

THE EARLIEST JASON. WHAT'S IN A NAME?

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The most important mythical figure associated with the teaching of young heroes in the early Greek literary sources is Chiron the wise and just centaur (cf. *Il.* 11.832). The ancient texts provide us with a number of different hero figures who come under Chiron's tutelage: Achilles, Asclepius, Jason, Medeus (Jason's son by Medea), Aristaeus, Actaeon; and even Heracles (sch. Theocr. 13.9). These individuals come into his care at very early stages in their lives, often as a result of some trauma within the family (like the death of a parent [Asclepius]; or separation of the parents [Achilles]; or fear for the child's safety [Jason]). Chiron then conducts them through the rites of passage in the wild, and teaches them all sorts of skills, some of which are associated with the 'hand' from which he takes his name (*cheir*); archery, lyre-playing, mixing herbs for drugs, healing, etc.¹ The centaur's tutelage of young boys seems to be a very ancient theme in the Greek tradition, judging from Homer's allusions to his teaching of Achilles and Asclepius in the *Iliad* (4.217–19, 11.828–32).² There seems to be an assumption on the poet's part underlying these references that his audience is perfectly familiar with who Chiron is and what he does. Likewise, Chiron's care for Jason and his son Medeus is referred to as early as Hesiod, suggesting that this too is a very ancient story.³

The most important skill of the centaur in the Greek sources, that for which he is generally renowned, is the use of herbs or drugs for healing. There seems to be a certain unease about Chiron in the ancient sources, partly because he has an astonishing capacity to perform great feats with his drugs, and pass them on to his pupils. Whilst Chiron's virtue in his use of drugs is never really in question, he is not able to direct the activities of his pupils after they have left his care. One who goes astray after leaving Chiron is Asclepius, the star student of the centaur in the area of healing. Asclepius has such an ability in his use of drugs that he is able to revive the dead, an act of which the Greek sources have some firm and negative views.⁴ This particular act, and the severe punishment of it by Zeus, are referred to in Hesiod and Pindar, but, rather

interestingly, they are not found in the *Iliad* where Asclepius seems to have been consciously downgraded.⁵ Pindar's *Pythian* 3 is especially concerned with emphasizing Chiron's wonderful powers of healing, but at the same time condemning Asclepius for his attempt to overturn the mortal nature of human existence.

Rather oddly perhaps, given the overall mythical role of his teacher Chiron, and the meaning of his name (Iason = 'healer'), Jason seems to possess no medical or pharmacological knowledge in the ancient literary narratives.⁶ In the extant accounts of Jason's life and his many adventures, the knowledge of drugs belongs to Medea not to Jason. It is she who in her role as a sorceress provides major assistance to Jason in accomplishing his quest.⁷ Indeed in Euripides' *Medea* she describes her part in Jason's Colchian exploits, and claims virtually to have performed the quest herself (note esp. 480–2, 'and I killed . . . the dragon and held up the light of your deliverance').⁸ The play leaves us in no doubt that she has great ability in the use of drugs and magic, often for some quite evil purposes (cf. 285, 384–5, 395 ff., 717–8, 789, 1156 ff., and *passim*).⁹ Jason however is a very different kind of figure, and the emphasis in the play is on his sense of Greekness, and his male political aspirations, all of which are a stark contrast to her foreign female magical skills. On the basis of the extant literary accounts of his quest to Colchis, one could make a case that Jason is not thought of by the Greeks as a healer or an expert in drugs, despite his name and his background with Chiron. An alternative view, one that is argued below, is that it is Jason who may have possessed powers of healing and skills in mixing drugs in the very earliest narratives, but that this aspect of his heroic persona has largely disappeared from our record of him. The earliest Jason is largely lost to us, and the task in what follows is to consider what evidence there is, both in the literary and in the visual sources, that his name does indeed point us to an essential aspect of his heroism.¹⁰

Although he is referred to in the *Iliad* (7.468–71, 21.41, 23.747), and although the story of the Argonautic expedition seems to lie behind the *Odyssey* in various ways (note esp. *Od.* 12.61–72), we learn virtually nothing in Homer of the earliest Jason. Typically, Homer simply alludes to the story of Jason without providing very much in the way of detail. The Iliadic references are focused largely upon Euneus, Jason's son by Hypsipyle. In the first reference we learn that Euneus has helped to supply the Greeks with wine from Lemnos. Jason himself is described as 'shepherd of the people' (*Il.* 7.469; cf. Hesiod, *Theog.* 1000 and *Cat.* 40.1); but there is not much to be inferred from this.¹¹ Later references

