, *Aen.* 1.367-368, 3.226-227, 4.1-3, 8.330-331, 8.343-344, 8.345-346, and also Lucretius 1.140-142, 2.942-943, 4.1059-60. I discuss this feature of Vergilian etymologizing further in "Naming the Stars at *Georgics* 1.137-138 and *Fasti* 5.163-182," forthcoming in *AJP* 112 (1991).

following Apollonius, who glosses the name twice, both times with the word "Ἀρπυιαί at the start of the hexameter, like Vergil's *Harpyiae*:

"Ἀρπυιαί στόματός μοι ἀφαρπάζουσιν ἔδωδ' ἦν (2.223)

ἀλλὰ διὰ νεφέων ἄφνω πέλας αἴσσουσαι  
 "Ἀρπυιαί στόματος χειρῶν τ' ἀπὸ γαμφηλῆσι  
 συνεχέως ἤρπαζον, ἐλείπετο δ' ἄλλοτε φορβῆς (2.187–189)

In each passage the use of a form of the verb ἄρπάζω clearly alludes to the etymology. Williams mentions the connection of the name Harpy with ἄρπάζω, and also Apollonius' treatment of the Harpies, but does not say that Apollonius or Vergil directly alludes to the derivation. Bartelink's monograph on Vergilian etymologizing mentions the Vergilian passage only in passing, to say that etymologizing is unlikely there; he does not mention the Apollonian precedent.<sup>6</sup> Bartelink also does not mention Apollonius of Rhodes at all in the survey of etymologizing in Greek literature with which his study begins.

### III

After they leave the Strophades, Aeneas and his men sail past Odysseus' island of Zacynthus, and then land and celebrate games near the future site of Augustus' great victory over Antony in the Battle of Actium. The way in which Vergil "combines Leucas and Actium into a single stage apparently without reconciling the geographical facts"<sup>7</sup> will not concern us here. In line 280 Vergil refers to "Actian shores":

*Actiaque Iliacis celebramus litora ludis*

The adjective *Actius* in 280 is familiar, and will be conspicuously applied to Apollo as patron of Augustus in the Battle of Actium on the Shield of Aeneas (8.675 and 704). But *Actius* is a poetic form, as Williams notes in his comment on the line in Book 3. Strictly speaking, the adjective formed from Actium should be *Actiacus*, which occurs a number of times.<sup>8</sup> The shorter form *Actius* is convenient for the hexameter, and Vergil often forms a proper adjective directly from a noun, without the adjectival suffix.<sup>9</sup> But

<sup>6</sup>Bartelink (above, n. 4) 81, n. 2. Valerius Flaccus repeats Vergil's *diripiunt* to describe the activity of the Harpies at Arg. 4.454.

<sup>7</sup>Williams (above, n. 2) on 274 f.

<sup>8</sup>E.g., Suet. Aug. 18 (*victoria*), Tib. 6 (*triumphum*); Prop. 2.15.44 (*mare*); Ovid Met. 13.715 (*Apollo*), Her. 15.166 (*aequor*), Fasti 1.711 (*frondes*); Vell. Pat. 2.86.3 (*bellum*); Petron. 121 (*Bellum civile* 115) (*sinus*); Pliny HN 7.148 (*Mars*); Juv. 2.109 (*carina*); Tac. Ann. 1.42 (*legiones*), 15.23 (*religio*).

