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JASON, MEDEA, AND
THE ARGONAUTS

INTRODUCTION: THE MINYAE

The saga of the Argonauts covers much of the Greek world in its geographical scope and includes many of the leading Greek heroes of the age before the Trojan War. The crew of the *Argo* included the flower of Greece, descendants of gods and ancestors of Greek nobles. They are often referred to as Minyae, and among cities that claimed Minyan descent were Iolcus in Thessaly and Miletus in Ionia. Jason belonged to the ruling family of Iolcus, and the Euxine Sea (i.e., the Black Sea), where the main part of the saga takes place, was an area particularly colonized by the Milesians.

The name *Minyae* therefore tells us something about the origin of the saga. Homer calls the *Argo* "all men's concern," reflecting the adventures of the seamen of Mycenaean Greece. Later additions reflect the expansion of the Greeks into the Black Sea area from the eighth century onward. Folktale elements can be seen in the name *Aea* (which means no more than "land") that Homer uses for the country to which the *Argo* sailed, and its king, Aeëtes (Man of the Land). It is a mysterious land on the edge of the world, a suitable setting for a story in which magic and miracle play a big part. The folktale element can further be distinguished in the formal outline of the legend, where a hero is set a number of impossible tasks that he performs unscathed, helped by the local princess, whom he then marries.¹

THE GOLDEN FLEECE

The saga concerns the quest for the Golden Fleece by Jason and the crew of the *Argo*. The Boeotian king Athamas took as his first wife Nephele, whose name means "cloud." After bearing Athamas two children, Phrixus and Helle, she returned to the sky. Athamas then married Ino, one of the daughters of Cadmus, who attempted to destroy her stepchildren. She also persuaded the Boeotian women to parch the seed grain so that when it was sown nothing grew. In the ensuing famine, Athamas sent to Delphi for advice, but Ino suborned the en-

voys to report that the god advised Athamas to sacrifice Phrixus if he wanted the famine to end. As he was about to perform the sacrifice, Nephele snatched Phrixus and Helle up into the sky and set them on a golden-fleeced ram that Hermes had given her. The ram carried them eastward through the heavens. Above the straits between Europe and Asia (the Dardanelles), Helle fell off and drowned, and the straits were called the Hellespont after her. Phrixus continued his flight and came to Colchis, at the eastern end of the Black Sea, where King Aeëtes (son of Helius and brother of Circe and Pasiphaë) received him with kindness and gave him his elder daughter, Chalciope, as wife. Phrixus sacrificed the ram to Zeus Phyxius (i.e., Zeus as god of escape) and gave the Golden Fleece to Aeëtes, who hung it up on an oak tree in a grove sacred to Ares, where it was guarded by a never-sleeping serpent. Phrixus himself lived on at Colchis, where he finally died; his four sons by Chalciope—Argus, Melas, Phrontis, and Cytisorus—play a minor part in the Argonauts' saga. The fleece, a golden treasure guarded by a dragon, became a goal for a hero's quest.

JASON AND PELIAS

Cretheus, brother of Athamas, was king of Iolcus. At his death his stepson Pelias (son of Poseidon and Tyro, wife of Cretheus) usurped the throne and deposed the rightful heir, Aeson, son of Cretheus and Tyro and father of Jason. Jason's mother, Polymede,² sent the boy away to the hills to be educated by the centaur Chiron and cared for by Chiron's mother, Philyra. After twenty years Jason returned to Iolcus to claim the throne that rightly belonged to his family. Pelias knew that he was fated to be killed by a descendant of Aeolus, and the Delphic oracle had warned him to "beware of the man with one sandal." He therefore realized that his fate was approaching when Jason appeared wearing one sandal.

On the way down from the hills, Jason had carried an old woman across the river Anaurus in full spate, losing one sandal as he tried to get a foothold in the mud. The old woman was the goddess Hera, who thereafter favored him, just as she remained hostile to Pelias, who had neglected to sacrifice to her. Pelias promised to yield the throne as soon as Jason brought him the Golden Fleece, which Phrixus, appearing to him in a dream, had ordered him to obtain. Whether for this reason or for some other, Jason readily undertook the task.

THE ARGONAUTS

In preparation for the expedition, the *Argo* was built, "which . . . first through the Euxine seas bore all the flower of Greece" (Spenser, *Faerie Queen* 2. 12. 44). Its name means "swift," and it was built by Argus, son of Arestor, with the help of Athena. In its bows she put a piece of wood made from an oak of Dodona (where there was an oracle of Zeus), which had the power of speech.

The crew came from all over Greece, motivated by the heroic quality of *arete* (Pindar, *Pythian Odes* 4. 184–187):

¶ Hera kindled all-persuading sweet desire in the sons of gods for the ship *Argo*, so that none should be left behind to nurse a life without danger at his mother's side, but rather that he should find even against death the fairest antidote in his own courage along with others of his age.

Lists of the names of the Argonauts vary, since the Greeks of later ages were eager to claim an Argonaut for an ancestor. Two heroes who figure prominently in all the lists, Orpheus and Heracles, have no place in the original story. The former is a post-Homeric figure, and the latter, as the most important of the Greek heroes, could hardly be left out of a saga that occurred in his own lifetime. He refused to accept the leadership, in favor of Jason, and he disappeared from the expedition before the *Argo* had even reached the Black Sea.

Of the fifty or so names included among the Argonauts, certain groups stand out. These are the heroes from Thessaly, such as Jason, and those from the Peloponnese, such as Augeas, king of Elis; a third group consists of Meleager and other heroes who took part in the Calydonian boar hunt; a fourth includes the parents of Trojan War heroes, such as Peleus (father of Achilles), Telamon (father of Ajax Telamoniuss), Oileus (father of Ajax the Less), and Nauplius (father of Palamedes).

Some of the Argonauts had special gifts. These were the seers Idmon and Mopsus; Castor and Polydeuces, excellent as horseman and boxer, respectively, with their later enemies, Idas and Lynceus, the latter of whom had such keen sight that he could see even beneath the earth; Periclymenus, son of Neleus, who could take whatever shape he liked in battle (this was Poseidon's gift); Euphemus, son of Poseidon, who could run so fast over the waves of the sea that his feet stayed dry; Zetes and Calais, the winged sons of Boreas; Argus, the skilled shipwright; and finally, the helmsman, Tiphys. Of these, only Polydeuces, Zetes, Calais, Argus, and Tiphys have any significant part in the legend as we now have it. Originally, the individual Argonauts must have used their gifts to help Jason perform his otherwise impossible tasks.

THE VOYAGE TO COLCHIS

HYSIPYLE AND THE LEMNIAN WOMEN

After leaving Iolcus, the Argonauts sailed to the island of Lemnos, where they found only women, led by their queen, Hypsipyle. Aphrodite had punished them for neglecting her worship and had made them unattractive to their husbands. The men therefore had taken Thracian concubines whom they had captured in war. In revenge, the Lemnian women murdered every male on the is-

land, with the exception of the king, Thoas, who was son of Dionysus and father of Hypsipyle. Hypsipyle first hid him in the temple of Dionysus and then put him in a chest in which he floated to the land of the Tauri (i.e., southern Russia) and there became a priest of Artemis. Meanwhile the Lemnian women received the Argonauts, who stayed on the island for a year. Among the many children born as a result of their stay were the twin sons of Jason and Hypsipyle, Euneos and Thoas (or Nebrophonus). After the departure of Jason, Hypsipyle's deception in saving her father Thoas was discovered and she was driven from the island. Eventually she was captured by pirates and sold into slavery, becoming the servant of Lycurgus, king of Nemea.

In Greece, Hypsipyle became the nurse of the child of Lycurgus, Opheltes (see p. 422). She was eventually brought back to Lemnos by her sons. As a mythological figure Hypsipyle is significant as the queen of a society from which males have been driven out and because of her connection with the founding of the Nemean Games in honor of Opheltes. The Roman epic poet Statius devoted a long episode of his *Thebaid* to her story, as did his contemporary Valerius Flaccus, in his epic *Argonautica*. Ovid made her a romantically deserted heroine in his *Heroides*.

CYZICUS AND CIOS

After touching at Samothrace, where they were initiated into the mysteries, the Argonauts sailed on to the Propontis and put in at Cyzicus, where the Doliones lived under King Cyzicus, who received them well. In return for this hospitality, Heracles killed the earthborn giants who lived nearby. The Argonauts were driven back to Cyzicus by contrary winds, and in a night battle (for the Doliones took them for night raiders) they killed the king. Next day they helped bury Cyzicus before sailing off again.

Their next port of call was Cios, farther eastward along the Asiatic shore of the Propontis, where they landed so that Heracles could replace his broken oar. Here Hylas was lost and Heracles left the expedition (see p. 577).

