

DIVINE INTERVENTION AT SEA IN APOLLONIUS OF RHODES' ARGONAUTICA

Abstract

*In this paper the authors discuss the role of divine intervention at sea in Apollonius of Rhodes' *The Argonautica*. The sea is characterized in the poem as an inherently dangerous place, thus the need for divine intervention in order to navigate it, either directly or through the use of prophecies and visions; this is especially true of the first three books of the epic poem. While the gods are depicted as themselves being responsible for dangerous sailing conditions, it is also noted that the sea at times represents a danger even to the gods themselves. In the final book of *The Argonautica*, the sea becomes a place of refuge, healing, and absolution, with a purificatory aspect revealed to be made use of, by both divine and mortal characters.*

Keywords: *Apollonius of Rhodes; The Argonautica; Jason; the Argonauts; the sea; divine intervention; purification.*

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Introduction

To the ancient Greeks, the sea represented various things at various different points in their history. While they were famed for their maritime commerce and their many overseas colonies, the sea remained a dangerous form of travel for the Greeks. It exemplified the unknown, and the unknowable:

Every Greek sailor knew that once one had sailed beyond the last points of land the sea just went on and on. What particularly frightened the Greeks, and therefore the European mind which inherited their philosophical tradition, was the idea of void. The sea's void, that infinitely dangerous blank beyond known land, was as worrying metaphysically as it was physically.¹

This frightening aspect of the sea is retained throughout most of Apollonius' only extant epic poem, *The Argonautica*; in the fourth and final book of *The Argonautica*, however, the sea begins, finally, to take on a healing role, as a means to sanctuary.

Apollonius of Rhodes' retelling of the story of Jason and the Argonauts is the most complete version of the story that we have inherited from the Greeks; it comes down to us, however, at a relatively late date, centuries after Homer gifted us *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. The Argonauts are alluded to by Homer himself in such a manner that it is suggested that his listeners are well acquainted with the story, and that the Greeks themselves were aware that the epic cycle concerning Jason antedated all other epic cycles.² As is the case with other Greek epic poems, elements of the story can be dated to bronze age Greece (the fanged helmet), still others are Indo-European in origin (the slaying of the dragon, divine twins), making it often difficult to discern which elements are Apollonius' alone, and which are inherited.³ While Apollonius retells an ancient story, predating alphabetic Greek, and uses source material dating from well before his time,⁴ he lives in the age of Hellenism, and imbues the tale with elements from his own time.

The sea voyage of Jason and the Argonauts, then, harkens in part back to a time when the Greeks were not yet the experienced sailors that they would later be known to be; the sea represented a dangerous place, especially when venturing out into

¹ James Hamilton-Paterson, *Seven-tenths: The Sea and its Thresholds*. Kobo ed., Faber & Faber, 2010., pp. 175-176.

² Albin Lesky, *A History of Greek Literature*, transl. Cornelis de Heer and James Willis, Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis, 1996., p. 734

³ A. Lesky, *A History...*, p. 54; Martin L. West, *Indo-European Poetry and Myth*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2007., pp. 186-191, 430.

⁴ A. Lesky, *A History...*, p. 734.

unknown territory. This is represented in *The Argonautica* through the representation of divine intervention during sea travel; dangerous sailing conditions are shown as being divine in origin, and intervention from other divinities is needed in order to escape those same dangers. Finally, in the final section of the poem (Book IV), the sea begins to take on purgative and healing properties, which are also shown to be divine in origin.

1. The sea as inherently dangerous

While the focus of *The Argonautica* is a heroic journey by sea set upon in order to complete a seemingly impossible task (i.e. the requisition of the golden fleece, guarded by a dragon), the actual acquisition of the golden fleece is anticlimactic. Jason, in fact, does not slay the dragon guarding the golden fleece (it is not slain at all, in fact, but rather lulled to sleep by Medea), and any monster slaying that he does accomplish is done with the help of magic potions given to him by Medea that give added strength and other such advantages⁵. The golden fleece, presented initially as the impetus for the entire epic poem, turns out to be little more than a footnote in the journey. The real force driving the narrative of the story is the journey over the sea itself, the sea being both the obstacle the protagonists must overcome and, in the last phases of the poem, a potential sanctuary.

