APOLLONIUS, THE LAUNCH OF THE ARGO AND THE MEANING AND SIGNIFICANCE OF *DECURRERE* AT CATULLUS 64.6 AND VALERIUS FLACCUS 1.186*

In the opening lines of poem 64, Catullus describes the Argo's maiden voyage, which he also marks as the wondrous start to mortal seafaring:

> Peliaco quondam prognatae vertice pinus
> dicuntur liquidas Neptuni nasse per undas
> Phasidos ad fluctus et fines Aeeteos,
> cum lecti iuvenes, Argivae robora pubis,
> auratam optantes Colchis avertere pellem   5
> ausi sunt vada salsa cita decurrere puppi,
> caerula verrentes abiegnis aequora palmis.
> diva quibus retinens in summis urbibus arces
> ipsa levi fecit volitantem flamine currum,
> pinea coniungens inflexae texta carinae.   10
> illa rudem cursu prima imbuit Amphitriten;
> quae simul ac rostro ventosum proscidit aequor
> tortaque remigio spumis incanuit unda,
> emersere feri candenti e gurgite vultus
> aequoreae monstrum Nereides admirantes.   15

The poet depicts the construction and sailing mechanics of the Argo in such meticulous detail that one can visualize its every movement in this scene: Athena has woven pine harvested from Mt Pelion into a curved hull and fitted the ship with oars of fir, which the sailors use to sweep over the sea and churn the water white while the wind fills the ship's sails and speeds it through the choppy waves out on the open ocean.[1] But scholars have long puzzled over what exactly Catullus means by *decurrere* in line 6. Is the Argo gliding down a wave out on

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[1] On the importance of visuality in these opening lines and throughout poem 64, see R. Jenkyns, *Three Classical Poets: Sappho, Catullus, and Juvenal* (Cambridge, MA, 1982), 85–150; W. Fitzgerald, *Catullan Provocations: Lyric Poetry and the Drama of Position* (Berkeley, 1995), 140–68; J.H. Gaisser, 'Threads in the labyrinth: competing views and voices in Catullus 64', *AJPh* 116 (1995), 579–616; and B. Duffalo, 'Reception and receptivity in Catullus 64', *Cultural Critique* 74 (2010), 98–113.

the ocean?[2] Or coming in from sea to shore?[3] Or racing through one leg of its journey?[4] Richard Thomas, whose analysis of this line offers good reasons for rejecting each of these explanations, remarks: 'I can find no wholly satisfactory parallel for Catullus' use of *decurrere*'.[5]

The verb *decurrere* is relatively common in Classical Latin and authors frequently employ it to describe a wide variety of motions related to ships, including the last two definitions above that have been proposed to explain Catullus' use here.[6] But as Thomas observes, differences between the contexts of these ostensible parallels and that of the opening lines of poem 64 pose substantial difficulties. The verb certainly means 'to sail shore-wards' in the commonly cited parallel from Virgil's *Aeneid* 5.212 (*prona petit maria et pelago decurrit aperto*), and Thomas compares the Greek verb κατατρέχειν as a linguistic and semantic equivalent for *decurrere* that mirrors this usage.[7] The narrative sequence of the poem's opening, however, taken together with the presence of *vada salsa* (6) as the accusative object of the verb, prohibits this sense in our passage. And the parallels cited for the meaning 'to race across' consistently refer to journeys that have been completed, usually with reference to actual distances travelled. But the narrative movement of poem 64's opening problematizes this sense as well, since there is no suggestion in this sentence, either explicit or implied, of the distance traversed or of the completion of part of the journey. In short, none of the Latin parallels so far adduced adequately explains what action Catullus' verb is supposed to describe in the context of poem 64's opening sequence.

Thomas proceeds to suggest tentatively that here *decurrere* may indeed be a calque on the Greek verb κατατρέχειν, but in the sense 'to put in to harbour' rather than 'to sail shore-wards', citing Callimachus, *Aetia* 4 fr. 108 Pf. as Catullus' source: Ἀργὼ καὶ σέ, Πάνορμε, κατέδραμε καὶ τεὸν ὕδωρ.[8] But while this line appropriately enough also deals with the Argo and it seems likely that Catullus

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[2] R. Ellis, *A Commentary on Catullus* (Oxford, 1889²), ad loc.: 'Aen. V. 212 *Prona petit maria et pelago decurrit aperto* suggests that the idea may be that of running down a slope of water'.

[3] E.T. Merrill, *Catullus* (Cambridge, MA, 1893), ad loc., citing Ov. *Fast.* 6.776–8: [*sc. Fors Fortuna*] *in Tiberis ripa munera regis habet.* | *pars pede, pars etiam celeri decurrite cumba,* | *nec pudeat potos inde redire domum.* Cf. also R.D. Williams, *Virgil: Aeneid Books I–VI* (London, 1996) on *Aen.* 5.212: '"down" to shore from the high seas (*decurrit*)'.

[4] K. Quinn, *Catullus: The Poems* (London, 1973²), ad loc.: 'normally an intransitive verb, "run or race down" (so several times in the *Aeneid*); the transitive use and the sense "race through or across" (*de-* as in *debellare* etc.) seem to have belonged to the technical language of navigation, chariot-racing, etc.; the latter connotation perhaps prepares the way for 9 *currum*'. Likewise E. Baehrens, *Catulli Veronensis Liber* (Leipzig, 1885), ad loc.; cf. W. Kroll, *Catull* (Stuttgart, 1989⁷), ad loc., who cites additionally Plaut. *Merc.* 547 (*decurso spatio breve quod vitae reliquomst*) for the transitive usage meaning 'to traverse a space (e.g. of time)'.

[5] R.F. Thomas, 'Catullus and the polemics of poetic reference (poem 64.1–18)', *AJPh* 103 (1982), 144–64, at 153–4.

[6] Of ships moving from the water towards the shore: *OLD* s.v. '*decurro*' 4a and *TLL* 5.227.57–64, citing Verg. *Aen.* 5.212 and Ov. *Fast.* 6.776; of ships moving over some finite distance: *OLD* s.v. '*decurro*' 8a and *TLL* 5.229.21–6, both citing the instance of *decurrere* at Cat. 64.6. The verb is also used of ships coming into port; cf. *TLL* 5.228.54–6 and Thomas's (n. 5) suggested interpretation of Catullus' usage discussed below.