to Jason in the poem deal with Euneus' purchase of Lycaon from Achilles (21.40 ff.), and also to a silver mixing-bowl which passed from Thoas (Hypsipyle's father) to Jason to Euneus, and then to Patroclus (23.740 ff.). The reference to Jason in the *Odyssey* is concerned specifically with the Argo's mission through the wandering rocks (Planctae, 12.61). Circe tells Odysseus that he will have to confront these rocks, and that Jason's was the only ship to get through them. Jason was successful she says because of Hera's great love for him (12.72).¹² In this sense therefore Jason's mission to get the fleece is a heroic precedent of Odysseus' quest to get home, and the two quests involve some similar labours. Indeed it has been argued that many of the folktale episodes in *Odyssey* 9–12 are derived from an early *Argonautica*.¹³ Hesiod goes into a little bit more detail in the *Theogony* (992–1002). He refers rather obliquely to Jason's many labours, put upon him by the outrageous Pelias. He also refers to Jason's return and marriage to Medea at Iolcus, and to the birth of a son, Medeus, who is handed over to Chiron to bring up in the mountains. As a consequence of all this we learn that the will of Zeus was accomplished (1002).¹⁴ Similarly, Jason's early life with Chiron is referred to in a fragment of Hesiod's *Catalogue of Women* (40.1–2 M–W). But this simply refers to 'Aeson, who produced a son Jason, shepherd of the people, whom Chiron brought up on wooded Pelion'. The epic poem of Eumelus (fl.c. 730 B.C.), the *Corinthiaca*, must have provided a detailed account of Jason and his quest, and so too the *Naupactia* (of uncertain authorship); but these survive only in fragmentary form.¹⁵ It seems that the *Corinthiaca* was concerned principally with linking Corinth to the Jason story, with Aetes even coming originally from Ephyre/Ephyra (a town which is, or becomes in Eumelus, associated with Corinth).¹⁶ For the most part therefore the literary sources for Jason from the earliest extant period, or what we have of them, tend to allude to his quest in general terms, but provide very little in the way of real detail of the hero's essential attributes.

Inevitably, as a consequence, we are dependent on later literary sources like Pindar, Euripides, and Apollonius of Rhodes to get a more detailed picture of Jason. These sources on the whole present us with very different images of the hero: Pindar's Jason is characterized by his strength and courage; Euripides' Jason is sly and ambitious, a man whose political ambitions have some disastrous consequences both for himself and for those around him; and Apollonius' hero (or anti-hero) is diffident and vulnerable. Jason is clearly one individual whose heroic

character is transformed very significantly through time within the literary tradition. The same can be said of the expedition which he leads to get the golden fleece. This seems to undergo some radical changes throughout the centuries, especially in geographical aspects of the quest and the personnel involved. The various transformations in the story of Jason and his voyage are such that Kirk describes it as ‘an amalgam of diverse elements . . . He (Jason) is clearly not on a level with younger legendary heroes like Agamemnon or Achilles, yet in a sense his diversity is typical of the difficulty in distinguishing older and younger traits in the subjects of heavily elaborated myth complexes’.¹⁷ In light of our evidence therefore it is very likely that the earliest pre-Iliadic Jason was quite a different kind of figure from those of Pindar, Euripides, and Apollonius. Our task in what follows therefore is to try, albeit with only limited evidence at our disposal, to reconstruct the earliest images of the hero.

If, rather magically, we were to discover a lost early literary reference to Jason as a healer of physical wounds, like Achilles or Asclepius in the *Iliad*, we might not be terribly surprised. This particular skill it seems, if the *Iliad* is any guide (4.217–19, 11.828–32), is one of the things with which Chiron’s pupils had a common connection. Moreover it would be in keeping with the meaning of his name, and therefore would fit well with our other evidence. But unfortunately we have no such early literary reference to Jason as a doctor, and so the best we can say is that there is circumstantial evidence, a *prima facie* case, for a medical role (or, as Kirk puts it, ‘His name “Jason”, “Healer”, suggests an originally rather different role’).¹⁸ Certainly the Greeks are quite conscious of the meaning of his name, even if there are no mythical narratives in which he evinces a knowledge of pharmacy *per se*. In Pindar’s *Pythian* 4, which has healing as a central idea, we learn that Jason was taken away from his parents shortly after his birth, and given over to Chiron to bring up. The youngster lived with the centaur and his family for twenty years, and it was Chiron who called him by the name Jason (*Pyth.* 4. 119). We learn nothing from Pindar, nor from anyone else for that matter, of Jason’s early life with Chiron (although there is an intriguing reference uttered by Jason himself to the ‘teaching of Chiron’, 102).¹⁹ *Pythian* 4, like most other ancient sources, is concerned principally with Jason’s adult life: his return to Iolcus (wearing long hair, one sandal, a Magnesian tunic and leopard skin, and bearing two spears, 79 ff.), and his subsequent adventures; his quest to get the golden fleece, his relationship with Medea, and his return with her to Greece. Pindar wrote the poem in 462

B.C. in honour of Arcesilas, ruler of Cyrene, for whom Jason is a mythical model. The poem was probably commissioned by a certain Damophilus who has been exiled and wants to return home. Pindar deals with the question of Damophilus' return to his homeland in metaphorical terms of healing a wound. In this context Arcesilas, the ruler of the city, who has the power to bring Damophilus home, is described as a 'very timely healer' (270), one whom Paean himself (i.e., Apollo the healer) honours.²⁰ Arcesilas should apply a 'soft hand' to the wound's affliction (271).²¹ It is very noteworthy therefore that Jason's name and that of Chiron are the subject of an etymological word-play (Jason / *iatêr* / 'healer', 270; Chiron / *chera* / 'hand', 271).²² Thus Pindar consciously plays upon the notion of Jason as a healer, even if there is no reference to any specific medical wisdom on his part.²³ By fulfilling his quest to get the fleece Jason 'heals' his city's long period of suffering, and rids it of the usurping tyrant Pelias (cf. *Pyth.* 4. 104–15, 156–67).²⁴ He ends the fear within the community which necessitated his exile with Chiron in the first place. Jason therefore is an appropriate mythical *exemplum* for Arcesilas, who can 'heal' the suffering of the young Damophilus by allowing him to return to Cyrene from his enforced exile (it is also worth comparing 293–4, 'but he [Damophilus] prays that having drained completely his devastating illness he may some day see his home').²⁵