Travel by sea is implied by Apollonius to be inherently dangerous, and something to be undertaken only when necessary: “But come, tell me now, and truly... what necessity forces you to travel overseas“.⁶ It is implied that no-one would undertake a long sea voyage for the purposes of commerce or piracy, and that some sort of divine goading or royal decree would be the only rational reason to take up such a dangerous expedition:

Aīētēs, don't jump to conclusions about this expedition—
it's not for the purpose you fear that we've come here to your city
and dwelling, nor did we choose to. Who'd willingly traverse
such a spread of sea to rob foreigners? No, it was heaven's prompting
and the cold-blooded fiat of an arrogant king that forced me.⁷

⁵ Cf. Apollonius Rhodius. *Apollonii Rhodii Argonautica*, ed. H. Hermann Fraenkel, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1961, Arg. I 15-17 and Arg. IV 99-189.

⁶ All of the translations of the *Argonautica* cited in this paper are from: Apollonios Rhodios, *The Argonautika: Translated, with Introduction, Commentary and Glossary* by Peter Green, University of California Press, 2007. Apollonios, *The Argonautika...*, Arg. II 1137-1138.

⁷ Apollonios, *The Argonautika...*, Arg. III 386-390.

The sea is mistaken for the underworld, and sea voyage is seen as something that is beyond the control of men: "For themselves, they had no notion whether it was in Hades / or on the sea that they were drifting; but still they entrusted / their safe return to the sea, not knowing where it bore them."⁸ In the Greek conceptualization of the world, the sky is made of ocean, as noted by Marinatos: "but there is an additional layer outside the ocean, this is Hades and Erebos and Zofos";⁹ the placing of the world of the dead next to the ocean highlights the dangers of marine travel.

The dangers of the sea are bound up with its boundlessness, its very nature which is perceived as endless. This boundlessness is mentioned as well by the son of the sun god:

Did some disaster
cut you off in mid-journey? You paid me no attention
when I warned you about the boundless length of the voyage,
though I knew it, had traveled it once, whirled in the chariot
of my father the Sun while escorting my sister Kirké
to that land in the west....¹⁰

This boundlessness and association of the sea with the rising and setting cycle of the sun is, indeed ancient; according to Northrop Frye, the archetypal sun-god travels not in a chariot, like the sun-god of the Greeks, but by boat.¹¹ The sea and the sky become interchangeable, limitless spaces, easily navigable only by the gods. The ocean and sky are tightly linked in the conceptualization of the Greeks, who of the world believed that "it is imagined as a sphere, perhaps like an onion with many layers. The ocean would surround the inhabited world like the outer layer of an onion. It would contain and surround the orbit of the sun, in the sense that the sun moves only within this sphere".¹²

This limitlessness is particularly dangerous due to its obliteration of the self and its erasing of the lines between us and the Other. Grgas discusses this with regards to cultural differences: "Pred morem nestaje polazište u odnosu na koje bi se utvrdila vlastitost. Otvorenost i bezgraničnost mora nužno potkopavaju rad razgraničenja i

⁸ Apollonios, *The Argonautika...*, Arg. IV 1699-1701.

⁹ Nanno Marinatos, "Light and Darkness in Archaic Greek Cosmography" in: *Light and Darkness in Ancient Greek Myth and Religion*, ed. Menelaos Christopoulos, Efimia D. Karakanta and Olga Lavaniouk, Lexington Books, Lanham, 2010., p. 198.

¹⁰ Apollonios, *The Argonautika...*, Arg. III 306-311.

¹¹ Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1957., p. 159.

¹² N. Marinatos, *Light...*, p. 198.

nameću misao o proizvoljnosti kulturalnih dioba¹³. Cultural identity was of particular importance to the Greeks, who defined their identity as Greeks through shared narratives and language.¹⁴

2. The use of prophecy, seers, and portents

While various divinities, as is common in Greek epic poetry, directly intervene with the heroes' journey in *The Argonautica*, they often intervene in indirect ways as well: through the use of prophecy, seers and portents. In this manner they are able to guide heroes from afar, and the protagonists themselves are given a certain amount of agency in actively seeking divine signs.

