The Argonautika: The Story of Jason and the Quest for the Golden Fleece (Hellenistic Culture and Society) by Apollonios Rhodios

Great Translation With More Commentary Than Youll Read.

The Argonautika, the only surviving epic of the Hellenistic era, is a retelling of the tale of Jason and the Golden Fleece, probably the oldest extant Greek myth. Jason, a young prince, is sent on a perilous expedition but comes through various ordeals with the aid of the king's daughter, Medea, winning the golden fleece and carrying off Medea herself. He is a very modern figure, not at all Achillean: almost an anti-hero. Along the way, the story incorporates vivid accounts of early exploration and colonizing ventures. Peter Greens lively, readable verse translation captures the swift narrative movement of Apollonioss epic Greek.

Apollonios Rhodios (c. 305-235 B.C.), the author of the Argonautika, was appointed Chief Librarian in the legendary library at Alexandria around 265 B.C. His first draft of this poem, composed when he was a very young man, drew scornful reactions from the literati of the day, Kallimachos in particular, who thought epic passé and long poems vulgar. Apollonios withdrew to the maritime island of Rhodes (his work is notable for its nautical expertise), where he hammered out the text as we know it today, returning to eventual success in the city that had rejected him. The compromise that resulted is a fascinating combination of age-old myth and modern treatment that produces a gripping and unforgettable narrative. Peter Green has translated this renowned poem with skill and wit, offering a refreshing interpretation of a timeless story.

The cloth edition of the Argonautika includes Peter Greens lively and incisive commentary, the first on all four books since Mooneys in 1912. While clarifying text and background, the commentary takes full advantage throughout of the recent upsurge of scholarly interest in Apollonios.
Alternate spelling: Argonautica, Apollonius Rhodius

My Personal Review:
The Argonautika should be as widely read as the Iliad and the Odyssey (or for that matter the Aeneid). Before reading this particular version one should first study the structure of the work, completely discarding Greens Introduction to it, unless, of course, you happen to be a working classical scholar! The translation of Apollonios Argonautika is an excellent read, made much more understandable by the excellent Glossary, which provides background information on all the characters and gods mentioned in the epic, and on geographical locations as well. This glossary is either an excellent first source of information or as a refresher to what the reader might already know. Excellent maps detailing the route the Argonauts took are found in the back of the book. Although an excellent read, its not one that should be done at a rapid pace! The bibliography makes no mention of Robert Graves narrative work on Jason and the Golden Fleece, Hercules My Shipmate.

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