De excidio Troiae by Dares Phrygius and Valerius Flaccus

De excidio Troiae by Dares Phrygius is a short prose tale concerning the Trojan war, written probably between the 5th and the 6th centuries AD. In the first three chapters it starts by narrating the journey of the Argonauts to Colchis with the goal of conquering the golden fleece, presented as the remote cause of the Trojan war. In chapter one Dares narrates that Pelias, king of the Peloponnese, had a brother called Aeson and that, since his son Jason is a strong and brave man who could become a peril for his power, Pelias thought up the voyage to Colchis in order to kill him. In the second chapter Dares describes how Jason sailed with his fellows towards Colchis and landed first on the Phrygian coast where he suffered king Laomedon’s threats. Chapter 3 tells Hercules’ revenge on Laomedon with the looting of Troy, the murder of the king and the kidnapping of Hesione, his daughter.

Hermann Dunger in 1869 was the first to recognize many similarities between these initial chapters of Dares’ tale and Valerius Flaccus’ Argonautica, advancing the thesis that they are the result of Dares’ familiarity with Valerius’ account; Dunger’s thesis has recently been restated by Andrew Zissos in his diachronic survey of the literary and artistic reception of Valerius Flaccus’ Argonautica from the Flavian period down to the 20th century. The most important similarities between the two poems pointed out by Dunger are the following:

1. Dares’ mistake in making Pelias the king of the Peloponnese (see ch. 1 Pelias rex [in Peloponneso]), which can be attributed to a misunderstanding of Val. Fl. 1.22-5 Haemoniam primis Pelias frenabat ab annis / iam gravis et longus populis metus. Illius amnes / Ionium quicumque petunt, ille Othryn et Haemum / atque imum felix versabat vomere Olympus. This argument, however, doesn’t seem plausible: if Dares had misread the verses of Valerius in this way, he would have...

1) Daretis Phrygii De excidio Troiae is one of the sources for Daretis Phrygii Ilias de bello Troiano, an epic poem in Latin written around 1183 by the English poet Joseph Iscanus.  
2) Schissel von Fleschenberg 1908, 169 dates Dares’ tale between 510-30 AD because, according to him, the terminus post quem was the publication of Dracontius’ De raptu Helenae. Schetter 1985, 211-31 modified this view: Dracontius, according to Schetter, knew Dares’ poem and he used it for his De raptu Proserpinae.  
3) Dunger 1869, 7-21. 
4) Zissos 2006, 165-85. Zissos states that “Historia de excidio Troiae (…) evinces signs of familiarity with Valerius’ epic: the journey of the Argonauts presented as precursor to the Trojan war, the landfall at Troy en route to Colchis, the inclusion of Philoctetes among the Argonauts and Dares’ reference to an epic poem with a Latin title”.

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to be unaware of the fact that *Haemonia* in Latin poetry normally indicates Thessaly, and he would also have mistaken a description of the north of Greece for one of the south.

2. the inclusion of Philoctetes among the Argonauts, which, according to Dunger, points once more to Valerius’ epic because “diese Angabe finden wir jedoch nicht bei jenen Griechen, wohl aber bei Valerius Flaccus” (see Val. Fl. 1.391-3). This argument doesn’t seem convincing since even Hyginus’ catalogue (see Hyg. *Fab.* 14.22) includes Philoctetes into the team led by Jason. However, any hero traditionally thought to have taken part in the Trojan war, if belonging to the right generation, would be liable also to have a role in the Argonauts’ expedition attributed to him by one or more authors in the long and complex history of the myth in Greek and Roman literature.

3. the Greek heroes’ landfall at Troy on their way to Colchis, which Dares’ version has in common with Valerius’ second book (cf. Val. Fl. 2.445-6 *Thessala Dardaniis tunc primum puppis harenis / adpulit et fatis Sigeo litore sedit*), because neither Apollonius Rhodius nor Diodorus nor the *Argonautica Orphica* refer to it. I think that the description of the Argo’s landfall on the Trojan coast en route to Colchis is certainly common to Dares’ *De excidio Troiae* and Valerius’ *Argonautica*, but this episode is narrated differently in *De excidio Troiae* and in Valerius’ epic. Valerius narrates Hesione’s rescue by Hercules and then Laomedon’s plan to kill the hero because of an oracle foretelling the sack of Troy through Hercules’ arrows; Dares instead narrates the Greek heroes’ landfall at Troy en route to Colchis and the conduct of Laomedon on this occasion to motivate the subsequent Trojan campaign under Hercules’ command and other ex-Argonauts: the second and third chapters of Dares’ tale put their emphasis directly on the hostility shown by King Laomedon towards the Greek visitors and sketch how Hercules’ determination to exact punishment leads to a vendetta with the looting of Troy, the murder of the king and the kidnapping of Hesione, his daughter. These events are presented by Dares as the direct cause of the Trojan war: at chapter 17, in fact, the Trojan king Priamus, son of Laomedon, mentions these *iniurias Argonautarum* as the ultimate reason for his declaration of war against the Greeks.

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51 *Interea legati missi ad Priamum veniunt. Ulixes mandata Agamemnonis refert, postulat ut Helena et praeda reddatur satisque Graecis fiat ut pacifice discedant. Priamus iniurias Argonautarum commemorat, patris interitum, Troiae expugnationem et Hesionae sororis servitutem, denique Antenorem legatum cum miserit, quam contumeliose ab eis tractatus sit, pacem repudiat, bellum indicit.*