

In Med(e)as Res:  
Seneca the Advisor on the Reigns of Jason and Claudius

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## ABSTRACT

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by  
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As an advisor in the imperial household, Seneca wrote tragedies whose portrayal of mythological rulers was doubtlessly influenced by his firsthand experiences. Though scholars have already analyzed instances of historically relevant themes in these tragedies, this new angle sheds light on facets of ruling that are particularly problematic for these first Roman emperors and reveals Seneca's thoughts on the inner workings of ruling in the early imperial era. Among Seneca's tragedies, *Medea* in particular seems concerned with issues of power and ruling. In retelling a story already markedly similar to Claudius', Seneca naturally remolds this traditional storyline to draw parallels between the situations of these two rulers and issues they face in asserting their power. Both Claudius' and Jason's authority is overshadowed as their own families directly impede their rise to power; they face serious difficulties in their relationships with their wives and heirs; they travel even to the ends of the world to assert their control over and seek benefits from foreign lands and peoples; and they must nevertheless rely on others for victory, given their own lack of military ability. The remarkable similarities between Claudius' and Jason's circumstances suggest that Seneca noted and wished to draw attention to the political advantages and pitfalls of different aspects of rulers' dealings with power. These shared trials suggest that decisive resolution of these challenges was necessary for the successful acquisition and maintenance of power, both for the mythological ruler and the historical one whose position Seneca understood so well.

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## I. Introduction

Beyond writing philosophical treatises, moral letters, and an isolated satire, Seneca, the Roman philosopher turned imperial tutor and advisor, also left among his diverse legacy a set of Latin tragedies. That Seneca composed such works is in itself not peculiar: even figures as austere as Augustus were engaged in writing dramatic pieces. Yet these tragedies still retain an air of mystery and curiosity. Tales of Oedipus, Agamemnon, and Hercules hearken back to the golden age of drama at Athens, but these tragedies are far more than mere retellings of their Greek predecessors. Fifth-century democratic Athens was not first-century imperial Rome, and cultural and political differences provoked substantial reinterpretations of these stories.

Since Seneca's plays were obviously reworked to suit his own time, a more exact dating of the tragedies would add to our understanding both of the works themselves and of the historical context of their composition.<sup>1</sup> Seneca lived through a critical phase of Roman history and had an intimate perspective on much of it; dating his tragedies more precisely may reveal valuable insights into both this period and the relationship between his literary works and contemporaneous events. First, we could learn more about Seneca's own position as an author: was he writing primarily as the frustrated exile, the imperial tutor, or the cautious advisor? In addition, we could gain insight into contemporary events and circumstances, as the plays offer an examination and critique of the actions of the emperor and the morality of Seneca's day. Finally, a more solid placement for the plays would set them in context with other literature of the era as well

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<sup>1</sup> Since many scholars have dismissed precisely dating these tragedies as an impossible or futile task, I aim instead at narrowing their composition down to a smaller period. Such an endeavor will show that the endeavor is both a fruitful enterprise and an excellent source of further information for understanding and appreciating Seneca's tragedies.

as with Seneca's other works.<sup>2</sup> Clearly, the issue of dating is not inconsequential to our understanding of Seneca's tragedies. The Julio-Claudian era was too varied and changing for us to simply leave Seneca's tragedies floating around haphazardly in it. Although finding a definite date is unlikely, even narrowing down the possible range will prove helpful in gaining a better understanding of some of Seneca's most intriguing writings.

But even a rough date for these plays' composition has been difficult to determine—previously proposed dates extend from the reign of Tiberius to shortly before Seneca's death under Nero.<sup>3</sup> Scholars have already used a variety of approaches—practical, stylistic, and allusive—in attempting to secure a date for the tragedies. Some less sanguine writers assign the plays to 41-48 CE, the time of Seneca's exile, merely because only then would he have had free time to compose them; yet this is not strong evidence, since other, equally busy Romans composed as many as four tragedies in only sixteen days.<sup>4</sup> In his analysis of stylistic differences within the plays (including the prevalence of enjambment and the length of final *-o*'s in scansion), Fitch has suggested some semblance of relative order, although this method cannot date any play exactly.<sup>5</sup> Other scholars have attempted to further the argument by recognizing the echo of (inter alia) a certain line used in *Hercules Furens* in a similar phrase in the later

*Apocolocyntosis*, thus placing *Hercules*—and those plays Fitch's theory places earlier—

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<sup>2</sup> Stoic philosophy offers one potential lens through which to examine the tragedies, considering Seneca's own interest in using poetry as exempla for moral guidance (see King (1971) 216 for such evidence). Sklenář (2007/8) refutes an entirely Stoic reading of the tragedies but still reveals some links between these two areas of Seneca's work. Ker (2005) 27-8 relates counterarguments to Stoic thought in the plays; however, he does allow for echoes between some of Seneca's other works (29-30) and also discusses relationships between Seneca's oeuvre and other exempla of its genres, although primarily earlier works are mentioned (25-7).

<sup>3</sup> On this range of potential dates, see Tarrant (1995) 215; he also discusses a few methodological issues.

<sup>4</sup> Calder (1976) 3-4 discusses the works and writing practices of various such figures and defends the "occasional" nature of Senecan tragedy.

<sup>5</sup> Fitch (1981) sets forth his extended arguments, which rely also on comparative data from Sophocles and Shakespeare.

before 54 CE.<sup>6</sup> However, a closer, historically-minded reading of Seneca's *Medea* may help locate the strands of his tragedies more securely within the literary fabric of this era.<sup>7</sup> Many of the issues addressed in Seneca's tragedies might have stemmed from his experiences as an intimate member of the imperial household. In this paper, I will investigate the issue of dating through examination of various themes in *Medea* that have been shaped by their author's personal experience. Based on depictions of power and ruling in this tragedy and overarching similarities between problems faced by Jason and Claudius, I will argue that the emperor's own predicaments likely influenced Seneca's understanding of Jason's character and situation. These examples suggest that a date in the Claudian era, and most specifically the latter part of Claudius' rule during his marriage to Agrippina, is most plausible for this tragedy.

Several scholars have already examined historically relevant material in Seneca's tragedies. The appearance of characteristically Roman themes and ideas within a nominally Greek setting helps date the pieces and elucidate Seneca's intentions and audience. Thus there are analyses of terms and formulae specific to Roman sacrifice, wedding hymns, and imperial edicts;<sup>8</sup> discussions of themes relevant to the Roman world, such as spectacles, violence, and the harshness of kings;<sup>9</sup> applications of choral odes on

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<sup>6</sup> This and further examples are cited and examined in Nisbet (2008) 349.

<sup>7</sup> Ker (2009) 138-145 notes that scholars "can mostly only speculate on how Seneca's tragedies were read in connection with specific historical and biographic events," but offers several examples of Tacitus upheld a "mimetic relationship" with the Senecan (or pseudo-Senecan) corpus. He particularly believes that the pseudo-Senecan *Octavia* "played a bridging function between Senecan tragedy and Tacitean history," as it was used by the latter in portraying the events of 62 (142-3).

<sup>8</sup> Analysis of Latin phrases, particularly those concerning autocracy, is available in Steele (1922); other terms and formulae are pointed out in Henry (1985) 161-70.

<sup>9</sup> Hadas (1939) discusses various Roman elements within the tragedies, and particularly their differences from Greek tragedy. Tarrant (1995) 228-30 and Henry (1985) 157-76 examine additional links to the Roman world in the plays.

sailing to Roman imperialism;<sup>10</sup> examinations of Jason and Medea's relationship under Roman marriage laws;<sup>11</sup> and so forth. However, these examinations usually deal with generic Roman themes and do not take into account specific events and circumstances of Seneca's life and career that may help anchor the plays to a more definite point within the Julio-Claudian era.

Given his relationship to the imperial family, one of the historical concerns that may have seeped into Seneca's works is how to rule, and particularly the problems faced by those in power. As the Roman imperial system became more firmly established, rulers and ruled alike needed to come to terms with this new, durable political framework and determine their roles within it. The tragedies of Seneca explore many issues that troubled leaders both mythical and historical.

Among the tragedies, *Medea* in particular seems concerned with issues of power and ruling. One relevant index is lexicographical: *Medea* involves the highest prevalence of the word *dux* and is solidly among the plays most frequently using *rex*.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, and unlike many of Seneca's other dramatic works, *Medea* does not depict any immoral, abhorrent tyrants; in fact, it and *Oedipus* are the only Senecan plays that do not use the term *tyrannus*. *Medea* does not include an Atreus or Lycus figure who evokes outright disapproval and indignation from its audience. Instead, this is one of the more ambiguous plays, in which Seneca has taken care to confuse readers' sympathies: the audience may initially pity Medea, but by the end they are appalled at her actions and can more easily

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<sup>10</sup> See Benton (2003) for a full treatment of this argument.

<sup>11</sup> See Abrahamsen (1999) for a full treatment of this argument.

<sup>12</sup> The statistics here give the number of occurrences in each play but are sorted by the term's frequency in the overall word count. *Dux*: *Medea* (11), *Phaedra* (12), *Agamemnon* (9), *Oedipus* (5), *Hercules Furens* (6), *Thyestes* (3), *Phaedra* (3), *Phoenissae* (0). *Rex*: *Oedipus* (63), *Hercules Furens* (76), *Agamemnon* (50), *Medea* (50), *Troades* (56), *Phoenissae* (32), *Thyestes* (33), *Phaedra* (30).

commiserate with Jason. Seneca also takes pains to rebalance the scales from previous accounts of Medea: whereas a highly sympathetic and vocal chorus weights Euripides' tragedy in Medea's favor, Seneca's chorus switches its allegiance to their king and his new heir. Such adjustments help the audience better understand the complexity of these rulers' problems, since they can evaluate them more impartially and consider both sides of the argument.

Seneca invites further meditation on ruling by including generalizing comments addressing the nature of both kings and their subjects. The cautious nurse figure warns Medea about proper submission to leaders: "a king should be feared" (*rex est timendus*, 168), she urges, and later adds, "no one can safely attack those in power" (*nemo potentes aggredi tutus potest*, 430).<sup>13</sup> Medea is disinclined to follow her advice, though. When Creon himself proclaims, "You should bear the command of your king, just or unjust," (*aequum atque iniquum regis imperium feras*, 195), she warns, "Unjust kingdoms never last forever" (*iniqua numquam regna perpetuo manent*, 196). Elsewhere, Jason remarks on rulers' harsh anger and the ubiquitous nature of kingship (494, 526), while the messenger mourns kings' greed and corruption (881-2). Such sentiments are scarce in previous versions of the Medea story. Euripides includes such comments only rarely and in passing,<sup>14</sup> and Ovid and Apollonius have even less to say on the subject. But by adding general comments pertaining to kingship, Seneca primes his audience to watch out for other, more subtle indications of his thoughts on leadership and power.

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<sup>13</sup> All translations from both *Medea* and other works are my own.

<sup>14</sup> Euripides' chorus laments that rulers' power makes them proud and uncontrollable (120-1), and Medea seconds rulers' susceptibility to bribes (964). However, Seneca's examples are for more blatant and numerous.

These doubts in the overall treatment of political themes across the ancient accounts of Medea can be largely attributed to historical context. Euripides' *Medea*, performed in 431, contains only a few passing comments on ruling; Athens was governed by a stable and successful democracy at this point, rendering such discussions less significant and less valuable to its audience. Apollonius' *Argonautica*, composed in the well-structured and stable Hellenistic Egypt, also would have been less concerned with evaluating rulers and power. However, modern scholarship leans toward considering Augustan literature as most influential for Seneca's work.<sup>15</sup> Although Ovid's *Medea* is lost, his *Heroides* and *Metamorphoses* provide examples of how he treats the myth and can offer evidence on his treatment of rule. *Heroides* XII is presented from Medea's point of view (Jason himself barely makes an appearance), and she does not discuss or even consider Jason's motivations as a ruler. The *Metamorphoses* at least presents Jason in a more positive light, but it too is not overly concerned with the interrogation of power. Again, this could be an effect of Ovid's time, when the locus of power was so confused and uncertain that raising issues of rule directly might have been a thankless or even dangerous task. On the other hand, Seneca had both motive and means to explore issues like these during the solidification of the imperial system.

Several passages from *Medea* reveal the issues Seneca sees as common to both these rulers. Each quote reveals various hardships Jason faces as a leader; yet when analyzed in light of the late Claudian era, each bears striking resemblances to issues this imperial ruler also faced. The most plausible conclusion is that Seneca's interpretation of Jason's situation was colored by his experiences in the Claudian household. However, we

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<sup>15</sup> Tarrant (1995) 222-3 and (2005) 1-5 give an overview of arguments for such influence. Although much earlier, the analysis in Steele (1922) remains valuable for its demonstration of textual relationships to Vergil, Horace, and Ovid.

should be clear at the outset that Seneca is not attempting a brazen allegory in which the Jason of his tragedy stands for Claudius. Seneca is too consummate a literary critic to reduce their complexities to a simple one-to-one comparison. (For instance, the “scorned wife” figure in each account could perhaps be construed as Medea and Messalina; but while Seneca at least initially seeks pity for Medea, it is unlikely that he had such empathy for the woman responsible for his exile.) Instead, as the next chapters will explore, Seneca uses a story already so markedly similar to Claudius’ to naturally draw parallels between the situations of these two rulers and the issues they face in discerning how to use and maintain their power. There cannot be many figures from history and mythology whose power is generally so overshadowed as their own families directly impede their rise to power; who face such serious difficulties in their relationships with their wives and children; who travel even to the ends of the world to assert their control over and seek benefits from foreign lands and peoples; and who must nevertheless rely on others for victory, given their own lack of military ability. These similarities between Jason and Claudius give Seneca the opportunity to explore facets of ruling that were particularly compelling or problematic for the first Roman emperors. In short, *Medea* reveals his own thoughts on the inner workings of ruling in the early imperial era.

## II. Rulers and Overshadowed Power

IAS. Cedo defessus malis.  
 et ipsa casus saepe iam expertos time.  
 MED. Fortuna semper omnis infra me stetit. 520  
 IAS. Acastus instat.  
 MED. Propior est hostis Creo:  
 utrumque profuge. non ut in socerum manus  
 armes, nec ut te caede cognata inquines,  
 Medea cogit: innocens mecum fuge.  
 IAS. Et quis resistet, gemina si bella ingruant, 525  
 Creo atque Acastus arma si iungant sua?  
 MED. His adice Colchos, adice et Aeeten ducem,  
 Scythas Pelasgis iunge: demersos dabo.

JASON: I give up, worn out by evil doings. You yourself should fear the downfalls you have already experienced.

MEDEA: Every fortune has always stood below me.

JASON: Acastus threatens us.

MEDEA: Creon is the nearer enemy: flee from both. Medea does not compel you to start a war against the forces of your father-in-law, nor to pollute yourself with the slaughter of kin: flee with me as an innocent man.

JASON: And who will oppose them if two wars advance on us, if Creon and Acastus join their forces?

MEDEA: Add the Colchians, add even Aeëtes the king to these, add the Scythians to the Pelasgians: I will make them retreat.