As a consequence of *Pythian* 4 we can at least say that in the literary sources Jason is a 'healer' in one sense of the term. Moreover he has much in common with other Greek heroes whose exploits have a major social benefit. Theseus for instance enters into the labyrinth to kill the minotaur, and by successfully doing so causes his city's suffering (the sacrifice of youths and maidens) to come to an end. But Theseus, as far as I am aware, has no knowledge of the use of drugs; and so we may think of him as a 'healer' in the metaphysical sense, like Jason in *Pythian* 4. Other heroes have a healing capacity both in a physical and in a metaphysical sense. Philoctetes is one such hero figure. As early as the *Iliad* Philoctetes is an individual associated with suffering (2.724), referring to his being cast aside with a painful wound on the island of Lemnos. In the Sophoclean play that bears his name the emphasis is on Philoctetes' capacity to cope with suffering (physical pain and isolation), and to bring it to an end. One aspect of this is his basic knowledge of drugs (*Ph.* 40 ff., 649 ff.), a skill which he seems to have acquired during his time on Lemnos. The herb that he uses cannot heal him as such, a fact which is borne out by the violent attack that he has within the play

itself (732 ff.). But at least it does help him to ease the pain from his wound. It is noteworthy in this context that the healing herb and the bow and arrows of Heracles are cited specifically together by Philoctetes as the essential items to be taken on his intended voyage from the island (645 ff.). Philoctetes has a special fate as the final destroyer of Troy using Heracles' bow, and he cannot be deprived of his crucial weapon (a fact stated, appropriately enough, by Heracles himself, 1409 ff.). The destruction of Troy is seen in terms of the ending of suffering, both in a personal sense for Philoctetes himself, and for all the Greeks (note esp. 1329 ff., 1418 ff.). Philoctetes has a personal share in the general healing process that he is fated to bring about. Similarly Pindar points to the fact that Philoctetes ended the suffering of the Greeks at Troy. He destroyed the city of Priam and ended the labours of the Greeks even though he was physically weak (*Pyth.* 1.52–4).²⁶

Likewise the other 'destroyer' of Troy, Homer's Achilles, is a healer both in a physical and in a metaphysical sense. Achilles' knowledge of medicine which he acquired from Chiron's teachings on the use of drugs, is alluded to by Eurypylus (*Il.* 11.828–32).²⁷ Having learnt this skill Achilles passed it on to Patroclus, to whom the wounded Eurypylus appeals for help (*Il.* 11.823 ff.).²⁸ Within the *Iliad* emphasis is also given to Achilles' capacity to sooth his own personal suffering after the taking of Briseis (9.186–9). He does so by means of music, by strumming the lyre and singing of the glorious deeds of men (9.189). Similarly, the central theme of *Iliad* 24 is the capacity of mortals to deal with death and suffering. Achilles has a major role not just in confronting his own grief after the death of Patroclus, but also in dealing with the suffering figure of Priam. One critical aspect of this is his capacity to 'heal' the grief of Priam and the Trojans by offering to hold up the fighting, to allow a full and dignified funeral for Hector (24.656 ff.; cf. 778 ff.). Priam replies to the offer by saying that Achilles would do him a great kindness if he did this (24.661). Thus the poem ends with the completion of the appropriate community ritual, a funeral for Hector, and there is considerable attention paid in the closing lines to the gathering together of all the Trojans (especially in the use of the verb *ageirô* and its cognates, 783, 789, 790, 802). Significantly, it is Achilles who plays the major part in allowing this to take place, as Priam reminds us (24.779–80).²⁹ The Iliadic hero is both destroyer and healer, and these elements are central to his role in the poem. One integral aspect of this is the thematic connection between Achilles and Apollo which has drawn comment in recent times.³⁰ In the final book of the *Iliad* Priam's love and courage,

and Achilles' act of compassion, both help to renew the social order of Troy.

Notions of healing therefore, metaphysical and sometimes physical, are germane to Greek hero myths; and Jason, at least in the metaphysical sense, is no exception to this.³¹ And so his name is in one way a reasonable reflection of his heroic identity. Yet the question inevitably arises as to whether Jason's healing role is limited to the overall benefits that he brings to his community through his heroic achievements, or whether he has a mastery over physical ailments too. It is in this question that the images on vases are most informative. Indeed if one fragmentary image has been correctly interpreted Jason is a healer in a much more tangible way than that with which Pindar is concerned. This image (see Figure 1) is probably more than one hundred years before *Pythian* 4.³² It is a fragment of a Corinthian column-crater dating to about 575 B.C. which has a group of figures interacting with one another in an episode from the Argonautic expedition. At left is the figure of Jason (with a retrograde inscription), nude and bearded wearing a sword on his left-hand side.³³ Phineus the Thracian seer-king is sitting on his throne, and Jason, who is standing behind him, holds his arms up and covers the king's eyes with his hands. Phineus at the same time shakes hands with two other Argonauts, Castor and Pollux. Apart from Jason another three of the figures on the fragment are identified by inscriptions, Phineus, Idaeia (=wife of Phineus), and Pollux. M. Vojatzi has argued that the scene represents the healing by Jason of the blindness of Phineus on the way to Colchis. There is no certainty that this is the case, especially in view of the fragmentary nature of the evidence, but it is an interpretation that seems to have some broad acceptance among scholars working in this area.³⁴ If she is right (and, in light of Phineus' proverbial blindness, it is surely a reasonable inference), it is a remarkable mythic scene because there is certainly no literary account for such a story. The Corinthian fragment seems to point us to a tradition about Jason which has either disappeared from the literature, or else never found its way into it.