[7] LSJ s.v. κατατρέχω I.2: 'of seamen or passengers by sea, *run to land, disembark*, X. *HG* 5.1.12'.

[8] LSJ s.v. κατατρέχω I.2, citing Polyb. 3.91.2 (εἰς ἃ [*sc. ἐμπόρια*] σχεδὸν ἐκ πάσης τῆς οἰκουμένης κατατρέχουσιν οἱ πλέοντες εἰς Ἰταλίαν). Cf. *TLL* 5.228.54–6 for examples of *decurrere* in this sense, especially Caes. *B Afr.* 3.5 and Livy 24.36.3.

knew this passage – as Thomas points out, the next episode of the *Aetia* is the *Coma Berenices* (fr. 110 Pf.), the primary source for poem 66 – the same difficulties that militate against the explanations he rejects also make his suggestion unsatisfactory. Mooring in a harbour would be no more appropriate to Catullus' vignette than landing on a shore, given the poet's emphasis on the Argo's swiftness (*cita … puppi*, 6; *verrentes*, 7; *levi … volitantem flamine currum*, 9; *tortaque … spumis incanuit unda*, 13).[9] And what harbour can the Argonauts be said to have dared to put in at here? The ship makes a number of stops along the journey, of course, but Catullus mentions no way-point between the Argo's home port of Pagasae and its destination at Colchis, and none of the harbours Apollonius recounts requires any daring on the part of the heroes to enter (*ausi sunt … decurrere*, 6).[10] And though the Argonauts are indeed bold to sail to Colchis and to carry off its Golden Fleece, it is difficult to imagine this city as the object of *decurrere*, since 'to put in to harbour' would mark an end to the journey and Catullus describes Colchis only as a prospective destination: *Phasidos ad fluctus et fines Aeeteos* (3) can express either motion whither (that is, they sailed *to and arrived at* the river Phasis) or simply direction (that is, they sailed *towards* the river Phasis). The latter seems more likely, given that *optantes Colchis avertere pellem* (5) implies a goal in progress rather than one accomplished. But even if Catullus' reference to Colchis can be read as signalling the completion of the heroes' voyage, Apollonius repeatedly states that the Argo does not dock at Colchis proper, but instead rides at anchor in a backwater of the nearby river Phasis.[11] Since no harbour suits Catullus' context, I find it doubtful that *decurrere* here can mean 'to put in to harbour'.

Thomas's intuition that a Greek passage stands behind this apparently unparalleled usage, however, points us in the right direction, and I think *decurrere* can better be explained in connection with Apollonius' own account of the Argo's launch, specifically as a calque on the verb κατολισθάνειν, 'to slip, sink down', at *Argonautica* 1.390. The preceding few lines (383–90), in which Apollonius

[9] Thomas (n. 5), 148–54 demonstrates that Catullus' emphasis on speed plays a central role in his polemical reworking of the Argonautic tradition by alluding to a Callimachean etymology for the Argo's name (Ἀργώ from ἀργός, 'swift') in contrast to the earlier derivations of Apollonius (from Ἄργος, the Argo's shipwright) and of Ennius (from *Argivi*, 'Argives'). Cf. Gaisser (n. 1), 582–4, who reads Catullus' etymological play with the Argo's name here as signalling allusively but not necessarily polemically the complexity of the Argonautic tradition before him.

[10] Of the six harbours Apollonius says the Argo enters, four lead to peaceful encounters (Pagasae at 1.390–562, Thynias at 2.669–719, the Acherusian headlands at 2.727–903 and the Amazonian headlands at 2.964–95). The other two (Cyzicus at 1.953–87 and Chytus at 1.987–1014) lead to battles, but neither suits Catullus' context. The latter, where the Argonauts kill the Earthborn men in a 'contest without fear' (ἀταρβὴς … ἄεθλος, 1.1012), obviously requires no daring. The former – which is also the object of κατέδραμε in Thomas' proposed source – becomes the scene of battle only after the Argonauts leave its harbour and anchor on the other side of the island (1.1015–152) and, since the fighting breaks out by accident and both sides later show remorse, it too requires no daring from the heroes.

[11] Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 2.1281–4, 3.167–99. The Argo's concealed anchorage in the river Phasis away from Colchis seems to have been a standard part of the story; cf. Diod. Sic. 4.46 (Jason anchors at a precinct of Helios near the sea and leaves his comrades to guard the Argo while he and Medea go off to Colchis) and V. Fl. 5.184–212 (Jason anchors near the tomb of Phrixus and Helle and prays to the river Phasis, who then turns the ship around to face the ocean, seemingly to mark the end of the Argo's outbound journey). It is unclear whether Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.9.23 (ἐγκαθορμισθείσης δὲ τῆς νεὼς ἧκε πρὸς Αἰήτην Ἰάσων) suggests that the Argo entered the harbour at Colchis, as the verb can imply anchorage in a harbour or along a shore; see LSJ s.v. ἐγκαθορμίζομαι.

describes the heroes pushing the Argo into the water for the first time, are necessary to contextualize the verb:

> τοὶ δὲ παράσσον
> ᾧ κράτεϊ βρίσαντε μιῇ στυφέλιξαν ἐρωῇ
> νειόθεν ἐξ ἕδρης, ἐπὶ δ' ἐρρώσαντο πόδεσσιν 385
> προπροβιαζόμενοι· ἡ δ' ἕσπετο Πηλιὰς Ἀργώ
> ῥίμφα μάλ', οἱ δ' ἑκάτερθεν ἐπίαχον ἀίσσοντες.
> αἱ δ' ἄρ' ὑπὸ τρόπιδι στιβαρῇ στενάχοντο φάλαγγες
> τριβόμεναι, περὶ δέ σφιν ἀιδνὴ κήκιε λιγνὺς
> βριθοσύνῃ· κατόλισθε δ' ἔσω ἁλός· 390

> And so immediately,
> leaning with all their strength, with one push they thrust it
> from its seat underneath, and they strained with their feet
> as they forced it forward. And the Pelian Argo followed
> swiftly, and the men on either side shouted as they rushed on.
> And under the sturdy keel the rollers groaned
> as they were chafed, and around them dark smoke streamed
> because of the weight. And it slipped down into the salty sea.

