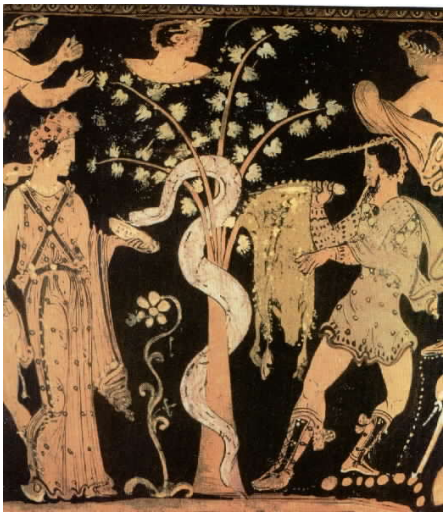
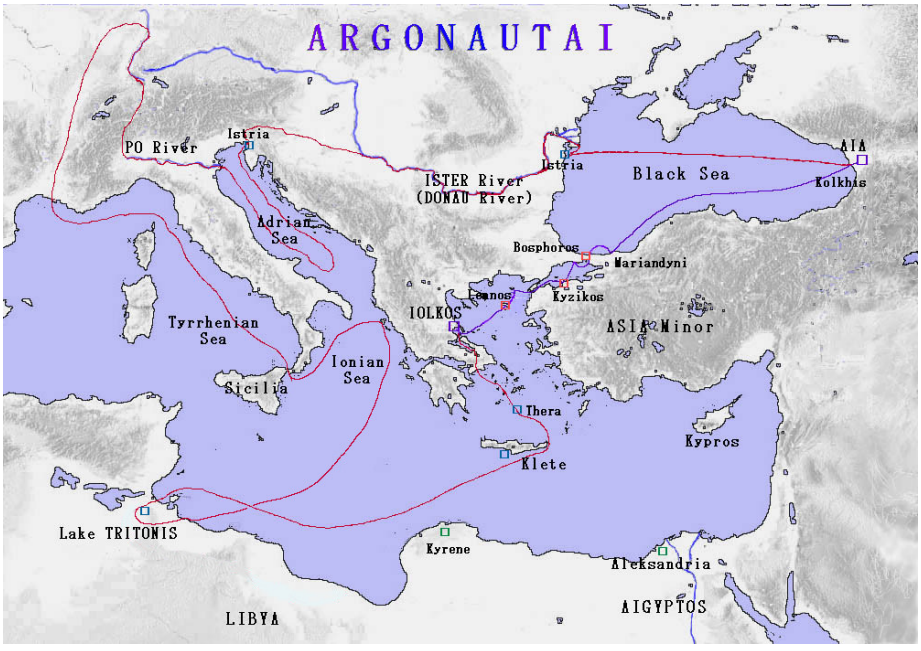
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND



Jason and the Golden Fleece is one of the oldest and most famous myths in the western world. The ancient Greeks thought that the great kingdom of the sun existed far to the east, where Helios, their god of the sun, began his daily journey through the heavens. At least as early as the eighth century B.C., they viewed Colchis as that kingdom. Homer assumed that his audience knew the myth because, in Book XII of *The Odyssey*, Circe tells Odysseus, "No ship bearing mortal sea-farers has ever survived that passage, except for the Argo—known to all who walk the earth—on her way home from Aeetes; and even she would have crumbled against those great rocks if Hera, out of her great love for Jason, had not pushed her through."



The voyage of Jason probably takes place in the mid-thirteenth century B.C. and involves fifty-two Greek heroes aboard a ship called the Argo. Jason and his companions, called the Argonauts, sail from the kingdom of Iolcus to the eastern shore of the Euxine Sea and the Phasis river—a distance of fifteen-hundred sea miles—in order to find the kingdom of Colchis and fetch the Golden Fleece from King Aeetes. The Argonauts are the fathers of Homer's heroes, who set sail for Troy about twenty years later, and whom we know from *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*.

The Argonauts' voyage takes them from Greece to the former Soviet Georgia, on the shore of the Black Sea—the end of the known world—and back again. It is a sea journey of three thousand miles, and from start to finish it is filled with adventures. Scholars always want to prove whether a story of such antiquity is myth (fiction in a historical sense), legend (partly based on historic fact), or history. The earliest writers considered these tales part of the history of their culture. Later writers viewed them as the product of imaginative minds and, therefore, as myths. However, with the development of archaeology, scholars have found evidence that much of their content has some historical basis.