Doves, a symbol of divine love both in pagan and Christian literature,¹⁵ are used to demonstrate to the sailors whether or not their passage through the mouth of the Black Sea is safe, in a manner similar to that mentioned in the Old Testament when Noah seeks to find out whether the flooded waters have abated:

First, then, I bid you
make trial with a dove; this will serve you as an omen.
Send it on ahead of the ship. If it flies safely
through the rocks to the Black Sea beyond, delay no longer
yourselves, no longer hold off from trying the passage,
but get a good grip on your oars, pull all together
and cleave through that narrow sea-strait, for your lives
will depend less on prayer than on the strength of your arms.¹⁶

8 Also he sent forth a dove from him, to see if the waters were abated from off the face of the ground; 9 But the dove found no rest for the sole of her foot, and she returned unto him into the ark, for the waters *were* on the face of the whole earth: then he put forth his hand, and took her, and pulled her in unto him into the ark. 10 And he stayed yet other seven days; and again he sent forth the dove out of the ark; 11 And the dove came in to him in the

¹³ "In front of the sea the starting point from which one might confirm his singularity disappears. The openness and boundlessness of the sea must bury the work of demarcation and impose thoughts on the arbitrariness of cultural division". (Translated by the authors of the article). Stipe Grgas, *Američki studiji danas: Identitet, kapital, specijalnost*. Meandar Media, Zagreb, 2014., p. 255.

¹⁴ Tim Whitmarsh, "Greece is the World" in: *Being Greek Under Rome: Cultural Identity, the Second Sophistic and the Development of Empire*, ed. Simon Goldhill, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001., p. 300.

¹⁵ Northrop Frye and Jay MacPherson, *Biblical and Classical Myths: The Mythological Framework of Western Culture*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 2004., pp. 75-76.

¹⁶ Apollonios, *The Argonautika...*, Arg. II 327-334.

evening; and, lo, in her mouth was an olive leaf plucked off: so Noah knew that the waters were abated from off the earth.¹⁷

In both texts, the dove is sent ahead in order to test the waters in order to deduce whether or not it is safe to travel through them, or to see if there is a safe harbour nearby; it is the divine made flesh, a guide at the end of a dangerous marine voyage.

Another divine portent mentioned in *The Argonautica* that has a reflection in the Bible in the story of the star of Bethlehem¹⁸ is the use of a shooting star as a guide, sent by a divine power:

So he spoke, and the goddess vouchsafed them an auspicious portent, at sight of which they all roared their approval, that this was the route they should take: for a shooting star blazed its sky trail far beyond them, where they'd find their passage.¹⁹

The star is here perhaps also a foreshadowing of the future of the twins Castor and Pollux, in which they both become the brightest stars in the constellation Gemini and are known to guide and protect sailors at sea.²⁰

The Greek god traditionally most closely associated with the sea is Poseidon, who is known to take the form of a horse.²¹ He sends the Argonauts a portent in the shape of a horse, which prompts Peleus to liken their ship to a mother. Thus, the sea becomes a symbol of birth, or in this case, rebirth after the climax of the heroic journey. This equating of birth with water is a primal archetype found in what Northrop Frye in *The Anatomy of Criticism* calls *The Mythos of Summer*: "Psychologically, this image is related to the embryo in the womb, the world of the unborn often being thought of as liquid; anthropologically, it is related to the image of seeds of new life buried in a dead world of snow or swamp".²² While birth is generally a positive motif, there lies inherent in birth the danger of death both for mother and child, hinted at by Apollonius with the mention of labour pains:

And then the Minyans witnessed the strangest of portents:
out of the sea a monstrous horse sprang landward,
gigantic, with golden mane flying high about his neck;

¹⁷ *The Bible*, Authorized King James Version, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2008., Gen. 8: 8-11.

¹⁸ *The Bible*, Matt. 2: 1-2.

¹⁹ Apollonios, *The Argonautika*..., Arg. IV 294-297.