Catullus' *vada salsa* (6) picks up Apollonius' ἔσω ἁλός (390) both semantically and lexically, and the verb κατολισθάνειν offers another Greek equivalent for the Latin *decurrere*, which here must mean 'to slip or run down into' (the shallows, *vada salsa*).[12] The subject of the Latin verb, *lecti iuvenes* (4), differs from that of the Greek, but the motion down the beach and into the sea remains fundamentally the same, and *decurrere* occurs in this sense elsewhere to describe people rushing down shores or riverbanks into the water.[13] The transitive force of Catullus' *decurrere*, however, is striking and has troubled commentators since Robinson Ellis, so a few words here are necessary.[14] While there are no precise parallels for a transitive usage of *decurrere* in this sense, it is not unusual for compound verbs of motion in Latin to take direct objects without a preposition, and there are several clear analogues of verbs compounded with the prefix *de-* that are normally intransitive with preposition showing motion whither, but that can occasionally take the destina-

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[12] Cf. LSJ s.v. κατολισθάνω and *OLD* s.v. *decurro* 1a, 'To run down, hurry down; (w. acc.) to run down (a path)', 1b, '(of things) to rush down, fall', and 2b, '(of air, free-running solids …) to run or flow down'. For *vada* as 'shallows', see below.

[13] *TLL* 5.226.83–227.12, especially Luc. 2.483–4 and 4.366–7, Tac. *Ann.* 14.8, and V. Fl. 3.421–3.

[14] See Thomas (n. 5), 153–4, who remarks that 'the real problem surely lies with the prefix *de-*'. As Quinn (n. 4), ad loc. notes, the simplex *currere* can have transitive force (cf. Verg. *Aen.* 5.235 *aequora curro*), but the compound *decurrere* meaning 'to run down' is normally intransitive (cf. Verg. *Aen.* 5.212) and accompanied by a preposition when describing motion whither (cf. Curt. 9.3.13 *licebit decurrere in illud mare*). As should be clear from my discussion below, I agree with Thomas et al. that Catullus' *decurrere* is most likely an unusual transitive instance of the verb and would argue that its linguistic peculiarity serves to focus attention on a moment of narrative and thematic significance within the poem. It must be noted, however, that another possible explanation, so far overlooked, could obviate the problem entirely: *decurrere* in the sense 'to run down' can also be read with its usual intransitive force if *vada salsa* is understood as an accusative of motion whither without a preposition, an uncommon but well-attested usage; see H. Leumann, J.B. Hofman and A. Szantyr, *Lateinische Grammatik: Syntax und Stilistik* (Munich, 1965³), 49–50; G. Maurach, *Lateinische Dichtersprache* (Darmstadt, 1995), 53; and R.G. Austin, *P. Vergili Maronis Aeneidos Liber Sextus* (Oxford, 1977), on Verg. *Aen.* 6.345.

tion moved down into as direct object without a preposition.[15] Moreover, though perhaps unique, Catullus' extraordinary usage of *decurrere* here is not altogether surprising. We might compare his play with *imbuere*, which he uses in its standard nautical sense 'to dip' (something in or into something else) with the preposition *in* at 4.17 (*imbuisse palmulas in aequore*), but at 64.11 (*prima imbuit Amphitriten*) in the sense 'to dip into' as a transitivized compound verb of motion without a preposition, as well as in the transferred senses 'to initiate' and 'to stain'.[16] As I argue below, *decurrere* and *imbuere* function in parallel in the opening of poem 64 to mark the moment when the Argo enters the sea for the first time, and thus Catullus can be seen to call special attention to this pivotal event by using both of these verbs in unprecedented ways, mirroring the novelty of the Argo as the first ship metaphorically with his own poetic innovation.[17]

But linguistic and stylistic analogies aside, the clearest evidence that Catullus' *decurrere* alludes to Apollonius' κατολισθάνειν and his account of the initial launch of the Argo appears in Valerius Flaccus' version of the Argo's launch at *Argonautica* 1.184–6, which itself alludes both to Apollonius' epic and, more significantly for our purposes, to the opening of poem 64:[18]

> at ducis imperiis Minyae monituque frequentes
> puppem umeris subeunt et tento poplite proni   185
> decurrunt intrantque fretum …

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[15] For the transitivization of compound verbs, see Leumann et al. (n. 14), 33 and Maurach (n. 14), 66. The verb *delabi*, 'to slip down', is normally intransitive (*OLD* s.v. *delabor* 1, 2 and 3) but appears once in Apuleius as a transitive verb taking the place slipped down into as direct object (Apul. *Met.* 9.22 *sol ipsum quidem delapsus Oceanum subterrenas orbis plagas inluminabat*; B.L. Hijmans, R.Th. van der Paardt, V. Schmidt, B. Wesseling and M. Zimmerman, *Apuleius Madaurensis Metamorphoses: Book IX* (Groningen, 1995), ad loc. suggest that this usage may be mock-epic, perhaps particularly relevant for Catullus' passage, given the similar contexts of objects slipping into the ocean). The verb *devenire*, 'to come down', is also normally intransitive (*OLD* s.v. *devenio* 1), but there are several examples with transitive force that take the place entered down into as direct object (cf. Verg. *Aen*. 6.638–9 *devenere locos laetos et amoena virecta | fortunatorum nemorum sedesque beatas*, of Aeneas and the Sibyl journeying down into Elysium, and V. Fl. 1.843–4 *donec silvas et amoena piorum | deveniant camposque*, of souls descending into the Underworld; see Kleywegt, ad loc.). We might also compare the transitive instance of *decurrere* at Apul. *Met*. 6.20 (*infernum decurrit meatum*, of Psyche rushing down into the Underworld), though it is unclear whether *meatum* should be understood as place entered down into or as finite space traversed (cf. n. 4 above).

