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THE DEPARTURE OF THE ARGONAUTS ON THE DINOS PAINTER'S BELL KRATER IN GELA

ABSTRACT

The main scene on an Attic red-figure bell krater in Gela by the Dinos Painter has been variously interpreted. Some identify the scene as the Argonauts' arrival at Kolchis, others as the departure of Theseus for Crete. Most recently, Alan Shapiro has interpreted it as Theseus's departure from Crete. A new analysis of all the elements of the picture suggests instead that it shows the Argonauts' departure from Kolchis. If this interpretation is correct, the vase constitutes the first known depiction of this scene as well as the first representation in ancient art of Apsyrtos and his stepmother, Idyia.

A remarkable Attic red-figure bell krater in Gela by the Dinos Painter presents an unusual main scene that has been interpreted in different ways (Figs. 1–7).[1] Fully published in 2004 by Alan Shapiro, this fragmentary vase, which dates to ca. 420–410 B.C., was first mentioned in 1978 by A. D. Trendall and Alexander Cambitoglou, who identified the figures in the scene as Jason and the Argonauts and noted that the vase was by the Dinos Painter, an attribution made earlier by Ian McPhee in 1976.[2] This interpretation was followed in 1983 by Cynthia King, who described the scene and identified the moment as the first encounter of the Argonauts with the Kolchians, upon the Argonauts' arrival at Kolchis. King, in turn, was followed by both Jenifer Neils in her 1990 article on Jason in *LIMC* and Giuseppina Siciliano in her 2003 booklet on Athenian vases.[3]

In 1981, however, Erika Simon, following the suggestion of her student Mata Vojatzi, interpreted the picture differently, identifying the scene as

1. Museo Archeologico, Gela (no inv. no.). An earlier version of this paper was given on April 9, 2005, at a conference organized by Jasper Gaunt at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. I wish to thank him here for this opportunity, as well as Adrienne Lezzi-Hafter, Ian McPhee, Linda Roccos, and Alan Shapiro for their help. Special thanks are owed to Giada Giudice, who kindly supplied me with her photographs of the vase (Figs. 1–7), and to Anne Hooton of the Agora Excavations for the drawing (Fig. 9).

2. Shapiro 2004; *RVAp* I, p. 37. McPhee kindly informed me that he had made the attribution in 1976.

3. King 1983, p. 386, n. 17; *LIMC* V, 1990, pp. 631, no. 11, and 637, s.v. Iason (J. Neils). A detail of the scene on the front of the vase was later published by Kostas Papaioannou and labeled as "Myth of the Argonauts": Papaioannou 1989, p. 291, fig. 116; 1993, p. 221, fig. 121. I thank Ian McPhee for the references to Papaioannou. More recently, Siciliano (2003, pp. 71, 73, 81, 92, and cover) published a full set of pictures and identified the scene as the arrival of the Argonauts at Kolchis.

Figure 1. Departure of the Argonauts from Kolchis, Attic red-figure bell krater by the Dinos Painter, ca. 420–410 B.C. Gela, Museo Archeologico. Photo courtesy G. Giudice

the departure of Theseus for Crete, an interpretation that was accepted by Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood in 1997.[4] Shapiro agreed with their reading of the main hero as Theseus but opted for a different moment in the story, the departure of Theseus and Ariadne from Crete. Thus, we face two primary questions: Who is the main hero, Jason or Theseus? And what moment is shown?

Let us start with a description of the main scene, since earlier descriptions are neither complete nor entirely accurate. I will not discuss the three mantled youths on the back of the vase since they are unrelated to the main picture, although they provide useful information for attributing the vase to the Dinos Painter, one of the most important Attic red-figure vase painters active in the last quarter of the 5th century B.C.[5]

In the top left corner of the main scene is the stern of a ship with two rudders (Figs. 1, 2). A single white ribbon is tied near the tip of the stern and a white wreath is suspended from it. A figure on board the ship steadies a ladder with both hands so that others may board the vessel. The garment that the figure wears, a sleeveless chiton, as well as the nature of the folds around the breasts, indicates a female. Her hair appears short, but the lock hanging over the back of the apiculated headband that she wears may indicate instead that her hair is tied up in back. King and Neils interpreted the figure as one of the Argonauts. Vojatzi was the first to realize that she is female and identified her as one of the female companions of Theseus. Simon, although not mentioning this figure specifically, followed her student's interpretation. Shapiro identified her as Ariadne.