<sup>9</sup>C. J. Fordyce, *P. Vergili Maronis Aeneidos libri VII–VIII with a Commentary* (Oxford 1977) on Aen. 7.219 (*Dardana pubes*), cites 2.618 *Dardana arma*, 6.57 *Dardana tela*, 7.710 *Amiterna cohors*, 1.686 *laticem Lyaeum*, 3.280 *Actia litora*, 4.552 *cineri Sychaeo*, 6.118 *lucis Avernis*, 8.675 *Actia bella*, and 10.273 *Sirius ardor*.

the word also has an interesting history. The Greek adjective ἄκτιος is used in Hellenistic poetry as an epithet of gods, and refers not to Actium but to any shore, or ἀκτή. Thus at Theocritus 5.14 Πάν ἄκτιος is "Pan of the Shore." "Actian Apollo" appears before Vergil in the *Argonautica*, when the Argonauts build an altar on the shore to Apollo Actios, and Apollonius makes clear the significance of the epithet:

ἔνθεν δ' αὖ λάιγγας ἄλδος σχεδὸν ὀχλίζοντες,  
νῆον αὐτόθι βωμὸν ἐπάκτιον Ἀπόλλωνος,  
'Ακτίου Ἐμβασίου τ' ἐπώνυμον. (1.402-405)

Here the word ἐπώνυμον serves as a signpost calling attention to the name, and the adjective ἐπάκτιον provides the simple gloss for the epithet Ἄκτιος, "of the shore."<sup>10</sup>

At *Aeneid* 3.280, *Actia* does mean "of Actium," but modifies a word that alludes to the original Greek meaning of Ἄκτιος, "of the shore." *Actia litora* suggests ἄκτιοι ἀκταί or *litorea litora*.<sup>11</sup> Vergil's fondness for learned glosses, or "modifiers that reflect the etymology of the word modified," to use the phrase from the title of McCartney's 1927 article, is well known.<sup>12</sup> This

<sup>10</sup> At 1.402-405 Apollonius seems to be following Callim. fr. 18 Pf., where in speaking of the Argonauts Callimachus apparently also referred to the temple of Apollo Actios (cf. Hyginus *Poet. Astr.* ii 37 p. 74 B, quoted by R. Pfeiffer, *Callimachus* [Oxford 1949] *ad loc.*). We do not know whether he alluded to the etymology; of the crucial line 18.12 only the last two words, ἐπώνυμον Ἐμβασίου, are extant.

<sup>11</sup> At *Achill.* 1.285, Statius refers to *Palladi litoreae*, and *litoreus* = ἄκτιος. At Prop. 2.34.61-62, *Actia Vergilium custodis litora Phoebi*, / *Caesaris et fortis dicere posse ratas* . . . , does Propertius anticipate Vergil, or is he borrowing from a section of the *Aeneid* that he has seen or heard? His next two lines, 63-64, will "echo" *Aen.* 1.1 ff.

<sup>12</sup> E. S. McCartney, "Modifiers that Reflect the Etymology of the Word Modified, with Special Reference to Lucretius," *CP* 22 (1927) 184-200. Vergil's practice is discussed by B. Rehm, *Das geographische Bild des alten Italiens in Vergils Aeneis* (Leipzig 1932, *Philologus Supp.* 24.2) Sachregister s.v. "Etymologien"; W. F. J. Knight, *Roman Vergil* (London 1944) 197-200; J. S. Th. Hanssen, "Vergilius ἐπιθέτως λέγων: Vergilian Notes 2," *SymbOsl* 26 (1948) 113-125; J. Marouzeau, "Virgile linguiste," in *Mélange de philologie et de littérature anciennes offerts à Alfred Ernout* (Paris 1940) 259-265, reprinted with additions in J. Marouzeau, *Quelques aspects de la formation du Latin littéraire* (Paris 1949) 71-79; Fordyce (above, n. 9) on *Aen.* 7.684; R. D. Williams, *P. Vergili Maronis liber quintus* (Oxford 1960; repr. Bristol 1981) on *Aen.* 5.2 and Williams (above, n. 2) on *Aen.* 3.693; David O. Ross, Jr., "Uriosque apertos: A Catullan Gloss," *Mnemosyne* 26 (1973) 60-62.

