

APOLLONIUS' *ARGONAUTICA*

The Theseus / Ariadne Desertion*

The predilection of Apollonius of Rhodes for both irony and literary games is clearly shown in his portrayal of Jason recounting to Medea the story of Theseus and Ariadne in an attempt by the hero to persuade her to help him (Arg. 3.997–1004). Jason omits to tell Medea that Theseus abandoned Ariadne on Naxos once her usefulness to him had ended. That Apollonius knew the desertion story of Ariadne becomes clear when he later speaks of a robe as

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the main lure to entrap Apsyrtus (4.423–34)¹. This robe, Apollonius explains, still exuded the perfume it received when Dionysus lay on it with Ariadne whom Theseus had carried off from Cnossus and abandoned on the island of Dia². The Ariadne myth has been variously treated by Homer (Od. 11.321–5), Plutarch (Thes. 20), Ovid (Met. 8.2; Her. 10; Ars Am. 2; Fast. 3.462), Apollodorus (Bibl. 3.1), Hyginus (Fab. 14, 43, 270) and Catullus (64). But the desertion story is not actually mentioned in any extant pre-Apollonian literary source. Yet Apollonius' irony would be completely lost (an irony compounded by Medea's words at 3.1107–8: οὐδ' Ἀριάδνῃ / ἰσοῦμαι: "nor can I match Ariadne")³ without his audience already knowing of the desertion story. It was, however, a common enough theme on Attic red-figure vase paintings⁴, and therefore we may reasonably assume, I think, that it was mentioned in the works of other authors before Apollonius.

I have suggested elsewhere⁵ that Apollonius' source was the epic poem *Aigimios* by Cercops of Miletus. The desertion story is actually alluded to in the *Aigimios*:

δεινὸς γὰρ μιν ἔτειρεν ἔρωσ Πανοπηίδος Αἰγλῆς.

The verse is quoted by Plutarch (Thes. 20 = F 298 M-W) who is recording a report that Theseus had abandoned Ariadne because he was in love with another woman. Plutarch adds that Hereas of Megara tells us (FGrHist 486 F 1) that this verse was removed from the Hesiodic corpus by Pisistratus simply to please the Athenians⁶. Some scholars have ascribed the authorship of the *Aigimios*

1) Cp. G. Zanker, The Love Theme in Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica*, WS n.s. 13, 1979, 67–8 n. 44; also A. Rose, Clothing Imagery in Apollonius' *Argonautica*, QUCC 50, 1985, 29–44.

2) According to Apollonius, the Graces had made the robe on Dia for Dionysus who later gave it to his son Thoas. He then left it to his daughter Hypsipyle who gave it to Jason as a memento of their love-making. Thus Apollonius cleverly used a circular structure for this literary game; and as Theseus used Ariadne so Jason would use Medea.

3) Cp. Zanker (above, n. 1) 67–8; P. Händel, Beobachtungen zur epischen Technik des Apollonios Rhodios, Munich 1954, 113; J. W. Mackail, Lectures on Greek Poetry, London 1911, 263 ff.

4) See LIMC 3.1, Addenda, 52–3 and 93–5. Also, S. McNally, Ariadne and Others: Images of Sleep in Greek and Early Roman Art, ClAnt 4, 1985, 152–93.

5) Creative Selectivity in Apollonius' *Argonautica*, Amsterdam 1993, 34.

6) For a full discussion of the Athenians' concern over Theseus' somewhat questionable reputation, see H. J. Walker, Theseus and Athens, Oxford 1995, passim. But Walker also discusses the anti-Athenian sentiments of Hereas of Megara in