[16] *OLD* s.v. *imbuo* 3, 4 and 1, respectively. D. Konstan, *Catullus' Indictment of Rome: The Meaning of Catullus 64* (Amsterdam, 1977), 16 rightly notes that *imbuit* at 64.11 contains all three meanings simultaneously, a semantic confluence that problematizes the action as neither wholly positive nor negative.

[17] Cf. Ellis (n. 2), ad loc. and Fitzgerald (n. 1), 150–1 on Catullus' unparalleled *nutrices* for *papillae* at 64.18, also a calque on a Greek word, as well as n. 32 below on Catullus' coinage of nautical vocabulary for the first ship, using metaphors from other fields of human craft. See S.J. Harrison, 'The primal voyage and the ocean of epos: two aspects of metapoetic imagery in Catullus, Virgil and Horace', *Dictynna* 4 (2007) for a metapoetic reading of poem 64's opening vignette.

[18] D. Galli, *Valerii Flacci Argonautica I: Commento* (Berlin, 2007), ad loc. compares Valerius Flaccus' *decurrunt* and Apollonius' κατόλισθε, but does not note Catullus' *decurrere* as an intermediary in Valerius Flaccus' 'two-tiered allusion' or 'window reference' (for the former, see S. Hinds, *The Metamorphosis of Persephone: Ovid and the Self-conscious Muse* [Cambridge, 1987], 151 n. 16; for the latter, see R.F. Thomas, 'Virgil's *Georgics* and the art of reference', *HSPh* 90 [1986], 171–98, at 188–9).

Though it does not provide an unambiguous transitive usage of *decurrere* in this sense (*intrant* obscures the force of *decurrunt*, and thus it is uncertain whether *fretum* acts as the direct object of both verbs or only of the former), there can be no question but that Valerius Flaccus' *decurrunt*, positioned between the Argonauts' hoisting of the ship on to their shoulders and their placing it into the ocean, must describe the intermediary movement down the beach.[19] And while this allusion might seem a heavy burden for one word to bear, the nearly identical content and contexts of these two passages from poem 64 and the *Argonautica*, as well as the fact that the verb *decurrere* is a virtual *hapax* in this sense, offer reasonable surety that Valerius Flaccus' *decurrunt* in line 186 serves to invoke Catullus' poem. Moreover, as I discuss below more fully, Valerius Flaccus at the beginning of the *Argonautica*'s first book makes several allusive nods towards Catullus' description of the Argo's pivotal first moments, creating a sense of 'collective security' that primes and activates this 'lexicographical allusion'.[20] This allusion thus shows that Valerius Flaccus interpreted *decurrere* to mean 'to slip or run down into', so we can reasonably conclude that Catullus' *decurrere* in turn allusively invokes the same meaning in Apollonius' κατόλισθε at *Argonautica* 1.390.

Recognizing more precisely the meaning of *decurrere* in the opening lines of poem 64 necessitates clarifying the semantic and syntactic nuances of some words that are inextricably linked to the verb in this passage. As I noted above, whereas Apollonius makes the Argo the subject of the verb κατολισθάνειν (390), Catullus transfers the performance of this action to the Argonauts themselves (*lecti iuvenes*, 4). In the process, he shifts the scene's focus on to human-motivated activity: whether the sailors are to be imagined pushing the ship down the beach, as Apollonius has it a few lines earlier (ἐπὶ δ' ἐρρώσαντο πόδεσσιν | προπροβιαζόνενοι, 385–6), or hoisting it on to their shoulders before running, as Valerius Flaccus describes (*umeris subeunt et tento poplite proni*, 185), the movement entailed in Catullus' *decurrere* here depends principally on the force of the Argonauts' legs (cf. Valerius Flaccus' *poplite* and Apollonius' πόδεσσιν).[21] Because this motion requires that the men remain in physical contact with the beach, we should construe the phrase *cita … puppi* (6) not as locative ablative (that is, 'in the ship') or as ablative of manner ('by ship', 'by sea' *sensu ampliore*), but rather as one of the instrumental-sociative functions of the ablative, especially means ('using the ship'), attendant circumstances ('with the ship'), or accompanying object ('together with the ship').[22]

This focus on the Argonauts' movement over land likewise requires that we reconsider the connotations of *vada salsa* (6), the direct object of *decurrere*, which has usually been read as synecdoche for 'the sea'.[23] This poetic usage of *vada*

[19] A. Zissos, *Valerius Flaccus'* Argonautica: *Book 1* (Oxford, 2008) interprets the verb in this way in his translation.

[20] For these concepts, see S. Hinds, *Allusion and Intertext: Dynamics of Appropriation in Roman Poetry* (Cambridge, 1998), 17–34.

[21] Cf. *TLL* 5.226.83–227.50 and 5.228.73–229.21 for examples of *decurrere* used of movement on foot, including the instance at V. Fl. 1.186.

[22] *OLD* s.v. *decurro* 8a, which interprets *decurrere* here as 'to travel over (a course), cover (a distance)', construes *puppi* as 'in a ship'; cf. Leumann et al. (n. 14), 121, citing Tib. 1.4.45 (*puppi ... ire per undas*) as an ablative of means influenced by the locative usage. See *OLD* s.v. *navis* 1c for examples of the ablative of manner with ships. It is often difficult to distinguish precisely between types of instrumental-sociative ablatives; see Leumann et al. (n. 14), 114–27.