Cf. G. 1.7 *alma Ceres* (see David O. Ross, Jr., *Virgil's Elements: Physics and Poetry in the Georgics* [Princeton 1987] 34); 1.75 *tristisque lupini* (cf. λύπη and see R. F. Thomas, *Virgil: Georgics*, 2 vols [Cambridge 1988] *ad loc.*); *Aen.* 1.298 *novae . . . Karthaginis* (Servius *ad loc.*: *Carthago . . . est lingua Poenorum nova civitas*; see too *Aen.* 1.366, 522); 2.529 *ardens . . . Pyrrhus* (cf. πυρρός; see Servius *ad loc.* and B. M. W. Knox, "The Serpent and the Flame," *AJP* 71 [1950] 379-400, at 390 and 394); 3.402 *parva . . . Petelia* (*petilus* = "thin," "slender"; this and the next two examples are noted by Williams [above, n. 2]); 3.693 *Plemyrium undosum* (πλημυρίς = "rise of sea," "flood"); 3.698 *stagnantis Helori* (Servius: *Graeci stagna ἔλη dicunt*); 4.247 *Atlantis*

example is different from most in that instead of the adjective alluding to the etymology of the noun as in *nova Karthago* or *Plemyrium undosum*, the noun *litora* glosses the original meaning of the adjective *Actia*. The classic example of this kind of reverse gloss is the phrase *Hernica saxa* at *Aeneid* 7.684. Servius tells us that *hernae* was a Sabine word for *saxa*, "rocks"; thus the noun *saxa* glosses the etymology of the adjective *Hernica*.<sup>13</sup>

So Vergil turns to Apollonius of Rhodes for precedent for etymological wordplay three times in the space of seventy-two lines. There are other, more crowded clusters of etymological wordplay in the *Aeneid*, of course, in particular as Aeneas sails past Sicily at 3.692-706, in the parade of heroes at 6.756-853, and in the catalogue of Italian forces at 7.647-817.<sup>14</sup> But the examples in 3.209-280 provide important insight into the care with which Vergil read Apollonius, the use of a model over a sustained number of verses, and the (often overlooked) thoroughly Alexandrian nature of Vergil's etymologizing.

## IV

The last example is not from *Aeneid* 3, but from the first book of the *Georgics*. In his description of the great storm at *Georgics* 1.316-334, Vergil names some typical targets of Jupiter's lightning:

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*duri* (cf. α + ῥάξ; see Knight [above, n. 12] 198-199 and Ross, "Uriosque apertos . . ." 60-62); 4.268 *claro* . . . *Olympo* (Servius: *Olympus quasi ὀλολαμπής*; 7.713 *Tetricae horrentis* (cf. *taeter*; Servius: *mons asperrimus, unde tristes homines tetricos dicimus*; for this and the next, see Fordyce [above, n. 9]); 7.740 *maliferae* . . . *Abellae* (cf. "apple"); 8.663 *exsultantis Salios* (cf. Bartelink [above, n. 4] 82).

<sup>13</sup>Servius on 684: *Sabinorum lingua saxa hernae vocantur. quidam dux magnus Sabinos de suis locis elicit et habitare secum fecit in saxosis montibus; unde dicta sunt Hernica loca et populi Hernici*. Cf. Festus p. 89, 24 Lindsay: *Hernici dicti a saxis quae Marsi herna dicunt*. See Bartelink (above, n. 4) 48, and Fordyce (above, n. 9) *ad loc.*

There may be another gloss with the noun alluding to the etymology of the adjective at *Aen.* 11.143, in the phrase *funereas . . . faces*. Varro, Donatus, and Servius derive the word *funus* from the rope torches (*funalia*) that burn in funeral rites. Cf. Servius on 143 and more succinctly on 6.224 (*FACEM de fune, ut Varro dicit: unde et funus dictum est*), and Donatus *ad Ter. An.* 108 ("*funus*" *est pompa exsequiarum, dictum a funalibus*). Although the phrase "funereal torch" needs no etymological motivation, Vergil's *funereas faces* may allude to this etymology.