Some scholars think that the Golden Fleece was actually amber, a commodity so valued in ancient times that the Greek peoples decided to unite—for the first time in their history—in order to acquire it. Others have considered the Golden Fleece to be a symbol of fertility and agricultural prosperity. However, Tim Severin, a specialist on the history of exploration, carefully read *The Argonautica* and actually simulated the *Argo's* voyage. Early in the 1980s, he set forth on a twenty-oared ship that replicated Jason's fifty-oared open vessel, and he made the sea journey from Volos (ancient Iolcus) to the Republic of Georgia (ancient Colchis). The following information is part of what he discovered.

First, Greeks living in 1245 B.C. could have made such a voyage on such a ship. Archaeological evidence reveals that the ancient Greeks sailed as far as the Black (ancient Euxine) Sea in about 3300 B.C. in order to learn how to create bronze. Pottery shards excavated in Volos show a Greek vessel from between 1600 and 1500 B.C. *The Argo*, sailing about three hundred years later, is described as the largest ship of its time, being powered by fifty rowers plus a steersman and a stroke-master. Homer, in writing about the Trojan War of c. 1225 B.C., describes ships rowed by fifty men.

Second, Greeks were living in Iolcus in 1245 B.C. Archaeologists have discovered a Mycenaean town on a site that would have been a good seaport for Iolcus. Moreover, on the outskirts of Volos, they have unearthed the walls of a small Mycenaean manor house or palace, with a royal burial tomb. Apparently, it was occupied for no more than a century and then peacefully abandoned.

Although the story of Jason and the Golden Fleece contains elements of myth and folklore, Jason's quest may have a historical basis. People have lived on the eastern shore of the Black Sea and along the Rhioni (ancient Phasis) River for at least five thousand years. Archaeologists have excavated a late Bronze Age site, dating back to c. 1300-1200 B.C., near the Phasis and Aea, King Aeetes' capital city. The name Aeetes means "ruler of Aeae" and may refer to the entire kingdom of Colchis as well as to its capital.

Linguistic evidence reveals that the Mycenaean Greeks must have known about Colchis some time before 1000 B.C.—when the Colchian language changed—because their words for Colchian objects reflect the earlier Colchian language. For example, the ancient Greeks called Georgia's great river the Phasis, rather than the Rhioni. Moreover, the ancient Greek word for *sheepskin* is related to the ancient Colchian word for *fleece*.

Although archaeologists have not discovered any physical evidence that Mycenaeans, such as Jason and the Argonauts, reached Colchis, archaeological excavations in the Rhioni River valley and Tim Severin's conversations with the Svan people who live in the nearby mountains cast an interesting light on many aspects of Jason's experience in Colchis.

Archaeological excavations throughout the Rhioni River valley may explain why King Aeetes demands that Jason perform a test that involves plowing a field. Agriculture appears to have been a very important activity in ancient Colchis. Archaeologists have uncovered late Bronze Age stockaded settlements where kings were buried with farm implements.

Moreover, when Jason must yoke Aeetes' fire-breathing bulls if he hopes to win the Golden Fleece, these bulls may symbolize the real bulls—sacred to members of the bull cult—that lived in the sacred grove and near the sacred tree on which the Golden Fleece hung. Archaeologists have excavated a site on the coastal plain by the Rhioni, where Jason could have anchored the *Argo*. Called *Namcheduri*, the site contains the remains of a late Bronze Age wooden, stockaded building that was probably a temple, since it contains evidence of a bull cult. Within the building, archaeologists have found collections of bull totems fashioned from stone and clay.

Even the Golden Fleece was probably real because, in the Bronze Age, the ram was sacred to the people or Svanetia, who lived in the foothills of the Caucasus Mountains of Georgia and in the Rhioni River valley. The Svan culture is at least four thousand years old, and for thousands of years the Svan people created symbolic forms of the ram. Archaeologists have found a double spiral of ram's horns in a Svan grave from about 1500 B.C. The church in the village of Kala, near the Svan capital of Mestia, contains a small bronze ram that dates from the time of Jason's arrival in Colchis. A Svan folktale describes a secret cave in the Caucasus mountains where a golden ram, tied with a golden chain, guards a secret treasure.

