HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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Apollonius of Rhodes (First half of third Century B.C.)

Apollonius was a scholar and Librarian of the Great Library at Alexandria. Though few details are known of him, it appears he was born in Egypt, was of prominent family and well educated, and was a student of the poet and Librarian Callimachus, who was his instructor of rhetoric. The post of the Head Librarian at Alexandria was a high honor, conferred by the reigning Ptolemy in Egypt, and Apollonius was well qualified for his adventures in scholarship. It will have to strike the reader, of this ebook, that though we have met fastidious philosophers like Aristotle, law givers like Solon, or historians like Thucydides, it is only here, with the Alexandrian period, that we come on the first Greek scholars, editors and commentators on the Greek cultural past. He wrote the first recorded scholarly monograph on Homer, as well as scholarly commentaries on Archilochus and Hesiod—though these have perished. His major work, however, is the *Agonautica*, an epic about the expedition of Jason to recover the Golden Fleece, and, as it happened, to encounter the sorceress Medea and bring her back to Greece—with tragic results. This work collates themes from Euripides' *Medea* and any number of motifs, characters, and plot developments from Homer's *Iliad*; the result is a new kind of 'Hellenistic epic,' far less primal and universal than Homer, far richer in erudite commentary, academic digressions, and pathological inquiries—as into the psychology of thwarted love. The result is an epic half the size of Homer's, four books and 6,000 lines of dactylic hexameters. In the following passage we see Jason, a new Odysseus as it were, approaching and entering a city in Colchis.

And he went on his way to the city like to a bright star, which maidens, pent up in new-built chambers, behold as it rises above their homes, and through the dark air it charms their eyes with its fair red gleam and the maid rejoices, love-sick for the youth who is far away amid strangers, for whom her parents are keeping her to be his bride; like to that star the hero trod the way to the city. And when they had passed within the gates and the city, the women of the people surged behind them, delighting in the stranger, but he with his eyes fixed on the ground fared straight on, till he reached the glorious palace of Hypsipyle…