

## A Human Hero and a Distant God: Jason and Apollo in the *Argonautica*

Apollonius of Rhodes's *Argonautica* is the only surviving epic poem from the Hellenistic period. The *Argonautica*'s narrative is generally like other Greek epics, but Apollonius's characterization of both mortal and immortal characters greatly differs from what is shown in Homer and Vergil. The main hero, Jason, rarely resembles the Homeric archetype of an epic hero. Rather than being characterized by divine-like attributes such as superhuman strength and courage, there is something uniquely human about the Apollonian Jason (Jackson, 1992). He is diplomatic but hesitant, he is introspective but terribly pessimistic. Apollonius depicts his hero in a way that would resonate specifically with a Hellenistic audience (Hunter, 1988). Furthermore, deities play a more limited role in the *Argonautica* than in Homer. The distance between the mortal and immortals might be reflective of Hellenistic-era religious trends emphasizing abstract divinities over the Olympian gods and goddesses.

I argue that Jason's behavior can be partially explained by looking at his relationship with his patron god, Apollo. The god of prophecy plays a surprisingly limited role in the epic. We are led to believe that Apollo will be Jason's closest Olympian ally: the poem begins with an invocation of the god and Jason prays to him before embarking on his quest. However, the narrative sees Hera, Athena, and even Aphrodite become more active characters. I examine Apollo's general apathy towards human affairs and focus on how his general inaction might have impacted Jason's defeatist attitude. This research explores both the epic's narrative and the Greek in several passages to explore the language used whenever Jason and Apollo interact. Finally, I look at how this relationship may have resonated with a Hellenistic audience. This essay aims to

better understand Apollonius of Rhodes as a poet, and beliefs involving leadership and personal religion during the Hellenistic era.

#### Bibliography

Hunter, R. L. “‘Short on Heroics’: Jason in the *Argonautica*,” *The Classical Quarterly*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (1988): 436-453.

Jackson, Steven. “Apollonius’ Jason: Human Being in an Epic Scenario,” *Greece & Rome*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (Oct., 1992): 155-162.