The story of Medea, Jason, the Argonauts, and their accompanying adventures had enjoyed a long history even by Seneca's time: the *Iliad* refers to Jason's character, while Hesiod knows of Medea. Although several centuries had passed since the more substantial Greek accounts of Euripides and Apollonius, Seneca's audience would not have been unfamiliar with this tale. Only a few decades before, Ovid had composed three pieces on Medea (a lost tragedy, a section of the *Metamorphoses*, and two letters in the *Heroides*), while Cicero felt that Medea was a sufficiently well-known figure to refer to her in a series of jokes against Clodia. Seneca's *Medea* was only the most recent in a long line of retellings, and it would not be the last: only a few decades later, under the emperor Vespasian, Valerius Flaccus would compose yet another *Argonautica*. So although

Seneca does not recount Jason and Medea's history in detail, his audience would still have been acquainted with it and kept these other versions in mind as they experienced Seneca's tragedy.<sup>16</sup> Seneca actively prods his audience into recalling Jason's past by hinting at it throughout the play: Medea begins the tragedy by calling upon the gods of marriage who witnessed Jason's earlier oath to her. Several choral sections recount the Argo's journey, Jason is referred to as one "ordered" (*iusso*, 669) to undertake the quest, and Medea reminds Creon that the Greek heroes would have perished without her help.

One overarching theme of Jason's life that pervades his background is his inability to maintain the position he was entitled to without being usurped by those who would overshadow his potentially bright future. As the son of Iolcus' king, he could have expected to follow his father to power, except that his uncle Pelias had seized the throne. Though he grew up in exile, Jason returned to Iolcus as a young man, at which point he was compelled by Pelias to fetch the Golden Fleece; even on this expedition, Jason is only one of the many heroes undertaking the quest.<sup>17</sup> Upon his return home, Jason finally takes his rightful place on the throne, but only momentarily. After Medea murders Pelias, his son Acastus drives the couple out of Iolcus, leaving Jason powerless once again.

Although Creon readily welcomes Jason to Corinth, Seneca's character is still not really in a position of power, as these lines from the middle of Jason and Medea's main argument reveals. Perhaps haunted by his past failures at holding power, Jason enumerates the various enemies he must face. Though his alliance to the Corinthian royal

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<sup>16</sup> As discussed in Calder (1976) 4-5, there has been much controversy over whether Seneca's dramas were performed, publicly recited, or just read in private. Calder discusses the possibilities of each but believes that performance is both possible and probable.

<sup>17</sup> Jason is the nominal leader of these heroes, although they initially prefer Heracles (Apoll. 1.332-50). Throughout their journey, Jason relies on guidance from the other Argonauts and displays a few lapses in judgment that others must correct.

family puts him in one of the best positions he could have, he lacks Medea's confidence in his chances of overcoming them. Like his problems with Pelias, these threats are not from nameless, unknown factions, but rather from his own friends and family: Medea notes that she will not involve Jason in any "familial slaughter" (*caede cognata*, 523) or compel him to fight against his father-in-law's troops (*in socerum manus*, 522). Creon and, by extension, Creusa control Jason because they have the keys to his and his sons' safety; no one else (except Medea, whose help Jason refuses) can save them all from Acastus and offer Jason a new chance at a kingdom. Acastus, the reincarnation of a foe Jason has already dealt with, seeks revenge for Pelias' death. The Colchians would gladly retaliate against Jason and Medea as plunderers, murderers, and traitors; and the couple naturally imagines that other peoples would join in the vendetta against them. This paranoia about losing his position once again is not entirely unreasonable, though; Jason may have solved his earliest problems, but he still is not quite in power. Overshadowed and overwhelmed by the more powerful Corinthian king, he cannot seem to find a way to break out of the shadows and have any authority himself. He appears forlorn and unhopeful, offering brief, uncomplicated responses and complaining that he is "worn out by evil doings" (518). Medea is more positive, offering to once again get him through his difficulties with little work on his part. Jason, however, replies with "Who will oppose them?," seeming to completely ignore or discredit Medea's offer (525). Jason here is decidedly unleaderlike, while Medea seems decisive and in control of the threatening situation. After this argument, Medea increasingly dominates the play and other characters pay more and more attention to her. Overall, this section marks one of Medea's most optimistic and civil exchanges with Jason in the play; but when faced with

her husband's unwillingness to let go of what shadow of power he has in Corinth and his inability to trust her, Medea chooses to move on and do what is best for herself. Jason not only declines Medea's help, he forces her to act against him by refusing to take action himself.

Stylistically, several elements within the dialogue reinforce Jason's fears and feeling of defeat. Spatial and directional elements fill the passage, emphasizing and mocking his uncertainty about his place in the power hierarchy. Jason feels threatened from enemies who loom over him metaphorically as they approach him physically; he describes their actions using verbs with *in-* prefixes (*instat*, *ingruant*). In contrast, though Jason warns her to beware "falls" (*casus*, 519), Medea claims that even Fortune is below her (*infra me*, 520). Medea believes that Creon poses a greater danger because he is "nearer" (*proprior*, 521), while other enemies are considered threatening if they begin to unite with each other. Acastus' forces "join" Jason's other enemies (*iungant*, 526), while the last groups of foes seem to be physically "added" and "joined" to the ever-burgeoning conglomeration of hostile forces. Furthermore, the dialogue is riddled with both imperatives (four, including the emphatically enjambed *time* and *fuge* and repeated *adice*) and subjunctives (five); the variation in grammatical mood emphasizes the contrast between surety and uncertainty that runs throughout Jason and Medea's exchange.

This passage is not the only place in *Medea* where Jason's overshadowed position is noticeable. Throughout the rest of this dialogue, examples of Jason's precarious situation and strained relationships become apparent. Jason tries to offer Medea anything she needs to make her exile easier, but can only supply things that belong to his father-in-law: he himself has nothing, retains little control over his life, and must rely totally on

Creon.<sup>18</sup> Earlier, Jason must beg the king not to kill Medea, while Creon takes advantage of Jason, “an exile afflicted and terrified by grave fears”<sup>19</sup> who is totally reliant on him. Medea too notes her husband’s fearful submission to the Corinthian king, wondering, “was he afraid of Creon and wars with the Thessalian leader?”<sup>20</sup> She concludes that “he ceased when he was forced to and gave up his troops.”<sup>21</sup> Jason himself remains reluctant to acknowledge this; Medea alone names Creon as their enemy, while Jason finds it more difficult to speak against his savior. Furthermore, Jason’s affection for his new wife Creusa is suspect—he still seems to sympathize with Medea quite a bit, and after Creusa’s murder Jason reacts rather impersonally in seeking justice. He treats his new wife instead as a necessary part of the uncomfortable arrangement dictated by her father. Jason also seems weaker and less in control of matters because he must wait over four hundred lines (almost half the play) to speak, has both the chorus and Creon make his arguments and excuses before him, and appears onstage infrequently. Only when Creon is dead does Jason step up and take command, rousing the citizens against Medea and demanding that she heed his orders.

Though inspired by and reliant on them, Seneca’s treatment of Jason is at variance with earlier versions of his story. It might be expected that Apollonius’ account focus most on Jason’s problems in Iolcus, but it breezes through the events with Pelias and the starting of the quest with alacrity. Jason is elected the leader of the company of heroes and guides them to Colchis, seizes the Fleece, and brings them home again. Many of the heroes offer Jason guidance along the way and ensure the success of the voyage, but it is

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<sup>18</sup> *Si quod ex soceri domo / potest fugam levare solamen, pete*, 538-9.

<sup>19</sup> *Exulem legendo et afflictum et gravi / terrore pavidum*, 255.

<sup>20</sup> *Timuit Creontem ac bella Thessalici ducis*, 415.

<sup>21</sup> *Cesserit coactus et dederit manus*, 417.

still Jason who faces Aeëtes' tasks and makes final decisions for the company. In Euripides' *Medea*, Jason seems more secure in his position and has more autonomy: he was not coerced into his new marriage and does not reveal any hesitation in following Creon's wishes upon his installment into Corinthian politics. Jason also seems more affectionate toward his new wife: his children's tutor notes that love for Glauce<sup>22</sup> has overcome his attachment to his old family (88), and he is much more distraught at her death (1293-1305). In the *Heroides*, Jason is still described as *iussus* in respect to his travels, but he too doles out orders as he commands Medea to leave Corinth and in general appears less subservient to Creon (12.134). The *Metamorphoses* too depicts Jason as an independent, confident, and self-motivated commander; in fact, Jason's return with the Fleece is welcomed by Aeson, while Pelias and his usurpation are not even mentioned. Seneca's Jason—with his hiding in the shadows, inability to act as he sees fit, and need to bow to Creon's desires—departs from the established tradition. Seneca magnifies Jason's woes, leaving him in a more unstable position than all his predecessors. Medea's earlier reference to Jason as the “leader of leaders” (*ducum...ducem*, 233) comes across as ironic, a reminder of what he once was and could be again, if only he accepted her help.

Although Seneca was not yet directly associated with the imperial family when Claudius finally took up the power he had been kept from for so long,<sup>23</sup> various accounts of these unexpected events must have rapidly spread across the city and the empire. Later literary accounts of Claudius' rise to power are confused and frequently disagree with

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<sup>22</sup> Glauce, rather than Creusa, is the name of Jason's new wife in Greek accounts. Creusa (Κρέουσα) is just a feminized form of Creon (Κρεῖων), which means “ruler, lord, or master.” The name Glauce (“grey”) leaves this figure with a similarly colorless character.

<sup>23</sup> Seneca was exiled from 41-48 CE at the behest of Messalina; Claudius had come to power in early 41.

each other, no doubt in part because of the suddenness of Claudius' fortune. Nevertheless, they are consistent about much of Claudius' earlier experience with power (or the lack thereof), a problem which Seneca seems to have also found applicable in Jason's case. As Jason's earliest problems originated from his uncle Pelias, who denied him his rightful place in Iolcus, so too Claudius' initial problems came from his own family members. Their opinions of the sickly, deformed, and supposedly slow young man were harsh: his own mother referred to Claudius as "a monstrosity of a man, not finished but merely begun by nature."<sup>24</sup> Ashamed, they held Claudius' coming-of-age ceremony in the middle of the night and kept him out of their way as much as possible (Suet. *Clau.* 2). His relatives' low opinions of Claudius also gave them pause even when contemplating his appearance in public, while their willingness to grant him public office was even more halting. Suetonius cites letters between Augustus and Livia that discuss Claudius' future: here, the pair makes decisions about whether the young man will attend games held for his father, take part in the festivities on the Alban Mount like his peers, or ever hold office (4). Although named in the wills of both Augustus and Tiberius, Claudius is only deemed worthy to be an heir in the third degree.<sup>25</sup> In the *Apocolocyntosis*, when the deceased Claudius arrives at Olympus to make his case to the gods to stay among them, it is Divus Augustus himself, not any of the actual Olympian divinities, who banishes his step-grandson back to Hades (10-11). Claudius was further overshadowed by the popularity and accomplishments of his brother Germanicus, whose military ability, good looks, and promising future highlighted his brother's ineptitude. Although Claudius was

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<sup>24</sup> *Portentum eum hominis dicitabat, nec absolutum sed tantum inchoatum*, Suet. *Clau.* 3.2.

<sup>25</sup> That is, he would only receive an inheritance if the previous two heirs declined what was offered to them; Suetonius claims this was the same level as people who were *paene extraneos*, "barely part of the household" (*Clau.* 4.7). On the contrary, Tiberius was granted two-thirds of Augustus' estate in his will (*Aug.* 101.2). See Levick (1990) 17 for further explanation of inheritance rules.

appreciated by the people, they seemed to like him mostly for his connections to other greater men, greeting him as the “emperor’s uncle” or the “brother of Germanicus” (Suet. *Clau.* 7).<sup>26</sup> In the face of such adversity, it is unsurprising (as Suetonius remarks) that “then, having at last cast aside his hope for a position, [Claudius] gave himself up to idleness.”<sup>27</sup>

Though the sources present Claudius’ failures fairly uniformly, critical readers may be more skeptical about his supposed worthlessness. A closer examination of the sources reveals that Claudius was not the addle-brained fool his family thought—he wrote histories, learned Etruscan, conversed with other scholars, and made decisions that (although seeming quite ridiculous on the surface) reveal some astuteness.<sup>28</sup> Claudius did seek (and to some extent received) advancement under the subsequent emperors Tiberius and Caligula. Tiberius gave him consular regalia, though refusing him the responsibilities of the actual position; Caligula finally granted him his first and second consulships, allowing him to begin his political career at the relatively advanced age of forty-six (*Clau.* 5, 7). Although his assignments included mundane tasks like arranging statue contracts for Caligula and serving as an ambassador to this uncontrollable emperor on behalf of the nervous Senate (9), his advancement does reveal some trust from his family. Suetonius might consider Claudius’ rise from his shaky beginnings an “extraordinary fortune” (*mirabile casu*, 10.1), but modern readers need not be so surprised that Claudius overcame the obstacles that threatened to block his rise to power. However, that he had

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<sup>26</sup> Ironically, Claudius relied on connections to the family who had so adamantly kept him from office to obtain the power that he was so long denied—his connections to the previous rulers, his name itself, and even his popular associations with Germanicus all gained him support as he rose to the highest office.

<sup>27</sup> *Tunc demum abiecta spe dignitatis ad otium concessit, Clau.* 5.

<sup>28</sup> For example, Suetonius (15.1) scoffs at Claudius for rejecting as a juror a man who was particularly eager to be one. Given the prevalence of bribery among ancient juries, however, Claudius’ decision may have been quite shrewd.

this potential but was still held back by others must have been even more discouraging for Claudius.

Modern scholars debate how active a role Claudius might have had in Caligula's assassination.<sup>29</sup> Disagreements among the assassins led to chaos after the deed was done, and their end goal, including plans for Claudius, remains unclear. Did they wish Claudius to die, be hailed Caligula's successor, or something in the middle? Debate after the assassination was even more discouraging, as the abolishment of the imperial system and the return of the Republic were considered. Even as Claudius shed the yoke of his overbearing family and stood on the threshold of the highest office possible, people did not even rally around him as a goal for their plot. As the idea of a returned Republic fell aside, other candidates dared to put their own names forward, usurping the place of the only man who, as a direct relative to the previous emperors, could claim precedent in assuming power.<sup>30</sup> Even the Praetorian Guard, who had rescued Claudius after the assassination and kept him safely in their camp out of the Senate's grip, had to be bribed for their support—between 15,000 and 20,000 sesterces each for regular soldiers.<sup>31</sup> This bribery was one more step along Claudius' long, winding path toward the power that should rightfully have been his.

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<sup>29</sup> Major (1992) examines both primary and secondary sources in her discussion of Claudius' potential involvement in the assassination and can serve as a background here.

<sup>30</sup> Information on these rival claimants can be found in Levick (1990) 32.

<sup>31</sup> Suetonius claims that this is the first instance of an emperor needing to bribe his troops for support; however, he is only partially correct—discussion of such bribery from emperors before Claudius appears at Scramuzza (1940) 60-3. As early as the Late Republic, rulers recognized the importance of treating soldiers well, finding them land in Italy or throughout the empire to settle on after their term of service. Augustus' and Tiberius' wills left rewards to Praetorians as well as regular legionaries. However, these emperors were nowhere near as generous as Claudius, granting the soldiers only a thousand sesterces each, a mere fraction of their later bounty. See Scramuzza (1940) 60-62 more a more detailed analysis of imperial presents to guards upon both accessions and deaths.