AMYCUS

Next the Argonauts passed into the Euxine (the Black Sea) and came to the land of the Bebryces, a Bithynian tribe whose custom was to compel strangers to box with their king, Amycus, a son of Poseidon, who had never lost a boxing match. Polydeuces fought Amycus and killed him.

PHINEUS AND THE HARPIES AND THE SYMPLEGADES

Next they came to Salmydessus on the Euxine shore of Thrace, where they were received by King Phineus, a blind prophet.³ He was tormented by the Harpies,

two winged monsters (their name means "the snatchers") who, every time a meal was set before him, swooped down upon it, snatched away most of the food, and fouled the rest. When the Harpies next appeared, Zetes and Calais, the winged sons of Boreas, pursued them with drawn swords to the Strophades Islands, where Iris put an end to the chase by making the sons of Boreas return and the Harpies swear never to go near Phineus again. Phineus foretold the rest of the voyage to the Argonauts and forewarned them of its dangers. He told them of the Symplegades (Clashing Rocks), two huge rocks near the western end of the Black Sea that clashed together driven by the force of the winds. Nothing had ever yet passed between them, and it was fated that they should remain fixed once a ship had made the passage. Phineus advised the Argonauts to release a dove, and if it succeeded in flying between the rocks, then they themselves were to row hard between them as they recoiled. If it failed, they were to turn back. In the event the dove was successful, and the Argonauts, with the help of Athena (or Hera), got through before the rocks clashed for the last time, losing part of the ship's stern ornament. The Symplegades remained fixed, never to threaten seafarers again.⁴

THE VOYAGE THROUGH THE EUXINE SEA

Not far along the Asiatic coast of the Euxine lived the Mariandyni, whose king, Lycus, received the Argonauts hospitably. Here Idmon was killed by a boar, and the helmsman, Tiphys, died. Nevertheless, with the Arcadian hero Ancaeus, son of Lycurgus, as the new helmsman, they sailed on past the land of the Amazons and that of the iron-working Chalybes and came to the Island of Ares, where the Stymphalian Birds (frightened away from Greece by Heracles in his sixth Labor) now lived. These they kept at bay by clashing their shields together. Here they also found Phrixus' four sons, shipwrecked during an attempted voyage from Colchis to Boeotia. They took them on board the *Argo* and found them of no little help when they reached Colchis. Finally, they sailed up the river Phasis to Colchis.

JASON AT COLCHIS

JASON'S TASKS

At Colchis, Aeëtes was prepared to let Jason take the fleece only if he first performed a series of impossible tasks. These were to yoke a pair of brazen-footed, fire-breathing bulls, the gift of Hephaestus to Aeëtes, and with them plow a large field and sow it with dragon's teeth, from which would spring up armed men, whom he would then have to kill.⁵

MEDEA'S ROLE

Medea, Aeëtes' younger daughter, now enters the saga and brings to it elements of magic and folktale. Through the agency of Hera and Aphrodite, she fell in love with Jason and agreed to help him at the request of Chalciope, mother of Argus (who had returned to Colchis with the Argonauts). She was herself priest-



Jason Is Disgorged by the Dragon That Guards the Golden Fleece. Athenian red-figure cup by Douris, ca. 470 B.C.; diameter 11³/₄ in. Athena (not Medea) watches the bearded dragon disgorge Jason. She holds an owl and wears the aegis. The fleece hangs on the tree in the background. There are no literary sources for this version of the myth. (Museo Nazionale di Villa Giulia, Rome, Italy. Alinari/Art Resource, New York.)

ess of Hecate, as skilled in magic as her aunt Circe. She gave Jason a magic ointment that would protect him from harm by fire or iron for the space of a day. So he plowed the field with the fire-breathing bulls, and he threw a stone among the armed men who sprang from the dragon's teeth to set them fighting one another. Then he took the fleece, with Medea's help, drugging the serpent with herbs that she had provided.

Euripides, however, in his tragedy *Medea*, gives Medea a larger part in performing the tasks and gaining the fleece. She, rather than Jason, is the dragon-slayer, as she reminds Jason (*Medea* 476–482):

☞ I saved you, as all the Greeks know who embarked with you on the ship *Argo*, when you were sent to master the fire-breathing bulls with yokes and sow the death-bringing field. I killed the serpent, which unsleeping guarded the golden fleece, twining its many coils around it, and I brought you the light of salvation.

In the red-figure cup reproduced on page 627 Jason's part is even less heroic, as he hangs limply from the jaws of the serpent while Athena (not Medea) stands before him.

OVID'S NARRATIVE

Ovid's account restores Jason's heroic stature. It begins the day after Medea's meeting with Jason at the shrine of Hecate (*Metamorphoses* 7. 100–158):

☞ The next dawn had put to flight the gleaming stars when the people assembled in Mars' sacred field and took their place on the higher ground. The king himself sat enthroned among his army, conspicuous by his purple robe and ivory scepter. The brazen-footed bulls puffed forth fire from their adamantine nostrils, and the grass burned at the touch of their breath. . . . Yet Jason faced them; with threatening look, they turned their awesome faces toward him as he came, their horns tipped with iron; with their cloven hooves they pounded the dusty earth and filled the place with their bellowing and clouds of smoke. The Argonauts were petrified with fear. On came Jason and felt not their fiery breath, so great was the power of [Medea's] drugs. He stroked their deep dewlaps with fearless hand and compelled them, driven beneath the yoke, to draw the plow's heavy weight and tear open the soil as yet unplowed. The Colchians were amazed, while the Argonauts shouted encouragement and strengthened Jason's spirits. (100–121)

Next he took the serpent's teeth in a bronze helmet and sowed them in the plowed field. The soil softened the seed, which had been smeared with strong poison, and the teeth grew and became new bodies. Just as a baby takes on human form in its mother's womb and inside its whole body grows in due proportion, only to issue into the outside world when it is fully formed, so, when the forms of men had been made in the womb of the pregnant earth, they rose from the mother-furrows, and, yet more miraculously, at their birth clashed their weapons. (121–130)

When the Greeks saw these warriors preparing to hurl their sharp spears at the head of the young Thessalian, their eyes and spirits were lowered by fear. Medea, too, who had made him safe from attack, grew pale when she saw so many enemies attacking the solitary young hero. . . . Jason threw a heavy rock into the middle of the enemy and turned their attack from himself to them: the earthborn brothers killed each other and fell in civil war. The Greeks applauded and eagerly embraced the victor. . . . (131–143)

It remained yet to put to sleep with drugs the wakeful serpent. It was the fearsome guardian of the golden tree, a monster with a crest, three tongues, and



Jason Takes the Golden Fleece, by Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640); oil on panel, 1636, 10½ × 11¼ in. Jason jauntily passes by the statue of Mars [Ares], with the fleece draped over his left arm. He is dressed as a Roman soldier. Rubens follows the narrative of Hyginus, who said that Phrixus dedicated the fleece in the temple of Mars, rather than the narrative given here. Note the absence of Medea or Athena as Jason's helpers. (*Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels, Belgium.*)

curved teeth. This serpent Aeson's heroic son fed with a soporific herb and repeated thrice a charm that brought peaceful sleep. When sleep came upon those eyes that it had not visited before, Jason took the gold, and in the pride of his spoils, took her who had made possible his success, a second prize. Victorious he returned to the harbor of Iolcus with his wife. (149–158)

THE RETURN OF THE ARGONAUTS

PINDAR'S NARRATIVE

Ovid's narrative focuses upon Jason the hero, winner not only of the fleece, the prize of his quest, but also of the princess Medea. He set sail with her, pursued by the Colchians under the leadership of Medea's brother, Apsyrtus, whom he killed in an ambush near the mouth of the Danube.⁶ Pindar gives the earliest continuous account of the capture of the fleece and the return journey. The poem is addressed to Arcesilas, king of Cyrene and winner of the chariot race at Delphi in 462 B.C.⁷ Pindar's narrative begins after Jason has successfully completed ploughing with the fire-breathing bulls (*Pythian Odes* 4. 239–254):

His companions stretched out their welcoming hands to the valiant hero, and they crowned him with garlands of grass and congratulated him with honeyed words. Then [Aeëtes] the wonderful child of the Sun told him of the shining fleece, where the knives of Phrixus had stretched it out. And he did not expect that Jason would complete that labor. For the fleece lay in a thicket, the lair of a serpent, held in its fearsome jaws, and the serpent in thickness and length was greater than a fifty-oared ship which the blows of iron have built. . . . (239–246)

He killed the grey-eyed spotted serpent, O Arcesilas, and he stole Medea with her connivance, and she caused the death of Pelias. And they came to the waves of Oceanus and the Red Sea and the nation of the women of Lemnos, who had killed their men. And there they showed their strength in physical contests with clothing for the prize, and there they lay together. (249–254)

Pindar's narrative is brief and clear. Jason, as befits the hero of the quest, himself performed the final labor, took the prize, and returned home with the princess. Their journey took them to the ends of the earth (for the River of Ocean encircles the earth; see Figure 24.2, p. 633) and to the mysterious but unspecified "Red Sea," which in Pindar's time usually meant the Indian Ocean. Earlier in the poem, Medea had referred to the journey during which "relying on my counsel we carried the sea-ship on our shoulders for twelve days, hauling it up from Ocean, across the desert lands" (4. 26–28). Although the twelve-day portage appears to have taken place in Africa, Pindar seems rather to be describing a voyage whose details are set in a mythological landscape (indicated by the River of Ocean beyond the boundaries of the world) than in any particular lands. Lemnos is a recognizable place in the Greek world, and Pindar places the Lemnian episode during the re-

turn. He adds the celebration of the Lemnian Games, which evidently were part of the funerary ritual in honor of the dead men of Lemnos, with a cloak as the appropriate prize for a festival that marked also the resumption of marriage.