Approaching the ladder to board the ship is a youth who looks back, as if he were being followed (Fig. 3). A mantle is slung over his left shoulder and arm, while a sword in a scabbard hangs by his side from a baldric that crosses his chest. A petasos on his back hangs from a white cord around his neck; in his left hand he carries two spears over his shoulder. His apiculated headband is indicated in white.[6] All have identified him as the main hero, either Jason or Theseus.

4. Simon 1981, p. 65, followed later in print by Vojatzi 1982, pp. 149–150, n. 268. Sourvinou-Inwood 1997, pp. 267, n. 38, and 268.

5. Shapiro 2004, p. 229.

6. Shapiro (2004, p. 229) describes the figure as wearing chitoniskos, boots, and diadem. There are several other discrepancies in his description of the scene, including misidentifications of some of the garments worn by the female figures. I will not point out all these misreadings here.

Figure 2. Medea in the Argo, Attic red-figure bell krater by the Dinos Painter, ca. 420–410 B.C. Gela, Museo Archeologico. Photo courtesy G. Giudice

Figure 3. Jason and companion, Attic red-figure bell krater by the Dinos Painter, ca. 420–410 B.C. Gela, Museo Archeologico. Photo courtesy G. Giudice

The youth above him in the composition (Fig. 3), wearing a mantle around his lower body, left shoulder, and arm, and a white apiculated headband, looks in the same direction as his companion. The gesture that he makes with his arms indicates concern and possibly alarm at what he sees. His lower body is hidden by the landscape—a rock, mound, or hill. All agree that he is one of the companions of the main hero.

Beneath the ladder is another figure that has been overlooked by everyone but Shapiro. I will discuss it last, since it provides the crucial evidence for my interpretation of the scene.

Figure 4. Athena, Attic red-figure bell krater by the Dinos Painter, ca. 420–410 B.C. Gela, Museo Archeologico. Photo courtesy G. Giudice

A magnificent Athena holding an upright spear in her left hand stands frontally in the middle of the scene (Fig. 4). She turns her head and gestures with her right hand toward the couple on the right. An ornate helmet is propped atop her head, and a necklace with white beads and an earring further enhance her appearance. The combination of garments that she wears with her aegis, an Attic peplos and a shoulder-pinned back-mantle, is a costume that is first represented in the late 5th century and then becomes very popular in the 4th century on both funerary and votive reliefs.[7] Unusual in the example from Gela is the highly decorative nature of the shoulder-pinned back-mantle with designs and fringe. A similarly dressed Athena appears in a scene depicting the Judgment of Paris on a contemporary hydria by the Painter of the Karlsruhe Paris.[8] Athena is the only figure on the krater in Gela whose identity is not disputed.

To the right are two more figures (Figs. 5, 6). The first is an elderly man who is seated and dressed in a sleeveless chiton, mantle, and headband (or possibly a wreath). The white paint used for his beard and hair is augmented in places by a dilute yellow glaze. With his left hand he holds an upright staff, scepter, or walking stick—its exact identification is uncertain. His right hand is extended, palm up, toward Athena, thereby indicating that they are conversing.[9] The branches above him belong to a tree that is partially hidden by the landscape, and they further indicate an outdoor setting for this encounter.

7. Roccos 2000.

8. Karlsruhe, Badisches Landesmuseum 259 (B 36): *ARV*[2] 1315, no. 1, and 1690; *Paralipomena* 477; *Beazley Addenda*[2] 362; Burn 1987, p. 100, no. C 1, pls. 39–41. I thank Linda Roccos for pointing out this comparison to me.

9. The painter forgot to depict the lower part of Athena's spear between the elderly man's right hand and his knee.

Figure 5. Athena, King Aietes, and Idyia, Attic red-figure bell krater by the Dinos Painter, ca. 420–410 B.C. Gela, Museo Archeologico.
Photo courtesy G. Giudice

Figure 6. Idyia, Attic red-figure bell krater by the Dinos Painter, ca. 420–410 B.C. Gela, Museo Archeologico.
Photo courtesy G. Giudice

Behind him stands a female (Fig. 6) who rests her chin on the clenched hand of her right arm, which is supported by her left arm tucked across her waist. She wears a chiton and *kandys;* the latter is richly decorated and easily identifiable by the unused sleeve visible alongside her right elbow. The *kandys* was a garment worn by Persian men that is best characterized as a cloak with sleeves that were not normally used. It first appears on Athenian women, including mythological figures such as Andromeda, on late-5th-

Figure 7. The dead Apsyrtos below the ladder to the Argo, Attic red-figure bell krater by the Dinos Painter, ca. 420–410 B.C. Gela, Museo Archeologico. Photo courtesy G. Giudice

century Attic red-figure vases.[10] The *kidaris,* a Persian hat with laplets, that the standing woman also wears is predominantly black and decorated with white dots. This oriental hat led scholars at first to identify the figure as Medea, since she is frequently depicted at this time in eastern garb.

