JASON'S DEPARTURE: APOLLONIUS RHODIUS AND HEROISM

by David Pike

(University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg)

Apollonius' Alexandrian epic, the Argonautica, purports to be the account of an heroic adventure belonging to what has become a stereotypical narrative genre: a young hero is sent on a supposedly fatal voyage by an anxious elder relative in quest of a fabulous treasure in a distant land ruled by a deadly king who has a beautiful daughter.

This paper will examine Apollonius' treatment of the beginnings of that ancient adventure: the quality of the crew, the 'tone' of passages describing the start of the expedition, and in particular the details of the parting of Jason (the expedition's nominal leader) from his family and his country. In this way, we may obtain a clear indication of what Apollonius is doing with the fundamentally 'primitive' material that he has chosen to handle—material stretching back through many predecessors to a time before Homer.

On the face of it, the Argonautic enterprise, as Apollonius initially describes it, will be a grand adventure embarked upon by brave young men. The Argonauts collectively are designated as ἄνδροι (21 and 124), ἀριστήρεσι (70, 206, 302), θρασέσσι ... ἄρωσι (100), and as a περιθαρσέα ... ὀμολογ/ἄρωσι (195–6).

In the Catalogue of crew-members (22–233), most of the Argonauts are described in terms which suggest that they are not men to be trifled with. Thus, we are told that Oileus is 'outstanding for manliness' and 'expert at charging after the enemy' (75–6); Butes is 'warlike' (95); and Phalerus is εὐμυστήρις (96—like Priam of Troy). The good ship Argo herself is said to be the 'most excellent of all ships that braved the sea with oars' (113–4). Further crew-members look impressive: Leodocus is ἔφθιμος (119); and when Heracles appears, there is (figuratively) a fanfare of trumpets—the 'mighty, stouthearted' hero, we are told, was just returning from one of his Labours when he heard of the Argonautic expedition (124–7); and, in typically reckless fashion, he flung down (from his 'broad shoulders', 129) the trussed Erymanthian Boar at the entrance to the Agora of Mycenae (128–9), and set off to join the Argonauts 'without the knowledge of Eurystheus' (his taskmaster; 130). The pugilist Polydeuces is χρατερόν
and his brother Castor is 'an expert in swift-footed horses' (147). Both Idas (151) and Ancaeus (188) are ὑπέρβης: a somewhat ambivalent epithet which can mean 'exceptionally strong' or 'excessively violent' (or, doubtless, both); and Idas and Lynceus are both 'very bold/confident in their great prowess' (152). We learn that Periclymenus has been blessed (by Poseidon) with 'limitless (ἀπεφεστήν) strength' (158-9). Ancaeus is Formidably clad in a bearskin and carries a great double-axe (168-9); Euphemus is 'the most swift-footed of all' (180); Meleager shows promise of being 'superior' (ὑπέρτερον, 196) to all, and he is accompanied by his uncle (Iphiclus) who is 'an expert at matching himself against others with the javelin and in close combat' (199-200). Finally, Zetes and Calais (sons of Boreas) are described in some detail (211-23), especially as regards the astounding wings on their ankles (219-23).

Once the Catalogue is completed, the real action of the poem begins with the Argonauts setting off through the town towards the harbour, surrounded by a throng of ordinary people who provide a foil for the splendid heroes in a brief simile:

οἱ δὲ φαίνοι
ἀστέρες δυς νεφέεσσι μετέπερπον

(239-40). Inspired by the sight, the bystanders predict that this 'band of heroes' (242-3) could at once destroy the Colchian king Aeetes' palace if he were to oppose them (244-5) (a prediction which is not at all fulfilled in the event: see Book 3 passim). This view is clearly the general one in the town (247).

Jason himself, on his departure for the port, is compared to Apollo (307-9). Soon afterwards, at the beach, Jason holds an election to choose what he calls τὸν ἔρησον (338) as the leader of the enterprise; and (after a false start, of which more later) he is chosen. Apollonius compliments him with the epithet ἄρης (349).