APOLLONIUS' NARRATIVE AND THE MARRIAGE OF JASON AND MEDEA

Apollonius of Rhodes takes the Argonauts up the Danube, across to the head of the Adriatic, then up the mythical Eridanus River and across to the Rhone, down which they sailed to the Mediterranean Sea. Here they sailed to the western coast of Italy, where they visited Circe (the aunt of Medea), who purified Jason and Medea from the pollution caused by Jason's murder of Apsyrtus. After this, they encountered many of the same dangers described by Odysseus—the Planctae, Scylla and Charybdis, and the Sirens.

Next they came to the land of the Phaeacians, still pursued by the Colchians. Medea appealed to Queen Arete for protection, and she and the king, Alcinoüs, agreed not to give Medea up if she were already married to Jason. That night they celebrated the marriage, and the Colchians gave up their pursuit. Resuming their journey, the Argonauts sailed to Libya, where they were stranded on the shoals of the Syrtes. They carried the *Argo* on their shoulders to Lake Tritonis (a twelve-day journey), past the garden of the Hesperides. On the way Mopsus was killed by a snake. From the lake, they made their way back to the Mediterranean, guided by the sea-god Triton.⁸

TALUS

Another adventure took place off the coast of Crete. The island was guarded by the bronze giant Talus, who walked around it three times a day and kept strangers from landing by throwing rocks at them. His life depended on a membrane (or bronze nail) that closed the entrance to a vein above one ankle. If this were opened, the ichor (the divine equivalent of human blood) would flow out and he would die. The Argonauts caused this to happen and thus Talus perished.⁹

THE END OF THE JOURNEY

Finally the Argonauts reached Iolcus and there the saga (like the epic of Apollonius) ends. Jason handed the fleece over to Pelias, and he dedicated the *Argo* to Poseidon at the Isthmus of Corinth. Years later, he was struck on the head and killed by a piece of timber from its stern that fell upon him.

The geographical details of the return of the Argonauts are confused and largely fanciful. The time when the saga was taking its final form (i.e., in the archaic period, before the sixth century) was one of expansion and discovery in the Greek world, when Greeks traveled far to the east and west for trade and

colonization, venturing as far as Russia and North Africa. The voyage of the *Argo* perhaps recalls actual voyages, but it is impossible to attempt to match details from Pindar and Apollonius with actual places.¹⁰

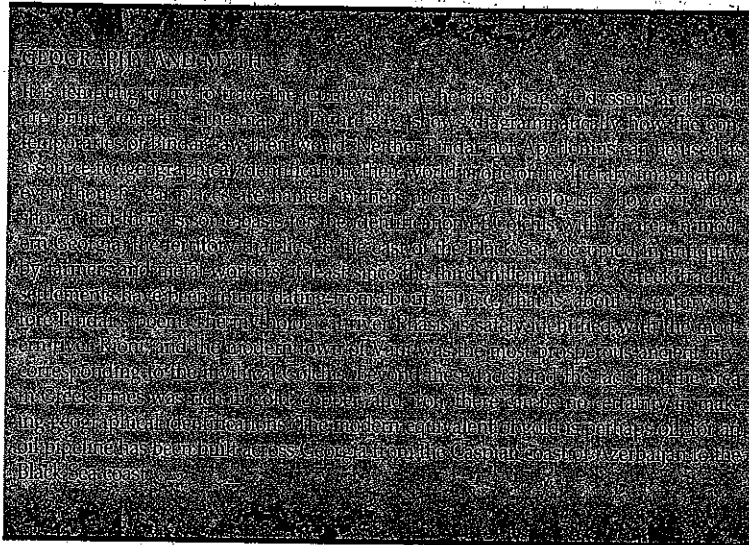
JASON AND MEDEA IN GREECE

IOLCUS

At Iolcus, Pelias refused to honor his pact with Jason, and Medea therefore contrived to cause his death. Making a display of her magic arts, she rejuvenated Jason's father, Aeson, by cutting him up and boiling him in a cauldron along with magic herbs, and then rejuvenated an old ram as well. Persuaded by these examples, the daughters of Pelias tried to rejuvenate their father in the same way. But Medea did not give them the magic herbs, and their attempt led only to his death.

CORINTH

Thus Jason was revenged on Pelias, but he did not gain the throne of Iolcus; for being defiled by the murder of Pelias, he and Medea were driven out of the city by Acastus, son of Pelias. They went to Corinth, the setting for Euripides' tragedy *Medea*. The connection between Medea and Corinth was made as early as the eighth century by the Corinthian poet Eumelos. In his version, Aeëtes and his brother Aloeus were the sons of Helios and Antiope. Helios divided his lands



between the brothers, so that Aloeus inherited Arcadia and Aeëtes received "Ephyra," which Eumelos identified with Corinth. Aeëtes then went to Colchis, leaving Corinth in the hands of a regent. Later the Corinthians summoned Medea from Iolcus to be their queen. Thus Jason became king of Corinth through his marriage with Medea, who meanwhile had resisted the advances of Zeus out of respect for Hera (who was especially worshiped at Corinth). As a reward, Hera

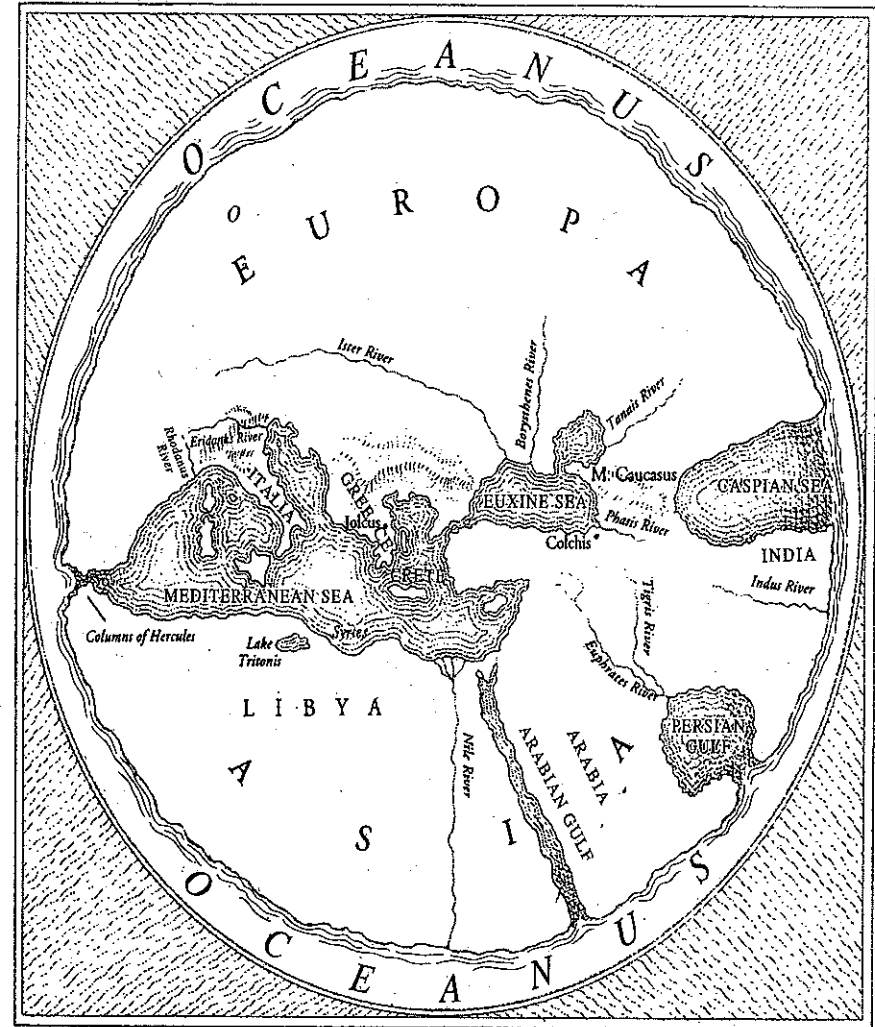


FIGURE 24.2. Map of the World According to the Ideas of Hecataeus of Miletus (ca. 500 B.C.). The River of Ocean is assumed to run around the edge of the inhabited world, which is divided into Europe and Asia. (© Laszlo Kubinyi, 1994.)

promised to make Medea's children immortal. Medea therefore concealed her children in the sanctuary of Hera, believing that in this way she would make them immortal, but they died and were honored with a cult. Medea refers to this in her final speech to Jason in Euripides' tragedy (*Medea* 1378–1383):

I shall bury them with my hand, carrying them into the sanctuary of Hera Akraia [Hera of the Acropolis], so that none of my enemies can violate them by digging up their graves. And I shall impose upon this land of Sisyphus [Corinth] a solemn feast and ritual for the future, in return for this impious murder.

