

Much recent scholarship on Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica* has focused on how Valerius' portrayal of the Argonautic mission and its heroes diverges from that of Apollonius Rhodius. Valerius' poem, in contrast to Apollonius', appears to be largely "ameliorative" (Feeney 1991, Herskowitz 1998): while Apollonius provides us with a rather cynical view of the myth, Valerius embarks on a mission to rehabilitate the heroism of the mission itself and its leader (Adamietz 1967, Hull, 1975). In this paper I examine one aspect of Valerius' recuperative program: his remodeling of the relationship between Jason and Hercules. Whereas Apollonius pits the two figures against one another, Valerius molds Jason to fit the Herculean standard.

My discussion centers primarily on Valerius' use and conception of the term *labor*. Though *labor* is an often-used word in Latin epic, Valerius seizes upon the term's obvious connection to Hercules. He invokes Hercules as the paradigm of achievement through *labor* and casts the Argonauts' quest as a series of *labores* which are reminiscent of Hercules' heroic feats. For instance, the Argonauts' passage through the Symplegades is described as a *labor* (4.638), and their relief at accomplishing such a feat is compared to the relief Hercules felt after successfully returning from the underworld (4.699-72). Valerius uses internal verbal parallels to liken the Argonaut's rescue of Phineus from the Harpies to Hercules' rescue of Prometheus (4.63-4, 4.460; 4.79, 4.67-8, 4.450, 4.492), and Jason's wartime activities in Colchis (included, in part, to bolster Jason's heroism) are construed as *labores* (5.542, 5.617, 5.688). Valerius similarly treats the series of toils that Jason must overcome to gain the fleece as heroic, Herculean labors (7.73, 8.117): the serpent who guards the fleece is called a "hydra" (7.76) and once Jason has obtained the fleece, Valerius explicitly likens him to a triumphant Hercules (8.125-6).

For Valerius, *labor* is not only important as a means of patterning Jason after Hercules, but it is also instrumental in connecting both heroes to the poem's larger, Jovian mission. In a new era whose ruler, in a fashion quite reminiscent of Vergil's Jove in *Georgics* 1, rejects Saturnian *otium* (1.500), the Argonauts provide positive *exempla* of achievement through *labor*. Moreover, just as Jove's labors (1.564) put him in control of the heavens and Hercules himself is immortalized as a reward for his labors, the Argo and several of its heroes will also achieve this goal (1.4, 1.99, 5.294-5). In opposition to authors who suggest that the Argo's voyage is a negative event in mythic history (e.g., Cat. 64, Sen. *Medea* 301-79, Hor. *Carm.* 1.3, etc.), Valerius forcefully asserts otherwise: as Hercules and Jason show, in the new Jovian order, it is through heroic *labor* that one demonstrates true heroism and reaps its rewards.