[23] Baehrens (n. 4), ad loc.; Thomson, ad loc.; and *OLD* s.v. *vadum* 4, citing this instance.

occurs regularly in Latin literature, and while nothing in this passage forbids such a reading, an overly broad interpretation obscures the craft and significance of Catullus' word choices here. The phrase *vada salsa* can evoke the sea generally, but taken literally it also signifies the 'salty shallows' of the ocean into which boats can be launched from the shore – and consequently, into which the Argonauts can run on foot, *decurrere*.[24] In fact, the adjective *vadus* and its cognate noun in their principal senses indicate water that is not too deep, especially water in which a person can stand or walk, and both are connected etymologically to the Latin verb *vadere*, 'to go' or 'to walk', as well as the English verb 'to wade'.[25] And as he does elsewhere in this passage, Catullus engages in etymological wordplay, both Latin and Greek, with the phrase *vada salsa*. Henry Nettleship and Kenneth Quinn have suggested that Catullus uses *vada* in its etymological connection with *vadere* to connote travel along a thoroughfare.[26] Additionally, we can also recognize here an example of a suppressed *figura etymologica* between *vada* and *decurrere*. The *vada*, 'shallows', are so called because they are sufficiently shallow for someone 'to go', *vadere*, through them on foot; this is the explanation given both in the scholia to Horace (*ideo … vada dicta sunt, quia brevitate sui vadari, hoc est ambulari possunt*, on *Carm.* 1.3.24) and by Isidore of Seville (*vada … sunt per qua in mari vel in fluminibus homines vel animalia pedibus vadunt*, *Etym.* 13.18.6). This is also the same movement implied by *decurrere*, since the Argonauts are running through the shallows on foot. The reader must supply the intermediary word *vadere*, but the leap is not far and we have seen Catullus using a similar kind of suppressed etymologizing on the Argo's name in this passage.[27] Moreover, as I noted above, the adjective *salsa* alludes to Apollonius' ἁλός (390) lexically and semantically,

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[24] Cf. Verg. *Aen.* 5.158 (*longa sulcant vada salsa carina*), which seems to suggest coastal water, since the poet is describing the boat race between the Sicilian shore and a rocky outcrop near the beach resting in low shallows (*brevibusque vadis*, 221); but cf. also Sil. *Pun.* 17.155 (*propulsa sulcant vada salsa carina*), which alludes to the Virgilian line but denotes the sea. Shallows in antiquity are hazards to be avoided, but only when a ship's draught is too deep to allow navigation through them or it unexpectedly runs aground and founders upon them, as on a sandbar or blind reef; see *OLD* s.v. *vadum* 2. Paradoxically, however, they also signify calmer waters and, by extension, safe havens; see H. Nettleship, *Contributions to Latin Lexicography* (Oxford, 1889), s.v. *vadus* 3a, citing Plaut. *Rud.* 170 (*at in vadost, iam facile enabit*) for the literal usage, as well as metaphorical examples at *Aul.* 803 (*in vado salutis res videtur*) and Ter. *An.* 845 (*omni' res est iam in vado*); for the latter, cf. Donat. ad loc. (*in vado, in securitate. nam ut in profundo periculum est, ita in vado securitas est. proverbiale in vado, in tuto*) and Ter. *An.* 480 (*nunc huius periclo fit, ego in portu navigo*), where *portus* appears in the same sense as *vadum* later in the same play. Livy describes the harbour of Ephesus as full of shallows (*vadosum ostium portus sit*, 37.14), and this usage of *vada* for waters in which to land or launch ships is also preserved in the names of several ancient coastal towns; see W. Smith, *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Geography* (London, 1854) s.vv. 'Caput Vada' (modern Ras Kaboudia, south of Mahdia, Tunisia), 'Vada Sabbata' (modern Vado Ligure, south of Savona, Italy), and 'Vada Volaterrana' (modern Vada, south of Livorno, Italy), as well as their respective *RE* entries.

[25] *OLD* s.v. *vadum* 1a: 'a piece of water not too deep to wade in, a shallow'; cf. Varro, *De ora maritima* ap. Serv. on Verg. *Aen.* 1.112 (*si ab aqua summa non alte est terra dicitur vadus*) and Isid. *De natura rerum* 44.2 (*vada quibus in mari potest stari*). For the etymological connections, see R. Maltby, *A Lexicon of Ancient Latin Etymologies* (Leeds, 1991) s.v. *vadum*, and *OED* s.v. 'wade, *v.*' for the relationship between the Latin and English verbs.

[26] Cf. Quinn (n. 4), ad loc. ('*vada* in its etymological sense of "way"') and Nettleship (n. 24), s.v. *vadus* 3f ('poetically, of the sea or a river as a highway', citing this instance).

[27] See n. 9 above. For etymologizing by suppression as a standard technique of Latin poets, see J.J. O'Hara, *True Names: Vergil and the Alexandrian Tradition of Etymological Wordplay* (Ann Arbor, 1996), 79–82.

and although the Greek word can denote the sea broadly, it is used 'generally of shallow water near shore'; the phrase *vada salsa*, 'salty shallows', can thus be read as a calque on both senses of ἁλός, 'salt' and 'shallow water'.[28]

One last point about the importance of taking *vada salsa* literally: Thomas rightly notes that the poet's rich set of vocabulary for describing the ocean in these opening lines creates both artful variety and an archaic, epicizing flavour.[29] But more significantly, this complex of marine terminology also provides the detail necessary for articulating the Argo's progression precisely in these opening lines. Catullus carefully distinguishes the shallows off Pagasae (*vada*, 6) from the open ocean (*aequora*, 7) as he describes the sequence of events in the ship's first journey, mirroring Apollonius' own division of the Argo's movement by means of oars in the shallows (1.536–46) and by means of sails on the sea (1.559–79). As I mentioned at the beginning of this paper, Catullus describes this scene meticulously – almost cinematically – and appreciating the poet's lexical precision enables the reader to visualize the events more clearly and vividly.

Finally, we must also reassess the participle *verrentes* (7), which modifies *lecti iuvenes* (4), the subject of *ausi sunt … decurrere* (6). The tense of the Latin participle, of course, usually indicates time relative to the verb governing its clause, with the present tense generally denoting contemporaneous action. But the present active participle may also impart a sense of futurity or purpose, and this is clearly the significance of the participle *volitantem* three lines later in the poem (*ipsa levi fecit volitantem flamine currum*, 9).[30] The ship cannot have been flying with the breeze at the same time that the goddess was building it, but rather we must understand that the goddess made it with an eye towards its future flight. Likewise in line 6 the sailors dared to run down into the shallows with their ship, not 'while they were sweeping' the seas with their oars, but instead either 'as they were about to sweep' or 'so that they might sweep' over the seas after their initial launch. Taking all these points together, then, I would for the sake of clarity render the first seven lines of poem 64 into English as follows:

> Once upon a time, pines descended from the peak of Pelion
> are said to have swum through Neptune's flowing waves
> towards Phasis' currents and the borders of Aeetes,
> when the chosen youths, strong stock of Argive manhood,
> desiring to wrench away the gilded fleece from Colchis
> dared to run down into the salty shallows with their swift ship,
> intending to sweep the blue-green seas with palms of fir wood.