Once in power, Claudius faced additional difficulties staying in and maintaining his position. While Jason repeatedly fell out of power after catastrophes in Iolcus and Corinth, Claudius remained in power only under the control of others. In part, this was a practical matter: since his family doubted that Claudius would ever rise in politics, they had neglected parts of his instruction he would otherwise have gotten. This, along with his physical and emotional infirmities, added to the necessity of forming an even stronger “court” of freedmen to help Claudius run the empire. Much has been made of Claudius’ reliance on his freedmen: ancient sources particularly chastise him for becoming a tool of others and relying so heavily on this lower social class. Freedmen, however, were essentially the only class Claudius could have used—senators would not have been willing to work under someone technically their equal, and knights too would have balked at the proposition.<sup>32</sup> But our sources here wrote in a time period in which such restrictions had been loosened, allowing upper classes to work under the emperor more freely. Furthermore, Claudius, who had been raised apart from the social circles of his distinguished family, was probably less influenced by their exclusivity but instead sought those who could help him accomplish his job properly and quickly. Even though Claudius did rely on inferiors, his commands and decisions still reveal an idiosyncratic flair and he took full responsibility for the deeds committed during his rule.<sup>33</sup> He himself still was the emperor, after a long period of waiting in the shadows for his moment to come.

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<sup>32</sup> According to Scramuzza (1940) 85, knights during this period could not and would not serve in the emperor’s household for the same reasons they avoided serving the consuls.

<sup>33</sup> Athanassakis (1973) 50 notes that in the *Apocolocyntosis*, Claudius is forced to take responsibility for the murders of thirty-one named victims; however, he did not order all their deaths himself, nor was he even aware of what happened to them—Messalina was responsible for six and Narcissus another nine. By including these victims, Seneca (and perhaps Romans in general) attributed to Claudius responsibility for all events happening in his reign and blamed him for letting his wife and freedman mislead him.

Although most Romans seemed rather unconcerned about Claudius' difficult journey toward the pinnacle of authority, they were normally very mindful of the hierarchy of power and keeping it for the most fit. Roman public offices were organized along the *cursus honorum*, a system which kept candidates for offices in line by compelling them to start at the bottom of the hierarchy and work their way up the ladder of offices. Those who skipped rungs or jumped straight to the top were judged harshly; for instance, Pompey, who faced much criticism for his appointment to the consulship despite not even being a senator at the time. Romans of the Late Republic were also perturbed by the rise of "New Men," those whose ancestry did not include any consuls but who were now attempting to start a political tradition for their families by running for office. Competitions based on such distinctions rose to new heights during the confrontation between Catiline and Cicero, in which the former started a conspiracy to overthrow the Republic and the senate after he was foiled in his bid for the consulship by the latter, himself a *novus homo*. The Romans also explored such feelings of resentment about losing one's expected position in literature. For instance, the *Aeneid* describes the wrath of Turnus as his status and opportunities slip away when Aeneas arrives in Italy and steals his bride and attention. The Romans were keenly aware that certain people, by dint of lineage, abilities, or past experience, had the right to certain positions, making it unsurprising that Claudius fervently sought to emerge from the shadow in which he had lay hidden, awaiting his turn for premier authority.

The most basic connection between Jason and Claudius, the clearest problem they share, is that both desire to be a leader in the face of great adversity. As the following sections reveal, each ruler was willing to endure uncomfortable family situations, travel

to the ends of the earth, and exploit companions for help in feigning military competence. Their goal was to secure and preserve the positions they had long sought and felt entitled to. Jason's fear that he is threatened on all sides by enemies near and far is only the most recent worry on his long and winding road to power. Fighting off barbaric kings and treacherous relatives alike, Jason is rightly cautious about new threats to his precarious position. But Medea's arguments in this dialogue remain equally valid. Jason cannot live in Creon's shadow to avoid being overpowered by others—his current situation is degrading and equally constricting. Given Medea's offer to take care of their problems with her skills, Jason's choice should be clear, but at this critical juncture he loses his nerve for his bid for power. Claudius' path too was strewn with obstacles in the form of friends, family and foes. The imperial succession was not hereditary; however, for practical purposes it did stay within the Julio-Claudian family, making Claudius' difficulties harder for him to bear. Both these figures faced problems as "rulers" before they even merited such a designation, fighting for their positions with varying degrees of force and success. Seneca had surely witnessed Claudius' struggles to overcome others' doubts about his qualifications; for him, the emperor's endeavors found expression in Jason's wearied fear that there was always some new foe to convince of his own superiority.

### III. Rulers and Familial Concerns

IAS. O dura fata semper et sortem asperam,  
 cum saevit et cum parcit ex aequo malam!  
 remedia quotiens invenit nobis deus  
 periculis peiora! si vellem fidem  
 praestare meritis coniugis, leto fuit 435  
 caput offerendum; si mori nollem, fide  
 misero carendum. non timor vicit fidem,  
 sed trepida pietas; quippe sequeretur necem  
 proles parentum. sancta si caelum incolis  
 Iustitia, numen invoco ac testor tuum: 440  
 nati patrem vicere. quin ipsam quoque,  
 etsi ferox est corde nec patiens iugi,  
 consulere natis malle quam thalamis reor.  
 constituit animus precibus iratam aggredi.

JASON: O fates always harsh, and lot cruel and equally bad when raging and when sparing! How often the god finds for us remedies worse than the dangers! If I wanted to maintain my faithfulness as befits the merits of my wife, I had to offer myself to death; if I did not want to die, I had to be found lacking in wretched faithfulness. Not fear, but fearful devotion overcame my loyalty; certainly my children would have followed their parents' death. Holy Justice, if you do inhabit the heavens, I call upon your divine power as my witness: my sons conquered their father. Indeed even she, I think, although she is fierce in spirit and intolerant of the yoke, prefers to take care of her children over her marriage. My mind has resolved to approach her with entreaties, though she is angry.

Jason's first appearance in *Medea* provides a glimpse into the inner workings of his mind as he debates with himself the choices he has had to make regarding Medea and his sons. Seneca has already tipped the balance of the play in Jason's favor by altering the loyalty of the chorus; he now allows Jason a chance to defend himself and his choices by revealing his inner thoughts and letting him puzzle through his options before the audience's eyes. The other side of the argument now gains a voice beyond the snide remarks of Euripides' Jason, the opportunistically deceitful lies of Ovid's, or the sappy promises of Apollonius', as Seneca helps the audience understand that decisions like these really play a role in ruling a state. As emperors in Seneca's time were often honored

with the title *pater patriae*, Jason too acts as a “father” to the city, taking as much—if not more—care of it as for his own family. Should Jason make the wrong decision, or be unable to convince his former wife to accept his verdict, not only his family but all of Corinth could end up suffering for it. Jason must deal with this decision and its consequences appropriately if he is to be considered a worthy leader. If he cannot control his own household, the Corinthians will doubt his ability to control the whole city. In this opening passage, Jason reveals important leadership qualities such as a willingness to sacrifice and an ability to mediate. This passage highlights the interconnectedness of the personal and public spheres for Roman rulers and the dilemmas that these issues posed. As a philosopher embroiled in his own era’s political chaos, Seneca acutely appreciated Jason’s difficulties in trying to live morally in a world that made doing so very difficult.<sup>34</sup>

Jason’s ponderings here betray one of his most pressing concerns: the need to distinguish his personal and public lives by balancing his political needs with his attachment to his wife and children. Jason emphasizes the difficulty of the choice and the fact that he had no good option. The crux of his dilemma appears in lines 434-7: “If I wanted to maintain my faithfulness as befits the merits of my wife, I had to offer myself to death; if I did not want to die, I had to be found lacking in wretched faithfulness.” Jason rightly laments the difficulty of his choice; his *fatum* and *sors*, terms that already denote unchangeable situations, are here described as “harsh” and “cruel,” reiterating that he is stuck in a situation with no clear solution.<sup>35</sup> Jason even calls on a personified Justice to approve his choice, seeking divine approval to soothe his frenzied mind and

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<sup>34</sup> For more on Seneca’s literary works in relation to his political life, see Griffin (1976), and particularly Chapter 10, “The Philosopher on Political Participation.”

<sup>35</sup> See OLD *sors* s.v. 8 and *fatum* s.v. 5. Hine (2000) 158 discusses Jason’s use of these terms as opposed to Medea’s use of more flexible terms for “fortune” and “chance.”

acknowledging his inability to truly deal with the situation “justly.” Medea too faces a choice, but hers is between her marriage and her sons (*natis...quam thalamis*), and thus lacks the broader political implications that Jason’s has. Nevertheless, Jason treats his abandoned wife quite kindly here, admitting that she deserves better (*meritis*) and beseeching her (*precibus*) to let go of her anger even though she can be difficult to deal with (*ferox, nec patiens, iratam*). Yet Jason also attempts to cast much of the blame from himself. He claims that he has been conquered (*vicere*)—but by his sons and his own piety. Moreover, he has maintained his *pietas* and *fides* (both family-centered virtues) throughout his trials. *Pietas* in particular is a recurrent motif for Jason: in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Jason’s “piety” (offering to give his life for his father) is contrasted with the “impiety” of Pelias’ daughters (as they hack him to pieces).<sup>36</sup> Jason’s inner debate and uncertainty give the audience a glimpse into the tempest of his mind as he balances his duties to his family, sense of honor, political necessity, and parental affection to come up with a solution that will be both privately and publicly viable.

The style of this passage further reinforces Jason’s difficulties and indecision. His gerundives (*offerendum, carendum*) and subjunctives (*vellem, nollem, sequeretur*) underscore his feelings of being compelled to make decisions and uncertainty about what he should have done. The meter also betrays his lack of resolve. Five lines at the very heart of his speech (including four sequential lines, 436-9) contain caesurae and full stops in mid line, giving Jason’s speech a halting quality. Additionally, the succession of tribrachs in 433, near the start of his speech, represents the speaker as stuttering and anxious. Jason’s uncertainty over the relative difficulties of his problems and solutions is

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<sup>36</sup> *Mota est pietate rogantis*, Ovid *Meta.* 7.169-90; *his, ut quaeque pia est, hortantibus in pia prima est*, 7.339.

highlighted by the disrupted word order and alliteration of 433-4: *peiora*, although delayed over a line to be near *periculis*, belongs grammatically with *remedia*, confirming Jason's confusion over whether the dangers or remedies are worse. Jason's *fides* is also emphasized through its placement at the ends of three of four successive lines as he strives to claim virtues even amidst such struggles (434-7).

These familial difficulties are one of the most obvious connections between Claudius and Jason. *Medea* is essentially about familial uproar provoked by political action, and Claudius' reign begins, ends, and is shot through with such family concerns. Before their present situation, Jason relied on Medea very much: without her help, he could never have survived her father Aeëtes' tasks or retrieved the Golden Fleece. Though such events occur outside the action of this play, Medea, the chorus, Creon, and Jason himself all refer to this original basis for their relationship; where they differ is on the party responsible for its end and the crimes committed on its behalf. Jason's problem now, though, is that after being forced to leave Iolcus again he needs a new kingdom and political alliances. Staying with Medea makes no political sense. She has no allies, her only friend in Corinth is her husband, and her flame-retardant potions are no longer in high demand. Staying with his children makes more sense for Jason; they can remain his heirs until he and Creusa have children of their own. Creon's offer to marry Jason to his own daughter and his apparent acceptance of Jason's children is almost too good to be true, as Creon himself notes in reference to Jason's position as a hunted exile (252-7, 284). As a good politician, Jason accepts the offer, despite the obvious mental anguish about the decision's cost his opening remarks reveal. Jason spends much of the play convincing his wife, and perhaps himself too, that her past help means nothing to him,

that he is not guilty of these earlier crimes, and that he never asked her to commit them in the first place. But in reality, he is just moving from one opportunistic marriage to another.

Added to Jason's internal conflict is external pressure from both Creon and the chorus of Corinthians to leave Medea. During the chorus' wedding hymn, the Corinthians sneer, "If any runaway girl be wed to a foreign husband, let her go away in silent shadows."<sup>37</sup> Creon, no less harshly, first addresses Medea as "noxious offspring of Colchian Aeëtes,"<sup>38</sup> emphasizing her foreignness and the poisonous effect her presence has on his citizens. Awareness of his wife's unpopularity no doubt causes Jason further mental anguish, since it would be doubly beneficial to switch his allegiance to Creon and Creusa. In this passage he laments having to break faith with Medea, but the realization that his life would become much easier if he did must have been very persuasive. In addition, the chorus presents Jason's earlier marriage as a forced matter: they say he was "frightened" (*trepidus*, 104), that his right hand was "unwilling" (*invita*, 104), and that only this time does he act with his father-in-law's consent (*soceris...volentibus*, 106). This earlier marriage is opposed to his upcoming one, whose legitimacy they praise (*facibus legitimis*, 67). Their claims make Jason's choice even more agonizing by offering him another excuse to leave Medea. With such problems confronting them, it is no surprise that the pair grows short with each other, noticeable in both words and actions. Verbally, they rarely refer to each other by name, but rather with intensive pronouns as here (*ipsam*, 441) or other sarcastically spiteful titles like "royal son-in-law" (*regius...gener*, 461). More direly, this animosity manifests itself in uncontrolled actions

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<sup>37</sup> *Tacitis eat illa tenebris, si qua peregrino nubit fugitiva marito*, 114-5.

<sup>38</sup> *Colchi noxium Aeetae genus*, 179.

throughout the course of the play. Jason leaves Medea for his new wife; Medea retaliates by deceitfully murdering the innocent Creusa. And when Jason attempts to deprive her of their children, Medea murders them before their father's eyes. Both these types of animosity evidence the deep-rooted obstacles that stood in the way of this relationship's success.

Jason's attitude toward his wife can be contrasted to his treatment of their children. For rulers both real and mythical, having legitimate male heirs was of the utmost importance. Euripides' Medea finds a new refuge by helping a childless neighboring king; early emperors also took having male heirs very seriously and were sure to adopt worthy replacements (the second-best option) if their own sons could not rule. Unlike in Euripides, where Medea decides early on that killing her children will be necessary, in Seneca it is Jason's own expression of his sons' dearness that inspires Medea to her crime. Though Jason and his children never appear onstage together until the final death scene, his words clearly express his feelings for them. In this passage, Jason notes that he made his final decision based on what was best for his children, avoiding his own death only for their benefit (338-9). Shortly thereafter, he seals their fate by warning Medea that separation from his sons is something "not even my king and father-in-law himself could force me to endure."<sup>39</sup> And at the very end of the play, he ineffectually begs Medea to take his own life rather than slaughter their second son. Though Medea questions Jason's loyalty to her sons and fears that Creusa's future children will be preferred to hers, Seneca's version of Jason is actually much more devoted to his children than this character in other accounts. In Euripides' *Medea*, Jason

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<sup>39</sup> *Pati, / non ipse memet cogat et rex et socer*, 545-6.

readily allows his wife to bring the children along in her exile; their tutor believes that love for his new wife has driven away any love for his children (88). Only later, when Medea has convinced Jason to keep the children in Corinth, does he consider making them leaders (along with their stepbrothers) when they grow up (916-7). Further evidence of this Jason's disregard for Medea's sons as potential heirs can be discerned through his diction. Throughout the play, characters refer to the children as both τέκνα (a more general term whose neuter gender and special reference to the mother dissociate the children from the likelihood of ruling—LSJ s.v. A) and παῖδες (a masculine term with special reference to the father—LSJ s.v. AI). Although Jason refers to both his future children with his new wife and children in general as παῖδες, he prefers τέκνα for his previous children. However, after Medea has convinced him to keep the children in Corinth, he switches to παῖδες, only to revert back to τέκνα after their deaths. After their slaughter, Jason does show remorse, but given his earlier nonchalance his words seem far less believable. Such uncaring attitudes about children are further explored in a choral ode that describes the difficulty parents face in raising children, and remarks on the good fortune of those who have not had to put up with these hardships (1090-1115).