Ancient Colchis was famous for its gold, and Svanetia was the principal source of that gold. Today, the Svan people live in the Caucasus Mountains, but their language, beliefs, and traditions are still rooted in the Bronze Age. As recently as the 1980s, Svan men told Tim Severin about having gathered gold in the following ancient way.

Each spring, when the glaciers and snowfields in the mountains would begin to melt, they would carry sheepskins, scrapers, and flat wooden boards up to the high valleys. They would find their favorite stream, where the water would contain gold that had been washed from veins in the rocks. Then, using new or last year's boards, they would nail their sheepskins, fleece-side up, to their boards, and they would place the boards, in a descending series, on the floor of the stream-bed, weighing them down with rocks so that the water would flow over them.

As the stream flowed down the mountain, the gold particles, being heavy, would drop to the bottom and become lodged in the wool of the sheepskins. When they were satisfied with the amount of gold that had collected in their sheepskins, they would remove them from the stream-bed and, using scrapers, water, and a wooden trough, they would clean the fleece and collect the gold particles that had lodged in the wool. In a richly laden stream, the highest fleece would often be so filled with gold that it was truly a "golden fleece." The Greek geographer Strabo {64 B.C.--c. A.O. 25) wrote: "It is said that, in their country (Colchis), raging mountain streams carry pieces of gold, which the barbarians use perforated troughs and fleecy skins to collect, and this is the origin of the myth of the Golden Fleece."

Finally, evidence reveals that a serpent would have guarded a golden fleece because it was a cult object. Near Namcheduri, archaeologists al Kobuleti have found clay tablets that combine forked bull's horns with a zigzag groove that may symbolize a serpent guardian. Possibly the ancient Colchians kept snakes inside their temples to guard their sacred objects, just as, until recently, many Georgian families in the Rhioni River valley kept a protective snake within their homes. Since ancient pottery from the Rhioni River valley has been found in the Caucasus Mountains, it is possible that, in the Bronze Age, the mountain people may have given a golden fleece to the powerful king in the valley, either as a gift or as tribute. If the Colchians considered the fleece to be a cult object—which, in *The Argonautica*, they did—then they would have placed it in the wooden temple where they worshipped the bull, and the serpent guardian of the temple would have protected it.

Today, the legend of the Argonauts is well known in the Republic of Georgia. Medea and the Argonauts are folk heroes, and parents name their daughters Medea. Students study the voyage as a source of their history because it records the first contact between their ancestors and the ancient people of the Mediterranean.

RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND

Traces of an earlier matriarchal religion in ancient Greece are present in the myths connected with the myth of Jason and the Golden Fleece. When Argus tells Jason that Medea serves Hecate, the Night-wandering Goddess, he is describing Medea in a later and transformed human form. Yet Argus reveals Medea's earlier identity when he declares that she can manipulate all the herbs that grow on land and all that live in the sea, that she can call forth blazing fires and quiet rushing rivers, that she can make spring flowers bloom in summer and make grain ripen for harvesting in winter, and that she can make the chariot of the moon appear next to the chariot of the sun in the sky.

Argus's description of Medea's powers reveals her to be the Great Goddess or Mother Goddess of an earlier matriarchal religion. The Great Goddess functioned in three related forms. As Goddess of the Underworld, she controlled the three-stage cycle of life: first, the period of birth and childhood; then, the fertile period of maturity and

reproduction; and last, the sterile period of old age, with its decline and death. As Goddess of the Earth, she controlled the three-stage cycle of the seasons: first, spring (the period of birth or rebirth and budding growth); then, summer (the fertile period of blossoming and harvest); and last, winter (the sterile period of decay, barrenness, and death or dormancy). As Goddess of the Sky, she was the great Moon Goddess, who appeared in her three-stage cycle of phases: first, as the new and waxing moon (the period of birth or rebirth and growth); then, as the full moon (the period of maturity); and last, as the waning moon (the period of decline and death or dormancy).

In a matriarchal community, the reigning priestess of the Great Goddess or Mother Goddess took a young male consort to be the community's sacred king for the new year. In order to earn this honor, young male contenders competed with other candidates in contests that took unusual courage, strength, and skill. Then, as part of his coronation ceremony, the winner performed additional tasks that took remarkable courage, strength, and skill. One task usually involved wrestling with a bull. The community thought that the bull brought rain because its fiery breath was like lightning, and its roar sounded like thunder. The new sacred king's goal was to grab hold of one of the bull's horns so that he would gain the bull's rain-making magic and increase his own powers of fertility. Another task often involved cleaning or plowing a hill or a field in one day. The tasks that King Aeetes (as an enthroned sacred king) demands of Jason (a contender for his throne) conform to this pattern.