The death of the children of Jason and Medea therefore was a central feature in the original myth.

Another variant, however, named Creon as king of Corinth and the enemy of Medea, who killed him and left her children in the sanctuary of Hera when she fled to Athens. The boys were killed by Creon's family, who said that Medea had killed them. This version was the foundation of Euripides' powerful drama, in which Jason and Medea lived in Corinth as exiles from Iolcus. Jason divorced Medea to marry Glauce (also called Creusa), the daughter of King Creon. In revenge, Medea sent her two children with a robe and a crown as wedding gifts to Glauce. The magic ointment with which Medea had smeared the gifts burned Glauce and Creon to death. After this, Medea killed her children as a final act of vengeance against Jason and escaped to Athens in a chariot drawn by winged dragons provided by her grandfather Heliuss. In the final scene of the drama, Medea appears in the chariot high above the stage holding the bodies of her murdered children, triumphing over Jason and foretelling his miserable end. Jason lived on at Corinth, and Medea was given asylum at Athens by King Aegeus.

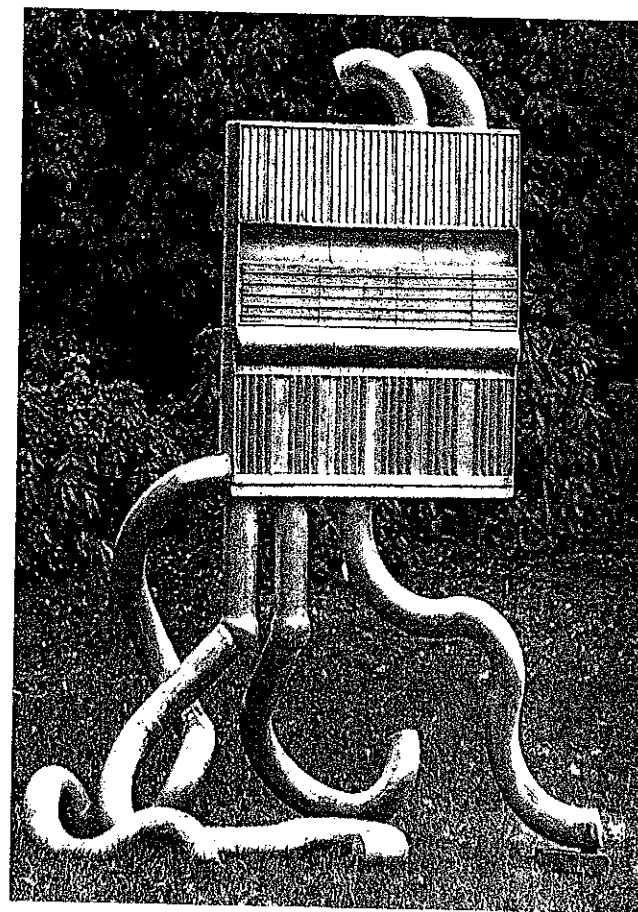
ATHENS

While at Athens, Medea was said to have become the mother of Medus by Aegeus. Later she nearly caused Aegeus to poison his son Theseus (see p. 603). Failing in this, she fled from Athens to Persia, where Medus established the kingdom of Media. Medea herself eventually returned to Colchis, and the rest of her legend is lost in the ingenious fancies of individual authors.

INTERPRETATIONS OF THE SAGA

THE ARGONAUTS IN LATER LITERATURE

The saga of Jason and the Argonauts has been filtered through literary interpretations as much as any other Greek saga.¹¹ It was known to Homer (who does not mention Medea), and it formed part of the epics of the eighth-century Corinthian poet Eumelos. In the third century B.C. it was the subject



Medea, by Eduardo Paolozzi (1924–2005); welded aluminum, 1964; height 81 in. The machine parts threateningly imply the destructive power of the barbarian princess. The mythological title suggests an allegorical meaning for the work without precise narrative content. Paolozzi's use of mechanical parts can also be interpreted as a satire on the modern age of machines. (Courtesy of Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo, Netherlands.)

of the epic *Argonautica* of Apollonius of Rhodes,¹ and this was translated or adapted by more than one Roman epic poet. The unfinished *Argonautica* of Valerius Flaccus, dating from the second half of the first century A.D., includes much of Apollonius' narrative, to which Valerius added episodes of his own, including the rescue of Hesione by Hercules and Telamon (see pp. 475 and 570). Statius, as we noted earlier, included a lengthy account of the legend of Hypsipyle in his *Thebaid*.



Medea Leaves Corinth in a Chariot Drawn by Dragons. South Italian krater, attributed to the Policoro painter, ca. 400 B.C.; height 20 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. Medea, wearing oriental cap and dress, drives a chariot sent by the Sun, whose rays encircle her. Winged Furies look down on the human figures below—on the left, Jason railing at Medea, and on the right the children's tutor and Medea's nurse mourning over the bodies of the two children, which are draped across an altar. A spotted feline reacts energetically to the dragons. The painting represents the final scene of Euripides' *Medea*. (*The Medea Krater*. Earthenware with slip decoration and added red, white, and yellow, late fifth-early fourth century B.C. © The Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, Ohio, Leonard C. Hanna Jr. Fund, 91.1.)

In drama, the *Medea* of Euripides has been a powerful influence, inspiring tragedies by Ovid (now lost), Seneca (which survives), and, in the twentieth century, Robinson Jeffers (*Medea*, 1946), to say nothing of many versions by French and German playwrights. It is one of the most frequently performed Greek tragedies in our contemporary theater. The saga appealed especially to the Victorians. William Morris' long narrative poem, *The Life and Death of Jason*, was published in 1867 and soon became popular. Its seventeen books cover the whole of Jason's saga, including the events in Corinth and his death. It owes as much, however, to Morris' feeling for medieval chivalry as to the classical epics, and Jason is a less ambiguous hero than he is in Apollonius or Euripides. Episodes from the saga were brilliantly narrated in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Tanglewood Tales* (1853) and Charles Kingsley's *The Heroes* (1855). These versions were written with a strong moral bias toward courage and adventure, and they are, as Michael Grant has happily described them, "brisk, antiseptic narratives . . . jolly good hero-worshipping yarns, without esoteric overtones or significances."¹²

THE HERO'S QUEST

Jason's legend is better seen as a Quest using Propp's model. This view makes many of the folktale elements fall into a coherent structure. At the same time, much of the saga goes back to the earliest stages of Greek mythology, not excepting Medea, whose status as the granddaughter of the Sun must once have been more important than her functions as a magician. By far the most powerful interpretation of her part in the saga is the tragedy of Euripides, produced at Athens in 431 B.C. While Euripides concentrates upon the psychology of Medea and explores the tensions in her relations with Jason, he also makes Medea into a quasi-divine being in the final scene, as she leaves in the chariot of the Sun. Medea is older (in terms of the development of the myth) and grander than the romantic heroine of Apollonius and Valerius Flaccus, and more formal than the driven, deserted, and clever heroine of Euripides. She and many of the other leading characters in the saga have attributes that point to elements in the myth that are both earlier and more significant than the quasi-historical tale of adventure that it has become.