The accounts of Ovid and Apollonius do not comment on Jason's relationship to his children by Medea, but both do include accounts of his earlier experience with Hypsipyle. Her involvement with Jason was remarkably similar to Medea's. Despite their love and her two children by him (whom she refers to as “pledges,” *pignora*, just as Medea does<sup>40</sup>), Jason ignores her pleas to return to her or recognize his children, foreshadowing his likely treatment of Medea's sons. Seneca thus makes key changes to

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<sup>40</sup> Sen. *Medea* 1012, Ovid *Her.* 6.192

the typical Medea storyline to emphasize this element's importance in the delicate art of ruling.

Jason's interactions with Medea are also quite different from previous accounts of their story. In Euripides he is condescending rather than pitying. He blames her for her exile, declaring that her life is difficult not because of anything he has done, but because of her own outspokenness in criticizing rulers (452-3). Jason also is even more ungrateful in Euripides, claiming that Medea vastly overexaggerates the favors she has done for him. Most importantly, Jason says that he feels no regret for leaving her but rather sees himself as very fortunate to be allowed to marry Creon's daughter despite his status as an exile (551-4). The Jason in *Heroides* XII appears far more conniving, since Medea actually recounts Jason's approach to her for help and his eventual reneging on his promise to remain hers. Similarly, the Jason from the *Metamorphoses* "promised marriage" (*promisitque torum*<sup>41</sup>, 91), but despite Medea's warnings about deceiving her, he betrays her anyway. In none of these other versions does Jason express remorse or consider Medea's needs, but instead treats their relationship with indifference. Seneca's emphasis on Jason's changing relationships in general also becomes clear in comparison to these other works. In Euripides, his new marriage has already taken place; in *Heroides* XII it is currently happening, but offstage and not in the presence of Medea or the audience. Only in Seneca's version does Medea invoke marriage gods from the very first words of the tragedy and behold the wedding procession herself. The chorus' subsequent ode in praise of the new couple rubs Medea's rejection in her face and reiterates for the

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<sup>41</sup> For this definition of *torum*, see s.v. 5b in the OLD.

audience this theme's importance throughout the play, while hinting at the problems it will soon cause.

Although he remained in exile for the first half of Claudius' reign, Seneca had previously been an individual of sufficient stature to agitate Caligula. He was eventually recalled from exile by Agrippina to act as tutor for her son, and from then on remained an important member of the emperor's inner circle and was privy to the imperial household's most intimate, family-centered affairs. The philosopher-tutor understood the imperial household well enough to act as occasional speechwriter for them, as in Nero's oration upon Claudius' death (Dio 61.3.1). His firsthand experience with the issues of Claudius' reign, and particularly with these more private affairs, would naturally have influenced Seneca as he wrote about Jason. In fact, the first lines of Jason's monologue here could have come straight from Claudius' mouth as Gratus swung open the curtain, delivering poor Claudius from danger with a "worse remedy"—having to take up the imperial mantle. Whether intentional or not, Seneca's interpretation of Jason was inexorably shaped by his role in the Claudian regime.

The relationships between Claudius and the two wives of his imperial reign, Messalina and Agrippina, are even more difficult to examine than Jason's with Medea, in part because of problems with our sources. Messalina is typically depicted as a doer of "disgraceful and dishonorable deeds" (*flagitia atque dedecora*, Suet. *Clau.* 26.2); like Medea, she apparently earned much disapproval from Claudius' subjects on account of her adulterous behavior, acceptance of bribes, and particularly her marriage to Gaius Silius, the epitome of her depravity. However, the attacks on Messalina come from significantly later sources that are likely biased against the fallen empress. In reality, only

a vague official decree described this marriage: people likely embroidered the story and added further condemnations in the absence of actual information.<sup>42</sup> However, such claims still reveal opinions of these wives' characters, regardless of their veracity. In reality, Claudius had benefitted greatly from Messalina. Her marriage to Claudius and the birth of their son Britannicus occurred around the same time as his ascent to power. As the great-granddaughter of Augustus' sister Octavia, she brought political influence to her husband and was later favored with a variety of honors, even riding with Claudius in his British triumph. However, Claudius apparently found these benefits too insignificant as his career progressed. Scholarship now suggests that Messalina's marriage to Silius might have been politically motivated as she sought protection for herself and her son against an emperor who was perhaps already considering a new marriage.<sup>43</sup> Regardless of her intentions, Claudius chose to have her eliminated at this point in his career. Messalina could no longer adequately fulfill Claudius' needs for political support. Claudius the politician understood the importance of both being well connected and not allowing his family to negatively affect his public image. Faced with a situation much like Jason's, Claudius too decided that the time had come to change horses.

Claudius' subsequent marriage to his niece Agrippina brought even more problems, although it was intended to strengthen the emperor's power. Only a particularly valuable political marriage could have torn Claudius away from his vow to never remarry (Suet. *Clau.* 26.2). Again, Claudius seems to have been aiming at solidifying his own position through a new marriage, as seen by his selection from among the three potential brides. Aelia Paetina, his previous wife, was a known quantity and a

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<sup>42</sup> Information on this decree and thoughts on others' embellishments is available at Osgood (2010) 210.

<sup>43</sup> Osgood (2010) 211 unites similar theories from earlier authors in presenting this argument.

“safe” choice; Lollia Paulina, a rich aristocrat, offered financial stability and some prestige; and Agrippina herself brought significant political and social advancement. Agrippina was both the great-granddaughter of Augustus and the daughter of the much-beloved Germanicus, Claudius’ brother; she also already had a son, whose age (he was three years older than Britannicus) would leave him in an opportune position to take over the role of heir in place of the disgraced Messalina’s son. A marriage to Agrippina would not only help Claudius’ current political situation but would also right past political wrongs by appeasing those who were upset by the murder of her family members under Tiberius and her own exile by Caligula.<sup>44</sup> This new wife also brought clients from the provinces and connections to the Jewish court, widening her husband’s influence substantially.<sup>45</sup> As empress, she became the first living imperial wife to be called “Augusta” during her husband’s reign;<sup>46</sup> she also assumed many of Messalina’s honors, such as the right to ride in a special chariot at festivals (Dio 60.33.2). But these benefits came at a price: although Claudius’ previous wife would not be seeking revenge, Agrippina seems to have caused her husband difficulty with her own influence and authority. Ancient historians claim that Claudius “became a slave” to his wife (ἐδεδούλωτο, Dio 60.31.8) and that, through fear and favors, she gained complete control over her husband and wielded his power and influence. Again, as with Messalina, these reports may have been reinterpreted by later traditions. The only contemporaneous account from which another view might be solicited, the *Apocolocyntosis*, is in no position to speak out against the mother of the current *princeps* who had ended its author’s exile. But given Claudius’ past history of unsuccessfully

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<sup>44</sup> This additional benefit is pointed out in Levick (1990) 70.

<sup>45</sup> For further information on Agrippina and her foreign connections, see Wood (2000) 250-1.

<sup>46</sup> Osgood (2010) 216 explores several of Agrippina’s honors and their precedents.

balancing his own power with his need for support from powerful wives, it would not be surprising if he had trouble dealing with Agrippina as well.

Overall, Claudius' marriages were every bit as chaotic, troublesome, and opportunistic as Jason's. He too faced public disapproval for his choice of wives, particularly of Agrippina: the pair first had to rewrite Roman law regarding uncle-niece marriages, and even then risked popular disapproval for this "incest" (Tac. *Ann.* 12.5). Sources also note that these wives were not chosen freely, but were forced upon the emperor by political necessity. Messalina and Agrippina, both relatives of the original *princeps* and well-connected imperial women, gave Claudius the extra authority he needed to be taken seriously. Agrippina in particular was specifically pitched to Claudius by his freedmen, while both Tacitus and Suetonius note suspicions that she used her position as his niece to get closer to Claudius.<sup>47</sup> In such overtly political marriage-alliances, it is unsurprising that friction arose between the ruler and his spouse. Even before they are married, Claudius seems to have second thoughts about his actions—according to Suetonius, he constantly referred to Agrippina as his "daughter and nursling" (*filiam et alumnam*, 39.2). Tacitus tells how Agrippina is upsetting the entire imperial household with her scheming (12.65), and in the end it is this evil wife who is accused of capping off her husband's reign with his mushroom fiasco. Although modern scholars accept this story less readily than the ancient sources do, even false claims reveal conceptions of Agrippina's nature.<sup>48</sup>

Claudius' troubled relationships with his wives are, as in Jason's case, contrasted with his devotion to his heirs, a notion absent since the days of Gaius and Lucius, the

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<sup>47</sup> Suet. *Clau.* 26.3, Tac. *Ann.* 12.3

<sup>48</sup> Barrett (1996) 140-2 examines accounts of Claudius' death in the primary sources and argues that Agrippina's guilt cannot be concluded from them.

one-time heirs of Augustus. Tiberius “loved with a father’s affection neither his natural son Drusus nor his adopted son Germanicus;”<sup>49</sup> his actual heirs, Caligula and Drusus’ son, received little personal concern from the reclusive old emperor. Caligula himself, perhaps because of his youth, seems to have made little preparation for a successor. In contrast, Claudius does display concern for his heirs, particularly for his son Britannicus. When Britannicus is born, Claudius takes him “in his hands” (*in manibus*) and “keeps him constantly before him” (*ante se retinens assidue*), proudly displaying him to the applauding throng of soldiers and plebeians (Suet. *Clau.* 27.2). Besides this simple fatherly love, Claudius also shows interest in his son’s advancement, something he never received from his own relatives. Despite his son’s technically insufficient age, Claudius intends to honor Britannicus with the *toga virilis* “so that the Roman people might at last have a real Caesar.”<sup>50</sup> Although Claudius’ adopted son Nero does not appear as frequently, it is likely that these later authors, aware of how terrible an emperor Nero became, purposely edited him out.<sup>51</sup> But some affection from Claudius is still discernible in Suetonius, who closes his account with one of Claudius’ last acts: the emperor exhorts Britannicus and Nero to make peace between themselves and then begs the Senate to oversee both youths without regard for their age or true parentage (46).

This care for their children-heirs causes only further tension between the leaders and their wives, since the wives had their own, often conflicting, plans for their husbands’ children. Problems between Agrippina and Britannicus spring up frequently in

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<sup>49</sup> *Filiorum neque naturalem Drusum neque adoptivum Germanicum patria caritate dilexit*, Suet. *Tib.* 52.1.

<sup>50</sup> *Ut tandem populi Romani verum Caesarem habeat*, Suet. *Clau.* 43.

<sup>51</sup> Although Nero did not suffer an actual *damnatio memoriae*, the senate declared him a public enemy (*se hostem a senatu iudicatum*, Suet. *Nero* 49.2) and there was much ill will toward him. Distaste for Nero was particularly strong among the upper classes, of which these later authors were members. While they do not attempt to completely excise Nero from memory, the historians still hesitate to show Claudius treating Nero favorably. Champlin 2003 (29) clarifies common misconceptions regarding Nero and the *damnatio memoriae*.

both Tacitus and Cassius Dio. Agrippina recognizes the threat posed by Claudius' blood relative to her own son, just as Medea voices concerns that her sons will be overshadowed by those Jason will have with Creusa. To solve this, Agrippina robs Britannicus of his status by keeping him away from his own father (Dio 60.34.1) and starting rumors that he is insane or epileptic (60.33.10). In general, she ensures that Britannicus receives "neither any honor nor attention" (οὔτε τινὰ τιμὴν οὔτε ἐπιμέλειαν, 61.32.5). Her plans for the boys are on display at some circus games, where Nero wears triumphal robes but Britannicus remained in his *toga praetexta* (Tac. *Ann.* 12.41). Again, some of this material is likely skewed by later authors, but, as Augustus' many troubles revealed, setting up one's heirs and ensuring that they received substantial popular support was an important task for a successful leader.

Concern with controlling one's own family had long been important for Romans. Imperial similarities to a regal dynasty, not to mention the presence of royal characters in many of the tragedies, might have reminded the audience of Rome's own kings.<sup>52</sup> Servius Tullius, who was betrayed, deposed, and trampled by his own daughter, shows that Romans were well aware of the necessity of controlling one's family and the problems that could result if one did not. Publius Horatius' murder of his own sister and the subsequent trial, though an overly dramatic example, likewise emphasizes the Roman insistence on putting the state before one's own family and the political implications of a relative's actions. The audience might also recall more recent examples, such as Augustus' family problems with Julia and his efforts to disassociate himself from his

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<sup>52</sup> The lasting importance of the regal period is evident in accounts of historians like Livy and Tacitus. Livy devotes the first book of his history of Rome to the seven kings; Tacitus, although he does not actually discuss these figures in his work, nevertheless begins his *Annales*, "From the beginning, kings held the city of Rome" (*urbem Romam a principio reges habuere*, 1.1).

daughter. Augustus' problems too showed the necessity of dealing appropriately with one's family members, the effect they had on one's public image, and the interconnection of political and familial matters.

As a Stoic, Seneca had further philosophical reason to be alarmed at the impact faulty relationships could pose for rulers. Family members are classified as "external goods" that impede reason and happiness. In *Epistulae Morales IX*, for instance, the philosopher Stilbo loses his wife and children but nevertheless remarks, "All my goods are with me!" ('omnia,' inquit, 'bona mea mecum sunt,' 9.18). Clearly, Jason and Claudius could have benefited from some Stoic counseling. Their personal issues with their wives would have been quashed, Jason would never have uttered the comments that inspired the murder of his children, and the fate of their offspring would have troubled neither ruler.

Even the most private, personal decisions leaders make can lead to serious consequences for those they rule. Jason's led to the death of the Corinthian king and his daughter, the loss of his immediate heirs (his sons), and the destruction of the palace, if not more of Corinth as well (887). Claudius' decisions may have led to an even more corrupt imperial household, and eventually his own death and the accession of Nero instead of his original heir Britannicus. However, these decisions were much more than merely personal: they were enacted for a very public and political agenda of getting or strengthening power. In *Medea*, Seneca allows his audience to consider the personal implications that these very political decisions may have had for the rulers themselves. He emphasizes Jason's regret at having to leave his wife and the difficulty of his decision; Jason later reveals that he has saved Medea from Creon's wrath (perhaps at the

risk of angering his new ally) (490-1) and takes responsibility for his wrong at the end of the tragedy (1004). But like Claudius, Jason is a “prisoner of his position,” compelled to make decisions regardless of his private inclinations or feelings.<sup>53</sup> Part of the tragedy in the play arises from this understanding of Jason’s feelings about his choice. Examination of such sentiments, and not the dry historical accounts, reveals the personal toll that such decisions could exact from leaders.

Seneca’s *Medea* is a reinterpretation of an old myth shaped to suit its author’s own time. The remarkable similarities between the circumstances of Jason and Claudius suggest that Seneca wanted to draw attention to the ruler’s struggle to control his own family. These two rulers’ difficulties elucidate the political advantages and pitfalls of marriage—the benefits inherent in marrying the right person, balanced precariously against the separation of one’s public and private lives. As the period of Claudius’ principate attests, decisive resolution of intrafamily struggles was part and parcel of the successful acquisition and maintenance of imperial power. Seneca’s position in relation to this power offered him a front row seat to the *fata dura* and *sors aspera* faced by leaders of his own time.