During the next 153 lines, preparations for departure proceed in an atmosphere of enthusiasm and eager activity (apart from one problematic incident, to be dealt with below); Jason takes the initiative in organizing a sacrifice to Apollo (353-62), and (as Apollonius says) εἰς ἔργον πρῶτος τράπεθ (363); and at last Argo pulls away from the shore in a stirring descriptive passage filled with the sound of oar-blades churning the brine (540-3) and the radiance of armour flashing in the sunshine (544-5). Even the gods look down οὐρανόθεν (547) to admire the sight of this ἡμιθέσων ἀνδρῶν γένος, οἱ τότ᾽ ἔρησοι/πόντον ἐπιλώσασσον (548-9). The famous expedition is under way.

However, from an early point in the poem, the heroic and optimistic atmosphere discussed above is repeatedly undercut, even negated; and heroic
promise is constantly cast into shadow by what can only be called a negative, melancholy, almost ‘autumnal’ tone.

The first hint of this is to be seen early in the Catalogue, where we learn that Polyphemus from Larisa, who as a youth had fought for the Lapiths against the Centaurs (41-3), is now ‘weighed down [by old age?] in the limbs’ (43-4)—though Apollonius at once assures us that ‘his warlike spirit still remained as it had been’ (44). Somewhat similarly, Coronus is said to be ἐσθηλος—but ‘no better than his father’ Caeneus (58); and Apollonius then devotes six lines (as opposed to the two allotted to Coronus) to an account of the heroic exploits of the father (long since ‘immobilized’, though not killed, by Centaurs: 59-64).

It appears, further, that Theseus and Peirithous are simply not available to join the other Argonauts (they are in the Underworld, 101-3). If they had been available, observes Apollonius, the Argonauts’ task would have been easier. But they were not.

It begins to look as if Jason is getting the ‘leftovers’ of Greece’s heroes, at least to some extent. There is, temporarily, the great heavyweight, Heracles; but he drops out of the voyage near the end of Book I, long before he can contribute anything substantial to the success of the mission. That leaves a number of other ‘experts’—many of whom are not specifically warriors at all: Orpheus, the seer Idmon, Lynceus with his telescopic and X-ray vision, Tiphys the helmsman, the incredible sprinter Euphemus. There are indeed some good fighters in the crew, as we have seen earlier, but the truth is that not one of them helps in the slightest in dealing with the real challenge, and climax, of the mission, namely, the performance of the dreadful tasks set by Aeetes and the acquisition of the Golden Fleece (all of these achieved mainly thanks to Medea’s witchcraft).

The ‘uselessness’, in this context, of such characters, however, only becomes really clear much later in the poem; and these ‘specialist’ characters all play some part in the poem, often quite an important part. Some participate in the action (Orpheus, for instance, defuses the quarrel at 494-512; the Boreades chase away the Harpies in Book 2.273-300); some have a ‘representative’ or symbolic value. But the fact remains that, in the end, it is Jason, aided by Medea (a teenage girl!), by magic, and by goddesses, who achieves the ultimate goals.

Still within the Catalogue, we learn the sombre fact that Idmon, the seer, was reluctant to join the expedition because he knew that he would die in the course of it (139-41; but he joined anyway, to avoid ill-repute at home, 141). This same gloomy note is sounded again later (see below). As for Ancaeus, whose impressive bearskin outfit was noted earlier, it appears that he was wearing it only because his grandfather had hidden his armour in order to prevent the young man from joining the other heroes (169-71). Meleager, so promising a youth, still needs another year’s training, at
home, before he can realize his potential (197-8)—he is actually not ready yet, and contributes nothing to the enterprise. Finally, we are told that Palaemonius is a cripple (204); but (again we are quickly reassured) this is because he is a son of Poseidon (203), and anyway ‘no-one could have scorned his manliness’ (204-5); he ‘would increase Jason’s glory’ (206). Does Apollonius protest too much?\textsuperscript{14}

Once the Catalogue is complete (233),\textsuperscript{15} this constant ‘undercutting’ trend continues unabated. As we have seen, the Argonauts stand out among the townspeople ‘like bright stars among clouds’, and induce in the crowd a mood of optimism and admiration (239-44); but the women see things differently. Most pray to the gods for a safe outcome to the voyage (247-9); but at least one is more negative and, bursting into tears (250), laments to her neighbour that the whole enterprise will be an utter tragedy for Jason’s aged mother (Alcimede), and that his father would be better off dead and knowing nothing of what the speaker calls these κακάς δέθηκεν (251-5).\textsuperscript{16} For Alcimede, she feels, there are άλγες μωρία in store (259).