King and Neils, who interpreted the scene as showing the Argonauts, identified the elderly man as King Aietes, but Simon and Vojatzi, who opted for Theseus departing for Crete, identified the same man as King Aigeus. Shapiro, however, identified the pair as King Minos and Pasiphae, the parents of Ariadne, the female in the boat who, in his interpretation, is about to depart from Crete. Although recognizing only the oriental headgear of the woman next to the seated elderly man, as others had, and not the *kandys,* Shapiro argued that "the exotic headgear of Pasiphae" was appropriate because of her kinship with two other related sorceresses, her sister Circe and their niece Medea. He further argued that, although Pasiphae was a rare figure in 5th-century art, she must have made regular appearances on stage accompanying her husband, who was, as Shapiro noted, "a favorite figure of vilification among Athenian dramatists."[11] The one likely depiction of her, albeit in Greek dress, is on a red-figure calyx krater where she sits near Minos while Herakles defeats the Cretan Bull.[12]

Let us now return to the figure lying underneath the ladder (Fig. 7) and review Shapiro's description:

> Perhaps the most intriguing element of the whole scene, previously overlooked and first recognized by Mario Iozzo, is the upper portion of a figure just visible above the break alongside the ladder. That the torso is human is evident from the left arm, which rests limply against the side of the chest. What should be the head is an indistinct area consistent with a figure falling backwards and drastically foreshortened. Two small protrusions could be read as the stumps of horns.[13]

He also noted the following:

> The dead Minotaur on our krater is of course not meant to be taken as literally present—as if it were some trophy displayed on the shores of Crete—but rather as a visual reminder of an earlier episode in the myth.[14]

10. Miller 1997, pp. 165–170.
11. Shapiro 2004, pp. 230–231.
12. The krater was on the Swiss art market: *Münzen und Medaillen Auktion Catalogue* 56, 1980, pp. 53–54, lot no. 108, pls. 49–50; Vollkommer 1987, p. 148, fig. 1; *LIMC* VI, 1992, p. 572, no. 29, pl. 314, s.v. Minos (J. Bažant).
13. Shapiro 2004, p. 231.
14. Shapiro 2004, p. 232.

Figure 8. Tondo: Theseus and the Minotaur. Interior: deeds of Theseus. Attic red-figure cup by the Kodros Painter, ca. 430–420 B.C. London, British Museum E 84. FR III, p. 49, fig. 22

Thus, Shapiro identified the figure lying underneath the ladder as the Minotaur, which was crucial for his interpretation of the scene as the departure of Theseus and Ariadne from Crete.

But is this figure really the Minotaur? Normally the Minotaur is shown with little or no hair on his head, and often the skin around his neck is flabby. The figure on a cup by Epiktetos in London dated 520–510 B.C. is a typical example.[15] A more contemporary comparison can be made with the image of the dead Minotaur being dragged out of the labyrinth by Theseus on a cup by the Kodros Painter in the British Museum (Fig. 8).[16] This vase is only about a decade earlier than the Gela krater, and the lifeless figures on both are quite similar in pose. Note that the thick head of hair on the figure on the Gela krater is not what we see on the Kodros Painter's Minotaur, or on any other depictions of Minotaurs, to my knowledge.

In the same vein, the two small protrusions from the head that Shapiro and Iozzo would like to read as horns are not horns, but two curls of hair, similar to those we find on other figures on the Gela krater—the female figure in the boat, for example, has several, as do the two young men by the boat (Figs. 2, 3). Drawing heads with locks of hair in this manner is a convention of the late 5th century, for other vase painters do it as well. A good example is the hair of Theseus on a contemporary cup by Aison in Madrid,[17] where the hero is shown dragging the dead Minotaur out of the labyrinth as on the Kodros Painter's cup. Once again very little hair is found on the beast, and there are indications of flabby skin on its neck.

15. London, British Museum E 37: *ARV*² 72, no. 17, and 1623; *Paralipomena* 328; *Beazley Addenda*² 167; Schefold 1992, p. 164, fig. 202.