The principal purpose of a sacred king was to ensure the human and agricultural fertility of his community. In order to assure this fertility, the priestesses ritually killed their enthroned king while he was still young and healthy and then put a young and healthy successor in his place. Once the sacred king was dead, the priestesses tore apart his body and either ate his raw flesh, or they stewed the pieces of his corpse in a soup and ate his flesh cooked. By doing this, they expected that his spirit—particularly, his powers of fertility—would pass into them. They would become pregnant, and nine months later, in the next lambing season, the spirit of the sacred king would be reborn in their infants. The priestesses sprinkled the farm animals and the earth with the sacred king's blood in order to fertilize them as well.

At first, the sacred king was ritually sacrificed in midsummer, on the last day of the thirteen-month lunar year. Later, he was permitted to experience a mock death each year while a boy surrogate was enthroned for one to three days and then ritually sacrificed in his place. In this way, the sacred king was able to reign for one hundred lunar months, or approximately eight years, before he was sacrificed.

The myth of Phrixus, told in the Prologue to *Jason and the Golden Fleece*, conforms to this pattern. Phrixus is a sacred king whose impending sacrifice will mark the end of his reign. His community intends to obey the oracle and sacrifice him because of crop failure and famine. They expect that his death will restore the fertility of their land. Of course, Phrixus would prefer to live, and he is fortunate that his attempt to escape is successful.

A ram's fleece was a symbol of the sacred king because he used it in his annual rain-making ceremony. In ancient Greece, in matriarchal times, Zeus was a storm god rather than a sky god, and the fleece was purplish black—the color of clouds before a thunderstorm—rather than gold. The fleece became gold when religion became more patriarchal, and Zeus became a sky god as well as a weather god. The myth of Phrixus reveals that rams were sacred to Zeus. Nephele, Phrixus's mother, prays to Zeus, who sends a ram to rescue Phrixus, and Phrixus flees to Colchis on its back. Later, communities accepted a ram as a substitute sacrifice for human beings. Apparently, in Classical Greece, an old man wearing a black sheepskin mask was still symbolically killed on the summit of Mount Pelion and then restored to life by companions who were dressed in white fleece.

The fact that Medea cuts up Jason, Pelias, and (in some versions) Aeson and then puts them into cauldrons of rebirth and rejuvenation also reflects earlier religious practices. The myths, legends, and folktales of other cultures—including those of Italy, Germany, Russia, Scandinavia, and the Celts in Ireland—involve similar magic cauldrons. Priestesses would cut up a living human being or animal, put the fragments of the corpse into a magic broth, and then recite proper incantations as a fire caused the soup to boil. The corpse would then revive and emerge rejuvenated. Because fire was thought to be an aspect of the sun, it was sacred in cultures where people worshipped a

sun god. Therefore, the fire, as well as the broth, was necessary for the renewal of youth and the extension of life.

APOLLONIUS AND ALEXANDRIA

The oldest, most complete version of J*ason and the Golden Fleece* that we have, *The Argonautica*, was written by Apollonius Rhodius, a Hellenic (Greek) scholar-poet living in Alexandria, Egypt, in the third century B.C. during the Golden Age of Hellenistic poetry. These Hellenes had inherited the empire established by Alexander the Great in the prior century. Many were now living far from Hellas (Greece), in foreign lands.

There, they were the most prosperous citizens. Their members formed the governing body of their community, and they viewed the native people with whom they lived as resident aliens. They shared their Hellenic language with these Egyptians, Romans, or Jews, but they alone lived under Hellenic law. They surrounded themselves with Hellenic culture, but they shared it only with other Hellenes throughout the empire. Alexandria was the intellectual and artistic center of the Hellenic world. The Alexandrian Museum gained fame as an institute for research in all fields, including science, philosophy, and literature. The great Alexandrian Library was the largest in the western world. It contained between 100,000 and 700,000 volumes (estimates vary), and it supported a large staff of important scholars and scribes.