Having, I think, sufficiently established the meaning of *decurrere* and its related words in this passage, I would like to return to Apollonius' description of the Argo's launch and flesh out more fully the significance of Catullus' allusion to his Greek predecessor.

Apollonius uses forms of κατολισθάνειν only twice, once at 1.376–7 (τὴν [νῆα] δὲ κατάντη κλῖναν ἐπὶ πρώτῃσι φάλαγξιν | ὥς κεν ὀλισθαίνουσα δι'

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[28] LSJ s.vv. ἅλς A and B. We might also compare the etymology of *sal* from *sol* at Isid. *Etym.* 16.2.3, where salt is explicitly connected with coastal water: *alii sal a salo et sole vocatum existimant; nam aquis maris sponte gignitur, spuma in extremis litoribus vel scopulis derelicta et sole decocta.*

[29] Thomas (n. 5), 156–7.

[30] See Leumann et al. (n. 14), 386–7.

αὐτάων φορέοιτο) and again in our passage a few lines later, and their appearance together in close succession is significant. In the first instance Apollonius describes preparations for moving the Argo down the beach on rollers, using the participle ὀλισθαίνουσα (377) in the simplex to indicate motion and the adverb κατάντη (376) to show direction. But in the second instance he describes the ship's actual launch using the verb κατόλισθε (390), whose effect is slightly different. The prefix κατ- does double duty, indicating both the direction and the completion of the action.[31] Apollonius' use of the compound form of the verb in the aorist seems pointed to mark the moment of the Argo's transition from shore to shallows, when the boat ceases to glide downwards on wooden rollers and first slips into the water. And it is this moment, I think, that Catullus tries to capture in *vada salsa … decurrere* (6).

Catullus' focus in the opening lines of poem 64 rests squarely on the start of the journey and the many 'firsts' the Argo's voyage initiates: the first ship's first plunge into the sea (*illa rudem cursu prima imbuit Amphitriten*, 11), the first slice through the waves that lures the Nereids to the surface (*quae simul ac rostro ventosum proscidit aequor … emersere feri candenti e gurgite vultus | aequoreae monstrum Nereides admirantes*, 12–15), the first and only time mortals glimpse the sea-nymphs naked (*illa, atque <haud> alia, viderunt luce marinas | mortales oculis nudato corpore Nymphas*, 16–17), and the first meeting of Peleus and Thetis (*tum Thetidis Peleus incensus fertur amore, | tum Thetis humanos non despexit hymenaeos, | tum Thetidi pater ipse iugandum Pelea sensit*, 19–21). The Argo's first launch into the shallows off Pagasae is equally pivotal. It marks the ship's transition from terrestrial construct (*currus* in the sense of 'a vehicle riding on wheels', which the Argo literally is as it runs on wooden rollers down the beach at Apollonius, *Argonautica* 1.383–90) to nautical vessel (*currus* in the unique metaphorical sense at Catullus 64.9).[32] It also pinpoints the instant when humans first transgress their terrestrial boundaries and violate the sea (*rudem … imbuit Amphitriten*, 11; *proscidit aequor*, 12; *torta … unda*, 13). When the Argo violently breaches the line between shore and shallows, it signals the opening of an irreconcilable rift between mortals and the divine and sets in motion the theme of primal Fall that recurs prominently in the opening, middle and closing scenes of the poem.[33] Catullus cinematically

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[31] Smyth 1648, 1690. Catullus' *figura etymologica* in *decurrere* (6), *currum* (9), *carinae* (10) and *cursu* (11) seems to imitate Apollonius' κατάντη … ὀλισθαίνουσα (376) and κατόλισθε (390) by playing with the different senses that both the prefixes κατ- and *de-* can impart to verbs (motion downwards and completed action); see *OLD* s.v. *de-*. On Catullus' etymological play with these Latin words, see A. Michalopoulos, 'Etymologising on common nouns in Catullus', *Emerita* 67 (1999), 127–45, at 133–4.

[32] This is the only instance of *currus* as 'ship' in extant Latin literature; see Thomas (n. 5), 152 n. 29. Since the first ship necessarily predates nautical language, Catullus throughout this passage borrows metaphors from different fields to highlight the Argo's novelty; see Konstan (n. 16), 13–14 and cf. *nasse* (2), *verrentes … palmis* (7), *volitantem … currum* (9), *pinea … texta* (10), *rostro … proscidit* (12), *monstrum* (15), and perhaps *aequor* (7, 12) as well, if we read the word using its original meaning, 'plain' (*OLD* s.v. *aequor* 2, and cf. Ov. *Am.* 2.10.33–4 and J.C. McKeown, *Ovid: Amores*. Vol. 3 [Leeds, 1998], ad loc. for the intertwining of agricultural and nautical metaphor).

[33] Cf. 64.265–8 (mortals leave the palace of Peleus and Thetis before the divine guests arrive) and 382–408 (the 'epilogue' lamenting the departure of gods from an impious world). Regardless of whether poem 64 can be read as a positive reminiscence of a lost heroic age or as a negative indictment of mortal arrogance, the vocabulary Catullus uses of the Argo's voyage is violently transgressive; see Konstan (n. 16), 15–18 and D.C. Feeney, *Caesar's Calendar: Ancient Time and the Beginnings of History* (Berkeley, 2007), 118–27.

compresses this event (which Apollonius stretches over 42 lines (1.351–93) and separates from the ship's departure (533) with 140 lines of prayer, dialogue, song and sleep) into a moment frozen in time and seamlessly fused with other similarly compacted points in the Argo's history.[34] Paradoxically, condensing the ship's launch into the word *decurrere* amplifies its importance, as it allows the poet to zoom in on elements that are most significant to his narrative. The daring (in both positive and negative senses) of the first sailors (*ausi sunt*) and the preternatural swiftness of the boat (*cita … puppi*) mentioned in the same line as *decurrere* (6) emphasize the Argo's ominous strangeness (*monstrum*, 15) in a world previously untainted by mortal seafaring.