16. London, British Museum E 84: *ARV*² 1269, no. 4; *Beazley Addenda*² 356; Boardman 2001, p. 207, fig. 222.

17. Madrid, Museo Arqueológico Nacional 11265: *ARV*² 1174, no. 1, and 1685; *Beazley Addenda*² 339; Simon 1976, pp. 150–151, fig. 221.

To sum up, I agree with Shapiro that the figure by the ladder is intended to be seen as dead, as indicated by the limp wrist and hand and by the pose with the left arm resting on the torso, but I do not agree that it is the Minotaur. In addition, I do not believe that the figure is shown with its head thrown directly back, but rather that it lies on its side with its head turned down, so that we see the head and hair from the side, although not quite fully in profile.[18] The front of the figure's face with eyes, nose, and mouth is lost. Figure 9 presents a possible reconstruction.

If this figure is not the dead Minotaur but a dead youth, who is he? If the scene indeed shows Theseus departing from Crete, the only possibility is that the figure represents one of the dead Athenian youths, part of the tribute to the Minotaur. This identification, however, would make little sense because it would refer to an action that took place much earlier than that shown; the group of Athenian youths and maidens who came with Theseus from Athens were saved by his slaying of the Minotaur. Thus, we need to look elsewhere for a candidate.

Fortunately, there is one in the story of Medea and Jason at Kolchis: Apsyrtos, the half brother of Medea, born from a different mother. His role in the story of Jason and the Argonauts is known in two major versions. In the one fully told in the *Argonautika* of Apollonios of Rhodes (4.393–481), Apsyrtos is already a grown man, who pursues Jason and Medea with a band of Kolchians.[19] Catching up with Jason and Medea at a sanctuary of Artemis near the mouth of the Danube River, he is slain by Jason, thanks to Medea's treachery. Apsyrtos's body is then cut up by his sister and thrown into the sea.

In the other version, as related by Apollodoros (1.9.24), Apsyrtos is a child who is taken aboard the Argo by Medea as she and Jason flee from King Aietes. To prevent the king from catching them, she kills the child and cuts him into pieces, throwing them into the water so that his father has to stop and pick them up.[20] In an earlier variation of this version that appears in Sophokles' *Kolchides* (Schol. Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 4.228; *TrGF* IV 343), the child Apsyrtos is not murdered in the boat, but in the palace.[21] It is this variant, which is contemporary with the Gela krater, that I believe is depicted on the vase, and I propose to identify the figure lying beneath the ladder as the dead Apsyrtos who, having been killed earlier in the palace, will shortly be taken on board the ship, only later to be cut up and his body parts dispersed in the water to slow the pursuit of King Aietes.

This identification allows a fresh look at the entire scene and all of the figures in it. The woman at the top left of the scene in the boat, the *Argo,* must be Medea (Fig. 2), who supports the ladder for Jason (Fig. 3) as he approaches to board. Her appearance, which led other scholars to think that she was male, may be explained, perhaps, by the fact that she is a barbarian. That she is not dressed in oriental garb, as she is on several Attic red-figure vases, should not mislead us, for she also appears in Greek garb on some Attic red-figure vases from the second half of the 5th century,[22] and her non-oriental appearance here indicates that she has already started the process of becoming hellenized.

The dead Apsyrtos (Figs. 7, 9) lies beneath the ladder and will be taken eventually onto the Argo. He is not shown aboard the ship because there

18. Shapiro (2004, p. 231, n. 13) unconvincingly compares the head to that of a komast on a fragmentary cup in Florence, who is shown frontally, throwing his head straight back: Florence, Museo Archeologico Nazionale 10 B 180: *ARV*² 335, no. 9; *Beazley Addenda*² 218; Buitron-Oliver 1991, p. 293, fig. 11.

19. See also Hyg. *Fab.* 23; Orph. *Argon.* 1022–1034; Plin. *HN* 3.151; Strabo 7.5.5 (C 315); Steph. Byz, s.v. Ἀψυρίδες.

20. See also Pherec. (Schol. Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 4.223, 228 = *FGrH* 3 F32a–b); Zen. 4.92; Ov. *Tr.* 3.9.19–34; Ov. *Her.* 6.129–130; Val. Fl. *Argon.* 8.261–467; Cic. *Leg. Man.* 22.