To the Hellenes of Alexandria, Alexander the Great was more of a hero than Alexander's own hero, Heracles, because they were no longer a warrior culture. In time of war, foreign warriors (mercenaries) fought on their behalf. The goal of the Alexandrian Greeks was to avoid unnecessary wars—by declaring neutrality wherever possible and by settling disputes peacefully through arbitration.

The prevailing values in Alexandrian society emphasized intelligence and diplomacy rather than physical strength and skill, cooperation rather than individuality, and socialized, rational behavior that would enable citizens to relate peacefully with others. Many educated Hellenes found the old religion—with its focus on the Olympian gods of Homer and Hesiod and on the superhuman, mythic heroes of earlier centuries—to be irrelevant to their lives.

Little is actually known about Apollonius. Early in his adulthood, he was put in charge of the great Alexandrian Library, where he wrote scholarly works on Homer and Hesiod, as well as poetry. He was still a young man when he gave a public reading of his epic, *The Argonautica*. The members of his audience knew the story of Jason and the Golden Fleece since they had learned other versions of it—along with the epics of Homer and the tragedies of the great fifth-century playwrights—as part of their cultural history. Moreover, they were familiar with Medea's homeland since trade between Alexandria and Colchis was frequent. Like Mycenae, Colchis was famous for being "rich in gold," and ancient gold objects from the far end of the Euxine Sea helped keep the tales of the Argonauts' voyage alive.

However, for some reason, Apollonius's audience strongly disliked his version of the ancient story, and Apollonius was so disturbed by their reaction that he retired to the island of Rhodes, where he may have remained for as long as twenty years. There, he revised his epic and gained fame as a fine teacher. In time, he returned to Alexandria with the finished product and offered his epic to the public once again, this time with great success.

APOLLONIUS AND THE LITERARY TRADITION

The myth of Jason and the Golden Fleece is as old as the myth of the Trojan War, and it, too, has roots in the oral tradition. The folktale motifs that it contains reveal both its age and its universality. For example, anyone with knowledge of fairy tales finds the plot of Jason, Medea, and the Golden Fleece familiar when it is related in its generic form, as follows: A powerful and jealous king (Pelias) forces a prince (Jason) to venture forth to the kingdom of a wicked king (Aeetes) in search of a valuable object. There, the wicked king gives the prince a series of impossible tasks, which the prince must perform if he is to win the object for which he has come. The wicked king's daughter (Medea) falls in love with the prince and secretly helps him perform these tasks. However, when the king discovers his daughter's behavior, he refuses to give the prince his prize. Once again, the princess helps the prince, this time by stealing the prize for him. The prince must now flee, and he takes the willing princess with him. The wicked king pursues them, but they escape by tossing items behind them that he will want to collect.

In other familiar tales, a youth {Jason) encounters a stranger in the form of an old man or woman, who, in myth, is usually a god or goddess in disguise (Hera). The stranger asks the youth for some form of help, which turns out to be a secret test of the youth's character. Previous youths have ignored the stranger, but this youth sympathetically offers assistance, thereby revealing the proper human values. Because the youth is kind, the stranger befriends the youth and helps the youth perform otherwise impossible tasks. In still other familiar tales, a father/king (Aeetes) imposes difficult tasks on any suitor (Jason) who wishes to marry his daughter (Medea), or a youth (Jason) must succeed in accomplishing difficult tasks, which are tests he must pass in order to claim his inheritance, or a jealous stepmother (lno) contrives to kill her stepchildren (Phrixus and Helle), thereby causing the children to flee.

We cannot know much about Apollonius's sources because, according to one scholar, Apollonius probably had fifty times more Greek literature available to him than we do. For example, only seven of Aeschylus's, seven of Sophocles', and nineteen of Euripides' tragedies still survive. Most were destroyed in 47 B.C. when Julius Caesar was in Alexandria and the Library was burned. Fortunately, Hellenic scribes had made copies of the most revered and popular works—including the epics by Homer and Hesiod, the lyric poetry of Pindar, and certain tragedies by Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. These were available throughout the Hellenic empire, and their multiple copies and broad distribution enabled them to survive to this day.