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<sup>53</sup> Osgood (2010) 223 uses this quote and argues similar sentiments.

#### IV. Rulers and the Outside World

CHOR. Nunc iam cessit Pontus et omnes  
 patitur leges. 365  
 Non Palladia compacta manu  
 regum referens inclita remos  
 quaeritur Argo:  
 quaelibet altum cumba pererrat.  
 Terminus omnis motus, et urbes  
 muros terra posuere nova. 370  
 nil qua fuerat sede reliquit  
 pervius orbis;  
 Indus gelidum potat Araxen,  
 Albin Persae Rhenumque bibunt.  
 Venient annis saecula seris, 375  
 quibus Oceanus vincula rerum  
 laxet, et ingens pateat tellus,  
 Tethysque novos detegat orbes  
 nec sit terris ultima Thule.

CHORUS: Now even the sea has yielded and submits to all laws. There is no demand for the glorious Argo, built by Pallas' hand and pulling back the oars of kings: any little boat wanders around on the ocean. Every boundary has been moved, and cities have established walls in a new land. The traversable world has left nothing in the place it was: an Indian drinks from the cold Araxes, Persians drink from the Albis and the Rhine. There will come ages in later years in which the Ocean will loosen the chains of these matters and the huge earth will lie open, and Tethys will reveal new regions and Thule will not be the farthest of lands.<sup>54</sup>

Despite the chorus' usual animosity toward sailing and the fear they exhibit toward the pursuit, this choral ode betrays quite the opposite emotions—respect, amazement, and perhaps even excitement about the results of ever-expanding travel.<sup>55</sup> This particular section keenly interests scholars and readers, who have found in it meanings ranging from growing imperialism in Seneca's own time to the discovery of the

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<sup>54</sup> This passage refers to many geographical entities: the Araxis is the Aras in Turkey; the Albis is the Elbe, beyond the borders of the empire but known about through expeditions through Germania; and the Rhenus is the Rhine, the border of the empire between Gaul and Germany. Thule is a region or island that the geographer Strabo says is six days' sail north of Britain, and is considered the farthest-away region (*Geography* 1.4.2).

<sup>55</sup> For example, the choral ode at 579-669 describes both general dangers of travelling and the deaths of the Argonauts, many of whom died in nautical catastrophes.

Americas by fifteenth-century Europeans. Perhaps this is because here, more than anywhere else in the play, Seneca seems to have had his own era in mind and breaks out of what is expected in Jason's world.<sup>56</sup> Sailing is elsewhere presented in a much more negative light: the chorus remarks how many of the Argonauts died during their quest and blames increased travel for the demise of the Golden Age. In this passage, on the other hand, the chorus revels in the opening of the world that Jason's journey accomplished. For leaders of both history and mythology, a successful relationship to the outside world played an important part in ruling. Both control of and cooperation with the non-Roman—both foreign lands and their inhabitants—provided another source of authority, as outsiders and subjects alike gained respect for their leader. A ruler who successfully managed such encounters could impress his subjects by increasing the size of the empire, showing courage in facing the unknown, appearing more cultured or knowledgeable about the world, or discovering new lands, people, or resources. The outside world was a rich source of both earning favor from subjects at home and gaining new supporters abroad. Yet the chorus (and the emperor's subjects) was correct that such interaction could also be dangerous. Travelling itself, dealing with potentially hostile foreigners, overextending one's empire, and being away from the center of politics for lengths of time could all be perilous for rulers trying to maintain their authority.

In this passage, however, the chorus seems willing to overlook such perils and instead concentrates on the benefits and glory of interaction with the outside world. These newly civilized realms provide space for the growth of new colonies (*urbes / muros terra posuere nova*, 369-70) and anyone, not just heroes, can now travel about (*quaelibet altum*

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<sup>56</sup> See, for example, Hadas (1939) 229, Bishop (1985) 150-1, Benton (2003) 282-4, and Boyle (2006) 126-8.

*cumba pererrat*, 368). Here, the sea has been conquered and yields to the laws and order that its Roman conquerors impose, as if it were an actual foe (364-5). Further spectacle appears as foreigners from one end of Rome's empire visit the other end, revealing the amazing breadth of the empire. However, although this passage appears generally panegyric, it still has melancholy undertones. The "glorious Argo" (*inclita...Argo*, 367-8) has been replaced with "any sort of boat" (*quaelibet...cumba*, 368), and the speakers' comment that "the traversable world has left nothing in the place it was" (*nil qua fuerat sede reliquit / pervius orbis*, 371-2) sounds almost wistful, recalling other sweeping changes like those the Roman political system had recently undergone. Furthermore, remarks that this change "may loosen the bonds of the world" (*vincula rerum laxet*, 376) sound quite terrifying and destructive, as if by taking advantage of these new benefits the Roman people might actually be dooming themselves. Medea makes a personal note about the cost of the opening of the world: "whatever paths I opened for you, I closed for myself," she reminds Jason, stressing the hidden cost and personal loss such "advancements" may have.<sup>57</sup> Some scholars of Stoicism have even gone so far as to assert that positive readings of this passage are indefensible, believing that the ode actually represents a Stoic depiction of the destruction of cosmic order.<sup>58</sup> Thus, underneath the chorus' lone defense of sailing lurks a warning of the tragic consequences that could still result.

Despite their subjects' concerns, each leader knew that successful control and manipulation of the outside world would help strengthen his claim to authority. As we saw in section II, Jason had to undertake such a quest to a foreign land to reclaim his

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<sup>57</sup> *Quamquam aperui tibi vias, clausi mihi*, 458.

<sup>58</sup> Montiglio (2006) 574 examines evidence in favor of each reading and references key proponents of each view.

kingdom from the usurper Pelias. Claudius too sought respect and increased authority from his own dealings with the outside world and its inhabitants, both conquering and improving areas on the edge of the empire and extending citizenship rights to more of the provincials. Seneca seemed to have had Claudius' British campaign particularly in mind while composing this segment of *Medea*, as travelling through the outside world was a method each ruler used to exert his dominance and gain support.<sup>59</sup> As the chorus notes, travel is the necessary precursor to taking advantage of the many benefits the outside world can offer: trailblazing rulers could indeed open the world, encouraging others to travel after them, discovering places for future colonies, finding opportunities to conquer and expand the empire, and interacting with outsiders. Travelling was also a benefit to Jason and Claudius specifically because it entailed much less skill and dedication than all-out conquest (which, as the next section examines, neither was proficient at). Journeys to the outside world played an important part in the reign of each ruler. Claudius' voyage to Britain and Jason's to Colchis became defining characteristics of who they were and constituted the most successful point of both of their careers.

The journeys to Britain and Colchis do contain a number of similarities, particularly regarding the difficulties these journeys posed for rulers. For instance, both leaders travel to the very end of the known world on their missions, meriting the claim that "every boundary had been moved" by their expeditions. Apollonius' Jason exclaims to Phineus that "Colchian Aea lies at the farthest parts of Pontus and of the world," while Euripides' Jason snidely comments that his former wife lived "out there at the boundary

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<sup>59</sup> See, for instance, Boyle (1997) 132, Romm (1992) 167-71, and Hine (2000) 152-4.

of the world;”<sup>60</sup> this land is so close to the edge of the world that its inhabitants are the descendants of Helios, as the sun rises in their land. Likewise, Britain lay at the very edge of the world for the Romans, and was even beyond the Ocean. The prospect of fighting “outside the inhabited world” (ἔξω τῆς οἰκουμένης, Dio 60.19.2) so terrified the Roman troops that they initially refused to cross the channel with Claudius’ commanders at the invasion of the island. Jason’s and Claudius’ journeys to these remote locations are riddled with difficulties and dangers. The Argo faces “fickle breezes” and pursues an “unsure” course as it travels “the paths of life and death.”<sup>61</sup> The deadliest part of its trip, the passage between the Symplegades, is described in nearly every account; Seneca himself portrays the clashing rocks as “barriers of the deep” which clash together and “groan with an unworldly sound.”<sup>62</sup> Meanwhile, during Claudius’ journey from Ostia to Britain, the emperor “was nearly sunk twice by a violent northwest wind,”<sup>63</sup> although his main storm was not physical: despite spending only sixteen days in Britain, Claudius had to be away from Rome for six months because of travel time, and had to choose someone he really trusted to lead Rome in his absence (Dio 60.23.1). Faced with equally risky journeys to the very brink of civilization, neither ruler is deterred by the perils. Desperate to take advantage of another way of getting power, both these insecure rulers dared voyages that merited their subjects’ fear.

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<sup>60</sup> Ἄια δὲ Κολχίς / Πόντου καὶ γαίης ἐπικέκλιται ἐσχατιῆσιν, Apollonius 2.417-8; εἰ δὲ γῆς ἐπ’ ἐσχάτοις / ὄροισιν ὄκει, Euripides 540-1. Apollonius’ account recalls that Aea, the original name for Colchis, really just means “land” or “earth” (as in γαῖα; see LSJ s.v. II); the land was so far away that it originally did not even merit an actual name.

<sup>61</sup> *Levibus auris, dubioque, vitae mortisque vias*, 304-7. Furthermore, characters in the tragedies of Euripides and Seneca frequently use metaphors involving nautical turbulence to describe their disturbed emotions; see, for instance, Sen. *Medea* 940-3.

<sup>62</sup> *Claustra profundī, aetherio gement sonitu*, 342-4. See also Ovid *Meta.* 7.62-65 and Eur. *Medea* 1-4.

<sup>63</sup> *Vehementi circio bis paene demersus est*, Suet. *Clau.* 17.2.

Particulars of the Argonauts' journey appear in all the accounts, but each story uses travelling to express different ideas, and only Seneca's Jason takes advantage of travel as a method of self-aggrandizement. Euripides' play mentions the trip infrequently and the chorus does not discuss Jason's journey, although the play begins with the nurse wishing that the Argo had never gone to Colchis and started such trouble for both Medea and the Corinthians. The most interesting note is that near the end of the play, Medea foretells that Jason will die when the rotting Argo collapses on its brooding commander, revealing that the journey will actually be the death of him even if he returns to Iolcus safely (1387-8). On the other hand, the *Argonautica* discusses sailing and travel constantly, but again without much meaning. There are concerns for the Argonauts' safety (1.261-67) and a glorious departure scene (1.559-579), but little concern for what these experiences in the outside world will mean for Jason. Their travelling itself is in some ways odd and unrealistic as well: the sailors face no major storms during their trip, and more often enjoy fine weather or avoid storms safely. The *Metamorphoses* also recounts the Argonauts' journey in a fairly plain manner, making no comment on the moral implications or possible benefits of his trip. Medea here expresses a fear of the sea, but is undaunted because of her love, claiming, "having embraced [Jason], I will fear nothing" (*nil illum amplexa verebor*, 7.67). In Ovid's *Heroides*, journeys bring only trouble as a form of punishment. Medea begins her rant with an inversion of Seneca's sentiments, regretting that the Argonauts ever drank from the waters of the Phasis River in her homeland and how much trouble Jason's arrival brought to Colchis (12.10). She later wishes that she and her former husband could have died on the journey back to Greece, crushed by the Symplegades or devoured by Scylla (12.121-6). Although each of

these accounts reflects on the dangers of the voyage, none of them considers the implications of such dangers and the benefits that interaction with the outside world could have on the travelling ruler as much as Seneca does. Although Seneca's Jason does not seem to have travelled significantly differently than his predecessors, how he has sold his journey to his subjects and how they view both the journey and Jason's role in its success now help give him authority. Only in Seneca's account does the chorus link Jason's quest to vast changes in the world: as travel intensifies, the world is conquered, colonies spring up, foreigners and natives traverse new lands, and the empire expands immensely.

Jason's and Claudius' travels, undertaken to supplement the leaders' power on their own, also brought the advantages and trials of profitably interacting with or imposing dominance over the inhabitants of those foreign lands. A successful journey might result in triumphal spoils, monuments, or commemorative coinage, but dealing with new peoples and deciding what role they would play in society entailed more complex, long-lasting, and potentially advantageous decision-making. The choices Claudius and Jason made about how to treat these outsiders had effects on their reigns that outweighed any benefits they might have been able to achieve through the journeys themselves. These interactions could benefit rulers in many ways. Although violent interactions or conquest were certainly common, rulers found other ways of strengthening their rule through more peacefully taking advantage of these peoples. Rulers could attempt to more amicably assimilate their lands as tribute-paying provinces, or they might ally themselves with outsiders and make them their own personal supporters. Besides taking advantage of an outside land's natural resources, leaders could treat the peoples

themselves as a resource, using their skills or abilities for their state's (or their personal) benefit.<sup>64</sup> Claudius, who lacked support at home and interacted with many groups of outsiders, relied especially on the second option. Jason, on the other hand, needed specialist skills to escape dangerous situations, and later put Medea's abilities to use neutralizing threats to his rule. Medea's help accomplishing Aeëtes' tasks, securing the Golden Fleece, bringing the Argonauts safely home from Colchis, and eliminating the rival Pelias were only the beginning of what she could accomplish for her husband with her barbarian magic.

Although he does not refer to Jason's actual voyage very much, Seneca definitely explores Jason's dependence on and manipulation of foreigners in detail, and particularly how he attempts to control Medea and harness her power for his own benefit. Jason may only be dealing with one barbarian, but his strong reliance on her and the intensity with which Seneca burdens Medea with barbarian connotations make up for this fact.

Although not barbaric in her own eyes and having forsaken her homeland to come to cultured Greece, Medea still epitomizes the barbarian. As Romans claimed Romulus as their eponymous founding hero, Medea was (at least according to the Greeks and Romans) the namesake of the barbarian group the Medes, as she and her son Medus fled to them after leaving Athens (Herodotus *Histories* 7.62.i). As a wife without a husband and a mother who slaughters her children, Medea already constitutes an antitype of what is expected and appropriate; to these attributes, Seneca adds the similarly inverted propensities for unfeminine behavior and impiety toward the gods. Several times, Medea

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<sup>64</sup> For instance, upper-class Romans ensured their children's facility with Greek by importing slaves from there to care for their children. In entertainment, certain gladiator types were based on the fighting styles of foreign enemies. In religion, skilled priests might be imported along with their gods. And militarily, Claudius relied on the special fighting abilities of some German troops to win battles in Britain.

urges herself to “drive out [her] womanish fears” (*pelle femineos metus*, 42), while Creon wonders that Medea has “a woman’s wickedness for daring everything, but her resolve is a man’s” (*feminea cui nequitia ad audendum omnia, / robur virile est*, 267-8).<sup>65</sup> Even more perversely, Medea relies on gods of darkness, like Hecate, and frequently shows disrespect to the gods in general. Creon notes that she “disturbs the gods” (*sollicita deos*, 271); the nurse remarks that Medea often “attacked the gods” (*aggressam deos*, 673); and at the end of the play, Jason warns Medea that her departure is godless (*testare nullos esse, qua veheris, deos*, 1027). Medea’s foreign oddness is also made clear through her use of magic. She performs “mysterious, private, and hidden” deeds (*arcana secreta abdita*, 679), devotions made more sinister because they are performed with her left hand (*laeva...manu*, 670). The ingredients for her magic are terrifying enough on their own: they include a wreath of serpents, some of the poison that killed Hercules, and a Harpy’s feathers, and are followed by some of Medea’s own blood (771-808). As the epitome of barbarians, Medea symbolizes all the terrible power of the outside world that Jason hopes to dominate. To control such a fearsome barbarian and bend her to his will would be an awesome feat for Jason and would greatly secure his position.