to Hesiod himself while others attribute it to Cercops (Athenaeus 503 D)⁷. R. Merkelbach and M. L. West (FF 294–301) maintain a neutral approach. But Istrus of Cyrene, the amanuensis and pupil of Callimachus, had no hesitation in attributing to Cercops Theseus' breaking of his oath to Ariadne for the sake of Aegle (FGrHist 334 F 10 = Athenaeus 557 A–B = FF 147, 298 M–W). Istrus, as Athenaeus records, gave a list of the women associated with Theseus in the fourteenth book of his *Attica*. He catalogued the women under the headings of 'Rape' (Helen, Ariadne, Hippolyte, Anaxo, and the daughters of Cercyon and Sinis), and 'Marriage' (Meliboea, Hippe, Aegle, Phereboea, and Phaedra). It is noteworthy that in his list of Theseus' women at Thes. 27–9 Plutarch has practically⁸ the same eleven names that appear in the Istrian fragment, including the same distribution between 'Rape' and 'Marriage', and it is generally agreed that Plutarch's list comes directly from Istrus⁹. It is fair to say that we can gain some idea of Istrus' individual treatment of the various cases from Plutarch's respective accounts of the rape of Helen and the story of Ariadne. But, surely, Istrus' account was much more comprehensive and erudite. There can be little doubt, for instance, that Istrus discussed in detail the authorship of the verse concerning Aegle. Almost certainly, too, the same applies to the other sources mentioned by Plutarch at Thes. 20, among these the Naxian writers (= FGrHist 501 F 1).

The Naxian writers, according to Plutarch, cover the situation by explaining that there were two Minoses and two Ariadnes. One Ariadne who bore Oenopion and Staphylus was married to Dionysus in Naxos, while the other Ariadne at a later date was

particular and of Megarians in general (36 with nn. 1–3) which may be relevant here. He concludes that it is very unclear how any Athenian could have influenced the text of the *Aigimios*.

7) For the supposed rivalry between Hesiod and Cercops see Diog. Laert. 2.46. Cp. Suda s.v. 'Ορφεύς for discussion of the poets' respective dates. For a full discussion of the *Aigimios* see G. L. Huxley, *Greek Epic Poetry*, London 1969, 107–10.

8) Plutarch's Antiope is Hippolyte, as Plutarch himself explains at Thes. 27.5. Cp. Cleidemus FGrHist 323 F 18 and 328 F 110, also Pindar F 176 Sn.–M. Istrus probably discussed the question of the name of the Amazon. Plutarch's Iope, daughter of Iphicles, is Hippe (the text of the excerpt in Athenaeus is less corrupt), and his Periboea, mother of Ajax, is Meliboea. Cp. also Plut. Compar. Thes. et Rom. 6.

9) See M. Wellmann, *De Istro Callimachio*, Greifswald 1886, 19ff. Plutarch (Thes. 34) also quotes from Istrus (Book 13 of the *Attica* = FGrHist 334 F 7) on the subject of Theseus' mother Aethra.

carried off by Theseus and deserted by him and came to Naxos with a nurse called Corcyne, whose tomb the natives will still show you. Both Ariadnes died in Naxos but they are celebrated in different ways there, the first with revelling, and the second with lamentation.

According to Diodorus 5,51,3 (FGrHist 501 F 5) the local historians of Naxos also record that after the Thracians had inhabited the island for more than two hundred years and then left it because of a drought, the Carians came to live there, the king of whom Naxos, son of Polemon, changed the name of the island from Dia to Naxos after himself. It was during the reign of his grandson Smerdius that Theseus sailed in from Crete with Ariadne and was given hospitality. While asleep Theseus dreamt that Dionysus was threatening him with dire consequences unless he left Ariadne on Naxos. Theseus fled terrified, and during the night Dionysus led Ariadne onto the mountain called Drius where they both disappeared. The Naxian writers also celebrate the fact that Dionysus was reared on the island. They relate that Zeus came to Naxos with the baby sewn up in his thigh and then took it out and gave it to the local nymphs to raise, and that the islanders in turn were repaid for their kindness¹⁰.

Homer (Od. 11.321–5) tells us that Theseus once tried to take Ariadne, the beautiful daughter of Minos, from Crete to Athens but never had any joy of her since Artemis killed her on the evidence of Dionysus in sea-girt Dia. Interestingly, no desertion on Theseus' part is even hinted at here, neither for the sake of Aegle nor of anyone else for that matter. And, clearly, in the older legend, Ariadne was already the consort of Dionysus¹¹. Dia was

10) For the affinity of the islanders with Dionysus see also Pliny, NH 4.67 = FGrHist 499 F 6, Steph. Byz. s.v. Νάξος = FGrHist 501 F 4, and Diod. 5.52.2 = FGrHist 501 F 5.