²⁰ M.C. Howatson, "Dioscuri", *The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1989., pp. 193-194.

²¹ Davor Ljubimir, "Posejdon u Delfima" in: *S ove strane beskonačnosti: Filozofiranje i more*, eds. Petar Šegedin and Ozren Žunec, Demetra, Zagreb, 2008., pp. 139-186; p. 139.

²² N. Frye, *The Anatomy*..., p. 198.

and lightly shaking the streams of brine from his quarters
 set off at a gallop, wind-swift. Then straightway Peleus
 announced, rejoicing, to his assembled companions:
 “I believe that Poseidon’s chariot has just, this moment,
 been unyoked by the hands of the god’s own wife; and our mother,
 I’d guess, is none else than this very vessel
 we sail in: it’s true she has us forever in her belly,
 and groans at the troublesome labors to which we set her.”²³

3. Direct intervention of the gods

The immortals most often intervene directly with the Argonauts and their journey at sea; that is to say, they appear to the heroes in a presumably physical form, and directly manipulate the sea, winds, or other natural phenomena that assist in the heroes’ journey. These manipulations may be primarily divided into those that help the heroes, and those that hinder them. Help is given as a reward of some sort for help, good behaviour or some other such act. Examples of help are much more numerous than those involving hinderance, although examples of gods hindering the Argonauts’ enemies in order to let the Argonauts escape are here classified here under *help*.

3.1. Hinderance

The only divinity to hinder the progress of the Argonauts in *The Argonautica* is precisely the one with the most power in the Greek pantheon: Zeus. He, unlike many of the other gods and goddesses mentioned in the poem, is never made visible to the heroes, nor is he described as a physical figure. He is a force of nature, one that is uncontrollable and upon whose will the completion of the Argonaut’s journey depends; in this way, Zeus is like the sea itself.

There are several reasons Zeus’ animosity. First, the Argonauts saved Phineus from Zeus’ curse out of pity for the prophet by killing the harpies that Zeus sent to ruin his food, angering Zeus in the process;²⁴ the helping of Phineus, however, turned out to be a blessing, as the prophet used his skills to give the Argonauts guidance. Second, Zeus punished the Argonauts for the death of Medea’s own brother at her request but relented after they were ritually cleansed of the deed by Circe.²⁵

²³ Apollonios, *The Argonautika*..., Arg. IV 1364-1374.

²⁴ Apollonios, *The Argonautika*..., Arg. II 209-497.

²⁵ Apollonios, *The Argonautika*..., Arg. IV.

Finally, rivalry with his wife, Hera, might account for some of his animosity towards the Argonauts. As noted in the following section, Hera is aware of her husband's philandering, and the animosity between them that results from it leads to a sort of rivalry between the spouses, that often makes collateral damage of epic heroes.

Zeus uses his power to directly influence natural phenomena at sea in an attempt to drown the Argonauts; he sends a strong wind which stirs up a hurricane and a deluge:

That day, indeed, they'd come very close to the island,
but Zeus stirred up a driving northerly gale,
marking with rain the Great Bear's sodden orbit.²⁶

The Argonauts beg passers-by for help, asking for succour in the name of Zeus, patron god of guests and hospitality, the same Zeus who is to blame for their present situation. While the Argonauts are aware that Zeus is likely watching their situation unfold, they do not mention that they brought down Zeus' wrath upon themselves with their actions:

The deluge sent by Zeus
ceased at sunrise. Soon the two groups approached each other
and met: it was Argos who spoke first. "In the name
of All-Seeing Zeus, we beg you, whoever you may be,
to treat us with charity, help us in our distress!
A fierce hurricane, swooping down seaward, scattered the timbers
of the wretched ship in which of necessity we'd embarked
and were ploughing the deep. So now we're your suppliants, ask you
to find us clothes for our nakedness, take us with you,
show compassion for men like yourselves in their misfortune,
respect strangers and suppliants for the sake of Zeus,
the protector of strangers and suppliants, both of whom
are Zeus's concern—and his eye may well be upon us now."²⁷

Of note, the aforementioned Phineus also implores the help of the Argonauts by invoking Zeus, yet in the same breath lets them know that that same help involves killing the harpies of Zeus, an act sure to anger the head of the Greek pantheon.²⁸ Zeus, thus, even when angered is invoked when help is needed; mortals (and immortals alike) must tread lightly when it comes to Zeus, for he has both the power to put mortals at peril by controlling the elements, such as weather affecting the sea, and he

²⁶ Apollonios, *The Argonautika*..., Arg. II 1097-1100.