In Jason’s home, in fact, total misery prevails: his mother is either (depending on the text) ‘clinging to him’ or ‘struck dumb’;\textsuperscript{17} his father, stricken ὀλοκλήρως ὑπὸ γῆρα (263), is lying on his bed wrapped up and groaning (264). It is already clear that either (a) there are some unnecessarily dismal people about or (b) the voyage of Argo is good cause for genuine fear and heartbreak.

Jason tries to soothe and encourage his parents (265-6); but his mother continues to cling to him, weeping even more desperately (268-9). Her grief is compared, in a curious ‘inverted’ simile,\textsuperscript{18} to that of a girl who has been maltreated by her stepmother and weeps helplessly in the arms of her old nurse (269-555). She delivers a speech (really an extended wail) which is filled with suicidal misery (280), self-pity and pain due to the fact that Jason is her only child (287-9) who will leave her bereft, pining and alone (285-6).

"Ως ἦγε στενάχουσα κινύρετο, ταλ ὅ γυναίκες ἀμφίπολον γοάσκον ἐπισταθὸν (292-3).

What a lacrimose scene! Jason again tries to calm his mother, μετιλχίου ἐπέσσα παρηγορέων (294), then leaves for the port; and we may risk the rather ‘modern’ conjecture (Apollonius says nothing, as often, about Jason’s actual feelings) that this only son’s departure is dogged by pain and guilt.

Certainly, when he is suddenly compared to Apollo (307-9), the simile comes as a surprise (albeit, perhaps, a welcome relief). At once, however, the Apolline radiance is tarnished by a poignant little incident: as Jason proceeds through the cheering crowd, an aged priestess comes forward and
kisses his hand (310–13). We are told that she was eager (τεμένη) to speak to him but could not do so, since the crowd swept Jason away (313–14); and 'she was left there at the side, as the old are by younger people' (315–16). We know nothing definite about her relationship to Jason; we only see her actions, and are informed that she is a priestess of Artemis (312). For all her status, she appears like a piece of flotsam. The entire (technically 'unnecessary') incident leaves a chill on the air.

Even freed as he now is from the pitiful grasp of old ladies, Jason's arrival at the beach is not an unqualified success. As he arrives, the other young men, who are just welcoming him (318–19), notice behind and beyond him Pelias' son Acastus, accompanied by Argus, hurrying down to join them in defiance of Pelias' orders (321–3). This is, understandably, a surprise and a distraction; and the actual effect of it is to 'upstage' Jason almost completely.

Jason 'refrains from asking any questions' (327–8), and then to some extent re-asserts whatever authority he may have by 'commanding' (ἀνωγεί) the crew to take their places for an assembly (328), and by acting as Chairman. He addresses them, Homerically and conventionally, ἐφρονέων (331). Jason attempts to hold a respectable, democratic election regarding the leadership of the voyage, urging the men to choose τὸν ἄριστον (338) as their captain. This election more or less blows up in his face: the Argonauts immediately and unanimously (πάντες) call on Heracles to take command (341–3). The latter, without even bothering to stand up to speak, declines, and demands that Jason be chosen ('and,' he says, 'I won't let anyone else stand up': 343–7). So much for democracy! The rest of the young men, like sheep, do what Heracles has ordered, and Jason is 'elected'. Apollo- nius notes (with almost excessive irony, surely?) that 'warlike Jason was delighted' (γιγαντισμοῖς: 349–50). Whatever for? His delight, after this farcical election, suggests that he is either very stupid, very vain and/or very naive (like a child being 'king of the castle').

Of course, what none of the Argonauts (including Jason and Heracles) knows is that in this enterprise, as Apollonius tells it, Jason's particular talents (charm, persuasiveness, skill: τέχνη) will prove far more effective than brute force (βία, as exemplified especially by Heracles), but the reader does not know that either, until Book 3. Thus, the election still comes across as a farce.

Three final episodes in this early phase of the story deserve attention. The first (already mentioned) is the prophecy uttered by Idmon after the animal-sacrifice conducted on the beach: the seer foretells that the Argonautic quest will be hard but will have a successful outcome (440–2); but he also declares that he himself will die in Asia (443–4). This latter is
dark news; and we may note that, perhaps symbolically, the sun begins to decline a few lines later (450–2).