Indeed the literary sources for Phineus' blindness give us quite a different picture. Hesiod (fr. 254 M–W) seems to have described the story that Phineus had been blinded because he had shown the way to Phrixus, or otherwise because he had preferred a long life to having sight. There is no surviving statement in Hesiod that Phineus has his sight restored. In Apollonius (2. 178 ff.) Phineus' blindness was the consequence of his arrogance; for after Apollo had given him the power



Fig. 1: Fragment of a Corinthian column-crater dated to around 575 B.C. now in a private collection. The fragment shows Jason standing behind a seated Phineus (both inscribed). Jason has his arms up and covers Phineus' eyes with his hands. Other inscribed figures are Idaea and Pollux. Photograph from M. Vojatzi, *Frühe Argonautenbilder* (Würzburg, 1982), Tafel 7, B39.

of prophecy Phineus recklessly disclosed the sacred truths of Olympus, a crime for which he was blinded by Zeus and tormented by the Harpies. In this poem it is made quite clear that Phineus has given up all hope of recovering his sight (2.441 ff.), and he merely hopes for a quick death and pleasant afterlife. But the Argonauts at least do him a great favour by ridding him of the tormenting Harpies.³⁵ One consistent aspect of the encounter between Phineus and the Argonauts was in all likelihood the notion of reciprocal gift-giving; although the exact nature of the gifts exchanged might have varied from one version to another. In Apollonius' *Argonautica*, Phineus, out of gratitude for being rid of the Harpies, utters a prophecy of their forthcoming journey to Colchis (2.311 ff.). The prophet's presence therefore lies behind many of the later adventures of the Argonauts, and his name is evoked at critical moments in the successful fulfilment of their quest (e.g., 4.253 ff.).

The account in our most detailed literary source therefore is that the

Argonauts rid Phineus of the Harpies; but he stays blind. There are however some relevant fragmentary references to the healing of blindness in the story of Phineus. A fragment of the *Phineus* of Sophocles refers specifically to the fact that Asclepius does heal blindness, although the recipient of the actual healing act is not clear.³⁶ Another important account of the restoration of sight in the story of Phineus was provided by the Athenian historian Phylarchus (3rd century B.C.). This does not refer to the blindness of Phineus himself, but to a related story in which his two sons are blind.³⁷ It seems that in the ninth book of his history Phylarchus stated that Asclepius was struck by Zeus' thunderbolt, not because he raised the dead (as in Pindar *et al.*), but because he restored the sight of Phineus' sons.³⁸ We learn nothing from Sextus Empiricus, our source for the story, about how Asclepius is supposed to have healed the boys. Sextus is more concerned to deal in a general sense with the various versions of Asclepius' undoing. In light of Asclepius' renown as a magical healer, however, one assumes that he is able to perform the feat through his special knowledge of drugs and magic. An astonishing medical act like the restoration of sight clearly needs special powers. The importance of this story is that Asclepius' act is ranked, at least by Phylarchus, as a crime of major proportions, one that can be compared with the usual reason for his death, his reviving of the dead. This at the very least reminds us that Jason's apparent restoration of Phineus' sight on the Corinthian fragment is an act of 'Asclepian' proportions. It suggests that there is an ancient tradition in which Jason has the kind of astonishing magical healing power more usually associated with Asclepius. My own view is that this aspect sits quite comfortably with Jason's name and his training as a child with Chiron.³⁹ It quite plausibly lies behind our literary accounts (esp. *Pythian* 4), but never actually appears in them. Chiron's own capacity to heal blindness was probably dealt with in Euripides' lost play *Phoenix* in which the centaur may have restored Phoenix's sight upon the request of Peleus (as he does in Apollodorus).⁴⁰ Thus there appears to be a trio of healers, Chiron, Asclepius, and Jason who are all shown in various ways to possess the power of restoring lost sight.

We are in a position therefore to say that the Greeks are conscious of the healing associations of Jason's name (Pindar); and that there may be a tradition in antiquity in which Jason, like Asclepius and Chiron, is associated with notions of magical healing (the Corinthian fragment). Thus Chiron's astonishing powers of healing seem not just to fall upon Asclepius alone, but upon Jason too. It would be surprising however if

these special powers of healing were limited to the treatment of medical conditions, or even to the social benefits that Jason brings through his heroic actions. Greek heroes tend to be characterized by their 'otherworldly' activities, their close contact with the divine, their descents into the Underworld, the way that they confront death and re-emerge to tell the stories of their adventures. Indeed in some cases (like Heracles and Achilles) the physical prowess of the hero is secondary to the level of their contact with the spirit world. They are 'religious' heroes insofar as they transcend the ordinary mortal conditions of existence. They are not confined by the fundamental boundaries within which most individuals lead their lives, and it is this that makes them so special. The immersion in fire that both Heracles and Achilles undergo helps to indicate just how different they are from the living forms around them.⁴¹