However, Aeschylus wrote eighty-three tragedies, including the lost *Athamas, Argo,* and *Phineus*. Sophocles wrote one hundred twenty-three tragedies, including the lost *Athamas* (I and II), *Phrixus, Phineus* (I and II), *Women of Colchis* (Jason's adventures in Colchis, including the murder of Medea's brother, Apsyrtus), *Root-Cutters* (about Medea's gathering of her special herbs), and *Scythians* (Jason and Medea's escape and a second version of Apsyrtus's murder). Moreover, Euripides wrote about seventy tragedies, including the lost *Phrixus* (I and II) and *The Daughters of Pelias*.

Fortunately, Euripides' *Medea* was so valued that multiple copies enabled it to survive the passage of centuries. Therefore, we know from the surviving plays and from the titles of lost plays that myths about Jason and Medea provided stimulating material

for the great writers of ancient Greece. Further, we know that almost all of these were available to Apollonius.

Our earliest sources of *Jason and the Golden Fleece* are those of Hesiod (late eighth century B.C.) and Pindar (fifth century B.C.). Hesiod's version, in *The Theogony*, is brief and without detail. He states that, "having accomplished the terrifying tasks imposed on him by the wicked King Pelias, Jason, by the will of the gods, led Medea, King Aeetes' daughter, forth from her father's house to his swift ship, and after much suffering, he returned to Iolcus with her and made her his wife. Medea submitted to Jason, shepherd of the people, and bore him a son."

Pindar is the earliest known writer to tell a brief but complete version in his *Fourth Pythian Ode*. Reflecting his interests and the time in which he lived, Pindar celebrates a male's athletic victory by emphasizing Jason's heroic feats rather than Medea's. Aphrodite teaches Jason how to win Medea away from her parents, and it is Jason who cleverly kills the serpent that guards the Golden Fleece.

In contrast, Apollonius is more interested in the psychological aspects of human behavior, particularly as these are revealed in the love story of Jason and Medea. Apollonius's choice of epic poetry enables him to relate the quest for the Golden Fleece in great detail, and he designs aspects of his characterizations and style to remind readers of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.

By supplying the earlier part of the myth, Apollonius's *Argonautica* also reminds readers of Euripides' *Medea*, written two centuries earlier. Apollonius makes the attitudes and actions of his youthful Jason and Medea consistent with the attitudes and actions of their mature counterparts in Euripides' tragedy. However, he carefully avoids Euripides' subject by stopping his version with Jason's successful return to Iolcus.

APPEAL AND VALUE

At a time when short, original poems were popular and realism was fashionable, Apollonius chose to write a long, derivative poem about mythical heroes and their great deeds. However, given his talent as a poet, the nature of his subject, and his treatment of it, he deserved the success he finally achieved.

First, *The Argonautica* is one of the world's great stories. As told by Apollonius Rhodius, the love story of Jason and Medea is unique in ancient Western literature, being the first psychologically accurate description of falling in love and the first work of Western literature in which love plays the major role in the development of the plot. Its nature and quality have continued to influence later writers of romance, beginning with Virgil and Ovid, and the nature and quality of their stories, in turn, have continued to influence other writers. Therefore, Apollonius can be considered the father of romantic literature, at least in the Western tradition.

The Argonautica is also one of the world's great adventure stories, second only to the *Odyssey* of Homer. Few readers from Apollonius's time to ours can resist such a well-told tale. Yet the adventures of Jason's companions remain peripheral to Jason's myth in that Apollonius could have inserted other adventures of other heroes in their place.

Unlike Homer, Apollonius has neither the need nor the interest to explore the nature of the ideal warrior or king. Apollonius did not create *The Argonautica* to be an entertaining model for ideal human behavior but, rather, to be valued as a captivating work of literature. Like Homer and Euripides, Apollonius is interested in the human psyche and, specifically, in Jason and Medea's choices—although he leaves the consequences of their choices to Euripides, whose *Medea* cannot be surpassed. Apollonius's psychological insight, his skill with conversation, and his sense of humor are so effective that *The Argonautica* captures the imagination and heart of the reader.

Second, in preserving ancient Greek myth as historical fact, Apollonius gave value to Greek culture and united Greek-speaking peoples at a time when they lived in many lands and so were happy to retain and confirm their identity. For all of us, through the centuries, who are not Greek, *The Argonautica* has continued to give value to ancient Greek culture and to confirm the common human bond that unites the people who lived in the past with those who live in the present.