ADDITIONAL READING

JASON AND MEDEA IN EURIPIDES

This summary of Euripides' *Medea* with commentary centers on a translation of the three scenes in which Jason and Medea appear together. Euripides begins with one of his typical prologues (cf. the *Hippolytus* and the *Bacchae* in Chapters 10 and 13), with a monologue that provides essential background and sets the

These were the crow's hard words. Mopsos smiled when he heard the divine-sent voice of the bird and said:

'Son of Aison, you go on to the goddess' shrine where you will find the girl. She will be very accommodating to your request, thanks to Kypris who will help you in the challenges, as indeed Phineus, son of Agenor, has already told us. As for us, Argos and myself, we shall not accompany you, but we shall wait in this very spot until you return. You go on alone, beg her, and win her over with subtle words.'

This was his sound advice, and both the others immediately approved it.

START → Despite the games, Medea's spirit could not be distracted to other thoughts. Whatever game she played, none gave her pleasure or kept her amused for long, but she kept breaking off, unable to concentrate. Nor could she keep her eyes fixed on the crowd of maidservants, but constantly she turned her face away and peered into the distance along the paths. Often indeed did her heart within her breast seem to shatter, whenever she was unsure whether what she heard was the rapid sound of a foot or of the wind. Soon, however, he appeared to her as she desired, like Sirius leaping high from Ocean; it rises brilliant and clear to behold, but to flocks it brings terrible misery. Just so did the son of Aison approach her, brilliant to behold, but his appearance roused the sickening weariness of desire. Her heart within her breast dropped, her eyes grew misty, and a hot flush seized her cheeks; she had no strength at all to move her legs, but her feet were held fast beneath her. In the meantime all the maidservants had withdrawn from them. The pair then faced each other, silent, unable to speak, like oaks or tall firs, which at first when there is no wind stand quiet and firmly rooted on the mountains, but afterwards stir in the wind and rustle together ceaselessly. Just so were this pair destined to have much to say under the inspiration of Love's breezes. The son of Aison realized that some divinely-sent affliction was upon her, and with soft words he addressed her as follows:

'Why, maiden, are you so afraid of me, when I am alone? I am not an insolent boaster, as other men are, nor was I when I lived previously in my homeland. My lady, do not be too shy in front of me, either to ask or to say without prompting what is on your mind. Since we have come here with friendly intentions towards each

other, in a holy place, where the gods do not permit sin, speak and question me openly. Do not deceive me with sweet words, now that you have promised your sister to give me the drugs which will provide me with strength. I beseech you, by Hekate herself and your parents and Zeus who holds his hand over guests and suppliants: I have come here, both your suppliant and your guest, forced by necessity to clasp your knees; without you I shall not accomplish the grievous challenge. In return for your help I shall show my gratitude to you in the future, as is right and appropriate for those who live a long way away, by spreading your name and your glorious repute. So also the other heroes will sing your praises on their return to Hellas, as will the heroes' wives and mothers, who now no doubt sit on the sea-shore and mourn for us; it is in your power to scatter their bitter pains. Once upon a time another kindly maiden, Ariadne* daughter of Minos, rescued Theseus from terrible challenges; her mother was Pasiphae, daughter of Helios. When Minos' anger had soothed, she embarked upon Theseus' ship and left her homeland; the very immortals loved her, and as her sign in the middle of the sky a crown of stars, which men call 'Ariadne's Crown', revolves all night long among the heavenly constellations. Thus will the gods show gratitude to you also, if you save so great an expedition of heroic men; and to judge from your appearance I would guess that your character is both gentle and kindly.'

Such were his flattering words. She turned her eyes aside and smiled a heavenly sweet smile; her heart melted as she soared in his praise, and she looked up directly into his face. She did not know what to say first, but she wanted to pour out everything together in one stream. Without hesitation she took the drug from her fragrant breast-band, and his hands grasped it quickly and joyfully. She would have drawn off her whole soul from her chest and granted it to him in the thrill of his need for her; such was the love which flashed its sweet flame from his fair head and snatched the bright sparkle of her eyes. Her senses grew warm and she melted away as the dew of roses fades as it grows warm in the early rays. At one moment they both stared coyly at the ground, at the next they cast glances at each other, smiling with desire, their faces lit up. Finally, the young girl found the strength to address him as follows:

'Listen now to the help I will devise for you. After you have gone

to collect from my father the deadly teeth from the dragon's jaw for sowing, then wait for midnight which divides the night in two. Bathe in the stream of a river which is never still and, alone, without others, dress in dark robes and dig a circular pit. Over it slit the throat of a female sheep and burn it whole, heaping high a pyre on the very edge of the pit. Make appeasement to Hekate, the only-born, daughter of Perses, by pouring in libation from a cup the works of bees in their hives. When you have honoured the goddess in accordance with my instructions, then retreat back from the pyre. Let no footfall or barking of dogs cause you to turn around, lest you ruin everything and do not yourself return to your companions in the condition you should. In the morning soak this drug and anoint your naked body with it, as though it were an unguent. Your body will possess boundless might and great strength, and you will think yourself the equal not of men, but of the immortal gods. What is more, sprinkle your spear, shield and sword with the liquid. Then the spear-points of the earth-born men will not pierce you and the irresistible darting flame of the deadly bulls will not harm you. You will not be like this for long, but only for that one day; nevertheless, do not hold back from the contest, and here is a further good piece of advice which I shall give you. When you have yoked the powerful bulls and with strength and courage ploughed the whole hard field, the crop of earth-born will rise up in the furrows as the dragon's teeth are sown into the dark earth; when many of them have sprung from the field, then without being seen throw a heavy stone among them. Like fierce dogs fighting for food, they will kill each other over the stone; then make straight to join battle with them. If you do this, you will carry the fleece away from Aia back to Hellas, far into the distance; but go wherever you wish, wherever you want to go when you have set sail from here.'

So she spoke and then fixed her eyes in silence on the ground before her feet; warm tears flooded her lovely cheeks as she wept because he was going to travel over the sea, far away from her. She looked up again into his face and addressed pained words to him, grasping his right hand; for shame had now left her eyes:

'If ever you return home safe, remember the name of Medea, as I shall remember you, though you are far away. Please tell me this: Where is your home? When you leave here, where will you cross the

sea in your ship? Will you pass near wealthy Orchomenos or the island of Aiaie? Tell me about the young girl, whom you called the glorious daughter of Pasiphae, the one who is my father's sister.'

So she spoke, and as the young girl wept, deadly love crept over Jason also, and he replied as follows:

'Neither at night nor during the day do I think I shall ever forget you when I have escaped death, if indeed I escape safe to the Achaian land, and Aietes does not throw some worse challenge in front of me. But if it would please you to learn of my country, I shall tell you; I too am strongly urged by my spirit to this. There is a land surrounded by steep mountains and very rich in sheep and cattle; there Prometheus son of Iapetos fathered noble Deukalion who first built cities and constructed shrines to the immortals, and first ruled over men.* The people of the area call this land Haimonia.* In it is Iolkos, my city, and there too are many other cities, and no one there has even heard the name of the island of Aiaie. Moreover the story is that Minyas*—Minyas of the family of Aiolos—set out from there and founded the city of Orchomenos which borders the Kadmeians. But why should I tell you all these empty stories, of my home and far-famed Ariadne, daughter of Minos? This is the brilliant name by which that lovely maiden of whom you asked me was called. As Minos then reached agreement with Theseus about her, so I would wish that your father would come to terms with me.'

So he spoke, seeking to calm her with his gentle words. But the most terrible pains gripped her heart, and in her grief she addressed him sorrowfully:

'In Hellas, no doubt, honouring agreements is a fine thing; but among men Aietes is not as you describe Minos, Pasiphae's husband, nor am I the equal of Ariadne. Therefore do not speak of friendly hospitality. Only, when you reach Iolkos, remember me, and I—despite my parents—will remember you. From far away may a rumour or a message-bearing bird reach me when you forget me; or may swift gusts of wind snatch me up and carry me over the sea to Iolkos so that I may reproach you to your face and remind you of how it was thanks to me that you escaped. On that day may I appear an unexpected guest at the hearth of your palace!'

Thus she spoke as piteous tears poured down over her cheeks. He then broke in and addressed her:

'Leave those gusts flapping aimlessly, my poor friend, and your message-bearing bird as well—your talk is as idle as the wind. If you reach that area and the land of Hellas, you will be honoured and respected among women and men; they will pay court to you reverently like a god, because it was thanks to you that their sons returned home safe, and their brothers, kinsmen, and husbands in their prime were saved from disaster. In our lawful marriage-chamber you shall share my bed, and nothing will separate us in our love until the appointed death enshrouds us.'

So he spoke. Her spirit within was flooded at his words, but she shuddered to contemplate the terrible things she had done. Poor girl! Not for long would she refuse to live in Hellas! So was Hera planning, that Medea of Aia should abandon her native land and reach holy Iolkos to bring disaster upon Pelias.