Just to ensure that his audience is aware of Medea’s foreignness, Seneca has his other characters mention her background with definite distaste. The chorus is rarely onstage with Medea; she usually appears alone or with the nurse. The wedding revelers conclude their hymn with a wish that Medea would just disappear, and Creon first greets her by referencing her foreign status (115, 179). Other characters particularly seem to

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<sup>65</sup> Medea’s male heroic qualities have been noted in other accounts as well; see Bongie (1977) for Medea as a “hero” in Euripides. However, although Medea may have some male characteristics in these other versions, she and the other characters do not link her to the male realm, as in Seneca’s play. In fact, in Euripides Medea seeks solidarity with the chorus in their female plights (see below).

fear Medea's words. Creon commands his subjects to take Medea away before she can start speaking, and with good reason. Not only is Medea skilled at using words in her magical formulae (738), she also presents her case to Creon so well that he is convinced to allow her to remain in Corinth for a day, a day in which she commits four murders and leaves the city in ruins. Clearly, Medea neither is nor wants any part of Corinthian society any longer, and instead lives out others' expectations of her by using her barbaric skills to enact the most nefarious and uncivilized crimes imaginable.

Unlike Seneca, other authors tend to downplay Medea's outsider status, while their Jasons ignore the potential benefit of using such a figure for personal or political gain. Both Greek accounts in particular portray Medea as less disconnected from the rest of society and less capable of sinister magic, even if still a barbarian. In Euripides, she does not entirely belong in Corinth (she is "from a barbarian land" (256) and remarks on the "newness" of the Greek city (238)), yet support from the sympathetic chorus makes her less of an outcast. In fact, many times Medea shows solidarity with women in general against men, showing that she is less of an outsider because she shares their troubles.<sup>66</sup> Medea also does not rely on magic to the same degree that her Senecan counterpart does, making her a more normal, human figure. Apollonius too seems less interested in portraying Medea as counter to civilization and the Greeks. Though enjoying the epithet πολυφάρμακος ("very knowledgeable about magic drugs"), his Medea uses magic and ingredients far less disturbing than those of Seneca's witch,<sup>67</sup> and she exercises her abilities more sparingly and for nobler purposes. This Medea also seems more affected by

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<sup>66</sup> For instance, see Medea's first speech onstage (230-251) in which she enumerates to the chorus the various injustices and woes all women face.

<sup>67</sup> This Medea creates her potion to fireproof Jason from the sap of a flower formed from Prometheus' blood (3.844-68) and puts the fleece-guarding dragon to sleep with juniper (4.156).

her magical wrongdoing: she is pained to leave her family and seeks cleansing for her wrongdoing. Especially given what the Argonauts witness when visiting her aunt Circe later in the book, Medea seems quite civilized in comparison.

Ovid's interpretation of Medea fits much more closely to the character Seneca envisions. Here, Medea admits that her own land is barbarous and acknowledges the allure of the "culture and arts" (*cultusque artesque*, Met. 7.58) of the civilized countries from which Jason hails; others refer to her as a barbarian and a poisoner (*venefica*, 7.316) who understands "incantations and the power of magical speech" (*cantus magicaeque potentia linguae*, 7.330). Seneca's story particularly invokes Ovid's magic scene: here, Medea emphasizes the disturbing and unworldly nature of her magic through ingredients like the wings of an owl, the head of a crow that is seven generations old, and the entrails of a werewolf (7.268-274). The *Heroides* likewise differs from the earlier Greek models. Medea especially acknowledges that Jason has turned her away because of her background ("I who have now in your opinion become a barbarian"),<sup>68</sup> while Jason reveals just how barbaric he considers the Colchians ("if by chance your people has any gods").<sup>69</sup> The Ovidian versions of Medea's story share a darker view of barbarians and their vast differences from the audience's world. Unlike the earlier Greek versions, Ovid and Seneca's accounts both emphasize Medea's otherness and distinction from the society of which she is only shallowly a part.

However, Seneca's take on Medea's outsider status is even more nuanced than Ovid's. In his play, Medea's understanding of her barbarian nature is fluid and changes throughout the course of the play. Although others denounce her as a barbarian all along,

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<sup>68</sup> *Ego, quae tibi sum nunc denique barbara facta*, 105.

<sup>69</sup> *Si forte aliquos gens habet ista deos*, 80.

Medea begins the tragedy seeing herself much less negatively than they do. She reflects on her honorable lineage that connects her to both kings and gods, and on her idyllic homeland, with its gently meandering river and fresh sea (210-220). She argues with Creon using reason and skill worthy of any Roman rhetor. Medea also turns the tables on her supposed barbarianism, referring to other cities as *urbes barbarae* (127), declaring the Greek Creusa's lineage lowlier than her own (510-2), and desiring that Jason should become a wandering outsider like her as punishment (20-1). But in the face of others' judgments, Medea is unable to keep her barbarian nature at bay. She resorts to magic, which she performs "loosening her hair from its binding in the manner of her people" (*more gentis vinculo solvens comam*, 752), and in her actions chooses to associate herself with barbaric violence and deceit. At the end of the play, she identifies herself most closely with her roots by claiming that her power, kingdom, and family have returned to her as she wreaks her final, most uncivilized revenge on Jason (982-4). Medea's shifting, rather than static, understanding of her role as a barbarian plays a key part in both her development and the action of the tragedy. Medea's barbarity, which by the end of play has intensified beyond the degree of any other work, associates Jason's attempts to master her with his desire to also control the outside world that she represents as a whole. While Medea in other accounts is a Corinthian with a foreign background, Seneca's Medea encapsulates the power, volatility, and potential usefulness of outside peoples that rulers might seek to harness for their own ends.

As usual, though, Jason fails to adequately utilize this source of serious benefit. Instead of earning Medea's favor and working with her to ensure her continued support, Jason falters and loses any benefit he could have gotten from such a connection.

Although his journey to Colchis helped cement his power and Medea's magical abilities were instrumental in supporting his rule in Iolcus, her foreign status soon becomes problematic. If she were not a barbarian, Medea would not have been as scorned by the Corinthians after Jason's betrayal, making her troubles easier to bear. Jason would have been less likely to reject her in the first place, as a Greek wife would likely have had more connections he could have cultivated. Therefore, instead of being an instrument to support his rule, Jason has allowed his would-be tool to become the implement of his authority's demise. Rather than exploring other avenues that he could use to benefit from association with the outside world, he considers only his immediate goals and gain when dealing with outsiders like Medea and ends up suffering from his oversight.

Claudius interacted with foreigners in very different ways, but the goals of his interaction were still to bolster his own power. Claudius' excursion to Britain inspired some of his most intense encounters with outsiders, but by no means his most frequent or important. Julius Caesar's unprecedented expansion through his conquest of Gaul, and particularly his brief foray into Britain, had had a serious impact on the Roman imagination. Nevertheless, the promise of such gains for both empire and prestige barely tempted early emperors, who were quite idle about their expansionism. In his will, Augustus even warned his successors against extending the empire beyond its current boundaries. Claudius too realized that there were better ways of using the outside world for support. Perhaps aware of his own military shortcomings, Claudius preferred making allies or clients of the peoples at the far reaches of the empire. Under the previous few emperors, the binding of outsiders to Rome through the granting of citizenship had happened mostly under the moderate standards of the republic, though in somewhat

varying degrees. However, the enfranchisement of peoples in outlying provinces could be a particularly valuable tool for Roman emperors. Provincials often viewed the emperor as their protector from senators or other aristocrats who might take advantage of them, and in return provided soldiers for both the army and the emperor's own Praetorian guard. They built a variety of monuments to him and in some places even worshipped him as a god. Especially since Claudius faced such opposition in Rome and had endured a difficult road to power, cultivating relationships among the provincials was particularly valuable for him, and he eagerly latched onto this opportunity for foreign support.<sup>70</sup>

Like many other aspects of his reign, Claudius' enfranchisement of new peoples brought ridicule upon him. Cassius Dio remarks of Claudius' typical hopelessness at managing imperial affairs: "he gave [citizenship] to others quite freely, both to individuals and to groups...someone who gave a person broken glass vessels could become a citizen."<sup>71</sup> Others joked that Claudius "had decided to see everybody—Greeks, Gauls, Spaniards, Britons—wearing togas,"<sup>72</sup> and there were also suspicions that Messalina or other members of the imperial household were involved in selling citizenship without Claudius' knowledge. Despite these and other harsh claims against the emperor, Claudius dealt with the enfranchisement issue quite well. Rather than uncontrollably allowing outsiders to become Romans, Claudius granted statistically far fewer citizenships than either Augustus or the later Flavian emperors, who were

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<sup>70</sup> Also, keep in mind that Jason too was kind of an outsider in both Iolcus and Corinth, so support from foreign sources would have been to his advantage as well.

<sup>71</sup> Ἐτέροις αὐτὴν καὶ πάνυ ἀνέδην, τοῖς μὲν κατ' ἄνδρα τοῖς δὲ καὶ ἀθροοῖς, ἐδίδου...κἄν ὑάλινά τις σκεύη συντετριμμένα δῶ τι, Dio 60.17.5-6.

<sup>72</sup> *Constituerat enim omnes Graecos, Gallos, Hispanos, Britannos, togatos videre, Apoc. 3.*

traditionally depicted as more conservative in this regard.<sup>73</sup> This had the benefit of making the honor more significant and indebted and kept foreigners from abusing the possibility of getting citizenship. He also acted quite wisely in controlling foreigners: provincials were not allowed to use Roman names, disruptive Jews were removed from the city, and entrance into the senate was prudently limited, although not entirely banned (Suet. *Clau.* 24-5). During some debates in the senate, other senators allowed for the granting of citizenship but refused to let outsiders “vulgarize the regalia of the senators or the honors of offices.”<sup>74</sup> However, Claudius relied on his knowledge of history to devise a precedent for granting them senatorial status: his reply traces Rome’s reliance on foreigners as far back as Romulus, and he consequently grants the Aedui the right to become the first barbarian senators of Rome. Moreover, Claudius upheld the laws of citizenship quite strongly, and even harshly, as when he executed those who gained citizenship illegally (25.3). Despite his opponents’ claims, Claudius was able to control the award of citizen status and even use it to his own advantage, gaining a reputation as a good manager among his subjects and as a fair judge among foreigners.

Claudius sought support from foreigners in more ways than just by adding them to the rosters of his citizen subjects: his reign also led to an abrupt increase in development in Gaul, Spain, Britain, and other areas of the empire. Roads in particular sprang up across many of the western provinces, while other works were updated with stone construction instead of the previous wood.<sup>75</sup> Claudius also fostered the cultural growth of the western provinces, such as by beginning Latin and Greek language

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<sup>73</sup> Scramuzza (1940) 142 analyzes census data, including numbers of provincial citizens, for different years of the early empire.

<sup>74</sup> *Insignia patrum, decora magistratuum ne vulgarent*, Tac. *Ann.* 11.23-4.

<sup>75</sup> A map of all the roads in Spain alone can be found in Levick (1990) 171.

competitions at his birthplace in Lugdunum (modern Lyons).<sup>76</sup> In the more developed eastern provinces, Claudius still garnered support through restoring old works or providing relief to earthquake and famine victims.<sup>77</sup> This growth and updating helped the emperor keep better control of the empire through improved communication and travel, increased the flow of natural resources from outlying territories, and further enhanced his reputation with provincial subjects. Although some of his activity was likely just finishing old projects or restoring works already in place, the tangible mark that Claudius left on the empire's infrastructure cannot be denied. Such improvements no doubt increased his esteem among both provincials and travelling Roman aristocrats, doubling the support he earned from his efforts.

The looming presence of barbarians in the Roman mindset in Claudius and Seneca's time—and particularly the negativity often felt toward them by the general public—is illustrated in jokes made even about the emperor himself. While his brother is away at the Rhine fighting real barbarians and earning his title “Germanicus,” Claudius conducts his own skirmishes with a barbarian—namely, a tutor whom Claudius believes is a barbarian because of his harshness and cruelty (Suet. *Clau.* 2). The richest source of such material, however, comes from Seneca's own *Apocolocyntosis*. Here, Seneca not only rehashes many of Claudius' relationships with outsiders (such as provincial worship of the emperor and accusations about the selling of citizenships), he also makes jokes about the emperor himself as a barbarian. Other characters exclaim that the emperor was “neither Greek nor Roman nor of any known race.”<sup>78</sup> They complain that they do not understand his language and that he mumbles nonsense like a foreigner, with a voice like

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<sup>76</sup> Further examples can be found in Levick (1990) 170.

<sup>77</sup> Levick (1990) 177-9 describes specific examples of Claudius' eastern projects.

<sup>78</sup> *Nec Graecum esse nec Romanum nec ullius gentis notae*, *Apoc.* 5.

that “of no earthly creature, but like what sea creatures usually have—hoarse and unclear.”<sup>79</sup> At Olympus, Claudius lacks the proper Roman ability to defend himself oratorically and instead is forced to go stumbling down to the underworld in disgrace. Interestingly, Claudius’ guide throughout the divine regions is Hercules, who is considered a “civilizing” force because he took care of problems in and brought culture to regions throughout and beyond the Greek world. Yet Heracles also provided slapstick humor in Greek tragedy—a contradiction also found in our uncertainty about Claudius’ nature.

As Claudius pointed out to the Senate, the outside world and its inhabitants were an important part of the growth and history of Rome. The young city had grown by providing asylum to foreign runaways and slaves, and even some of its earliest kings were non-Romans. Foreigners could be feared (like the Gauls who sacked and nearly obliterated Rome in 390 BCE) or honored (like the Gauls who aided the senate during the Catilinarian conspiracy). Foreign lands faced a similar ambiguity: the province of Egypt benefitted the empire by providing massive quantities of grain for Rome, but this advantage could be dangerous if the province were taken over by renegade forces. While foreigners themselves could certainly be dreaded, those who became too “non-Roman” also faced ridicule, hatred, and fear: Marcus Antonius, with his connections to Egypt and his mistress Cleopatra, offers an obvious example. Seneca himself blames Antony’s love of the Eastern Cleopatra for his descent into foreign behavior and un-Roman vices.<sup>80</sup> Nevertheless, the interconnectedness of Romans and barbarians and the importance their support could play in imperial politics had never been higher than now. Claudius’

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<sup>79</sup> *Nullius terrestris animalis sed qualis esse marinis beluis solet: raucam et implicatam, Apoc. 5.*

<sup>80</sup> *Quae alia perdidit et in externos mores ac vitia non Romana traiecit quam ebrietas non minor vino Cleopatrae amor, Ep. Mor. 83.25.*

expansion and public works in the provinces were better connecting outsiders to the Roman world, and now they were actually becoming part of that world as well. By granting them citizenship, allowing them to become senators, introducing Roman culture through projects like the Latin competitions in Lugdunum, and enacting countless other changes, Claudius was bringing outsiders and barbarians into the fold of the Roman world while presenting their arrival as a benefit to his other, Roman subjects. Romans keenly felt the distinctions between Roman and non-Roman, so using positive associations with external affairs to bolster one's rule would definitely have been noticed.