²⁷ Apollonios, *The Argonautika*..., Arg. II 1120-1133.

²⁸ Apollonios, *The Argonautika*..., Arg. II 209-290.

is the only one of the gods that truly has the power to help, or rather, who does not have to answer to any higher power with regards to his dealings with mortals.

Jason offers an interesting interpretation of his view of the hurricane that brought his ship to Enyalios; while he recognizes that the hurricane that took his ship off course was brought about by a god, not only does he not recognize which god is the cause of his misfortune, he mistakenly believes that the very god that has been causing the Argonauts trouble at sea has rescued them:

Aiētés, our ship was too soon ripped asunder
by a raging hurricane—we clung to its beams for dear life
and the waves tossed us up on the strand of Enyalios’s island
in the thick of the night. But some god came to our rescue,
for not even the birds of Ares, that till then had made
their home on that barren island, not even them
did we find still: no, these men had driven them headlong,
though they’d only disembarked there the previous day. For sure
it was Zeus’s will, in his pity for us—or some act of fate—
that made them delay there, since they gave us food and clothing
the moment they heard the illustrious name of Phrixos—
and your own, for it’s to your city they were journeying.²⁹

Jason mistakes Zeus’ will as being helpful towards him and his comrades, despite having killed the aforementioned harpies of Zeus; of note, however, Jason sees some good in his situation, and his suggestion that it might have been “some act of fate”³⁰ indicates that there is perhaps a higher will than even Zeus’ at play, and that even the king of the gods does not have complete control over matters at sea.

Despite his harsh treatment of the Argonauts, Zeus does foresee an end to their woes on the sea, after they are ritually cleansed of their deeds:

At sight of Apsyrtos slumped heavily into death
Zeus himself, king of gods, felt rage for what they’d done,
and decreed that only after the arts of Aiaian Kirké
had cleansed them of deadly spilt blood, and they’d suffered woes untold
would they have their homecoming.³¹

The sea, then, which poses as a hinderance and place of suffering to the Argonauts has the power to become a place of cleansing, gods willing. This cleansing aspect of the sea is further discussed in section 4.0.

²⁹ Apollonios, *The Argonautika*..., Arg. III 320-331.

³⁰ Apollonios, *The Argonautika*..., Arg. III 228.

³¹ Apollonios, *The Argonautika*..., Arg. IV 556-561.

3.2. Help

Hera, as opposed to Zeus, is not able to directly intervene with nature in order to protect or help Jason and the Argonauts; rather, she uses her position to convince other deities with closer ties to nature to control nature for her. Despite her position as the wife of the father of the gods, the sea is beyond her direct control. Her great love of Jason is expressed through her willingness to protect him in all perilous situations:

Him, even should he voyage to the nether regions
of Hades, to free Ixion from his brazen chains,
I will protect, with all my limbs' innate strength.³²

Hera's love of Jason is, quite appropriately, tied to an incident involving a body of water, this time not the boundless sea, but rather the raging river, a bound body of water. It is finally in this location, where the water, though raging, is held in on both sides, that Jason is able to first to exert agency; it is here that he saved Hera, in the guise of an old woman. This very event is the catalyst for the entire narrative, an example of control while in a body of water that leads to a positive outcome for the protagonist, that of acquiring divine inclination:

Besides, long before this Jason had won my
great love, ever since at the estuary of the flooded
Anauros he met me (I was testing men's righteousness)
on his way home from hunting: all the mountains and lofty
peaks were being powdered with snow, while down their gulleys
water cascaded in thunderous torrents. I'd taken
the likeness of an old woman: he felt sorry for me,
heaved me up on his shoulders, bore me through the rapids.
Hence the unfailing high honor in which I hold him. Nor will
Pelias pay for his outrage unless you grant Jason
a safe homecoming.³³

Help from the gods does not only come in the form of direct help for the heroes, it is also supplied in the form of hinderance to their enemies. This hinderance is not served by controlling the sea directly, but rather through elements that affect marine travel, in the following case through lightning:

The Kolchians, when they discovered their prince's murder,
went raging in pursuit of the Minyans and Argo
the whole length of the Sea of Kronos; but Hera from heaven's

³² Apollonios, *The Argonautika*..., Arg. II 61-63.