And yet we rarely think of Jason in this 'otherworldly' context. The Jason of Euripides and Apollonius, notwithstanding his successful taking of the fleece, seems to live under the same conditions of vulnerability as those around him. All the help that he receives from gods and mortals in his mission (Hera, Aphrodite, Athena, Medea, the Argonauts) seems to diminish his heroism rather than enhance it. Likewise the basic mythic pattern of descent and return, a theme which is so common in hero myths, seems to play only a very limited part in the literary accounts of his mission. But again the material evidence seems to point us in a different direction. One story that clearly had a strong tradition in antiquity, but has not survived in the literature, is the descent of Jason into the dragon's belly, and his subsequent emergence from it. The image of his emergence from the monster occurs on six objects from antiquity, three of which are Greek, the other three Etruscan.⁴² The two earliest are vases from Corinth (*LIMC* 'Iason' 30 and 31), and date to around the late 7th century B.C.. This makes them, as Neils points out, the earliest images of Jason to survive. Both vases have a man emerging from a serpent's mouth. They are not inscribed with Jason's name, and so we cannot say with absolute certainty that it is Jason being disgorged; but in light of the other inscribed vases showing a very similar scene (*LIMC* 32 and 35), there is some good reason to be confident that it is Jason. Clearly the finest of the images (*LIMC* 32), and the most detailed, is the Attic red-figure kylix dating to around about 480–70 B.C. from Cerveteri (see Figure 2). This has a long-haired and bearded Jason (inscribed) being disgorged by a large bearded serpent. Only the head and the neck of the serpent are shown on the vase. Athena stands at right in front of the scene holding an owl and bearing her spear and the aegis.



Fig. 2: Athenian red-figure cup by Douris, dated to around 470 B.C. The prominent figure of Athena watches as Jason (inscribed) is disgorged by the huge bearded dragon that guards the golden fleece. In the background the fleece hangs on a tree. Photograph courtesy of Photoarchiv Hirmer Verlag, Munich, no. 591.2027.

In the background the ram's fleece is hanging up on an apple tree. Of the three Etruscan images (*LIMC* 33–35) two date from the fifth century B.C. (33 and 34), and the third dates either to the mid-to-late fifth, or the early fourth century B.C. (35). The last of these, a bronze hand mirror, has Jason holding the fleece in his left hand, and with a sword in his right hand. Jason emerges from the serpent, which still has his left leg in its mouth. This last image has Jason's name inscribed.

These images of Jason being disgorged by the dragon which guards the fleece have no parallel in the extant literature for his quest. As we have seen, it is usually Medea who plays a critical part in the acquisition of the fleece. In the *Argonautica* she gives to Jason special drugs with which he can yoke the fire-breathing bulls, and she then overcomes the

monster allowing Jason to snatch away the fleece (above n. 8). Medea's involvement in overcoming the monsters allows her to claim a critical role for herself in the success of Jason's mission (Eur. *Med.* 480–2). Rather interestingly, Medea does not feature on any of the six objects on which Jason is disgorged, even though we might reasonably have expected to find her here.⁴³ As far as it is possible to say, it seems to be Jason himself (together with Athena's apparent assistance on the Attic kylix) who manages the feat of emerging from the dragon's body. In one sense it seems to be remarkable that the tradition of such a graphic encounter between man and monster should not be found in literary form. It would, one assumes, make a powerful scene in an epic account of Jason's adventures. We can only speculate on why a literary version of the episode failed to accompany the visual evidence from antiquity. One apparent pattern in the evidence is that many of the 'otherworldly' aspects of Jason's heroic career seem to be present within the images on vases, but absent from the literature. The literary sources for Jason seem to provide us with a rather bland figure when compared to the visual evidence. The images of Jason's apparent healing of Phineus' blindness, and his emergence from the dragon's belly, are two examples of this.⁴⁴

But whilst there seem to be some remarkable differences in the stories of Jason on vases from those in the literature, the fact that Jason descends into the dragon's belly and is then disgorged by it should not really be a matter of surprise. Descent into the confinement of a dark and deadly place is fundamental to many hero myths. Theseus goes into the labyrinth, Jonah into the whale, Odysseus into Polyphemus' cave, Heracles into the Underworld, and so forth. Often the hardest part of this kind of mission is getting back out from the place of darkness, something which also seems to be the main task for Jason. Confinement in darkness, and emergence from it, are crucial 'initiatory' elements of heroic transition.⁴⁵ There is a process of personal and social benefit brought about by virtue of the successful accomplishment of the hero's quest. We have no way of knowing in exactly what circumstances Jason goes into the belly of the dragon,⁴⁶ or what form the descent takes, but we can say that it places him in good heroic company, a fact indicated partly by Athena's presence on the Attic vase.⁴⁷

Indeed the more one examines the entire evidence for Jason, both literary and visual, the more one is conscious of how important the notion of descent is in his myth, and the fact that this is an integral part of his healing power. Jason's role as healer extends to the Underworld

itself. The journey to Colchis is consciously evoked, not least by Pindar (*Pyth.* 4.158 ff.), as akin to a journey to the Underworld. In this poem Pelias tells Jason that he (Jason) is 'able to take away the anger of those in the Underworld' (158–9). For Phrixus, he says, 'commands us to bring back his soul' (159) by recovering the fleece. Jason's special role as leader of the quest has a critical otherworldly aspect to it, in that he will 'heal' the anger (*menis*) of Phrixus by bringing home his soul (i.e., to inhabit his cenotaph).⁴⁸ Jason's task is to restore harmony to the upper and lower worlds. His quest therefore (which has much in common with Priam's mission to get Hector's body back in *Iliad* 24) restores the peaceful co-existence of the living with the dead. His mission to Colchis to get the fleece is a 'descent', much as if he were going to the Underworld itself to calm the soul of Phrixus. The same sort of symbolism (descent and return) is at work in the images of Jason's emergence from the dragon's belly. On the Attic vase (Figure 2) Athena is present at the crucial moment to help Jason, in much the same way as she helps Heracles in the Underworld (*Il.* 8.358 ff.). The 'major' quest of Jason (to Colchis and back to get the fleece), and his 'minor' quest (into and out of the dragon's belly at Colchis) are different manifestations of the same basic mythic pattern of descent and return.⁴⁹ But this theme plays only a very small part in the extant literary narratives describing Jason.