The second episode is the informal party held on the beach immediately after the ‘lengthening of the shadows on the fields’ (451). The Argonauts settle down with food and wine, and begin to tell one another stories. The scene is peaceful and convivial. But Jason? He, in total contrast to the rest, is ἄμηχανος,26 and, ‘withdrawing into himself, pondered everything, like one downcast’ (460–1).

Typically, we are given no explanation for his behaviour. Has it anything to do with Idmon’s prophecy about his own death? Is Jason the only person to realize the full implications of the voyage? What, precisely, is he ἄμηχανος about? Idas, noting Jason’s demeanour, upbraids him (νείχεσαν, 462), wonders whether Jason is stricken by panic (τάρβος, 465), and observes that it often paralyses ‘cowardly (ἀνάλκτιδας) men’ (465). How accurate and how justified are these criticisms?

In this connection we should observe that Idas is discredited more than once, here and elsewhere, in the poem,27 and that in the general quarrel which ensues on the beach nobody utters a word of reproach against Jason (474ff.). Nonetheless, the picture of the ‘warlike’ leader of the expedition slumped in anxiety and ἄμηχανα is not heroic in any obvious sense.

Finally, we should note another startling contrast between Jason and the rest which is to be seen as Argo at last pulls away from the shore. The hawsers are drawn in and libations poured onto the sea (533–4); and then the rowers lean into their strenuous task with a will (536–46). ‘But Jason, weeping, turned his eyes away from his native-land’ (534–5). He is the only one to show any pain, or fear, or homesickness, or whatever it is—and he is the only one who is not enjoying himself by engaging in energetic and positive activity.

In sum: Apollonius, at almost every important moment, seems to be pretending to be writing Homeric Epic and then at once telling us that this is really what we might call ‘Anti-Epic’.28 His ‘heroes’ are not as ‘heroic’ as they might at first appear; and Jason, in particular, is not nearly as ‘warlike’ as we were initially led to believe.

This depiction of Jason in the opening parts of Book 1 is enhanced as the poem progresses (an elaboration too lengthy to be attempted here); and if Jason is to be considered as any sort of hero at all, then perhaps he should indeed be labelled the ‘Love-hero’.29

Probably the most vivid picture of the hero of this ‘anti-epic’ is to be found early in Book 4, where Jason and Medea confront the great serpent which guards the Golden Fleece. This, on the face of it, is one of the supreme ‘heroic moments’ of the plot, comparable perhaps to Theseus encountering the Minotaur,30 Heracles facing the Hydra, Perseus attacking
the Gorgon; but what happens in Apollonius? Medea uses her magical charms to put the monster to sleep (4.145–8); and as for Jason:

εἴπετο δ' Ἀἴσινθης, σφισθημένος (4.149).\(^{31}\)

As the poem repeatedly shows, it is precisely Jason’s ‘unheroic’\(^{32}\) willingness, and ability, to attract and use Medea and her magic that guarantees his success in his mission.\(^{33}\)

**NOTES**

1. Dr. S.B. Jackson of the Department of Classics, University of Natal, Durban, was kind enough to read through the first draft of this paper, and I am greatly indebted to him for a number of helpful comments and suggestions. However, the final responsibility for all views expressed here is entirely my own.

2. Assumed by Homer (Od.12.70) to be well-known to everyone (καὶ σοὶ μέλουσοι).

3. All line-references are to Book 1 of the Argonautica unless otherwise stated. The text used was the Oxford Classical Text edited by Herman Fränkel, 1961.

4. See e.g. Hom. II.4.47, 165; 6.449.

5. Heracles, uniquely, is the only one of the Argonauts to hear of the expedition while actively engaged in an heroic exploit rather than while at home. Also, his appearance in the Catalogue is not ‘cluttered’ by any genealogical information. (See D.N. Levin, _Apollonius’ Argonautica Re-examined: I. The Neglected First and Second Books_, Leiden 1971,38,n.4). Heracles, of course, did not originally belong in the Argonautic expedition at all (see D.N. Levin, ‘Apollonius’ Heracles’, _CJ_ 67 [1971] 22–8, especially 22), and he drops out of the voyage at the end of Book 1. Apollonius could, therefore, have left him out altogether, as he left Theseus out (101–3). However, the author deliberately included Heracles, primarily (as far as one can see) to provide a foil to Jason: Heracles is an excellent example (as is Idas) of everything that Jason is not—powerful, direct, decisive, violent, unimaginative and undemocratic.