³³ Apollonios, *The Argonautika*..., Arg. III 66-76.

vault held them back with lightning, bright and terrible.³⁴

As Hera does not have control over the sea herself, she must rely on her considerable influence over other gods to get them to do her bidding and control the elements in order to make for a smoother homeward journey for Jason in the final book of the poem:

Dear Iris, come, if you've ever done my bidding,
 speed away now, on your light swift wings, to Thetis:
 bid her come here to me, up from her briny depths,
 for I have great need of her. Next, you must make your way
 to those island shores where the anvils of Hephaistos
 ring brazen under the strokes of his mighty hammers:
 tell him to damp down his fire blasts until the Argo
 is safely past them. Then go also to Aiolos,
 Aiolos, lord of all winds born in the high clear heavens
 and tell him, too, my purpose: let him hold up all motion
 of air in the firmament, let not the least breeze ruffle
 the deep, except for a gentle western tailwind
 until they reach the Phaiakian isle of Alkínoös.³⁵

She is shown spending a considerable portion of the final book of the poem³⁶ convincing Thetis (a sea nymph) to make the Argonauts' journey home a smooth one, resorting to emotional manipulation in order to achieve her end: "Do not forget, Thetis / how it was I that reared you from infancy, and loved you / more than all other sea nymphs that dwell in the salt depths / because you would not bed, for all his urgent longing, / with Zeus".³⁷

Thetis herself is not able to do much on her own yet is asked by Hera to... "fix them a risk-free voyage: / the rocks and those vaulting waves are your only concern, / and such dangers you and your sisters can well avert".³⁸ The final leg of the journey requires the help of a myriad of immortals, in order to navigate the dangerous waters. The Nereids are forced to hoist their skirts up to their knees in order to steer the ship, yet the ship is still tossed about: "Now Argo / was slammed from side to side by the riptides, while rough-rearing / waves all around beat wetly into the rock-face (Arg.

³⁴ Apollonios, *The Argonautika*..., Arg. IV 507-510.

³⁵ Apollonios, *The Argonautika*..., Arg. IV 757-769.

³⁶ Apollonios, *The Argonautika*..., Arg. IV 783-864.

³⁷ Apollonios, *The Argonautika*..., Arg. IV 790-793.

³⁸ Apollonios, *The Argonautika*..., Arg. IV 822-824.

IV 942-944).³⁹ So dangerous is the sea, that the gods themselves are terrified, and the Nereids spend a long day bringing the heroes to relative safety:

so the Nereids passed the swift ship in turn one to another,
 skimming it over the wavetops, always taking care to
 keep it clear of the rocks, as the roaring tide seethed round them.
 They had watchers: high on a sheer cliff's summit, standing
 erect, one brawny shoulder propped with his hammerhelve,
 Lord Hephaistos looked on; and high above the radiant
 heaven stood Zeus's consort, so scared by what she saw
 that she flung her arms in terror about Athena.
 For the whole allotted span of a day in springtime,
 so long the Nereids labored, heaving the vessel
 clear through the thunderous rocks, till the heroes recaptured
 a following wind, and sped onward, rapidly coasting
 past Thrinákia's meadows, where the sun god's cattle pastured.⁴⁰