11) For the marriage of Ariadne and Dionysus, see Sch. Arat. 71, pp. 106–7 Martin, and Epimenides of Crete FGrHist 457 F 19 = Eratosth. Catast. 5; and for children of the marriage, see Sch. Ap. Rh. 3.997, pp. 244–5 Wendel, Sch. Arat. 636, pp. 349–50 Martin, Paus. 1.3.1, Hyg. Fab. 10, 14, 19. The older legend was probably the version told by Nestor to Menelaus in the *Cypria* (see Proclus' summary, lines 38–9, p. 31 Davies). For Homer, Dionysus was not the important and much venerated god which he later became, but he was Dionysus Zagreus, son of Zeus and Persephone, who was persecuted by Lycurgus; see my 'Myrsilus of Methymna: Hellenistic Paradoxographer', Amsterdam 1995, 58 and 63 n.11. Also my 'Myrsilus of Methymna and the White Goddesses', ICS 20, 1995, 87. Dionysus is not here the son of Zeus and Semele as is suggested by W. B. Stanford, *Homer: Odyssey*, vol. I, London 1947, 11.321–5.

probably the small island lying off the north coast of Crete¹². The legend was not then associated with Naxos.

It is feasible that the Naxians concocted the story of their eponymous hero Naxus, and his changing of the name of the island from Dia to his own, simply to make that association. And Callimachus' remark (Sch. Ap. Rh. 4.425, p.285 Wendel = F 601 Pf.) suggests that he was well aware of the Naxian account:

ἐν Δίῃ· τὸ γὰρ ἔσκε παλαιότερον οὖνομα Νάξω.

It is equally feasible, in this case at least, that the Alexandrian poets consulted the painstaking research of Istrus, such was the comprehensive nature of his work. And that each poet selected the source which particularly suited his own dramatic purpose. When, for example, Callimachus (F 67,13–4 Pf.) refers to Ariadne sleeping on Naxos (Ἀριήδης / . . . εὐδόουσης)¹³, he is following a Naxian source because his heroine Cydippe hails from Naxos¹⁴. Apollonius, on the other hand, preferred (as perhaps one might expect) the older version of the legend mentioned by Homer, especially with respect to location: Δίῃ ἐν ἀμφιρῶτῃ (Homer): Δίῃ ἐν ἀμφιρῶτῃ (Apollonius). The scholiast on Theocritus (45/46b p.280 Wendel) names six islands called Dia but says, quite sensibly I think, that the island lying off the north coast of Crete was most likely the one where the events surrounding Ariadne occurred. But Apollonius, always fastidiously selective in his creativity¹⁵, chose also

12) Modern name 'Standia', see Stanford (above, n. 11) *ibid.* Cp. the account of Diod. 4.61.5. which suggests that Theseus' ship reached Dia on the same night as she sailed from Crete.

13) Interestingly, Callimachus uses the variant 'Ariede', which is preferred by his older contemporary Zenodotus at Il. 18.590, where Ariadne, dance, and Knossus are connected. Thus Callimachus links Naxian and Cretan dances when he speaks of Cydippe placing her delicate foot in the dance of sleeping Ariede; and he emphasises the connection with Crete in that Cydippe's lover Acontius of Ceos traced his descent back to Euxantius of Ceos (an early king) who was a son of Minos, the father of Ariadne (Bacchyl. 1.111 ff.). Cp. T. B. L. Webster, *The Myth of Ariadne from Homer to Catullus*, G&R 13, 1966, 22–3.

14) Theocritus (Id. 2.45–6) has Simaetha begging the goddess to instil in her lover Delphis of Myndus as much Lethe as once Theseus had for Ariadne in Dia. This tends to suggest that Theseus' desertion was more of an involuntary nature forced upon him by Dionysus who had duly instilled in him the appropriate amount of Lethe. The scholiast on Theocritus (45/46a p.280 Wendel) explains that this is indeed what Theocritus means and that the source is a Naxian one. Cp. Gow, *Id.* 2.44 ff.

15) For a full discussion of Apollonius' method of creative selectivity see *op. cit.* above n. 5, *passim*.

to use the source of Cercops' *Aigimios* for the element of Theseus' voluntary and deliberate desertion of Ariadne for another woman Aegle, an element which was in keeping with Theseus' legendary reputation, and which at the same time would evoke from the Hellenistic audience an appreciation of Apollonius' ironic presentation of the story.

Durban

Steven Jackson