Already the maidservants were glancing at them from a distance in silent suffering; very soon it would be past the time when the young girl would have to return home to her mother. But she would not yet have had any thought of return, for her spirit took delight in his beauty and winning speech, had not the son of Aison prudently broken the silence:

'It is time to depart, lest the sun go down first and some outsider get to know of everything; on another occasion we shall come here to meet each other.'

This then was the limit to which they probed each other with gentle words; after this they separated. Jason went off rejoicing to his companions and his ship, and Medea returned to her maidservants. They all came up close to meet her, but she did not see their approach, for her soul was flying aloft amidst the clouds. By themselves her feet mounted the swift wagon; with one hand she grasped the reins, and with the other the ornate whip for driving the mules, which set off in haste towards the city and the palace. When she returned, Chalkiope, distraught for her sons, questioned her; but the helpless Medea, her emotions awhirl, neither heard what was said nor had the will to reply to her questions. She sat on a low stool at the foot of her bed, resting her cheek to one side on her left hand; behind her eyelids her eyes were moist, as she pondered in what an evil deed she had chosen to share.

When the son of Aison had rejoined his companions in the spot

where he had left them, they set off to return to the main group of heroes, and he gave them a full account. Together they arrived at the ship, and when the others saw them they greeted and questioned them. Jason told them all of the young girl's schemes and showed them the powerful drug; alone of the companions only Idas sat apart, biting back his anger. Happily and quietly the others took their ease for the moment, because night's darkness prevented further action. At dawn, however, they sent to Aietes to request the seed; two men went, the warrior Telamon, and with him Aithalides, glorious son of Hermes. Their expedition was not fruitless: on their arrival King Aietes gave them the terrible teeth of the Aonian dragon* with which the contest was to be accomplished. At Ogygian Thebes the dragon, guardian of the spring of Ares, had been killed by Kadmos* when he came in search of Europa; there too Kadmos settled, having been guided by the cow which the oracle of Apollo had revealed to him to lead his journey. The Tritonian goddess knocked the teeth from the dragon's jaws and divided them equally between Aietes and the dragon's slayer himself. Kadmos son of Agenor sowed his teeth in the plains of Aonia and settled there a race born from the earth, all those who had been spared by the spear in the harvest of Ares. The others Aietes then gave willingly to the Greeks to take to the ship, since he did not imagine that Jason would bring the challenge to completion, even if he managed to yoke the bulls.

In the distance the sun was sinking beneath the dark earth, beyond the furthest peaks of the western Aithiopians, and night was placing the yoke upon her horses; besides the ship's ropes the heroes prepared their beds. Not Jason, however. As soon as the bright stars of Helike, the Bear, had slipped down, and the air was perfectly still through the heavens, he went to an empty place, like a furtive thief, with everything he needed, which he had prepared in advance during the day. Argos had fetched him a ewe and milk taken from a flock, but the rest he took from the ship itself. When he found a place set apart from men's paths, open to the skies in the midst of pure water-meadows, he first of all bathed his tender body in the holy river as ritual demanded, and then dressed in the dark robe which Lemnian Hypsipyle once gave to him, to remind him of their sweet love-making. After this he dug a trench a cubit long in the earth and

made a heap of cut wood; then he slit the sheep's throat over the pit and stretched its body over the fire in accordance with the rite. He lit the wood by putting in fire at the bottom, and poured out over it a mingled libation, calling upon Brimo Hekate to assist him in the contest. Having summoned her, he retreated. Hearing the call, the dread goddess came from the furthest depths to accept the sacrifices of the son of Aison. Around her head was a garland of terrible snakes entwined with oak-branches, and her torches flashed out a blinding brightness; all around her was the piercing bark of hellish dogs. All the fields trembled at her approach; the marsh-dwelling nymphs of the river who dance around that meadow of the Amarantian Phasis screamed aloud. The son of Aison was seized by fear, but even so he did not turn around as his feet carried him back to find his companions; already early-born Dawn was scattering her light as she rose above the snowy Caucasus.

Around his chest Aietes had put on a stiff breastplate which Ares had given to him after killing Phlegraian Mimas* with his own hands. On his head he placed a golden helmet, four-bolted; its gleam was like the encircling brilliance of Helios when he first rises from Ocean. Aloft he brandished his shield many hides thick; aloft too his terrible spear, irresistible—none of the heroic men could have withstood it, once they had left Herakles far behind, who alone could have clashed with him in battle. Phaethon brought up his father's sturdy chariot and swift horses so that he could mount; he stepped up, took the reins in his hands, and drove out of the city along the broad wagon-path towards the contest; with them went a great crowd of his people. In the manner of Poseidon* when he proceeds in his chariot to the Isthmian Games, or to Tainaron, or to the water at Lerna, for indeed the grove of Hyantian Onchestos—and often indeed he processes with his horses to Kalaureia, and Haimonian Petra—or woody Geraistos. Like this was the sight of Aietes, leader of the Colchians, as he went on his way.

In the meantime Jason had followed Medea's instructions. He soaked the drug and sprinkled it over his shield and his stout spear and all around the sword. His comrades tested the weapons with violence, but they were unable to bend that spear even a little; unbroken as before, it remained firm in their strong hands. The anger of Idas, son of Aphareus, had not abated, and he beat at the

end of the spear with his great sword, but the sword-edge bounced back like a hammer from an anvil. The heroes all gave shouts of joy in their confidence of success in the contest. Then Jason sprinkled the drug over himself: a mighty force entered him, inexpressible, without fear, and his two arms moved freely as they swelled with bursting strength. As a war-horse, longing for the fray, paws the ground prancing and neighing, its neck held up proudly and its ears forward, just so did the son of Aison exult in the strength of his limbs. This way and that he sprang through the air, shaking in his hands the bronze shield and ash-spear. You would say that storm-lightning was darting down through the dark sky as it flashed in patterns again and again out of clouds destined to bring the blackest rain-storm. Not for long were the Argonauts to refrain from the contest. They quickly took their proper places on the benches and hastened towards the plain of Ares. It was opposite the city, further up-river by the same distance as the winning-post which a chariot must reach is from the starting-gate, whenever the kinsmen of a king who has died hold games for runners and horsemen. There they found Aietes and all the massed Colchians, the latter standing on the Caucasian heights, while the king paced about along the bank of the river.

As his companions secured the ropes, the son of Aison was already on his way to the contest, armed with spear and shield; he had leapt from the ship, taking with him both the brilliantly gleaming bronze helmet full of sharp teeth and his sword strapped around his shoulders. His body was naked, and in different ways he resembled both Ares and Apollo of the golden sword. Looking around the ploughland, he saw the bronze yoke for the bulls and next to it the plough of tough adamant, all in a single piece. He drew close to them and stuck his mighty lance into the ground by its pointed end and put down the helmet to rest against it. Carrying only his shield he advanced further, following the countless tracks of the bulls. They have some hidden lair in the earth, where their strong pens are thick with murky smoke; from there, they both rushed forth together, exhaling glowing fire. Fear seized the heroes at the sight, but Jason planted his feet firmly apart and withstood their charge as a rough rock in the sea withstands the waves whipped up by ceaseless storms. He held his shield in front of him to block their

path; they snorted and crashed with their great horns against the shield, but their charge could not at all lift it into the air. As when the tough leather bellows of blacksmiths penetrate the pierced furnaces and cause sparks to dash out as they stoke the deadly fire, but then rest from their blowing and the fire crackles fiercely as it leaps up from below, just so was the noise as fiery flame flashed forth from the bulls' mouths, and burning heat enveloped Jason, striking him like the lightning bolt; but the maiden's drugs protected him.

He grabbed the right-hand bull by the end of its horn and, using all his mighty strength, dragged it over to the bronze yoke; he then brought it to its knees with a swift kick against its bronze hoof. In the same way he brought the other one down on to its haunches with a single, quick strike. He threw away his broad shield and, with his feet firmly planted right and left, he held both bulls down, one on each side of him, their front knees pressed into the ground, while he bent straight ahead through the flames. Aietes was amazed at the man's strength. Meanwhile, as had been arranged long in advance, the sons of Tyndareos came up to him, lifted the yoke from the ground and gave it to him to throw on the bulls. He bound it tightly on their necks, and then raising up the yoke-pole he placed it between the bulls and attached it to the yoke by means of its sharp end. The other two then retreated out of the fire back to the ship. Jason however recovered his shield and put it on his back; he then grasped hold of the stout helmet, which contained the sharp teeth, and his irresistible spear, with which he pricked the centre of the bulls' flanks, as a labourer uses a Pelasgian goad.* With a firm hand he guided the handle which had been fashioned from adamant and joined securely to the plough.