6. The word is used of Heracles in what looks like a complimentary sense in Pind. _Ol._10.15; but elsewhere it tends to have negative connotations. Pindar himself uses it in the same _ode_ at line 30 in the negative sense; and see also Hom. _Il._18.262 and _Od._1.368.

7. The scholiast on line 240 sees the distinction as a social and heroic one (if that is not a false dichotomy), contrasting the ἔρως to the δημοτικοῦς ἄχλους, and assuming that with regard to the former Apollonius is referring πρὸς τὸ γένος καὶ τὴν τύχην καὶ τὴν ἀνάρταν (see C. Wendel [ed.], _Scholia in Apollonium Rhodium vetera_, published by Weidmann 1974).

8. Jason, at this stage, is still inclined to conscientiousness in matters of religion. Later (4.421–76), he commits a disgraceful and cowardly murder, perpetrated in a temple and noticed by a Fury. (See below, n.19).

9. The phrase is an echo of _Il._19.165, where, however, the words (used by Odysseus) refer to the effects of lack of food on a fighting man.

10. Another echo: see _Il._19.164.

11. Yet another echo, this time of _Il._22.158, where the two men being compared are Hector (who, though ἐσθλὸς, is running for his life) and Achilles (ἀμίλων) who
is pursuing him. All three ‘echoes’ are interesting reminders not only of how frequently Apollonius uses Homeric expressions but also of how he alters their frames of reference or even inverts them. (On such adaptations of Homeric and other early passages, see M. Campbell, *Echoes and Imitations of Early Epic in Apollonius Rhodius*, Leiden 1981.)

12. Apollonius could not afford to have Theseus in his expedition, as the poet was later to make extremely ironic use of the Theseus-Ariadne exemplum (3.997–1004). Also, we may assume that Apollonius did not need Theseus in the way that he needed Heracles (above, n.5).


14. In fact, Apollonius’ constant ‘undercutting’ of old-style physical heroism is almost certainly due to the fact that he is ‘describing a world where ... instead of physical perfection ... politesse, verbal communication, manners are all-important’ (C.R. Beye, *Epic and Romance in the Argonautica of Apollonius*, Illinois 1982, 86).

15. It may be instructive to glance back briefly to the well-known catalogues in Homer. The chief of these are the catalogue of ships and tribal contingents at *Il.2*494–877 and the catalogue of famous women at *Od.l*1.233–327. Apollonius seems to have gone out of his way, as usual, to tell us both that he is imitating Homer and that he is doing something very different. His catalogue resembles that of *Il.2* in that the entries in each are fairly brief (in contrast to the quite substantial cameos of *Od.11*); but otherwise the differences are great. Beye (above, n.14) 79–80 observes that Apollonius’ catalogue is filled with distinctive individuals and that ‘Clearly the poet thinks of this enumeration as more than a list’, whereas Homer’s *Il.2* catalogue ‘does not attempt to describe characters: it lists territorial leaders and the contingents they lead’ (80). Curiously, Apollonius’ catalogue is perhaps more like Homer’s *Od.11* catalogue of women, with its more detailed and more personal entries (and it would be very typical of Apollonius that he would make his catalogue of male heroes look like Homer’s catalogue of females). There is, however, one small entry in the *Il.2* catalogue that deserves mention here and that is at 674–5, where we learn of Nireus of Sume that he was ‘fairest of all the Danaans who came to Iliion second (only) to the son of Peleus; but he was weak (ήκασταν, ήκαστόν), and had a small following’. Whether ήκασταν refers to Nireus himself or to the fact that he had few men to back him up, the sudden, surprising ‘undercutting’ in the second line of the passage is quite Apollonian. It is, however, an isolated instance in the lengthy Homeric catalogue. (One cannot help surmising that it may for that very reason have caught Apollonius’ eye.)