Third, Apollonius was sensitive to the needs and interests of his audience, and these determined both his depiction of Jason and the nature of the *Argo's* voyage. Homer was the Shakespeare of Apollonius's time and place, and the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were still the model for all epic poetry. His audience could recite much of

Homer from memory. Therefore, Apollonius's readers appreciated the many parts of *The Argonautica* that either reflected or contrasted with Homer's epics. They appreciated Jason because mercenaries fought their wars, and they had little personal interest in Bronze Age values and the Homeric type of hero. They understood Jason's pragmatism and prudence—his willingness to delegate to others whatever they could do better than he—because they lived in a law-abiding society that valued cooperation more than individualism in daily life. The contrast between Jason's ability to persuade others to use their courage, strength, and skill on his behalf and the individual feats of Homeric heroes, such as Achilles, Hector, and Odysseus, captured reader interest. Moreover, Medea's heroic role offered a valued change from Homer's male-centered world and the role of the female as helpless victim.

Fourth, Apollonius was sensitive lo the psychological nature of human beings. The ancient Greeks believed that all human beings, through their attitudes and actions, are capable of bringing sorrow upon themselves. In Homer's *Odyssey* (Book I), Zeus tells the gods, "It is shameful how quickly mortals blame the gods for the evils that beset them! But they, not we, are to blame. Their own blind recklessness brings them pain and sorrow that we have not decreed."

In Greek mythology and literature—and in modern life—people bring sorrow upon themselves when their attitudes and actions form a particular pattern known to the ancient Greeks. First, a person must possess some type of excellence (*arete*) or superior ability. A person may be unusually handsome, clever, or skilled. Unless that person is careful, excellence is followed by excessive pride (*hubris*) in oneself because of one's superior ability. Excessive pride, without words and deeds that express it, is harmless. However, it usually leads to rash behavior or blind recklessness (*ate*), because the person's superior ability leads them to feel entitled to overstep important natural boundaries. Finally, having said or done what one is not entitled to say or do, the person experiences some form of retribution (*nemesis*) because the gods—acting directly or through other human beings—do not tolerate such inappropriate behavior.

This behavior pattern is an important part of Jason and Medea's love and, therefore, Jason's quest for the Golden Fleece. Because we, too, are vulnerable to this pattern of behavior, seeing how characters in literature bring their suffering upon

themselves engages our sympathy and our concern for ourselves, or, in Aristotle's terms, it arouses our pity and fear.

Finally, Apollonius was sensitive to the nature of the human condition. Despite the "modern" Hellenistic age, he knew that gains in human knowledge never change the fundamental nature of the human condition. Therefore, *The Argonautica* has captured the imagination of its audience from Apollonius's time until the present. Like the members of his audience, we still are vulnerable when we have to confront the forces of nature, the unknown, and the consequences of our actions. Therefore, our lives, like theirs, are still unpredictable and dangerous. We, too, can identify with the characters in *The Argonautica* and value both human magic and the superhuman marvels of the gods.

Apollonius published two versions of *The Argonautica*, but only the later version —probably because its popularity resulted in multiple copies—exists today.

The following version of Jason's quest for the Golden Fleece is adapted from Apollonius's *Argonautica* and focuses on Jason, Medea, and the acquisition of the fleece. Medea's rejuvenation of Jason is adapted from several literary works from ancient Greece (sixth century B.C. and later).

CHARACTERS

ACASTUS: the son of Pelias, king of Iolcus; an Argonaut; later, the king of Iolcus
AEETES: a son of Helios; the father of Medea, Chalciope, and Apsyrtus; the maternal grandfather of Argus; the king of Colchis, in Scythia
AESON: the half-brother of Pelias (They share the same mother); a first cousin of Phrixus (Their fathers are brothers); the legitimate king of Iolcus, in Thessaly
APSYRTUS: the son of Aeetes; the brother of Medea and Chalciope
ARGUS: the eldest son of Phrixus; a grandson of both Athamas and Aeetes; a nephew of Medea; a second cousin of Jason (Their paternal grandfathers are brothers)
CHALCIOPE: a daughter of Aectes; a granddaughter of Helios; the sister of Medea; the wife of Phrixus; the mother of Argus and his three brothers
JASON: the son of Aeson; a second cousin of Argus; the husband of Medea and later, of Glauce; the leader of the Argonauts