To conclude this survey of Jason in the ancient sources we must return briefly to Asclepius. It is clear that from very early times Asclepius is a healer figure of astonishing ability using Chiron's skills, but one who breaks the fundamental law of nature that life ends for humans at the point of death. In our earliest literary sources this is an act of considerable gravity, a major abuse of the power of healing. The poets are therefore firm in their treatment of Asclepius. There is a sense in the earliest Greek literature that he must be dealt with in no uncertain terms. The Greek myth-makers are at their most censorious when dealing with figures like Asclepius. But the process of dealing with him takes *two* very different forms, not just one. The first of these, found in Hesiod and Pindar, is that strong emphasis is given to the punishment that Asclepius receives. To be struck down by Zeus's thunderbolt is a terrible fate, but one that is perceived as appropriate in light of the magnitude of his crime. The other approach is to ignore the story altogether, simply to allude to Asclepius without any elaboration of his transgressions. This is what we find in Homer in the *Iliad* who refers to both Asclepius and Chiron, but in a very minimal way. Asclepius in the

Iliad is a doctor in much the same way as his two sons are, Machaon and Podalirius (on whom see *Il.* 2.729 ff., 4.192 ff., 11.504 ff., and 11.823 ff., 14.1 ff.), except that he learnt his skills from Chiron himself. Asclepius' ability to break natural law through his use of drugs is taken from him by Homer in the *Iliad*, and he is downgraded to the status of a very good (human) doctor.

It seems to me that a similar process to this second one has taken place with Jason, the 'healer', in the literary sources, except that in his case he is probably unrecognizable from the earliest Jason figure. We still have vague glimpses in the literature of Jason as a healer, especially in Pindar's *Pythian* 4. But it is the visual material, much of it from Corinth, that really indicates so emphatically just how different the earliest Jason might have been. These images reveal not just a different kind of heroic figure who embarks on different tasks, but also one whose activities are potentially just as threatening as those of Asclepius. The descent into the belly of a monster is an episode that the poets were happy to omit, despite the apparent wide currency of the story in antiquity (as reflected in the material evidence). Likewise the apparent healing of blindness, when such a condition has been ordained by the heavens, is a fundamental challenge to the order of the world. In all likelihood therefore Jason at some early stage stirs the same moral dilemmas in the poets as Asclepius and Chiron do. Magical healers are perceived as dangerous, and their activities are deemed essentially inappropriate for Greek heroes like Jason. My own view is that this is one aspect of why Medea enters so strongly into the story of Jason. It is one thing for a Greek hero to employ such dangerous practices, but quite another for a foreign woman to do so. Jason's lack of knowledge of drugs in the literature, and Medea's extensive use of them, are different sides of the same coin. Both of them in their own ways help to reinforce notions of self-identity and difference, between Greeks and barbarians on the one hand, and men and women on the other. Jason it seems is transformed through time to conform to the demands of a society with firm views on the dangers of drugs, and the healing practices associated with them.⁵⁰

NOTES

1. On the etymology of Chiron's name, see C. Robert, *RE* III, s.v. 'Chiron' (1899), col. 2302; and H. Frisk, *Griechisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* 2 (Heidelberg, 1970), 1083.
2. Cf. Hesiod, *Cat.* fr. 204.87 ff., Merkelbach and West, *Fragmenta Hesiodica* (Oxford, 1967).
3. Hesiod, *Cat.* 40.2 (Jason); *Theog.* 1001 (Medeus).

4. Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Grammarians* 260–62, gives a list of the various healing acts that ancient sources provide for Asclepius' punishment by Zeus.

5. For Asclepius in Hesiod, see frs. 50, 51, 53, 58 (M–W). It seems that the *Naupactia* too dealt with this story (M. Davies, *Epicorum Graecorum Fragmenta* [Göttingen, 1988], 149, 10 A–C).

6. On the etymology of Jason's name, and the Chiron connection, see B. K. Braswell, *A Commentary on the Fourth Pythian Ode of Pindar* (Berlin and New York, 1988), 370.

7. For Medea and her expertise in drugs in *Pythian* 4, see 220–33.

8. This role in the accomplishment of Jason's quest has its parallel in Apollonius' *Argonautica* in which she has a significant involvement, especially in Jason's fulfilment of his task to yoke the fire-breathing bulls. For some of the significant references to her skill with drugs and magical power in the *Argonautica*, see 3.528 ff., 3.737–875, 3.1012 ff., 3.1246 ff., 4.139 ff., 4.662 ff. (this episode deals with the other principal sorceress figure, Circe, Medea's aunt), 4.1659 ff.

9. Creon calls Medea 'clever', and 'skilled in many evil arts' (285) referring presumably to her use of drugs. B. M. W. Knox, 'The Medea of Euripides' in *Word and Action. Essays on the Ancient Theater* (Baltimore, 1979), 306 ff., is very critical of the use of the term 'witch' to describe Medea (used by Page *et al.*). Notwithstanding how one chooses to define her, Medea's use of drugs and poisons gives her an enormous power in Euripides' play, as Knox acknowledges (308). On this aspect, cf., more recently, F. Graf, 'Medea, the enchantress from afar' in J. J. Clauss and S. I. Johnston (edd.), *Medea. Essays on Medea in Myth, Literature, Philosophy, and Art* (Princeton, 1997), 21–43 (esp. 29–30).