16. Jason himself would agree with this choice of terms: considerably later in *Book 1*, when parting from Hypsipyle of Lemnos, he describes his voyage as λυγρο ... ἀνθέλοι (841); and (again to Hypsipyle) he prays, μοῦνὸν μὲ θεοί λύσπιον αὐθέλοιν (903). His closest approach to enthusiasm for this venture occurs—one—at 350–2 where he, ‘rejoicing’ (γηθόσυνος) at his election to the captaincy of Argo, says to the crew, ‘If you do indeed entrust this honour and responsibility to me, then let there be no more hindrance, as before, to our voyage’; and his alacrity in organizing a sacrifice to Apollo immediately thereafter has already been noted.

17. Line 262: either ἀμφ᾽ αὐτὸν βεβολμένην or ἀμφαμη βεβολμένη. Against the latter reading it can be said that she is anything but silent in lines 269 and 277–92; and in support of the former we may note that in 268 she has her arms round Jason ‘as before’ (ὡς τὰ πρότερα).
the nurse (old). The simile is, in structure, a Chiasmus. Beye (above, n.14) observes that the effect of the simile is to underline 'Alcimede's emotional dependency upon her son, turning the conventional order of things around'; and he sees this dependency as an 'emotional encumbrance which threatens to smother Jason' (84).

19. It is possible that the incident is at least partly a portent of something which happens later in the poem: Jason’s disregard (however unintentional) of Artemis’ priestess may foreshadow his later impiety towards the same goddess, when he murders Medea’s brother Apsyrtus at 4.450–81. Apollonius twice notes that the murder took place on ground sacred to Artemis ('’Αρτέμιδος νησί ἐν, 4.452; νησί σχεδόν ὄν ποτ’ ἐξεμαίνη ’Αρτέμιδος βραχώε, 4.469–70). It is also possible that Iphias was trying to utter a prophecy, which Jason is never allowed to hear (see D.P. Nelis, ‘Iphias: Apollonius Rhodius Argonautica 1.311–316’, CQ 41 [1] [1991] 96–105); and it would surely be most interesting to know whether that prophecy would have been optimistic, pessimistic, or both. We will never know, just as we cannot be sure that she did have a prophecy to offer. As Nelis observes (98), ‘The crucial moment of departure is thus marked by uncertainty and doubt as well as by the brilliant image of Jason as Apollo’; and ‘The strongest impression left on the reader remains that of an opportunity missed, of what might have been.’

20. It is probably worth noting, also, that the participle and verb which denote Jason’s being ‘swept away’ by the crowd (ἐπιλαγχείς καὶ ἐλώσθη, 316) are both passive, as indeed is the verb referring to the priestess (λιξεν, 315: ‘she was left there’): neither of the two principal characters here seems at all in control of what is happening. However, even the language itself is ambiguous: Nelis (above, n.19) 98 points out that ἐπιλαγχείς in line 316 can also have an active meaning, such as ‘He carried on’, which would imply that Jason more or less deliberately and brashly ignored the priestess.

21. With regard to the priestess-incident, Beye (above, n.14) 82 observes that ‘the dependent old woman repeats the drag upon Jason which his mother had produced, and the melancholia deflates Jason’s triumph.’

22. Cf. e.g. Hom. Il.1.73, 253.

23. Lawall (above, n.13) 148 feels that Jason here reveals ‘a certain martial confidence’—which is almost totally misplaced, if that is what it is, in view of what has just happened. Perhaps naïveté is the best explanation: certainly, the youthfulness of the Argonauts as a whole is often emphasized in the poem (references collected by H. Fränkel, Noten zu den Argonautika des Apollonios, München 1968, 44, n.50).

24. See Lawall (previous note) 124–36. Fränkel (previous note) 67–9 (note on Arg. 1.338–50) argues with some cogency that Herakles is too ‘coarse’ (‘derb’), ‘aggressive’ (‘zuschlagend’), too much of an ‘individualist’ (‘Einzelgänger’) and a ‘dare-devil’ (‘Draufgänger’) to be a suitable and responsible leader of what Jason calls a ‘joint’ (ξυνός, ξυνα: 336 and 337) enterprise. This enterprise, as Jason himself points out, will need what amounts to a diplomat to handle all contacts with foreign peoples (339–40). Jason then is, in the end, θετος, the Best Man for the Job, in view of these considerations.

25. The fact that Jason does ultimately triumph at Colchis involves what C.R. Beye (‘Jason as Love-Hero in Apollonius’ Argonautika’, GRBS 10 [1969] 38) calls a ‘basic perversity’ and a ‘collision between content and form’; and he well emphasizes the ‘total improbability’ of Jason’s final successes.