In an attempt to secure a safe passage home, the heroes of *The Argonautica* build an extemporary, improvised altar to the god Apollo who had come to them as an apparition after having landed on a deserted island, without safe harbour for their ship. While a part of the crew was busy building the altar from rocks found on the shore, other members went in search of a beast that would make an appropriate sacrifice to the god. The crew then forms a circle around the altar, singing and dancing in a circle in praise of Apollo in order to designate the space as sacred, separating it from the profane space around it. After completing the ritual, they pray to Apollo to ensure a safe passage home through the sea, praying specifically to him for mercy. His apparition brings with it strong waves which cause the entire island to tremble, invoking fear in the crew.⁴¹ In the first book there is mention of another improvised altar of Apollo at the very beginning of their journey, with epithets of the god pointing to his nautical function ("Lord of Shores and of Embarkations"),⁴² praying to him to personally lead their ship to safety:

Hear me, Lord, you who dwell in Pagasai and Aisónis,
 that has its name from my father; you who promised me, when
 I consulted your Pythian oracle, to show me this venture's
 end and accomplishment, having been yourself to blame
 for my whole ordeal—now in person bring ship and comrades
 safe to their goal, and back to Hellas. For you hereafter

³⁹ Apollonios, *The Argonautika*..., Arg. IV 942-944.

⁴⁰ Apollonios, *The Argonautika*..., Arg. IV 952-965.

⁴¹ Apollonios, *The Argonautika*..., Arg. II 679-715.

⁴² Apollonios, *The Argonautika*..., Arg. I 404.

as many of us as get home will make splendid recompense,
 an ox for each man, on your altars, with countless offerings
 that I'll bring you, besides, to Delphoi, and to Ortygia.
 But come, now, Far-Shooter, accept this our sacrifice,
 our very first gift, the voyage-price we offer
 for our vessel: may I, Lord, through thy counsel and wisdom,
 cast off for a sorrowless future, and may a favoring
 wind blow upon us, let us sail through calmest seas.⁴³

4. The sea as a place of healing

While the sea is predominantly represented as dangerous in *The Argonautica*, and one that requires divine intervention in order to be safely navigated, there are several examples offered by Apollonius which illustrate that the sea holds healing properties as well; these are also, like the vast majority of examples that illustrate the dangers of navigation, closely aligned with the divine.

The sea is shown to have a cleansing function, used by the immortal Circe in order to cleanse herself of nightmares: “There they came upon Kirké / sluicing her head in seawater to cleanse away nightmarish nocturnal fears that had preyed on her as she slept”.⁴⁴ This first sighting of Circe by the Argonauts is a reflection of their reason for making the dangerous journey to her island, as they are seeking expiation and purification for the murder of Absyrtus;⁴⁵ thus, purification is granted not only by sea travel, but from the sea itself. To reach this place of cleansing, divine intervention is needed, and the Dioscuri are instructed to pray in order for safe passage to be given to them in order to reach their final destination. The instructions are given by the ship itself, previously equated with a divine mother or womb, now an object of terror that becomes the mouthpiece for Zeus.⁴⁶

In order to approach the gods, ritual cleansing is sometimes required in order for the hero to be able to be pure in the presence of divinity. Such a ritual is described by Apollonius of Jason who is entreated by Medea to prepare himself before invoking Hekate.⁴⁷ In *The Argonautica*, this ritual cleansing takes the form of ablutions in the flow of river water, animal sacrifice, and libation. Blood, water and mead, all liquids,

⁴³ Apollonios, *The Argonautika*..., Arg. I 409-424.

⁴⁴ Apollonios, *The Argonautika*..., Arg. IV 662-664.

⁴⁵ Apollonios, *The Argonautika*..., Arg. IV 586-588.

⁴⁶ Apollonios, *The Argonautika*..., Arg. IV 576-591.

