Pellucchi, T.

For an author whose work has been seriously undervalued, Valerius Flaccus is well served for commentaries. In addition to Spaltenstein’s three-volume commentary on the whole poem, we have recent commentaries on Books 1, 2, 4, 5, 6 and 7. To this we can now add Pellucchi’s (henceforth P) commentary on the final and incomplete eighth book.

P’s introduction is substantial, even though it omits material of the kind that we expect. There is, for example, no discussion of the poet’s life, of earlier versions of the myth, of Valerius’ use of language and metre or of the manuscript tradition. Rather, P focuses on Book 8 itself, with a discussion of two issues: the book’s narrative structure and its role in the poem’s ideological system.

In considering the book’s structure, P pays particular attention to Valerius’ treatment of his Apollonian model, noting significant modifications: his suppression of the dividing of the Colchian fleet and his change in the timing and setting of the wedding of Jason and Medea. Like most contemporary scholars, P views the poem as incomplete (as opposed to damaged in transmission) and accepts Schetter’s view that the poem was designed as a work in eight books. Perhaps more controversially, P accepts the view proposed independently by Hershkowitz and Nesselrath that the epic would have closed with the death of Absyrtus on Peuce. (Like P, I find this solution attractive: it deletes the problem of squeezing the material contained in Apollonius’ gargantuan fourth book into 400 or so lines, provides an ending that mirrors that of the Aeneid and balances the fratricide at the end of Book 1 with a fratricide at the end of Book 8.)

P’s discussion of the role of Book 8 in the poem begins with a discussion of the fact that Argonautica falls into two halves. While accepting the description of Books 1-4 as ‘Odyssean’, P rightly rejects the description of the second half as ‘Iliadic’. As we might expect, P discusses Jupiter’s ‘world plan’ in detail, noting the frequent allusions to the Trojan war in the first half and their justification in the second half, viz. the causal connection between the ‘rapes’ of Medea and Helen. The rest of this part of P’s introduction (xxix-lviii) is taken up with a discussion of Valerius’ treatment of Medea and Jason. P sees the distinctiveness of this Medea in the fact that she is a sorceress in love, a ‘maga innamorata’ (p. xxxi). P notes Medea’s resistance to her passion and the importance of Venus’ intervention. P concludes the discussion of Medea by arguing that the difference between the two halves of the Argonautica is not between two kinds of epic (Odyssean versus Iliadic), but between two genres (epic versus tragedy).
This conclusion is difficult to accept. While the poem foreshadows the tragic events at Corinth in both halves, it cannot be said that the events of Books 5-8 are of the kind that we find on the tragic stage. P begins the discussion of Jason with the opposition between Lüthje’s negative view of Jason (héros manqué, hypocrite etc.) and Adamietz’s more positive view (genuinely heroic character). P takes a positive view of Jason, arguing that Valerius systematically undermines Apollonius’ negative presentation. P also argues, however, that in Book 8, Jason is caught up in a typically Virgilian conflict between his roles as leader and husband and that in the end Jason fails as a hero because of the circumstances in which he finds himself, most notably his subjection to the tyrannical rule of Aëtes and Pelias.

P basically adopts Ehlers’ Teubner text, discussing textual disagreements in the notes, and offers a line-by-line Italian translation. There is no apparatus.

The commentary is very full, at just over four hundred pages on 467 lines. Since no commentary can hope to be comprehensive, i.e. to offer an answer to every possible question that a reader might ask, it is pertinent to ask what is the primary focus of P’s commentary. Clearly P is not primarily concerned with issues of textual criticism, unavoidable though these might occasionally be. So what kind of questions interest P?

I suggest that we can get a sense of P’s primary concerns by considering a number of passages. Consider P’s discussion of the first two lines of Book 8’s first simile, the comparison of Medea to Ino. Here are the first two lines (8.20-21):

\[
\text{inde velut torto Furiarum erecta flagello} \\
\text{prosilit, attonito qualis pede prosilit Ino . . .}
\]

On pp. 64-65 P discusses the use of \textit{inde velut}, explains the grammar of \textit{torto flagello} (ablative absolute), provides parallels for the phrase \textit{torto Furiarum flagello} (Virgil, Ovid, Senecan tragedy, Statius and Valerius himself), highlights the importance of Ovid \textit{Met.} 4.483-484 and Seneca \textit{Med.} 958-962. On line 21 (pp. 65-66) P notes that \textit{prosilit} translates Apollonius’ \textit{ἐξέσσυτο} (4.40), explains the different lexical values of the two verbs, notes the effect of the repetition of \textit{prosilit} (it underlines the assimilation of Medea and Ino and signals an allusion to \textit{Fasti} 6.493-494), highlights the reference to Euripides’ \textit{Medea} 1281-1289 and discusses the force of \textit{attonito} and the Ovidian character of the phrase. One question, however, is not asked: what is the point of comparing Medea to Ino? I suggest three possibilities: first, we might see Ino’s attempted sacrifice of her