On *G.* 1.309, *Balearis* . . . *fundae*, Servius derives the name *Balearis* from the Greek word βάλλειν, "hurl," because of those islanders' invention of the sling. Thus *Balearis* . . . *fundae* may also be a kind of reverse gloss, where *fundae* alludes to the etymology of *Balearis*.

<sup>14</sup>For Book 3 see Williams (above, n. 2) *ad locos*; for Book 6, see the commentators and Servius; for Book 7, Fordyce (above, n. 9) *ad locos*. I am preparing a monograph that will feature an annotated catalogue of over 400 examples of etymologizing in Vergil, with an introduction discussing the typical features, poetic function, and debt to the Alexandrian tradition of Vergil's etymological wordplay.

*ipse pater media nimborum in nocte corusca  
fulmina molitur dextra, quo maxima motu  
terra tremit, fugere ferae et mortalia corda  
per gentis humilis stravit pavor; ille flagranti  
aut Atho aut Rhodopen aut alta Ceraunia telo  
deicit;* (1.328–333)

Line 332 is modelled on Theocritus 7.77: ἡ Ἀθῶ ἢ Ῥοδόπαν ἢ Καύκασον ἔσχατόεντα. Vergil translates the first half of the line precisely, but then substitutes Ceraunia for Theocritus' Καύκασον. Thomas has offered an attractive explanation of almost every feature of this line.<sup>15</sup> He notes that the words *alta Ceraunia* translate the name *Acroceraunia*, with *alta* alluding to the Greek ἄρκος.<sup>16</sup> This is one of Vergil's several plays with words meaning "high" or "lofty."<sup>17</sup> Thomas explains further that the full name *Acroceraunia* occurs in no extant text earlier than the *Georgics*, and first occurs in Horace *Carmina* 1.3.20, the propempticon to Vergil. Nisbet and Hubbard observed that Horace's propempticon seems to owe much to the neoteric poet Cinna's propempticon to Pollio, which mentioned the nearby island of Corcyra,<sup>18</sup> and so Thomas plausibly suggests that Cinna may have mentioned *Acroceraunia*. Thomas speculates further that since Theocritus 7.77 is from a propempticon, Vergil in line 332 may have "conflated not only two favored poets, but the propemptica of two favored poets."

One more feature of the line must be mentioned, however. Vergil also surely alludes to the etymology of the name Ceraunia, from the Greek

<sup>15</sup>See Thomas (above, n. 12) on 332, and "Virgil's *Georgics* and the Art of Reference," *HSCP* 90 (1986) 171–198, at 194–195.

<sup>16</sup>Cf. Servius, quoted below in n. 19.

<sup>17</sup>On G. 1.364, *altam supra volat ardea nubem*, Servius connects the name *ardea* with the word *arduus*, "high, lofty" (*ardea dicta quasi ardua: quae cum altius volaverit, significat tempestatem*; cf. too Servius on *Aen.* 7.412). The word *altam* alludes to that etymology.

On G. 3.474, *aerías Alps*, Servius says that *Alpes* is the Gallic word for "high mountains"; thus *aerías* would be a gloss. On this idea of "a pre-Indo-European word meaning 'mountain'" that may lie behind the names of both the Alps, and *Alba Longa*, see R. M. Ogilvie, *A Commentary on Livy: Books 1–5* (Oxford 1965) on Livy 1.3.3 (p. 43).

At *Aen.* 3.703, *arduus . . . Acragas*, as Williams (above, n. 2) *ad loc.* notes, *arduus*, like *alta* in G. 1.332, is a gloss suggestive of Greek ἄρκος.

At *Aen.* 7.412, *magnum manet Ardea nomen*, as Servius notes, the word *magnum* serves as a gloss on the name *Ardea*, which is thus to be associated with the word *ardua* (Servius on 412: *bene adlusit: nam Ardea quasi ardua dicta est, id est magna et nobilis*; cf. Fordyce [above, n. 9] *ad loc.*).

