

The Story of Jason: Myth in Present Day

Of all the myths we have read in class up to this point, the myth that I feel most relevant to the present day is the story of Jason. It can be broken down into two tales: the journey of the Argonauts and the tragedy of Medeia. What sets Jason apart and makes his story relatable is that he is a pure human rather than demigods like Herakles, Theseus, or Perseus. This fact makes Jason more akin to modern human beings. Jason doesn't possess superhuman abilities; instead, he must gather a team of heroes for his quest. His choices are not solely dictated by divine figures or genealogy, but mostly stem from his own willpower. This aspect of Jason's character, notably his decision to abandon his wife Medeia, leads to a dismal outcome, showcasing the complexities of human nature, which is also seen in modern human beings.

Unlike Herakles, who used his immense strength in battles such as the Gigantomachy (Apollodorus D1), Jason lacks such prowess. While Herakles could accomplish his labors alone, Jason requires the help of the greatest heroes before the Trojan War to secure the Fleece. Additionally, his wife Medeia's cunning plays a crucial role in obtaining the Fleece (Buxton, pp. 110-112). Along the way, Jason also receives aid from the gods, such as the creation of the ship Argo, which is constructed from the oak tree of Zeus' oracle at Dodona (Buxton, pp. 109). This notion resonates with our modern understanding that individual efforts, while valuable, often encounter limitations. In today's complex world, achieving success frequently demands collaboration and the fortuitous alignment of external factors. Just as Jason, despite his determination and leadership, couldn't achieve his quest for the Golden Fleece alone, many real-world endeavors rely on teamwork, pooling diverse talents and perspectives for comprehensive solutions. Similarly, the idea that Jason received help from the gods during his journey reflects how in contemporary times, success sometimes hinges on unexpected assistance or opportunities that arise outside of human control—what we might attribute to luck or being in the right place at the right time. This parallel underscores the reality that while individual effort is significant, collective contributions and favorable circumstances often play pivotal roles in achieving substantial goals.

Another aspect relevant to our modern world is Jason's autonomy in decision-making, unswayed by lineage or divine intervention. Theseus, whose actions align with his Poseidon lineage,

driving him to abduct women. He famously kidnaps Helen (Lucian 12), seduces Ariadne (Apollodorus N5), carries off Antiope and Phaidra (Apollodorus N7). Jason, being purely mortal, isn't driven by such influences. Throughout his journey, Jason isn't directly manipulated by any god; his quest is driven by the circumstances rather than divine manipulation. While Hera drove Herakles to tragic madness resulting in the death of his wife Megara (Apollodorus K2), Jason's connection with the divine took a different turn. Unlike Herakles, Jason wasn't coerced into his quest by a god's manipulation. His journey wasn't imposed upon him by divine forces but rather arose from the necessity of the situation. In contrast to Herakles' unfortunate fate, Jason's interaction with Hera involved assistance rather than dictation (Apollodorus G1). This reflects how today, our choices aren't just shaped by genetics or external forces. Our individual decisions play a crucial role in guiding our actions, indicating that while these influences exist, we ultimately have the power to make choices based on our own judgment.

Most importantly, Jason embodies the intricate facets of human nature, simultaneously a hero and a deeply flawed individual. As the leader of the Argonauts, he displays heroic qualities, bearing immense responsibility and undertaking a monumental mission. Originally the quest of the Argonauts was seen as a way to retain orders, as Buxton noted "Jason's quest for the Golden Fleece originated, like several other mythical quests, in a crisis of destabilization, which the quest was designed to rectify." (Buxton, pp.108). Jason's leadership skills shine as he guides the greatest heroes. However, his betrayal of Medea, despite her immense sacrifices, showcases his darker side. Her efforts to aid Jason—betraying her father and eliminating his enemies—all come to naught when Jason decides to marry Glauce, daughter of the king of Corinth (Apollodorus G3, G4, G5). As it happened, Jason couldn't ultimately accept a wife from a foreign land, despite all that she had sacrificed and accomplished for him (Hyginus 25). This duality, where individuals exhibit both heroic attributes and moral shortcomings, serves as a poignant reflection of the intricate and multifaceted nature of humanity. It signifies the inherent complexity within us, illustrating how people are capable of embodying admirable traits while also facing moments of ethical frailty or shortcomings. This inherent duality underscores the reality that human beings are not simply defined by their virtues or failings but exist within a spectrum of behaviors, often navigating between acts of valor and instances of moral ambiguity or imperfection.

In comparison to the more romanticized tales of Herakles, Theseus, and Perseus, Jason's story feels grounded in reality. Lacking supernatural abilities, he relies on teamwork and navigates decisions based on his environment and judgment. He embodies the complexities of human nature, displaying both heroic and flawed traits, akin to people today. Jason's purely human nature intriguingly reflects a parallel between him and humanity, making his story incredibly relevant to the present day.

References:

Apollodorus D1, G1, G3, G4, G5, K2, N5, N7

Buxton pp108-112

Hyginus 25

Lucian 12