Understanding that Catullus' *decurrere* alludes to Apollonius' initial launch of the Argo also elucidates the structure and narrative movement of Catullus' opening, which falls into two parallel lines of thought. It has long been clear that lines 8–12 describe sequentially the construction, launching and sailing of the Argo, which moves from its creation by the goddess who keeps her citadels on the cities' heights (*in summis urbibus*, 8), down to the shore where it first dips into the sea (*prima imbuit Amphitriten*, 11), and finally out on to the open ocean (*ventosum … aequor*, 12). Recognizing the meaning of *decurrere* and its significance as an allusive gesture towards Apollonius, we can now see that lines 1–7 parallel this progression through construction, launching and sailing and from heights to shore to sea: the ship is built of pines from Mt Pelion's peak (*Peliaco … vertice*, 1), slips down into the shallows (*vada salsa … decurrere*, 6) and finally sails out on to the open ocean (*caerula … aequora*, 7). In effect, Catullus describes the Argo's first moments twice, once from a primarily mortal angle (*fines Aeeteos*, 3; *lecti iuvenes, Argivae robora pubis*, 4) and again from a primarily divine one (*diva … ipsa*, 8–9; *Amphitriten*, 11).[35] This structural division reinforces the thematic rupture between humans and gods that I discussed above, but it also hints at a relationship of mutual culpability between the two parties.

The Argo's maiden voyage is another iteration of Man's First Disobedience; but if the heroes are guilty of violating the order of the Golden Age, then their divine accomplices are no less so. This idea is especially true in Catullus' version of events. Apollonius states that Athena and Argus built the ship together: αὐτὴ γὰρ [Ἀθηναίη] καὶ νῆα θοὴν κάμε, σὺν δέ οἱ Ἄργος | τεῦξεν Ἀρεστορίδης κείνης ὑποθημοσύνῃσιν (1.111–12). In alluding to these lines in his opening, Catullus removes Argus completely, simultaneously suppressing the traditional derivation of the ship's name from that of its human shipwright and placing the construction solely in the hands of the goddess: *ipsa* [*diva*] *levi fecit volitantem flamine*

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[34] The effect is similar to a film technique called 'speed ramping', in which action alternately speeds up through movements that are merely connective and slows down at moments of physical contact or psychological importance; see K. Pearlman, *Cutting Rhythms: Shaping the Film Edit* (Oxford, 2009), 210–11 and cf. films such as *The Matrix* and *300*. Catullus uses compression techniques on a small scale, as here, as well as in his larger adaptation of Apollonius; for the latter see J.B. DeBrohun, 'Catullan intertextuality: Apollonius and the allusive plot of Catullus 64', in M.B. Skinner (ed.), *A Companion to Catullus* (Oxford, 2007), 293–313.

[35] Later poets often employ this 'theme and variation' technique to contrast two sides of the same issue; for the technique generally and Virgil's extensive use of it, see J. Henry, *Aeneidea, or, Critical, Exegetical, and Aesthetical Remarks on the* Aeneis. Vol. 1 (London, 1873), on Verg. *Aen.* 1.23–6 and 1.522–551; and G.B. Conte, *The Poetry of Pathos: Studies in Virgilian Epic* (Oxford, 2007), 30.

currum, 9.[36] Athena's help can no longer be read as vague divine inspiration (ὑποθημοσύνῃσιν) that may in fact have been merely the product of a clever human mind (cf. *Argon.* 1.18–19, which Apollonius echoes in 1.111–12 but which states that other poets attributed the actual work entirely to Argus: νῆα μὲν οἱ πρόσθεν ἔτι κλείουσιν ἀοιδοὶ | Ἄργον Ἀθηναίης καμέειν ὑποθημοσύνῃσιν). Catullus' repetition of the Argo's launch in lines 1–7 and 8–12 suggests that this disobedience was a joint venture, with Athena supplying the ship and the Argonauts the manpower, and both taking equal part in the initial violation of the sea (*ausi sunt … decurrere*, 6; *illa … prima imbuit*, 11).[37] This collaboration between gods and humans, and its resultant violence and suffering, also features prominently in the closing scene before the 'epilogue', where we glimpse the dark products of Peleus' and Thetis' wedding.[38] Catullus thus frames the poem with deeds so glorious that only alliances between heroes and gods could have accomplished them, as well as with the great destruction such partnerships inevitably entail.

This problematic relationship between mortal and divine stands at the core of many ancient versions of the Argonautic legend, and the Argo's violation of the boundary between land and sea continues to be momentously significant for writers after Catullus.[39] And, as I mentioned above, at least one ancient reader appropriates Catullus' *decurrere* to pinpoint the instant of this rupture. In his account of the Argo's launch at *Argonautica* 1.184–6, Valerius Flaccus nods allusively towards Catullus and signals the ship's breaching of the sea using the same relatively rare verb in an identical context. The details differ slightly, but the narrative movement remains the same: the Argonauts shoulder the boat, lean with it towards the shore (*proni*, 185), run down the beach (*decurrunt*, 186), and finally enter the straits off Pagasae (*intrantque fretum*, 186).[40] By alluding to Catullus at this point in his epic, Valerius Flaccus imports aspects of the Argo's primacy in an even more compressed space, emphasizing the violation of traditional boundaries and the opening of realms

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[36] See Thomas (n. 5), 149–50, as well as n. 9 above for the suppressed etymology and its role in Catullus' engagement with the poetic tradition.

[37] In addition to the structural division discussed above, *illa* in line 11 strengthens the assignment of responsibility to the goddess, since it can be understood ambiguously as referring both to the ship (*carinae*, 10) and to Athena herself (*ipsa*, 9). Although most scholars assume only the former, neither sense nor grammar forbids the latter; see Quinn (n. 4), ad loc. and J.J. O'Hara, *Inconsistency in Roman Epic: Studies in Catullus, Lucretius, Vergil, Ovid and Lucan* (Cambridge, 2007), 37. I am tempted to believe that Catullus also unites these lines phonetically in *decurrere* (6) and *rudem cursu* (11), though this connection may be coincidental.