At first the bulls showed their savage anger by exhaling a fierce blast of glowing fire; their breath rose like the groan of buffeting winds which cause terrified sailors to take in the great sail. Not long afterwards, however, the bulls set off under the constraint of the spear. Behind them, the hard field broke up as it was split by the combined efforts of the mighty bulls and the strong ploughman. Along the furrows made by the plough great fragments of earth, as large as a man could carry, broke off with a terrible rasping. Jason followed behind, his powerful foot pressed down on the end of the ploughshare.* He scattered the teeth into the freshly ploughed land

well away from himself, constantly turning around to make sure that the deadly crop of the earth-born did not attack him before he was ready. In front of him the bulls pressed their bronze hooves into the earth as they struggled. At the time when only the third part of the day which began at dawn is left, and exhausted labourers call for the swift arrival of the sweet hour at which they can release the oxen, then the field had been ploughed by the tireless ploughman, though it was four measures great, and the bulls were released from the plough. He shooed them away so they could escape over the plain, and went back to the ship, as he saw that the furrows were still empty of the earth-born warriors. His comrades gathered round to encourage him. With his helmet he then drew water from the flowing river to quench his thirst; he flexed his knees to keep them supple and filled his great heart with martial spirit. He was eager for the fray, like a wild boar which sharpens its tusks against men who hunt it and streams of foam flow to the ground from its angry mouth.

The earth-born were now springing up all over the ploughed field. The enclosure of Ares the man-destroyer bristled with stout shields and sharpened spears and shining helmets; the gleam flashed through the air, reaching all the way from the earth to Olympos. As when, after a heavy snowfall, wind gusts suddenly scatter the wintry clouds in the gloom of night, and all the stars of heaven shine brilliantly in the darkness; just so did the earth-born shine as they rose from the earth. Jason remembered the advice of crafty Medea: he picked up from the plain a great round rock, a terrible disc of Ares Enyalios—four strong men would not have been able to lift it even an inch from the ground—but he took it up easily and, darting forward, hurled it a great distance into their midst. Then he stealthily crouched down behind his shield, confident in the outcome. The Colchians gave a great roar, like the roar of the sea as it thunders against sharp rocks; but Aietes was struck dumb in amazement at how the great disc had been thrown. Like fierce dogs the earth-born leapt upon it and destroyed each other with a terrible screaming. Under their own spears they fell to earth, their mother, like pines or oaks which have been shaken loose by wind squalls. As a fiery star quivers upward in the heaven trailing a furrow of light behind it—a wondrous sign to men who see it shoot through the dark air with a brilliant gleam—just so did the son of Aison rush

upon the earth-born, wielding the naked sword-blade which he had drawn from his sheath.

He cut them down wherever he met them. Many had risen into the air only as far as the stomach and the side—half of them still hidden in the earth*—others had reached the knees, others had just got to their feet and others still were already running to the battle. As when there is war between neighbouring peoples and a farmer fears that the enemy will ravage his fields before the harvest: he snatches up his well-curved sickle which has just been sharpened and hurriedly cuts the crop before it is fully ripe, not waiting until harvest-time for it to be dried by the rays of the sun; just so did Jason cut the crop of the earth-born. The furrows were filled with blood as irrigation-channels fill with streams from a well. The earth-born fell, some face-first, their teeth biting the broken earth, others on their backs, others resting on their arms and sides, looking like beached sea-monsters. Many were struck before they had lifted their feet clear of the earth and that part of them which had reached the upper air lay on the ground, sinking under the weight of their soft heads. It is no doubt like this when a fierce storm from Zeus causes young shoots in the vineyard to bend to the ground, broken at the roots. The labour of the farm-workers is wasted, and the farmer who owns the land is seized by despair and bitter grief. Just so then did grievous pain grip King Aietes' mind; he went back to the city accompanied by the Colchians, plotting how he might thwart them with all speed. Nightfall came, and Jason's task was at an end.

BOOK 4

You yourself, goddess, tell of the suffering and thoughts of the Colchian girl, you Muse, child of Zeus; within me my mind whirls in silent helplessness, as I ponder whether I should call it the mad, sickening burden of desire or a shameful panic which caused her to abandon the tribes of the Colchians.

Together with the leading men of the people Aietes spent all night in his palace devising treachery which would bring certain death to the Argonauts; his heart raged with anger at the outcome of the hated contest, and he did not for a moment imagine that it had been accomplished without his daughters' help. Into Medea's heart, however, Hera cast most grievous fear: she took fright like a gentle fawn which has been startled in the thickets of a deep wood by the baying of dogs. All of a sudden she was sure that her assistance was no secret and that at any moment she would meet utter destruction. She was scared of what her servants knew. Fire filled her eyes, and in her ears was a terrible roaring; often she felt her throat, often she screamed in pain and lamentation, pulling her hair out by its roots. There and then the young girl would have killed herself with poisons, before her due time and bringing Hera's plans to naught; had not the goddess made her decide to flee in terror with Phrixos' sons. In her chest her fluttering heart was calmed and, changing her plans, she emptied out the whole casket of drugs and placed them all in the folds of her dress. She kissed her bed and both sides of the double door to her chamber, and ran her hand over the walls; she cut off a long lock of her hair, and left it in her room for her mother as a memorial of her virginity. In a voice of grief she lamented:

'As I go I leave you this flowing lock, mother, to take my place. Farewell—this is my wish as I depart on a very distant journey; farewell, Chalkiope and all my home! Stranger, would that the sea had torn you in pieces before you reached the Colchian land!'

So she spoke, and tears poured down from her eyes. Like a young girl, recently separated by fate from her homeland, who was torn* as a prisoner from a rich house and who has not yet tasted wearying labour, but unused to wretchedness and the work of slaves, she goes

in terror into the harsh control of a mistress; this was how the lovely girl rushed from her home. The door-bolts yielded to her of their own accord: they sprang back at the rapid sound of her magic incantations. On naked feet she ran through the narrow streets; with her left hand she held up her robe above her eyes to conceal her forehead and lovely cheeks, and with her right she lifted the hem of her tunic off the ground. Swiftly she passed in terror out of the walls of the broad city by a lonely path; none of the guards recognized her and she escaped unseen. She intended to make straight for the ship; she knew the roads well, as often in past days she had roamed in search of corpses and poisonous roots in the earth, as women who work in drugs do. Her heart trembled and quaked with fear. The daughter of Titan, the goddess Moon, was just rising from the horizon and saw her in her mad haste; she rejoiced with malicious pleasure as she reflected to herself:

'I'm not the only one then to skulk off to the Latmian cave, nor is it only I who burn with desire for fair Endymion.* Ah! How many times have your treacherous incantations caused me to hide when my mind was full of love, so that in the gloom of night and without disturbance you could work with your drugs in the way that brings you pleasure. But now you yourself, it would seem, are a victim of a madness like mine; a cruel god has given you Jason to cause you grief and pain. Be off then and for all your cleverness learn to put up with a misery that will bring you much lamentation.'

So she spoke, but Medea's feet carried her on quickly in her haste. With relief she climbed the rising banks of the river when she saw opposite the glow of the fire which the heroes kept burning all night long as they celebrated the outcome of the contest. In a shrill voice she called loudly through the darkness from her side of the river to Phrontis, Phrixos' youngest son. He and his brothers, together with the son of Aison himself, realized that it was the maiden's voice; their companions were struck with silent amazement when they understood the full truth of the matter. Three times she cried out, and three times Phrontis shouted back at the urging of the group; in the meantime the heroes rowed quickly in her direction. They had not yet cast the ropes from the ship to the opposite bank when Jason leapt swiftly on to the dry land from high on the deck; after him Phrontis and Argos, two of the sons of Phrixos, also jumped to the

ground. With both arms she embraced their knees and said to them:

'Friends, save me in my wretchedness, and save yourselves too from Aietes! Everything that we did is in the open—the situation cannot be salvaged! Let us flee on the ship before he has the chance to mount his swift horses. I shall give you the golden fleece by putting to sleep the dragon which guards it. You, stranger, before your companions here call the gods to witness the undertakings which you gave me, and once I have travelled far from my home here do not turn me into an object of scorn and disgrace because I have no one to protect me!'

So she spoke in her grief, and the son of Aison's heart rejoiced greatly. He gently raised her from where she had fallen to embrace his knees and spoke to her with warm words of encouragement:

'Dear girl, may Olympian Zeus himself, and Hera goddess of marriage, who shares Zeus' bed, witness my oath that I shall make you my lawful wedded wife in my home, when we return safely to the land of Hellas.'

With these words he straightaway took her right hand in his. She bade them row their swift ship without delay to the sacred grove, so that they could thwart Aietes by spiriting the fleece away while it was still night. They hastened to carry out her instructions as soon as they had been spoken. They embarked at once and pushed the ship away from the land; there was a great din as the heroes went with all speed at their oars. Medea rushed back and stretched her hands out towards the land in helpless despair, but Jason spoke to her encouragingly and supported her in her distress.

