

A New Propose for Prehistoric Tritonis Lake's Location based on Apollonius of Rhodes' description

This paper takes book 4 of Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica* as evidence for the location of the Triton Lake during the second millennium BC. The authors consider Apollonius' account of the Argonauts' journey inland from the Gulf of Syrtis to the Triton Lake, and their onward journey northwards across the Mediterranean. They compare this account to the geographical evidence. The precise location of the Triton Lake is a point of disagreement among ancient authors and in modern scholarship. Most modern commentators conclude that in Apollonius' account the lake was to be found near to the coast, near to the modern Libyan city of Benghazi. The authors of this paper, by contrast, propose that the Argonauts took their ship further inland, to Siwa Oasis in Egypt.

I am not qualified to comment on scientific or geographical aspects of this paper, except to say that the argument is interesting and plausible. There are, however, significant methodological concerns with this paper as a work of ancient history. I shall try to outline these concerns here.

1. It is assumed far too easily that Apollonius is describing historical events rather than a giving a literary account of mythological material. For example, on page 2, the authors place the Trojan War in the mid-thirteenth century BC, proposing a date as if it was a historical event. They similarly place the expedition of the Argonauts a generation earlier, given that many of the Argonauts are the fathers of heroes found in the *Iliad*. While it is true that ancient authors could think of the Trojan War as a historical event (e.g. Thucydides 1.9), it does not follow that Homer's *Iliad* is a work of history. Apollonius, whose epic poem was composed about a thousand years after the thirteenth century, seems unlikely to give us a reliable historical account of the expedition of the Argonauts, even if we assume that such an event took place.
2. If we do accept Apollonius as a historical source on the subject, it is not clear to me why this should be taken as the principal evidence in preference to any other ancient literary account. This assumption is made, for example, on page 4: 'we will try to answer where exactly Tritonis Lake was located based on the detailed description of *Apollonius Argonautica* text.'

A good solution to points (1) and (2) might be to reframe the argument. Instead of seeking to recover a single historical location for the Triton Lake, it would be more profitable to ask what assumptions lie behind Apollonius' account. In other words, a) we could usefully add to our understanding of the *Argonautica* if we can say which location Apollonius had in mind; but b) in doing do, we do not need to assume that his poem is an accurate historical record. This might be a useful gain for literary studies. It might, by extension, help us to understand how Apollonius and other inhabitants of Hellenistic North Africa understood the world around them.

On a smaller point, the argument on pages 8-10 (points A to D) needs careful revision and clarification. This part of the paper considers Apollonius 4.1375-77, arguing that the heroes' intend to drag their ship across the desert, perhaps on rollers, rather than to carry it. This makes an interesting argument, and I can see that it is relevant to the question of distance between the Gulf of Syrtis and the site of the Triton Lake. However, there are several issues that the authors may wish to address.

- It is not immediately clear which translation of Apollonius is being criticised in this section. I assume the intention is more broadly to correct the common view that the Argonauts will carry their ship.
- I am not persuaded that these lines lack any language of lifting up and carrying. At 1376, ἀνθέμενοι as a middle participle can mean to place on oneself (cf. Plutarch, *Moralia* 983b: τοῖς ὤμοις ἐκέϊνον ἀναθεμένη καὶ κομίζει). And οἴσομεν (1377) can certainly be translated 'we will carry'.
- If we do accept that Apollonius' heroes carry their ship, we can consider this against the background of generic expectations of heroic strength and behaviour. Apollonius is writing in the epic tradition, which tends to look back to a heroic time when heroes were stronger than in the poet's own time (e.g. Homer, *Iliad* 12.445-50). In other words, we can assume something close to superhuman strength.

The paper is reasonably well presented, although I would have welcomed line breaks between the paragraphs for ease of reading. On four other points of presentation:

- There needs to be a consistent approach to the italicisation of titles of poems (e.g. *Argonautica*, *Iliad*).
- The authors frequently use italics in the main text, I assume for emphasis. This can be useful, but it is perhaps overused in the article as it stands.
- The use of diacritical marks is inconsistent when quoting from ancient Greek authors. Some of the quotations appear to be set out like modern Greek and I wonder if this is the intention.
- The figures are useful and clearly labelled. However, I found some of them hard to read. For example, some of the images appear to be (quite small) screenshots taken from Google maps. The authors may want to put more care into producing high quality images. This seems especially important given the interdisciplinary nature of the paper, and the need to appeal to a wide readership.

I have included some additional points below in case they are useful.

Page 1, line 1 (title of the paper). Do we mean 'A new proposal'?

1, line 32. 'This phenomenon'. Presumably the reciprocal coastal wave mentioned a few lines earlier?

2, line 41. Word order: 'and he bids farewell'.

2, lines 42-3. Should be: '... Hercules, who was contemporary to the Argonautic campaign, participated in ...'. Note also that Hercules/Heracles himself appears as one of the Argonauts earlier in the poem.

2, line 61. Should be: 'which took place'

3, line 69. '... both Syrtis'. It would be helpful to explain what this means. In other words, say now (rather than a few lines down) what is meant by the 'major' and 'minor' Syrtis.

3, lines 82-3. The reference to the scholiast on Pindar is unnecessarily lengthy. It could be abbreviated to: 'Schol. ad Pind. *P.* 4.4) – assuming I have understood this reference correctly.

4, line 104. Should be: '... the same author clarifies'.

4, 129. Insert 'they', so it reads 'they arrived'.

5, 130. Should be 'the Cretan Sea'.

5, 132. Should be 'the god Apollo' (lower case for god).

5, 146. Should be 'and not to reach'.

6, 158. '... see the cycles in Fig. 1'. Do we mean circles?

13, line 368. Should be 'There exist there ...'.

13, lines 374-7. It would help to have line references for these two quotations from Apollonius.

15, lines 418-19. Should be: 'in the 13th century BC'.

15, lines 428-9. Should be: 'during the Trojan War'.

15, line 431: only one closing bracket is needed here.

15, lines 439-40. Should be: 'will depart'.

16, 467. Should this be 'The increase in ...'?