[38] Cf. 323–81 (the song of the Parcae, who reveal that the marriage of mortal Peleus and immortal Thetis will produce Achilles and the bloodshed that accompanies him). Fitzgerald (n. 1), 150 remarks: 'Human impiety begins traditionally with the voyage of the Argo, the first ship, which dared to ignore the natural divisions of the earth and made possible a new scale of human greed and violence. The voyage of the Argo is both the moment of supreme cooperation and mingling between gods and mortals and the beginning of their separation'.

[39] The list is too long and complex to recount here, but see Feeney (n. 33), 108–37, esp. 118–22, and bibliography at 263 n. 52 for sources on the first ship generally and the Argo specifically as harbinger of the rupture between the Golden and Iron Ages. See also D.C. Feeney, *The Gods in Epic* (Oxford, 1991), 330–4, esp. 331 n. 59. The Argo became thought of as the first ship only after Eratosthenes, and it is perhaps Catullus who popularized the idea among Roman poets, though it may already be present in Accius' *Medea*; see S. Jackson, 'Argo: the first ship?', *RhM* 140 (1997), 249–57, as well as Ellis (n. 2) on 64.15, Thomas (n. 5), 158–60 and O'Hara (n. 37), 40.

[40] See Kleywegt, ad loc. and Zissos (n. 19), ad loc. for the physical movements articulated here.

once forbidden to mortals, both major themes in the *Argonautica* from its very first line.[41]

This is not Valerius Flaccus' only allusion to the opening vignette of poem 64, but rather constitutes one part of a larger complex of allusive gestures towards Catullus that the poet makes while appropriating his predecessor's epyllion and its emphasis on the many 'firsts' related to the Argo. About a hundred lines earlier at *Argonautica* 1.64–76, Valerius Flaccus invokes Catullus' launch of the Argo to describe the moment when Jason realizes Pelias' evil intent and is at a loss as to how he will travel to Colchis to retrieve the Golden Fleece:

> mox taciti patuere doli, nec vellera curae
> esse viro, sed sese odiis immania cogi   65
> in freta; qua iussos sed tandem quaerere Colchos
> arte queat? nunc aerii plantaria vellet
> Perseos aut currus et quos frenasse dracones
> creditur ignaras Cereris qui vomere terras
> imbuit et flava quercum damnavit arista.   70
> heu quid agat? populumne levem veterique tyranno
> infensum atque olim miserantes Aesona patres
> advocet, an socia Iunone et Pallade fretus
> armisona superet magis et freta iussa capessat,
> si qua operis tanti domito consurgere ponto   75
> fama queat?

In trying to find a viable course, Jason calls to mind his predecessors who had to seek the help of the gods to access spheres normally barred to humans: Perseus takes to the sky using Hermes' sandals (*aerii plantaria … Perseos*, 67–8), Triptolemus pierces the ground to become the *primus auctor* of farming by using Ceres' wagon (*currus … terras*, 68–9), and Jason eventually decides to rely on Juno and Pallas to help him overcome the straits and open ocean (*freta … ponto*, 74–5), rounding out the standard trinity of air, land and sea as potential paths to heroic daring. Valerius Flaccus thus sets Jason alongside Triptolemus, founder of agriculture, as originator of the second most vital human craft, that of seafaring. In his description of Triptolemus' cultivation of the earth, Valerius Flaccus alludes to the opening of poem 64 using the same words and themes that Catullus applies to the Argo: just as Catullus' ship-as-wagon (*currum*, 9) initiates the virgin sea (*illa rudem cursu prima imbuit Amphitriten*, 11), Valerius Flaccus' wagon of Ceres initiates the earth previously untouched by the plough (*currus et quos frenasse dracones | creditur ignaras Cereris qui vomere terras | imbuit*, 68–70).[42]

This allusion creates a challenging chronological paradox. The poet uses Triptolemus to establish a precedent for Jason's subsequent building of the Argo as the first ship to penetrate the forbidden seas. But by invoking the Argo from

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[41] See Feeney (n. 39), 330–7 for Valerius Flaccus' elevation of these themes over even the Golden Fleece as the central point of the epic, as well as for the importance of the removal of *discrimina*, the traditional boundaries that separate parts of the world from one another. For Valerius Flaccus' compression of Apollonius' launch scene, see F. Spaltenstein, *Commentaire des Argonautica de Valérius Flaccus (livres 1 et 2)* (Brussels, 2002), ad loc.

[42] *Pace* Spaltenstein (n. 41), ad loc., who thinks these similarities are coincidental. Cf. Kleywegt, ad loc. and Zissos (n. 19), ad loc., who recognize Valerius Flaccus' allusions to Catullus here, as well as n. 32 above for the regular connection between ploughing and sailing in Roman poetry.

the opening of Catullus' epyllion to characterize Triptolemus' innovation, Valerius Flaccus presupposes the very craft that Jason has yet to invent and for which he turns to Triptolemus for inspiration. Seafaring thus precedes agriculture at the same time that agriculture precedes seafaring in this allusive convolution, which mirrors Catullus' own chronological contradictions throughout poem 64.[43] The poet's juxtaposition of Jason alongside Triptolemus as another *primus auctor* while alluding to the opening of poem 64 also links Valerius Flaccus' Jason closely with Catullus' version of the Argo as the first ship. This complex allusion at *Argonautica* 1.68–70 thus initiates a connection that enables *decurrunt* at 1.186 to renew the link between the two poems through a severely compressed lexicographical allusion. Taken together, these passages serve to underscore the importance that the opening of Catullus' epyllion held for its complication of the Argonautic tradition. The poet's precise articulation of the initiation of the Argo emphasizes its dense chronological significance, both as the craft that ushers in a new Age and as the ultimate marker of the rupture of all boundaries – between land and sea, between mortal and divine and even between past and future.

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[43] For chronological inconsistencies in Catullus 64 and their effects, see C. Weber, 'Two chronological contradictions in Catullus 64', *TAPhA* 113 (1983), 263–71; Gaisser (n. 1); O'Hara (n. 37), 34–41.