⁴⁷ William Guthrie, *The Greeks and Their Gods*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1971., p. 228.

serve to purify the hero; water is the font of life, mead our means of sustaining life by giving the body nutrition, and blood is the life force itself. While in the aforementioned quote Circe purifies herself using seawater, Jason, a mortal, must use river water, perhaps due to the bound nature of the river as opposed to the boundless nature of the sea, which would be too much for a mortal to handle:

and after washing yourself in the flow of the tireless river,
alone, apart from the others, wrapped in a dark cloak,
dig a round pit, and over it cut the throat of
a ewe and sacrifice it, burning the carcass whole
on a pyre that you've stacked up high at the pit's brink,
and sweeten with offerings Hékaté, Perses' only daughter,
pouring out from a cup the bees' hive-garnered produce.⁴⁸

The sea is also presented as a means to obtaining sanctuary, granted by the gods, the means by which land is created, given as a gift from the gods:

When you throw this clod into the sea, the gods will make it
an island, and it shall be peopled by your children's
descendants, for Triton handed it to you as a guest-gift,
this piece of the Libyan mainland: it was he, and no other
immortal, who made you this present at your meeting.⁴⁹

This seems, in effect, to be a passage that attempts to justify the legitimacy of Greek colonization on the Mediterranean, implying that it is divinely sanctioned for the Greeks to take portions of foreign land; the sea here, in so far as it is habitable, is seen as an extension of land, one which is god-given; the conquering of the sea is made possible by the will of the gods themselves, but only through the appropriation of land brought to sea. The sea may be tamed, through divine intervention, but not entirely conquered. Finally, in the closing verses of the poem, the sea, although a dangerous place, becomes a shelter for both the Argonauts and their descendants. The aforementioned clod of earth, as well as knowledge that will allow men to navigate the sea, is presented as the ultimate gift from the gods:

and there met them—in the likeness of a young man in his prime—
wide-ruling Triton, who picked up a clod of earth
and offered it to the heroes as a guest-gift with these words:
“Take this, friends, since at present I have no better guest-gift
to put in the hands of those who may entreat me.
But if it's the sea-lanes here that you're after, such as often

⁴⁸ Apollonios, *The Argonautika*..., Arg. III 1030-1036.

⁴⁹ Apollonios, *The Argonautika*..., Arg. IV 1750-1754.

men need to know when traveling through foreign terrain,
I'll show you them, for my father Poseidon gave me
expert knowledge of these waters.⁵⁰

Conclusion

The sea is presented as an inherently dangerous place in *The Argonautica*, with divine intervention needed in order to navigate it, either directly or through the use of prophecies and visions. Divine intervention also serves to make the sea an even more dangerous avenue to navigate at times; the gods, however, do not have complete control over the sea, not even Zeus, the head of the Greek pantheon and arguably the most powerful of the gods.

The Argonauts begin their journey with the blessing of a powerful deity (Hera), only to invoke the wrath of Zeus, the most powerful of all deities, who directly manipulates natural phenomena in order to make their voyage at sea perilous; Hera uses her influence to entreat various deities associated with the sea in order to offer help to the Argonauts, as without divine help their journey would be impossible to complete.

After enduring many dangerous and harsh conditions at sea, it is precisely at the end of the epic poem that the sea begins to show its gentler side, echoing the Greeks' journey from timid voyagers to colonizers. After angering the gods by committing the ultimate sin, fratricide, the sea becomes a means of absolution, bringing the heroes to Circe, in order to purify them. The immortal Circe herself makes use of the sea in order to purify her thoughts.

⁵⁰ Apollonios, *The Argonautika*..., Arg. IV 1547-1559.

BOŽANSKA INTERVENCIJA NA MORU U ARGONAUTICI APOLONIJA ROĐANINA

Sažetak

U radu se raspravlja o funkciji koju ima interveniranje božanstva na moru u djelu Argonautika Apolonija Rođanina. Morski se krajobraz u epu opisuje kao mjesto kojemu je opasnost inherentna, pa je za sigurnu plovidbu nužna božanska pomoć, bilo da se ona ostvaruje neposredno ili putem proročanstava i vizija. Ovo je osobito izraženo u prvima trima knjigama epa. Premda se bogovi opisuju kao uzročnici teških uvjeta plovidbe morem, pokazuje se da more kao takvo predstavlja opasnost i za same bogove. U posljednjoj knjizi Argonautike more se razotkriva kao utočište, duhovni prostor izlječenja i razrješenja, a njegova moć očišćenja kao djelotvorna podjednako za besmrtnike kao i za smrtno ljude.

Ključne riječi: *Apolonije Rođanin; Jazon; Argonauti; more; božanska intervencija; očišćenje.*