

This paper examines Valerius Flaccus' epic technique by focusing on his depiction of the battle between the Argonauts and Doliones at Cyzicus in Book 3 of the *Argonautica*. I show that Valerius constantly evokes earlier epic treatments of the fall of Troy, and I suggest that he does so in order to establish the battle in Cyzicus as a 'prequel' to the historically later Trojan War. By creating a symbolic link between the Trojan War and the battle in Cyzicus, Valerius uses this episode, which is something of a narrative dead end in Apollonius' epic, to advance the most important theme of his poem, namely the establishment of Jupiter's new cosmic regime. For fundamental to Jupiter's new vision for the world is a series of armed conflicts between east and west, as hegemony on earth shifts gradually westward, culminating in the Roman empire (1.537-60). I argue that the Iliupersis theme in Valerius' Cyzicus episode is designed to create the impression that the battle in Cyzicus is the very first of these armed struggles, the very first victory for the west over the east.

Valerius' dynamic engagement with material drawn from his epic predecessors is by now a well known feature of the Flavian author's poetic technique. Less well known but no less important is the fact that Valerius, rather paradoxically, often uses his status as a 'secondary poet' in order to establish the *priority* of his epic's subject matter, which concerns events that pre-date the Trojan legend. As such, Valerius' text often strives to be a 'pre-text' for the epics of Homer and Vergil. And it is precisely through allusions to his epic predecessors that Valerius carries out this process of poetic prefiguration.

With these ideas in mind, I offer a close reading of some passages in which Valerius draws on earlier epic accounts of Troy's fall during his depiction of the battle in Cyzicus. Verbal echoes of Vergil are especially numerous. For example, Valerius' *hostis habet portus* (3.45) recalls Vergil's *hostis habet muros* (*Aen.* 2.290) and his *decurrit ab urbe* (3.125) alludes to Vergil's *decurrit ab arce* (*Aen.* 2.41). Homer also looms large: for example, Valerius' Clite (3.325-5) plays the role of Homer's Andromache (*Il.* 6.429-30) and Valerius' Nestor (3.143-4) is a reprise of the Iliadic Nestor (6.66-71).

In this prequel to the Trojan War, Valerius' allusive gestures cast the Argonauts in the role of the victorious Achaeans, while the Doliones play the part of the doomed Trojans. In this way, the Argonauts' victory represents the first in a series of victories for the west over the east, which will in fact culminate in the subsequent fall of Troy. For it is the will of Jupiter that hegemony on earth shift ever westward, eventually leading to the foundation of the Roman empire. In Valerius, unlike in Apollonius, there is a method to the madness at Cyzicus. Valerius mobilizes images of the Trojan War in order to place the battle in Cyzicus within the scope of Jupiter's grand designs for world history. The episode is given new meaning by being incorporated into a broader, more universal historical process, a process that will lead directly to Roman supremacy on earth.