21. See also Callim. fr. 8Pf. (or 411) = Schol. Eur. *Med.* 1334; Eur. *Med.* 1334.

22. E.g., Bologna, Museo Civico PU 273: *ARV*² 1268, no. 1; *Beazley Addenda*² 356; *CVA*, Bologna 1 [Italia 5], pls. 19–22 [216–219]; *LIMC* I, 1981, p. 363, no. 36, pl. 279, s.v. Aigeus (U. Kron); Schefold and Jung 1988, p. 273, fig. 323. Christchurch, University 178/94: *LIMC* VII, 1994, p. 276, no. 18, pl. 216, s.v. Pelias (E. Simon); Cohen and Shapiro 1995, pp. 14–15, no. 8. See also the discussion of Medea's dress in Sourvinou-Inwood 1997, pp. 288–294.

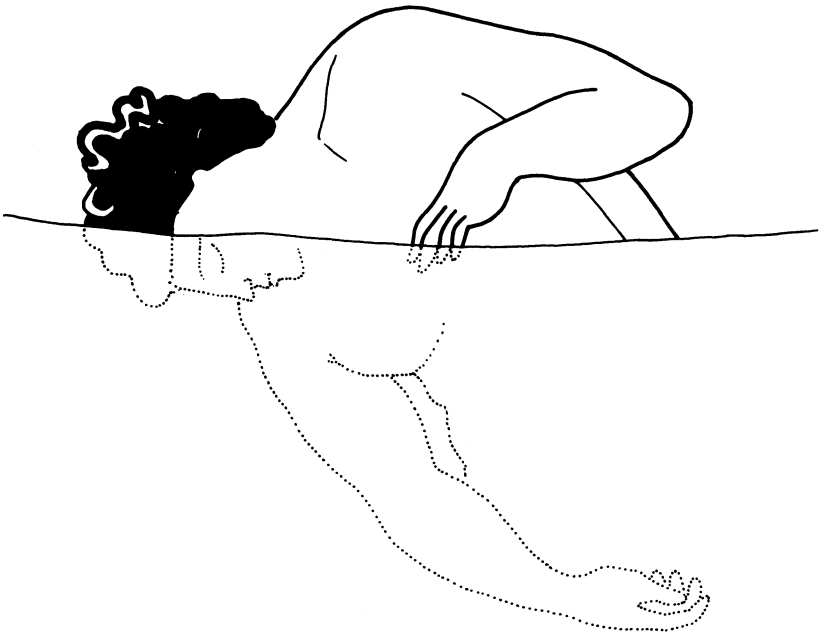

Figure 9. Possible reconstruction of the figure beneath the ladder, Attic red-figure bell krater by the Dinos Painter, ca. 420–410 B.C. Gela, Museo Archeologico. Drawing A. Hooton

is no room in the painting to do so. The companion above Jason (Fig. 3) looks on apprehensively, for he knows that the Kolchians are about to pursue them. Athena (Fig. 4) stands in the middle, the gesture she makes with her right hand indicating that she is trying to assuage the king's anger and mollify the situation—a proper role for a patron goddess. The seated King Aietes (Fig. 5), in turn, indicates his displeasure by the gesture he makes with his right hand—one can almost hear him saying "but look at what they've done." The branches above him may refer to the tree on which the Golden Fleece had been hung.[23] The woman in oriental garb (Fig. 6) must be his wife, Idyia (or Eidyia). Her oriental dress is very appropriate for her role as the spouse of an eastern potentate. Idyia's pensive pose is particularly appropriate for one torn between two children—her true daughter, Medea, who is making her escape, and her dead stepson, Apsyrtos.[24]

The motif of showing the stern of a docked ship, as Shapiro pointed out, had a brief vogue in Attic red-figure vase painting around the end of the 5th century B.C. when it appears on four vases: two calyx kraters by the Kadmos Painter showing Theseus, a volute krater by the Talos Painter showing the Argo, and the Gela bell krater, which I argue also shows the Argo.[25] In reviewing the history of this motif, Shapiro overlooked a column krater by the Orchard Painter dated 470–460 B.C. that depicts Jason and the Golden Fleece.[26] The docked stern of a ship on the right side of this scene is the earliest use of this motif in Attic vase painting. That it was used to show the Argo should not be surprising, since it was the most famous of all ancient Greek ships. Further supporting the identification of the ship on the Gela krater as the Argo is the pose of the Argonaut mounting the ship on the Talos Painter's krater, which closely resembles the pose of Jason on the Gela krater. There is no such figure on the two kraters by the Kadmos Painter that show Theseus.