MEDEA: a daughter of Aeeles; a granddaughter of Helios; the sister of Chalciope; an aunt of Argus; Jason's first wife; a priestess of Hecate; a sorceress
PELEUS: the king of Phthia, in Thessaly; an Argonaut
PEUAS: a son of Poseidon; the half-brother of Aeson (They share the same mother); the illegitimate king of Iolcus
PHINEUS: a Thracian king; a seer
PHRIXUS: the son of Athamas and Nephele; a first cousin of Aeson (Their fathers are brothers); the husband of Chalciope; the father of Argus and three other sons

THE GODS AND OTHER IMMORTAL BEINGS

APHRODITE: a daughter of Zeus; the goddess of sexual desire
APOLLO: the son of Zeus and Leto; the twin brother of Artemis; the god of prophecy, with his oracle at Delphi; the god of disease and medicine
ARES: a son of Zeus and Hera; the blood• thirsty god of war
ARTEMIS: the daughter of Zeus and Leto; the twin sister of Apollo; the goddess of wild animals; the goddess of the hunt; a goddess of childbirth; the patron goddess of Iolcus
ATHENA: a daughter of Zeus; the goddess of arts and crafts and defensive war; later, the goddess of wisdom; the patron goddess of heroes; the architect of the Argo
BOREAS: the god of the north wind; the north wind itself; the father of two winged sons who are Argonauts
CHEIRON: the immortal centaur
EOS: the goddess of dawn
EROS: the son of Aphrodite; the god of love
GAEA: the mother of all the gods and of all life; Mother Earth; the Mother Goddess
HADES: a brother of Zeus, Poseidon, and Hera; the ruler of the Underworld
HECATE: a goddess in Hades' kingdom
HELIOS: the father of Aeetes; the paternal grandfather of Chalciope, Medea, and Apsyrtus; the maternal great-grandfather of Argus; the god of the sun
HEPHAESTUS: the son of Zeus and Hera or of Hera; the metalsmith of the Olympian gods

HERA: a sister of Zeus, Poseidon, and Hades; the wife of Zeus; the mother of Ares and Hephaestus; an aunt of Aphrodite, Apollo, Artemis, Athena, and Hermes; the queen of Olympus; the goddess of marriage
HERMES: a son of Zeus; Zeus's messenger; the patron god of travelers
IRIS: Hera's messenger
NYX: the mother ofThanatos; the goddess of night
POSEIDON: a brother of Zeus, Hades, and Hera; the ruler of the sea; the god of earthquakes
SELENE: the goddess of the moon
THANATOS: the son of Nyx; the god of death
ZEUS: a brother of Poseidon, Hades, and Hera; the father of Aphrodite, Apollo, Ares, Artemis, Athena, Hephaestus, and Hermes; the king of Olympus and ruler of all the gods; the god of justice, hospitality, and rain; the patron god of suppliants, fugitives, and strangers, with his oracle at Dodona

GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATIONS

AEA: the capital city of Colchis, located near the mouth of the Phasis River, in Scythia
BOEOTIA: the region in the central, eastern part of Hellas
COLCHIS, SCYTHIA: the region at the eastern end of the Euxine Sea and south of the Caucasus Mountains (now the Republic of Georgia)
CORINTH: the region of Hellas that includes part of the northeastern Peloponnesus and most of the isthmus that connects the Peloponnesus with Attica and Boeotia to the east
DELPHI: a city on Mount Parnassus. in Phocis, in Hellas; the site of the oracle of Apollo and, therefore, the principal religious center of the Hellenes
DODONA, EPEIRUS: a city in the region in Hellas that borders on the coast of the Adriatic Sea (now southern Albania); the site of an ancient oracle of Zeus
HELLESPONT: (Sea of Helle) the narrow sea channel, or strait, that connects the Aegean Sea with the Sea of Marmara
IOLCUS, THESSALY: a city in the region north of Boeotia, in the eastern part of Hellas (now Volos, in Magnesia)

LIBYA: the region bordering on the African coast of the Mediterranean Sea, between Egypt on the east and the Pillars of Heracles, which line the Strait of Gibralta, on the west

MOUNT OLYMPUS: a high, snow-covered mountain near the Gulf of Salonika, in the region of Pieria, in northern Thessaly, in Hellas, where the gods of the Hellenes live

MOUNT PELION: a mountain near the city of Iolcus, in Thessaly

PHAEACIA: the island or Drepane; Homer's Scheria; thought to be located "at a far end or the sea• (now Corfu)