At *Aen.* 7.682, *altum Praeneste*, the word *altum* alludes to Cato's suggestion for the origin of the name, which Servius quotes: *Cato dicit quia is locus montibus praestet*. Cf. Bartelink (above, n. 4) 54.

<sup>18</sup>R. G. M. Nisbet and Margaret Hubbard, *A Commentary on Horace's Odes: Book 1* (Oxford 1970) 40–58.

κεραυνός, "thunderbolt," so called, Servius notes on *Aeneid* 3.506, because Ceraunia was high enough to be a frequent target for lightning.<sup>19</sup> Vergil's words *fulmina* in 329 and *telo* (= *fulmine*) next to Ceraunia in 332, and indeed the whole passage, point to the etymology.<sup>20</sup> Apollonius also offered an explicit etymological aetiology of the name:

... ἀνδράσιν Ἐγγελέεσσιν ἐφέσται· οἱ δ' ἐν ὄρεσσιν  
 ἐνναίουσιν ἅπερ τε Κεραῦνία κυκλήσκονται  
 ἐκ τόθεν ἐξότε τούσγε Διὸς Κρονίδαο κεραυνοί  
 νῆσον ἐς ἀντιπέραιαν ἀπέτραπον ὁρμηθῆναι. (4.518–521)

Apollonius' lines feature the etymological signpost (κυκλήσκονται) and also etymologizing at the ends of consecutive lines.<sup>21</sup> We cannot be as certain that Apollonius is Vergil's source here as we were with the cluster of borrowings from the *Argonautica* in *Aeneid* 3.<sup>22</sup> Cinna may have alluded to the derivation. Whether he did or not, Vergil has fashioned a verse of multiple allusions not only by combining elements from Theocritus' and (perhaps) Cinna's propemptica, but also by placing the whole construct in a passage that flashes with the lightning that explains the name Ceraunia.

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<sup>19</sup>Servius on Aen. 3.506: *Ceraunia sunt montes Epiri, a crebris fulminibus propter altitudinem nominati; unde Horatius [1.3.20] expressius dixit "Acroceraunia" propter altitudinem et fulminum iactus. Cf. Isid. Etym. 14.8.12: Ceraunii sunt montes Epiri, a crebris dicti fulminibus. Graece enim fulmen κεραυνός dicitur, and see Bartelink (above, n. 4) 46.*

<sup>20</sup>Vergil also engages in etymological wordplay involving lighting at Aen. 6.842–843, *geminus, duo fulmina belli, / Scipiadas. fulmina* refers to the supposed etymology of the name Scipio from σκηπτός, "thunderbolt." Vergil follows Lucretian and probably Ennian precedent; see R. G. Austin, *P. Vergili Maronis Aeneidos liber sextus* (Oxford 1977) *ad loc.*, Bartelink (above, n. 4) 67–68, Eduard Norden, *P. Vergilius Maro: Aeneis Buch VI*<sup>4</sup> (Stuttgart 1957) *ad loc.* (p. 333), Otto Skutsch, "De fulminum appellatione Scipionibus indita," in *Studia Enniana* (London and New York 1968) 145–150.

<sup>21</sup>On Apollonius here see Enrico Livrea, *Apollonii Rhodii Argonauticon liber iv* (Firenze 1973) on 519 (p. 163); he suggests that Apollonius may be etymologizing in part to rival the etymological learning displayed in Callim. fr. 11.6 Pf., which treats material similar to that of Argon. 4.516–521.

<sup>22</sup>For Apollonius' influence on the *Georgics* see Briggs (above, n. 1) 957–958, and Thomas (above, n. 12) general index s.v. "Apollonius of Rhodes." For Apollonian precedent for one example of etymologizing in the *Georgics*, see Ross (above, n. 12 [1987]) 157–163; cf. too Shechter (above, n. 3).