23. Siciliano 2003, p. 92.

24. For the gesture, see Neumann 1965, pp. 125–128; note especially the gesture of the Peliad on p. 132, fig. 64.

25. Shapiro 2004, pp. 234–236. Bologna, Museo Civico 303: *ARV*² 1184–1185, no. 6; *Paralipomena* 460; *Beazley Addenda*² 341; *CVA,* Bologna 4 [Italia 27], pls. 79 [1233]:3–4, 82 [1236], 83 [1237]:1–2 and 94 [1248]:9. Syracuse, Museo Archeologico Regionale Paolo Orsi 17427: *ARV*² 1184, no. 4; *Paralipomena* 460; *Beazley Addenda*² 341; Shapiro 2004, p. 238, figs. 13, 14. Ruvo, Museo Jatta 1501: *ARV*² 1338, no. 1; *Paralipomena* 481; *Beazley Addenda*² 366–367; Sichtermann 1966, pp. 23–24, pls. 1, 24–34 (see pl. 29 for the ship).

26. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 34.11.7: *ARV*² 524, no. 28; *Beazley Addenda*² 254; Richter and Hall 1936, pp. 118–119, pls. 90:88, 170:88. Kathy Schwab kindly reminded me that the motif appears on Metope North 2 of the Parthenon: Boardman 1985, p. 199, fig. 87.

If my interpretation of the scene on the Gela krater is correct, we now have the first depiction of both Apsyrtos and Idyia in ancient art, as well as the first depiction of the departure of the Argonauts from Kolchis.[27] One could argue against this interpretation on the basis of the two figures not being known elsewhere in ancient art, but I would point out that Pasiphae in Shapiro's interpretation, as noted above, is nearly as rare in Greek art and not known to have been depicted in oriental garb.

Shapiro proposed a dramatic source as the impetus for the painting on the Gela bell krater, perhaps the final scene in Euripides' *Theseus,* suggested by the unusual subject matter, the oriental headgear, the "large group of figures in a complex mythological narrative," and the dramatic gestures of some of the figures, such as Athena.[28] Obviously, if one accepts my interpretation, Euripides' *Theseus* could not have been the inspiration for this vase painting. There is, however, another dramatic source, mentioned above, that would work well for my interpretation because it appears to use the same variant story of the death of Apsyrtos—the *Kolchides* of Sophokles.[29] Unfortunately, only a few small fragments survive of this play, making it impossible to be certain.

Shapiro also concurred with Vojatzi's suggestion that the vase painting was influenced by monumental wall painting, particularly because he thought that Theseus's departure from Crete was a very appropriate subject matter for an Athenian wall painting.[30] The Dinos Painter was a member of the Polygnotan tradition in vase painting, a school of vase painters who were often influenced by monumental painting. This, along with the multileveled composition employed on the vase, a common feature of Greek wall paintings, adds additional support to his suggestion. Moreover, Pausanias (1.18.1) mentions a wall painting by Mikon in the Sanctuary of the Dioskouroi in Athens that depicts the Argonauts, indicating that they were the subject matter for at least one wall painting in Athens, and perhaps others. Unfortunately, however, no certain connection between this vase painting and a particular wall painting can be definitively proved.

Whatever the source of inspiration for this image, this splendid krater, one of the Dinos Painter's finest and most interesting vases, has deserved further attention. Its unique scene may show us for the first time in ancient art the departure of the Argonauts from Kolchis, and it may also represent the first known depiction of Apsyrtos and his stepmother, Idyia.

27. As Shapiro pointed out to me, this would be particularly ironic, since my Doktorvater wrote the entry in *LIMC* on Apsyrtos and was apparently disappointed to find no certain depiction of him: *LIMC* II, 1984, p. 467, s.v. Apsyrtos (C. W. Clairmont).

28. Shapiro 2004, pp. 237–238.

29. Also possible are his *Skythai* (Scythians) or *Rizotomoi* (The Root-Cutters). The first dealt with the adventures of the Argonauts, and the last might have also, so that all three plays may have belonged to the same trilogy. Sophocles frr. 337–349, 534–536, 546–552 (*TrGF* IV, pp. 316–320, 410–411, 415–418; Sutton 1984, pp. 32–33, 117–118, 120–124; Lloyd-Jones 1996, pp. 186–189, 268–271, 274–277).

30. Vojatzi 1982, pp. 141–150, n. 268; Shapiro 2004, p. 238.

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