10. For a very detailed survey of the early evidence for the entire Argonaut saga on a genre-by-genre basis, M. Vojatzki, *Frühe Argonautenbilder* (Würzburg, 1982), 11–22.

11. Although see M. L. West's note to *Theog. 1000* (Hesiod, *Theogony* [Oxford, 1966]).

12. For Hera's devotion to Jason, cf. *Pyth.* 4.184 ff. In Hesiod's account in the *Theogony* Jason leads away Aetes' daughter 'by the will of the immortal gods' (993).

13. A major work on this subject is K. Meuli, *Odyssee und Argonautika* (Utrecht, 1974; orig. publ. Berlin, 1921). See too D. Page, *The Homeric Odyssey* (Oxford, 1955), 2 ff.; E. Schwartz, *Die Odyssee* (Munich, 1924), 263 ff.; R. Merkelbach, *Untersuchungen zur Odyssee* (Munich, 1951), 201 ff.

14. Cf. *Theog.* 956–62, which deals briefly with the family of Medea, but does not refer to Jason.

15. For Eumelus, see Davies, *EGF* (above n. 5), 95 ff.; for the *Naupactia*, *EGF*, 145 ff.

16. For a basic discussion on the possible subject-matter of the *Corinthiaca* and the *Naupactia*, see G. L. Huxley, *Greek Epic Poetry: from Eumelus to Panyassis* (London, 1969), 60 ff.

17. G. S. Kirk, *The Nature of Greek Myths* (Harmondsworth, 1985), 162–3. Kirk's view is that the myth of Jason goes back to the Bronze Age. If that view is correct our first detailed literary sources for Jason are obviously very distant in time from the earliest stories about him.

18. Kirk (above n. 17), 163. Cf. W. Burkert, *Creation of the Sacred* (Harvard, 1996), 68 and 205 n. 42: 'The quest of the Argonauts to get the golden fleece from the land of the Sun, or to "bring back the soul of Phrixos," (*Pyth.* 4.159) with a hero named Iason or *Ieson*, whose name can be understood as "healer", are all shamanistic elements.'

19. Could it be that this refers to the proper aspect of healing rather than the negative use of drugs? For the former in Homer, note esp. *Il.* 4.191, 218; 5. 401, 900; 11. 830; 15.394; *Od.* 4.220 ff.; 10.287 ff. For the latter, *Il.* 22.94; *Od.* 1.261; 2. 329; 10. 213 ff. Chiron's rectitude in medical matters (*Il.* 11.832) can be contrasted with the likes of the lustful centaur Nessus whose use of poison has disastrous consequences for Heracles and his family (as in Soph. *Trach.* 555 ff.).

20. On Jason as healer and *Pythian* 4, see J. H. Finley, *Pindar and Aeschylus* (Camb. Mass., 1955), 85; E. Thummer, *Pindar. Die isthmischen Gedichte* (Heidelberg, 1968, 1969), 1.43 f.; E. Robbins, 'Jason and Cheiron: the myth of Pindar's Fourth Pythian', *Phoenix* 29 (1975), 205–13; P. Giannini, 'Interpretazione della *Pitica* 4 di Pindaro', *QUCC* 31 (1979), 35–63; C. P. Segal, *Pindar's Mythmaking* (Princeton, 1986), 19, 22, 134, 159–61; B. K. Braswell (above n. 6), 370–2.

21. Cf. *Nemean* 3.55 in which the same sort of word-play on Chiron's name is employed by Pindar ('gentle-handed use of drugs'), again in a healing context. It is however Asclepius who is the student in this case, not Jason.

22. Robbins (above n. 20) offers a very convincing discussion of this aspect of *Pythian* 4, although it fails to convince Braswell (above n. 6), 370–2.

23. It is worth noting that Medea's love for Jason in *Pythian* 4 is the consequence of a love charm used by Jason upon her (the *inyx*), 213 ff. This is of course quite a separate sort of power from that which one might expect to come from Chiron's drugs, and from that which Medea seems to

possess. Nevertheless, Jason's use of the *inyx* is clearly important in the context of the subject-matter of this article, for one might reasonably have expected Medea to be 'infected' with love by Aphrodite herself or through an intermediary like Eros (as in *Arg.* 3.1 ff.). This does show that to some degree Medea is defeated at her own game.

24. Cf. *Pyth.* 4. 136 ff. in which Jason offers a soothing speech to his kin at Iolcus. Pelias in Hesiod's *Theogony* is an even more outrageous figure: 'the great overbearing king, arrogant and reckless Pelias, perpetrator of violence', 995–6. The harmful impact of such an individual upon a community runs right through the Jason story.

25. Of course on another reading Arcesilas resembles Pelias, and Damophilus resembles Jason; but one assumes this is a reading which Pindar would have wanted consciously to avoid. B. L. Gildersleeve, *Pindar. The Olympian and Pythian Odes* (London, 1895), 302 describes such a reading as 'monstrous'.

26. For a comprehensive analysis of the theme of death as a healer, see C. Sourvinou-Inwood, 'Reading' *Greek Death* (Oxford, 1995), 388 ff.

27. It is worth comparing the story of Telephus, son of Heracles, the Mysian, who is wounded by Achilles, and eventually healed by him. The story of Telephus and his family was dealt with in the Epic Cycle (*Cypria* and *Little Iliad*); see Davies, *EGF* (above n. 5), 32, 52, 54, 56. The story was also the subject of four plays by Sophocles, *Aleadae*, *Mysians*, *Telephus*, and *Eurypylyus*; on which see, most recently, H. Lloyd Jones, *Sophocles, Fragments* (Loeb Text) (Camb. Mass., 1996), 32 ff., 82 ff., 216 ff.