At the time when huntsmen shake the sleep from their eyes—huntsmen who trust in their dogs and never sleep all through the night so that the light of dawn should not wipe away the tracks of the animals and their scent, as it strikes the ground with its bright rays—at that time the son of Aison and the maiden stepped from the ship on to the grassy spot called 'the Ram's Bed', where the ram first bent its weary knees after the journey with the Minyan son of Athamas on its back. Near there was the smoke-blackened base of the altar which Phrixos of the race of Aiolos had once established to Zeus Phyxios* when he sacrificed that marvel covered in gold, as he had been instructed by the kindly words of Hermes who came to

meet him. It was there that Argos advised the heroes to deliver Jason and Medea. They followed a path in the direction of the sacred grove, looking for the huge oak on to which the fleece had been thrown, like a cloud which blushes red in the flaming rays of the rising sun. Directly in front of them the dragon stretched out its vast neck when its sharp eyes which never sleep spotted their approach, and its awful hissing resounded around the long reaches of the river-bank and the broad grove. It was heard by those who dwelled in that part of the Colchian land which lies very far from Titan Aia, beside the streams of the Lykos; this river breaks off from the crashing Araxes and unites its sacred stream with that of the Phasis to flow as one into the Caucasian sea. Women who had just given birth woke in terror, and in panic threw their arms around the infant children who slept in their arms and shivered at the hissing. As when vast, murky whirls of smoke roll above a forest which is burning, and a never-ending stream spirals upwards from the ground, one quickly taking the place of another, so then did that monster uncurl its vast coils which were covered with hard, dry scales. As it rolled towards them, the maiden fixed it in the eye* and called in a lovely voice upon Sleep, the helper, the highest of the gods, to bewitch the beast; she invoked too the queen, the night-wanderer, the infernal, the kindly one,* to grant success to their enterprise. Behind her followed the son of Aison, terrified. Already under the spell of the song the dragon was relaxing the ridge of its earth-born coils, and it stretched out its numberless spirals, as when a black wave rolls weak and noiseless on a gentle sea. Even so, however, it lifted high its terrible head, seeking to enwrap them both in its deadly jaws. With a fresh-cut sprig of juniper which had been dipped in a potion, Medea sprinkled powerful drugs over its eyes while she sang, and all around sleep was spread by the overwhelming scent of the drug. Just where it was, its jaw dropped to the earth and far into the distance its countless spirals were stretched out through the thick wood.

Then Jason removed the golden fleece from the oak at the maiden's instruction. She stayed where she was, rubbing the beast's head with the drug, until Jason gave the order to turn back towards the ship, and they left the deep-shaded grove of Ares. As when a young girl catches in her fine dress the gleam of the full moon

hanging high over her bedroom under the roof, and her heart is delighted at the sight of the lovely radiance; just so then did Jason rejoice as he lifted the great fleece in his hands, and over his fair cheeks and forehead the sparkle of the wool threw a blush like flame. It was the size of the skin of a yearling heifer or one of the deer which huntsmen call 'achaiineai',* golden all over, and heavy with its thick covering of fine fleece. As he walked, the ground in front of his feet sparkled brilliantly. Sometimes he carried it draped over his left shoulder, and it reached all the way from the top of his neck to his feet; sometimes he rolled it up and stroked it in his hands, very fearful lest some man or god would cross his path and take it away.

Dawn was spreading over the earth as they rejoined the group. The young men stared in wonder at the great fleece which shone like Zeus' lightning. Everyone approached in his eagerness to touch it and hold it in his hands; but the son of Aison restrained them and threw a freshly woven robe over the fleece. He lifted up the young girl and settled her at the stern of the ship, and then addressed them all as follows:

'No longer hold back, my friends, from the return to your homeland: the object for which we undertook this terrible voyage and for which we laboured and suffered has been successfully accomplished by the maiden's skills. With her consent I shall take her home to be my lawful wife. She has brought noble aid to all of Achaia and to you yourselves: keep her safe! Aietes, I imagine, will come with a great force to prevent us reaching the sea from the river. Therefore each second man through the length of the ship should stay on his bench and ply the oars, while the others protect our return by holding out their ox-hide shields as a powerful barrier against enemy missiles. Now we have in our hands the fate of our children, our dear country, and our aged parents; upon our success rests whether Hellas will reap despair or great glory!

With these words he put about himself the weapons of war, and the others gave a great shout of eagerness. Jason drew his sword from its sheath and cut the ropes at the ship's stern. Clad in his armour he took his place near the maiden, beside Ankaïos, the steersman. The ship raced forward in the men's haste to row out of the river without delay.

Medea's love and what she had done was already fully known to

proud Aietes and all the Colchians. They gathered under arms in their meeting-place, as numberless as the waves of the sea, raised high by a winter wind or the leaves in a dense forest which drop to the ground in the month when the trees are stripped—who could count them? Like this were the vast hordes who thronged the river banks yelling with enthusiasm for the fray. On his finely wrought chariot Aietes was resplendent with the horses which Helios had given him; they ran like the blasts of the wind. In his left hand he raised up his circling shield, in the other a huge torch, and beside him lay his mighty spear, pointed forward. Apsyrtos held the chariot-reins in his hands. Already, however, the ship was cutting through the open sea in front of it, driven forward by the strength of the rowers and the current of the great river as it swept down to its mouth. In his grievous distress the king raised his arms to Helios and Zeus, and called them to witness the wrongs he had suffered. He shouted terrible threats against his whole people: if they did not bring back his daughter there and then, finding her either on land or still in the boat on the swell of the open sea, so that he could sate his anger which demanded revenge for all that had happened, they would take the full weight of his rage and distress on their heads and be taught a lesson.

So spoke Aietes. On that same day the Colchians drew down their ships, placed the equipment on board, and on that same day they put out to sea. You would have said it was a huge family of birds whirring over the sea in flocks rather than a vast naval expedition.

The goddess Hera caused the wind to blow strongly so that Aiaian Medea should reach the Pelasgian land with all speed, to bring disaster upon the house of Pelias. On the third morning they tied their stern-cables to the Paphlagonian shore at the mouth of the river Halys, for Medea had told them to disembark and offer propitiatory sacrifices to Hekate. All that was done as the maiden prepared the sacrifice—let no one know, may my heart not urge me to sing of it!—I forbear from telling. From that day, however, the shrine which the heroes built to the goddess on the shore stands still visible to later generations. In that spot Jason and all the other heroes recalled that Phineus had said that they would follow a different route on the way back from Aia, but no one had any idea what it was. Argos, however, responded to their need:

'Our destination was Orchomenos, by the route which that truthful prophet whom you recently encountered warned you to travel. For there is another way for ships, which the priests of the immortals who were born of Thebe, daughter of Triton,* discovered. Not yet did all the constellations whirl around the heaven, not yet could enquirers learn of the sacred race of the Danaans. Only the Apidanean Arkadians* existed, Arkadians, who are said to have lived even before the moon, eating acorns in the mountains. At that time the Pelasgian land was not ruled over by the glorious descendants of Deukalion; Egypt, mother of the men of earlier times, was called Eeria,* rich in crops, and Triton* was the name of the broad-flowing river by which the whole of Eeria is watered—as heavy rain from Zeus never drenches it—and whose streams cause crops to shoot up in the fields. The story is that a man* set out from there to travel through the whole of Europe and Asia, trusting in the might, strength, and boldness of his armies. In the course of his progress he founded numberless cities, some of which are still inhabited, and some not, for long ages have passed since then. Aia at least remains intact even to this day, together with the descendants of those men whom this conquerer settled in Aia. Moreover, they preserve writings of their ancestors, pillars on which are shown all the paths and boundaries of the sea and the land for those who are going to travel in a circuit. There is a river, the remotest branch of Ocean, broad and very deep and navigable by a merchant ship; men who have traced it a great distance call it the Istros.* For a long space it cuts its path as a single river through a vast territory, for its sources bubble up far away in the Rhipaian mountains beyond the blast of Boreas, but when it reaches the boundaries of the Thracians and the Scythians, it splits in two: one stream empties here into the eastern sea; but behind it the other branch flows through the deep gulf which rises up from the Trinakrian sea which lies along your land, if indeed it is true that the Acheloos comes forth in your land.*

So he spoke, and the goddess granted them a favourable omen; at the sight of it all shouted in approval that they should take this path. Out in front of them a furrow of radiant light in the heavens marked the path they must take. They left Lykos' son there and joyfully sailed across the sea with billowing sail, their eyes fixed on the

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