26. This epithet and its cognates, which are several times used of Jason (see M. Hadas, ‘The Tradition of a Feeble Jason’, CP 31 [1936] 166, n.3), are not confined to him but are used also of the Argonauts as a group in several places, and of certain
individuals other than Jason (including Peleus, Circe and Medea): see Levin (above, n.5) 49, n.2.

27. He is here roundly criticized by the doomed but gifted Idmon (477–84, especially 480, where his words are described as ἀτάσθαλα, 'presumptuous', 'wicked'); later, in Book 3, Idas delivers a scathing tirade to the crew about using women to fight their battles for them (3.558–63), which is received with 'mutters' (3.564–5) by his comrades, and then totally ignored (3.566ff.); and towards the end of Book 3, he 'spitefully' (or 'enviously': κότεον, 3.1252) hacks at Jason's magically fortified spear with his sword—which rebounds uselessly (3.1253–4). Frankel (above, n.23) 75 sees Idas quite simply as a foil to Jason in almost every way.

28. Beye (above, n.14) 79 puts it well: 'Apollonius has contrived to write what is formally an epic, yet in a sense not an epic. Homeric epic is, like all public and social literatures, essentially conformist ... But Apollonius is not writing as a spokesman for the community. To the contrary, this is a private narrative about private people. In that sense, the Argonautica is like the romance or the novel.' Beye concludes in his article (above, n.25) 34: 'Thus I would call the Argonautika “anti-epic”, rather than call Jason “anti-hero”. He fits comfortably into the Argonautika ...'. Even 'anti-epic' is not a wholly satisfactory label, implying as it does a determined effort to 'go against' Homer (in particular). Apollonius does produce 'anti-Homeric' effects; but he also repeatedly adapts Homer, and the Argonautica could even be seen as being a somewhat wry tribute to Homer. Perhaps, in the end, 'Hellenistic Epic' is the safest term here. Note Steven Jackson, 'Apollonius' Jason: Human Being In An Epic Scenario', G & R 39 (2) (1992) 155–162: 'Apollonius' Argonautica is a work of Hellenistic sensibility composed within the traditional framework of epic convention, motif, and idiom.' (155).

29. As in Beye (above, n.25) passim. However, such a designation is perhaps overly restrictive: Jason could as easily—and accurately—be called 'Diplomacy-hero', 'Reluctance-hero' or 'Democracy-hero'. All of these titles have some validity.

30. See R.L. Hunter, 'Short on Heroics': Jason in the Argonautica', CQ 38 (ii) (1988) 449–50, where the many similarities between the Jason and Theseus myths are noted; but Hunter equates Theseus' conquest of the Minotaur with Jason's conquest of the fire-breathing bulls rather than the serpent.


32. Argus (who first proposes that Medea's powers should be used) and Jason himself (who uses them) are well aware of the implications of such actions: when Argus presents Jason with the idea he says, 'You will dislike (διώσει) it' (3.475); and Jason, after hearing the proposal, laments, 'This is a wretched hope that we have, entrusting our homecoming to women!' (γυναξίων placed at the very end of its hexameter: 3.487–8). However, as Argus had also pointed out, 'One shouldn't omit any expedient (παράγει) in a bad situation' (3.476)—an opinion with which (we may surmise) Homer's Odysseus would have been in considerable sympathy.

33. It is perhaps worth noting, in conclusion, the eloquently enticing if fanciful view put forward by Beye (above, n.14) 83 that 'Jason is the prisoner and victor of his myth. One could probably say the Alexandrians were enslaved to their tradition in the same way. As a metaphor for the Alexandrian literary scene, Jason functions as the young and therefore tentative new direction in poetry which must contend with the moral authority imposed by the centuries of superlative creativity in the past. The inescapable fact was the Library, the stone Heracles of Greece's literary
past . . .'; and further (84) that the Argonautica, as well as being 'the personal story of a very young man caught up in an undertaking in which he is supremely insecure', is also 'an allegory of the obsolescence of the hero in the Alexandrian age' and 'a symbolic statement about the end of conventional epic poetry'—a view, as may need repeating, fanciful if eloquently enticing.
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