Stoics particularly understood both travelling and love of one's country. In his *Epistulae Morales*, Seneca states that "no one loves his country because it is great: he loves it because it is his own."<sup>81</sup> Elsewhere, he lists the welfare of one's country among one's "primary goods" (*Ep. Mor.* 66) and encourages Stoics to willingly die for their countries (76, 85). However, he also offers some advice that would have benefitted Medea: although living in one's own country is preferable, exile should be born with resolve (85, 91). Earlier Stoics were divided on the merits of travel: some claimed that travelling got in the way of obtaining wisdom, while others argued that interaction with new places and peoples actually increased knowledge. In general, Seneca denies that travelling necessarily brings wisdom, since it leads only to the acquisition of scattered and mindless knowledge, not philosophical understanding. He also reproves those who travel to escape troubled minds or on mere whims. Yet he praises those who travel specifically for the sake of knowledge about the world, are able to bear the stresses of

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<sup>81</sup> *Nemo enim patriam quia magna est amat, sed quia sua*, 66.26.

travel with equanimity, or travel in the service of their country.<sup>82</sup> Seneca describes the paragon of foreign travel, Alexander the Great, in terms similar to those in this choral ode: Alexander has “broken the boundaries of the world” (*mundi claustra perrumpit*, *Ep. Mor.* 119.7) and longs to conquer even across the Ocean. The dueling tones of this passage of *Medea*—awestruck optimism versus grim foreboding—is perhaps inspired by Seneca’s own uncertainty about the merits of travel and expansion.

Whether regarding matters at home or at the edges of the world, a ruler’s decisions were important means of authenticating his power. Claudius and Jason had varying levels of success that resulted from confrontations with the outside world. Jason’s interaction with foreign realms ensured the return of his power in Iolcus, but it eventually led to his exile from there, and his barbarian wife subsequently ruined his life in Corinth. Claudius fared better, although his subjects did not always approve of or appreciate their emperor’s efforts with foreigners. His success perhaps derived in part from his less personal involvement. He may have allowed outsiders into the senate and connected outlying regions more closely to Rome, but his decisions were not skewed by associations as personal as Jason’s. Additionally, *Medea*’s initial lack of barbarian qualities in Seneca’s tragedy suggests an admission that the foreigners Claudius is dealing with are capable of being reasonable. But as demonstrated later in the play, leaders ought to be wary of the non-Roman: dangerous elements still lurk in the inner recesses of even the most cultured barbarians. In portraying Jason’s relationship to the outside world much like Claudius’, Seneca is perhaps suggesting that barbarians, no matter how civilized they might seem, should still be kept at a distance from the self or

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<sup>82</sup> For Senecan views on travelers, see *Epistulae Morales* 2, 28, 69, 104, and others. For modern scholarship on Seneca’s views on travel, see Montiglio 2006; she includes an overview of others’ opinions at 554-5.

important affairs. Surely someone like Medea, who in Seneca's play "question[s] the durability of civilization itself," is not someone any decent leader should allow in his city (Boyle 122). But questioning what it means to be civilized and what basic societal tenets should be was not itself foreign to Seneca's audience; for them too, every boundary—from physical to political—had indeed been moved.

## V. Rulers and Military Affairs

MED.	ingratum caput,	465
	revolvat animus igneos tauri halitus,	
	interque saevos gentis indomitae metus	
	armifero in arvo flammeum Aeetae pecus,	
	hostisque subiti tela, cum iussu meo	
	terrigena miles mutua caede occidit;	470
	adice expetita spolia Phrixei arietis,	
	somnoque iussum lumina ignoto dare	
	insomne monstrum, traditum fratrem neci	
	et scelere in uno non semel factum scelus,	
	ausasque natas fraude deceptas mea	475
	secare membra non revicturi senis.	

MEDEA: Ungrateful person, may your mind turn back to the fiery breath of the bull, the flaming flock of Aeëtes on the weapon-bearing field among the cruel dread of the unconquered race, and the weapons of the unexpected enemy, when because of my order the soldiers born from the earth died in mutual slaughter. Add the desired spoils of Phrixus' ram, the sleepless monster ordered to give its eyes to unknown sleep, a brother handed over to be killed (a crime done not in one deed or at one time), and daughters deceived by my trickery to dare chopping up the limbs of an old man who would not live again.

Another section from Medea and Jason's extended argument reveals a further dilemma that Jason and Claudius faced in dealing with the outside world: although each was part of a society that valued military prowess, neither was particularly skilled at warfare and so had to rely on others for any necessary fighting. In this passage, Medea offers the most specific account of the major martial deeds she performed for Jason, while admonishing him for being "ungrateful" (*ingratum*) for her assistance. This complaint forms the backbone of Medea's resentment of her former husband, that after performing deeds like these for his own good, not her own, Jason has still abandoned her.

Although many of the relationships rulers had with outsiders could be peaceful, as explored in the previous section, such confrontations did not always proceed so amiably. The Greeks were very conscious of who was "Greek" and who "barbarian," and their

pride frequently caused clashes with others; the Romans at this time were also enlarging their empire on a grand scale and faced much resistance in doing so. Both Claudius and Jason came from societies in which military heroism was greatly valued and whose national heroes included Achilles and Agrippa, Cimon and Caesar, Miltiades and Marius. Claudius and Jason needed both the popularity that arose from military splendor and the martial backing of a satisfied and prosperous army to gain and keep their positions, but were incapable of handling such affairs themselves. To compensate for their lack of ability, both leaders claimed such skills and sought this fame by relying on trickery, spectacle, and most of all their comrades.

This segment of Medea's rant both lays out the catalog of deeds she performed on Jason's behalf and reveals her own power and Jason's need for help. She makes full use of violent terms like *caede*, *occidit*, *neci*, *scelere*, *secare*, *raptas*, *perustis*, and *capit*. Each deed of Medea's is matched with specific adjectives to emphasize the danger she averted: the bull's breath is "fiery" (*igneos*), the threats of the "fierce" peoples "threatening" (*saevos*, *indomitae*), and the animals in the "weapon-bearing" field "flaming" (*armifero*, *flammeum*). Medea relies on both her power (events happen by her "command")<sup>83</sup> and her cleverness (Pelias' daughters are "deceived by her treachery")<sup>84</sup> to commit these crimes, putting her skills to use for Jason's political and private gain. However, Medea's actions ultimately cause proceedings to go awry and disturb the natural order of things: the ever-vigilant serpent falls asleep, a sister kills her brother, and daughters tear apart the limbs of their own father. After performing such grave deeds for Jason, without which he

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<sup>83</sup> *Iussu meo*, 469; *iussum*, 472; note the emphasis in 469 through the delay of *meo*.

<sup>84</sup> *Natas fraude deceptas mea*, 475; note the emphasis through interlocked work order.

would have been ruined, and after then being betrayed by him, Medea naturally begins her invective with the curt and enraged “ungrateful person.”<sup>85</sup>

Jason’s status as an overshadowed ruler throughout much of his life holds particularly true in military affairs. Though perhaps nominally in charge, Jason seems incapable of accomplishing much on his own in this arena: Jason needs not only Medea’s help, but an outfit of heroes (not just a regular army) to pursue the Fleece. Apart from his journey to Colchis, he engages in almost no other militaristic activity, and even his actions in Colchis seem unusually peaceful compared to what one might expect from a Greek leader-hero backed by the greatest champions of his time. The Argonauts go all the way to the end of the world and were content to return with just the Fleece, missing opportunities for expansion and other plunder. The “campaign” to Colchis does not aim at conquest; Jason does not go there to make the Colchians his subjects, and after the Argonauts depart they have no intention of ever returning to impose taxes, levy troops, or interfere with local politics. Rather than invading Colchis, threatening Aeëtes, and demanding the Fleece, the Argonauts dine with the king and offer to perform favors for him to earn the Fleece (*Arg.* 3.391-5). The tasks imposed by Aeëtes, while violent and potentially deadly, do not cause Jason any harm, and the only blood spilt during their completion is that of the dragon-tooth men who attack each other (Ovid *Met.* 7.141). The very use of Medea (a woman and a traitor) rather than Greek soldiers makes the adventure much less heroic in nature. Medea herself claims that Jason has done no bold deeds: “For what has Jason done?” (7.25). Besides relying on Medea’s help in seizing the Fleece, Jason uses her to overcome some obstacles the Argonauts encounter on their

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<sup>85</sup> According to OLD s.v. 12b, *caput* even by itself can denote opprobrium for the person signified.

return and to take revenge on Pelias when they reach Iolcus. Although all this happened before the events in Seneca's *Medea*, the audience can still see that Jason has not changed. When the couple is pursued by Acastus, Jason chooses flight over fight: although Medea offers to get rid of Acastus and their other enemies (518-28), Jason opts to remain safely in Corinth. Jason admittedly shows some leadership after Creon's death, when time is right to avenge himself and save Corinth through decisive force. But instead of stepping into a more military role, Jason only orders the assembled citizens to seize (*capiamus*) Medea and overturn (*vertite*) the house (980-1), rather weak actions given the circumstances. The assembled group is prepared for military action (Seneca calls them "weapon-bearing men, a brave troop," *fortis armiferi cohors*, 980) but Jason resorts to begging, not fighting, in attempting to stop his wife.<sup>86</sup> With no one left to help him, he can only watch and wallow in helplessness as his former ally turns against him and his minion becomes his superior.

Claudius too was part of a society in which militarism was highly regarded. The importance of military achievements to Roman emperors is quite clear; even those who lacked such abilities did their best to disguise that fact. Augustus depended on Agrippa, while Caligula staged mocked battles against the sea and brought home seashells as spoils. Claudius himself combined his love of learning with a more military-minded agenda by frequently depicting the goddess Minerva on his coins.<sup>87</sup> Despite his military deficiency, Claudius attempted a variety of expeditions throughout the empire during his

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<sup>86</sup> *Armifers* is the same adjective used to describe the field in Colchis from which the dragon-tooth men sprung up (468), another potential threat Medea easily averted.

<sup>87</sup> See, for instance, Plate VIII in Mattingly and Sydenham (1923) for common Claudian reverses, among which are several versions of Minerva.

principate. He completed campaigns in Mauretania begun before his reign;<sup>88</sup> reorganized countries around the Black Sea;<sup>89</sup> dealt with other issues in Parthia, Armenia, and Judea;<sup>90</sup> and solidified and fortified the northern frontier along Germany.<sup>91</sup> Although these activities were likely somewhat beneficial to Claudius, they were no substitute for a sure, military victory. Overall, they lacked the authority, the originality, and most importantly the flair that a genuinely successful military adventure could offer Claudius.

By far the most extensive, important, and spectacular military affair of Claudius' reign was his invasion of Britain. The significance of Julius Caesar's previous campaign to the island has already been mentioned, and Claudius, not content with insincere offers of lesser honors from the senate, took up this challenge with enthusiasm (Suet. *Clau.* 17).

Osgood sums up Claudius' goals for the British expedition thus:

...[to] undertake a great war of conquest—one, no less, begun, but not finished, by Julius Caesar himself—and thereby establish [his own] reputation for posterity and secure a stronger image for himself, as ruler of the world, among the soldiers, their commanders, Senators back in Rome, citizens more generally, and provincials. (87)

Claudius' goals were not necessarily about conquest,<sup>92</sup> perhaps in keeping with Augustus' caution about further expansion. More importantly, his desire for a "reputation" and a "stronger image" drove Claudius' plans. By the end of the Julio-Claudian era, the island would be crisscrossed with roads and dotted with military encampments throughout its southern half and superficially, at least, the island was becoming Roman.<sup>93</sup> But despite

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<sup>88</sup> Further information on the Mauretanian campaign is available in Levick (1990) 137-40.

<sup>89</sup> Further information on the Black Sea campaigns is available in Scramuzza (1940) 184, 196.

<sup>90</sup> Further information on the Parthian, Armenian, and Judean campaigns is available in Scramuzza (1940) 186 and Osgood (2010) 240.

<sup>91</sup> Further information on the German campaigns is available in Levick (1990) 151-5, Osgood (2010) 237, and Scramuzza (1940) 198.

<sup>92</sup> As Tacitus notes, "Britain was conquered and immediately lost" (*perdomita Britannia et statim omissa*, *Hist* 1.2) only a short time after Claudius' exploits there.

<sup>93</sup> For map of such infrastructure, see Levick (1990) 138.

these promising advances, the campaign itself, and particularly Claudius' minimal role in it, reveals that the emperor was no military leader. The affair was mostly a sham and a misrepresentation, much like Claudius' attempts to disguise his lack of ability with a favorable reputation.

As Jason relied on Medea, the Argonauts, and Creon, Claudius employed minds far wiser and more experienced than his to plan and execute the invasion of Britain. Aulus Plautius, whom Claudius recruited fresh from wars in Pannonia, served as the commander-in-chief.<sup>94</sup> With him served a host of other experienced generals, including Gnaeus Hosidius Geta, brother to the general victorious in Mauretania; Gnaeus Sentius Saturninus, who later won triumphal honors for his involvement; and the future emperor Titus Flavius Vespasianus and his brother Sabinus, who had previously been fighting in Germany.<sup>95</sup> By the time Claudius arrived in Britain, Plautius had already crossed with his troops and had driven the Britains back as far as London, where, instead of pressing his advantage, he waited for Claudius to arrive and claim the glory (Dio 61.21.1-2). The emperor's sixteen-day visit to the battlefield was only a flash in the long slog in forcing the island into submission; the generals who would campaign in Britain for years to come were truly responsible for the successes that Claudius claimed for the undertaking.

The initial venture into Britain, like Jason's campaign in Colchis, suffered from a lack of wholehearted military intent, although it turned into a very long endeavor. Subjugation of the island was only a secondary concern for Claudius, who undertook the campaign because "although triumphal regalia had been decreed to him by the senate, he thought the honor too trivial for the majesty of the emperor, and wanted the splendor of a

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<sup>94</sup> Pannonia was a Roman province stretching from modern-day Austria to Serbia.

<sup>95</sup> For more info on the various generals, see Levick (1990) 141 and Osgood (2010) 89. They and their honors also appear in Dio 60.20.3, 60.30.1-2.

proper triumph; he chose Britain especially as the place from which he might acquire it.”<sup>96</sup> His concern for honor over victory is also manifested in his fear of others’ success, as he would rather remove effective generals and risk defeat than face a potential rival for glory. For instance, the general Gnaeus Domitius Corbulo, who was fighting in Germany with “valor” and “discipline,” was recalled to Rome in the middle of his campaign (Dio 60.30.4-5). Cassius Dio attributes Claudius’ decision to jealousy of Corbulo’s accomplishments, while Tacitus more explicitly notes “if [Corbulo] had been successful, so distinguished a man would have been dangerous to the peace and threatening to the cowardly emperor.”<sup>97</sup> Various authors comment that Claudius conquered Britain “without any battle or bloodshed” and that the islanders were too unorganized and unsuspecting to mount a real defense (Suet. *Clau.* 17; Dio 60.19.4-5). Rather than fighting outright, Claudius also relied on traitors within the British ranks and used surprise attacks (Dio 60.20.2). Lacking long-term goals, serious strategy, and organized opposition, the British campaign remained a far cry from the usual, serious Roman army endeavor.