28. The most renowned image of Achilles as a healer of physical wounds is the Sosias cup in the Berlin Antikensmuseum. This depicts Achilles tending the wound of Patroclus. On the subject of this cup, and other related images of Achilles, see G. F. Pinney, 'Achilles Lord of Scythia' in W. G. Moon (ed.), *Ancient Greek Art and Iconography* (Madison, 1983), 127–46.

29. Note that the Trojans keep guard just in case the Greeks set upon them (24.799–800); but Achilles is as good as his word.

30. On this subject, Burkert, 'Apellai und Apollon', *RhM* 118 (1975), 19; G. Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans* (Baltimore, 1979), 142 ff.; J. S. Clay, *The Wrath of Athena* (Princeton, 1983), 181–2; Robert J. Rabel, 'Apollo as a model for Achilles in the *Iliad*', *AJP* 111 (1990), 429–40; C. J. Mackie, 'Achilles' Teachers: Chiron and Phoenix in the *Iliad*', *G&R* 44 (1997), 1–10.

31. In this context it is worth bearing in mind that Chiron himself not only heals physical wounds, including blinding, but also rescues young lads from various traumas within their families (above page 1). The implication is that Chiron and his family (cf. *Pyth.* 4. 101 ff.) provide for the youngsters a quality of life that they could not get within their own societies.

32. *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae (LIMC)* (Zürich and Munich, 1990), Vol. V, No. 7 sv. 'Iason' (J. Neils).

33. M. Vojatzki (above n. 10), 71–84 and pls. 6–10.

34. J. Neils (above n. 32); and more recently, K. Scheffold, *Götter- und Heldensagen der Griechen in der Früh- und Hocharchaischen Kunst* (Munich, 1993), 267. Cf. Burkert (above n. 18) 205 n. 42.

35. Worth noting is the fact that this scene (Boreads pursuing Harpies) is on side B of the Corinthian vase (see Vojatzki, 83–4). It therefore seems that on the vase Phineus' suffering is 'healed' in two different ways by the Argonauts: his sight is restored by Jason, and he is also rid of the Harpies.

36. Aristophanes, *Wealth*, 634–6 (and scholia). On this passage and some late Classical reliefs representing similar scenes, Vojatzki (above n. 10), 81–2.

37. Jacoby, *FrGrH* 81 F18. On the various accounts of Phineus and his sons, see Apoll. *Bibl.* 1.9.21 (with Frazer's note 3, Loeb text); and 3.15.2 ff. (with Frazer's notes 1–4).

38. Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Grammarians* 262.

39. On the Chiron-Asclepius-Jason connection and the healing of blindness, cf. Vojatzki (above n. 10), esp. 81–2.

40. Apoll. *Bibl.* 3.13.8 (with Frazer's note 2, Loeb text).

41. On this subject, C. J. Mackie, 'Achilles in Fire', *CQ* 48 (1998), 329–38.

42. *LIMC* (above n. 32), nos. 30–35; for a detailed treatment of this theme, Vojatzki (above n. 10), 87–91.

43. For other images of the confrontation with the dragon, including Medea's involvement, *LIMC* (above n. 32), nos. 37–48. These images are all Greek South Italian or Roman; for Medea on vases, O. Taplin, *Comic Angels and Other Approaches to Greek Drama through Vase-Paintings*

(Oxford, 1993), 22–3; and, most recently, C. Sourvinou-Inwood, 'Medea at a shifting distance' in Clauss and Johnston (edd.), *Medea* (above n. 9), 253–96.

44. Another may be the dismemberment and rejuvenation of Jason by Medea, on which see *LIMC* (above n. 32), nos. 58–64. This story however clearly did appear in ancient literature, in Pherecydes and Simonides (D. L. Page, *Poetae Melici Graeci* [Oxford, 1967], fr. 548); and there was a similar account in the cyclic *Nosti* involving Jason's father Aeson (Davies, *EGF*, 68–9 fr. 6). The dismemberment and rejuvenation of a ram is also a popular theme in the ancient sources, and is often linked to the death (by dismemberment) of Pelias.

45. See M. Eliade, *Rites and Symbols of Initiation* (Chicago, 1958), 13 ff. and passim.

46. For different views on how to interpret the scene on the Attic vase (such as whether Jason has been in pursuit of the monster's tongue, as argued by E. Simon, *Die griechischen Vasen* [Munich, 1976], 119–20), see H. Meyer, *Medeia und die Peliaden* (Rome, 1980), 81–2.

47. It is worthy of note that in Pindar's version of Jason's return to Iolcus the hero is wearing a leopard skin over his Magnesian tunic (*Pyth.* 4. 78 ff.). There are clearly parallels in the imagery in Pindar and on the Athenian vase of Jason's body confined within that of an animal (albeit one dead animal, the leopard, and one that is very much alive, the Colchian monster!).

48. It is worth comparing *Pythian* 4.186–7 in which Hera stirs on each of the heroes to acquire 'the most noble remedy for his own heroic excellence'. Notwithstanding the semantic difficulties of this phrase, the notion of the quest being perceived as a 'remedy' (*pharmakon*) for personal heroic fulfilment is definitely worthy of note given the other healing aspects of *Pythian* 4.

49. As of course is his dismemberment and rejuvenation (above n. 44).

50. I am grateful to my colleague Dr Elizabeth Pemberton for her critical comments on an earlier draft of this article; and to Professor Jenifer Neils for her comments on the vases.