It is easy to be too negative about the expedition, however, especially given the sources’ overall opinions of Claudius. Although ancient writers condemn Claudius as a poor military leader, he at least acted somewhat sensibly and seemed aware of his limitations. Britain was becoming a hotbed of anti-Roman political activism and harbored a growing community of deserters and rebels who found a haven amidst the hostile British tribes (Suet. *Clau.* 17).<sup>98</sup> Besides pacifying these rebels, a campaign to Britain

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<sup>96</sup> *Cum decretis sibi a senatu ornamentis triumphalibus leviozem maiestati principali titulum arbitraretur velletque iusti triumphali decus, unde adquireret Britanniam potissimum elegit*, Suet. *Clau.* 17. This refers to honors granted to him for finishing a campaign in Mauretania that mostly happened before his succession; see Dio 60.8.

<sup>97</sup> *Sin prospere egisset, formidolosum paci virum insignem et ignavo principi praegravem*, *Ann.* 11.19.

<sup>98</sup> See also Levick (1990) 140 and Scramuzza (1940) 208 for information on these rebels.

would make available the wealth of the island's natural resources, particularly lead, tin, and other minerals. Claudius also shows some understanding of what the military would require for such an invasion. Besides selecting the best generals to lead his army, he also employed experienced legions: two from the Upper Rhine, one from the Lower Rhine, and one from Pannonia, all of which were accomplished at fighting in conditions like those they would face in Britain.<sup>99</sup> This expedition was to be the greatest military exploit in decades, and Claudius made sure that he had the forces to do it properly. However, even if we concede this, Claudius' quest was not entirely well thought out. Rebellious exiles kept encouraging natives to become increasingly anti-Roman and refuse to consider becoming part of the empire. Britain was far away from Rome and could only be reached by sea, making communication and control difficult and leading to uprisings that future leaders would face for generations. Although mining operations would be completely set up within six years of the Roman occupation, the mineral wealth of the island was insufficient to pay for the garrisons on the island, and in the long run the island proved to be a financial drain on the empire.<sup>100</sup> Leaders must tread a fine line between appearing militaristic for leadership's sake and acknowledging that they do not have the skills or means necessary to accomplish these ends. Given that not even Julius Caesar had managed to subdue Britain, it is surprising and perturbing that Claudius imagined himself up to the task.

Honor was only the beginning of a long string of benefits rulers could receive from successful military expeditions. Both Jason and Claudius were preoccupied with military honor tangibly represented through spoils and triumphs. As the major military

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<sup>99</sup> Osgood (2010) 88-9 sheds light on the backgrounds of these legions and how Claudius moved around troops to keep all the borders defended.

<sup>100</sup> Further information on British mining appears in Scramuzza (1940) 209-10.

expedition of his reign, the conquest of Britain reappeared in memorializing public events throughout Claudius' principate. The official triumph was celebrated in 44, though festivities had already occurred when news of the victories reached the city. Aulus Plautius was awarded a lesser ovation in 47, and two years later Claudius enlarged the pomerium in a gesture symbolizing the growth of the empire. In 51, the British leader Caratacus was paraded through the city, completing a series of British-themed events lasting the whole of Claudius' rule. Awed by such spectacles, citizens both in Rome and in the provinces offered Claudius even further honors. He was hailed as imperator several times,<sup>101</sup> granted the cognomen "Britannicus," offered a naval crown for his "conquering" of the ocean, honored by the construction of a triumphal arch on the Via Flaminia, and presented with golden crowns and theatrical events reenacting his success. In the provinces, those who might not otherwise have known much about their emperor's doings in Britain were enlightened by additional arches in Gaul and Cyzicus and a temple to Claudius in Colchester.

Jason too enjoys the extended benefits of the spoils and triumphs of his militaristic ventures. His immediate reward was the Fleece, yet Medea also is commonly considered Jason's spoils. The chorus in Seneca claims them both: "What was the prize gained by this voyage? The Golden Fleece and Medea" (361). Similar dualities can be found in Ovid.<sup>102</sup> However, in Seneca's *Medea* not only are the spoils emphasized, but the audience also sees Jason experiencing the lasting effect these spoils have on his reign as he brings them back and attempts to utilize them. The two Greek versions in particular seem much less focused on Jason's prizes from the journey. For instance, in Euripides'

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<sup>101</sup> According to Levick (1990) 144, at least five, and perhaps eight or nine, times.

<sup>102</sup> See *Her.* 12.111 and *Met.* 7.156.

play the Fleece is only mentioned twice, and although it is cited as the purpose of the journey (5-6), that purpose has nothing to do with future display that will glorify its captor. Furthermore, the ease with which Jason accepts his former wife's exile reveals that he never thought of her as "spoils" or as anything particularly valuable except a means to get him safely through Aeëtes' tasks. Apollonius' account also identifies the Fleece as the quest of the journey, remarks on how much it is desired and guarded, and to an extent notes the Argonauts' desire to forcibly take the Fleece—all aspects that could link to Fleece to spoils.<sup>103</sup> The element missing is that neither of these Jason figures intend to use the Fleece to show off their accomplishments when they have returned, and it is not treated as a symbol of their victory. The depiction of Medea as spoils is also missing from both these accounts. Ovid, on the other hand, goes much more into detail about the events in Colchis and lists both the Fleece and Medea as spoils, as does Seneca.<sup>104</sup> Yet Seneca's version differs from Ovid's because his audience witnesses how Jason suffers because of his plunder (Medea); it brings him scarce benefit. Despite all the trouble Jason went through to bring home tokens of his success abroad, these spoils and the problems they cause fittingly symbolize Jason's military shortcomings.

Jason was also less successful in the public spectacles he intended to commemorate his victories. While Claudius enjoyed triumphs, games, and monuments celebrating his success, Jason enacts nothing of the sort. Rather, it is Medea herself who triumphs at the end of the play by reclaiming Jason's spolia for Colchis. As Jason

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<sup>103</sup> "Were aiming for the golden Fleece" (ἐπιχομένους χρύσειον δέρος, 4.1319), "they might seize the fleece and carry it away against the will of Aeëtes" (κῶας ἐλόντες ἄγοιντο παρὲν νόον Αἰήταο, 4.102)

<sup>104</sup> See particularly *Metamorphoses* 7.156-7, "the heroic son of Aeson acquires the spoil and proudly bears with him the originator of this gift, another spoil" (*heros Aesonius potitur spolioque superbus / muneris auctorem secum, spolia altera, portans*); in *Heroides* 12.199 and following, Medea claims the Fleece, the Argonauts, and Jason as her dowry, in an unusual twist. At *Heroides* 6.47, the notion of earning spoils through travel is discussed.

summons the Corinthians to gather before Medea's house, she herself appears, proclaiming her success in defeating her foes, seizing appropriate spoils, and regaining her honor: "Now, now I have recovered my scepters, my brother, my father; the Colchians hold the spoils of the golden ram; my kingdom has returned, my stolen maidenhood has returned!"<sup>105</sup> A triumph is a fitting event with which to magnify this return of Medea's honor. Livy claims that "among the Romans, nothing was more splendid than a triumph"<sup>106</sup> because the event brought so much prestige to those who celebrated it—for example, Aemilius Paullus' triumph brought him the "most popular favor with the commoners" as he was "especially respected and honored by the people."<sup>107</sup>

Medea's declaration of victory and her claiming of spoils are also not untimely. Medea has destroyed the leaders of her opposition: Creusa and Creon are dead, and Jason, who has claimed that his "reason for living" was his children, is all but defeated as well.<sup>108</sup> The land of her enemies is also destroyed: the palace has been razed by her magical fire, which the herald claims also endangers the rest of the city. Her claim also comes only after careful preparation for the performance. Before this scene, as Medea works on her magic potion, her face grows scarlet with rage, recalling the red-painted faces of triumphing generals (858).<sup>109</sup> She has reclaimed both the figurative and physical spoils from her conquered enemies and has acquired a chariot and beasts to draw it. As Medea has accomplished this final victory mostly on her own, there are no soldiers to

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<sup>105</sup> *Iam iam recepi sceptrum germanum patrem, / spoliisque Colchi pecudis auratae tenent; rediere regna, raptam virginem redit*, 982-4.

<sup>106</sup> *Neque magnificentius quicquam triumpho apud Romanos*, Livy 30.15.12.

<sup>107</sup> Δημοτικωτάτην... χάριν ὑπὲρ τῶν πολλῶν, Plut. *Aem.* 38.1.1; σπουδαζόμενον ὑπὸ τοῦ δήμου καὶ τιμώμενον διαφερόντως, 38.1.2.

<sup>108</sup> *Causa vitae*, 547.

<sup>109</sup> The red face supposedly imitated the Capitoline statue of Jupiter Optimus Maximus, whose terracotta face was further reddened with cinnabar. See Beard (2007) 226, 231-2 for a fuller explanation.

march with her, but she has brought the son of her opposition's leader—Jason's second son—to parade before her and ultimately execute (974). And finally, the atmosphere is set: today is a *festus dies* (985), a term Livy too uses to describe the ambience of a triumph (34.3). It is a day of spectacle and high emotions that will forever live on in the memories of its audience.

Having made her preparations, Medea pauses to ensure that her efforts are worthwhile. She is particularly concerned with the publicity of her actions and whether everyone will be able to witness her formidable deeds. Generals in actual triumphs shared this concern: besides expecting leading senators, magistrates, and knights to attend their show, generals would also ensure that their processions passed through theaters and other large structures (and even built temporary seating) so that their victories could be known and admired by all (Jos. 7.125, 131). Medea fears to waste her efforts in hidden acts (*in occulto*, 976) and regrets having killed her first son without any spectators to recount her deed later on (993). As Jason gathers the citizens to seize her, Medea appears above them and “hangs out the top part of her roof” so that the second son's death may happen before the whole crowd, and especially as Jason is watching.<sup>110</sup> Medea is clearly enjoying the publicity of the event: at one point she proclaims, *meus dies est*—“This day is mine!” (1017)—and invites her pain to enjoy (*perfruere*, 1016) the act she is about to commit. As a real triumph would have been the epitome of a Roman general's glory and a celebration of his past success, Medea intends for her deeds here to be a sort of a celebratory, communal finale for all the hardships she has overcome.

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<sup>110</sup> *Tecti parte praecipiti imminet*, 995; *te vidente*, 1001.

Finally, the action of the scene itself draws upon many of the conventions of a triumph. First, Medea has successfully identified herself with the gods. On the day of the triumph, special regalia temporarily associated a general with Jupiter,<sup>111</sup> letting him become almost “godlike” for the day. Generals sometimes became overeager and emphasized these connections too much, as Camillus did in using white horses to draw his chariot: spectators considered his act unbecoming for a mortal and feared he had gone too far in putting himself on the level of Jupiter and Sol (Livy 5.23). Likewise, thanks to her power and divine connections, “the path to heaven lay open” for Medea, who goes even further in challenging the position of the gods.<sup>112</sup> After using her grandfather Helios’ robe to assassinate the royal family, Medea now obtains his chariot and unworldly serpentine steeds as well. Jason’s begging in some places is reminiscent of language used toward the gods: he eventually claims that he can no longer pray to Medea (*precor*, 1014) and calls himself her suppliant (*supplicis*, 1015). Although such language could also be used toward any more powerful person, Medea’s other divine connections give these words more meaning. This celebration also involves the presentation and execution of prominent enemies or their families. Hostile leaders like Caratacus would traditionally be forced to march in the parade and faced execution (or sometimes mercy) at the end of the procession (Dio 60.33.3, Jos. 7.153-4). Here, Jason’s children play this role—one killed preemptively and one who accompanies Medea up to the rooftop, where she threatens him. Sons of a triumphing general could actually ride in the chariot with their father or on horses beside him, as Titus and Domitian did at their father’s triumph (Jos. 7.152). However, as Medea has already disowned the children (*non sunt mei*, 934), they are

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<sup>111</sup> See Beard (2007) 226-33 for explanation of this symbolism and discussion of its significance for divinity, Etruscan origins, or some mixture of both.

<sup>112</sup> *Patuit in caelum via*, 1022.

better suited for execution as the sons of her enemy, their father. Medea also makes their murder reminiscent of offerings performed by the triumphing general to Jupiter Optimus Maximus. Three times, Medea orders herself to complete their murder with the traditional sacrificial formula *hoc age* (562, 905, 976) and describes her actions as performing a favorably-omened sacrifice (*litarem*, 1020).<sup>113</sup> As expected, this sacrifice is followed by the examination of entrails (*scrutabor ense viscera*, 1013). These *viscera* should represent the entrails of the animals sacrificed to Jupiter, but here are Medea's own as she ensures that no trace of Jason remains. And finally, the victorious Medea flies off in her chariot, ascending not the steps of the Capitoline, but the path to the heavens. Her triumphant celebration is concluded: her enemies are demoralized or dead, her spoils displayed, her sacrifices completed, her audience astonished, and her fame increased by her deeds more than by anything else she might have done. Her actions at this "triumph" have ensured that she will not be forgotten, even long after those who witnessed the spectacle are gone. Surely, triumphing generals would have wished no differently.

While Seneca grants Medea these triumphal connections and links her with the role of general and the seizure of spoils, he simultaneously denies such associations to her husband, further emphasizing Medea's victory over him. Jason is decidedly unmilitaristic, relying on Medea to eliminate his usurping uncle Pelias, cowering in Colchis when threatened by Acastus, and lacking the strength to prevent his wife's revenge at the end of the play. He also takes no part in the seizure of the Fleece, despite his position as leader of the Argonauts; instead, Seneca only ever depicts Medea taking the spoils, though Jason subsequently claims them as his own. Most importantly,

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<sup>113</sup> Henry (1985) 159 mentions instances of the phrase *hoc age* in other literature and how it ritualizes other pseudo-sacrificial events—including the assassination of emperors.

however, Jason's only opportunity during Seneca's play to stage any sort of public event is his wedding procession with Creusa (56-115). This pathetic attempt at public glory is even mocked by Medea, who refers to her own spectacle as a "new kind of wedding" (*nuptias...novas*, 894) and a "marriage day" (*diem...nuptialem*, 985-6)—one that is far more impressive and memorable than his. Rather than commemorating his military accomplishments and displaying spoils, Jason celebrates a marriage imposed on him by others as he leaves behind Medea, one of these very spoils. Jason's attempt to honor himself through such a celebration only further distances him from glory by feminizing him and undermining his position. The chorus compares him to the unmasculine gods Bacchus and Apollo, describes how Medea coerced him into his previous marriage, judges him by his looks instead of his merits, and taunts him with cheeky songs. In contrast to Medea's masculinized personality, Jason's marriage has feminized him by making him into the bride of the arrangement. Jason, not Creusa, leaves his father's house to live with his new family. Though Jason's family should receive a dowry, Medea (his closest available relative) provides gifts to Creusa instead. Furthermore, in a *matrimonium iniustum* (the type of marriage Jason and Medea had, because of her foreign background), the woman has the right to keep the dowry and children if the couple separates. Jason's insistence on keeping his sons and Medea's figurative dowry is thus inappropriate for his gender.<sup>114</sup> As with Jason's other attempts at claiming military glory, his public procession highlights his failures and weaknesses, especially when compared to Medea's awe-inspiring display of martial prowess. The great contrast between these two events further accentuates the success and spectacle of Medea's final celebration.

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<sup>114</sup> Abrahamsen (1999) 116-7, in her discussion of Jason and Medea's relationship under Roman marriage laws, explains that they have this sort of *matrimonium* and outlines the implications for each partner.

The Romans were a nation of conquerors with a long history of successfully subduing their neighbors. The *Aeneid* describes this practice as the Romans' destiny: "you, Roman, remember this, for these are your skills: to rule the peoples with your empire, to impose a tradition of peace, to spare those who are conquered, and to wage war against the proud."<sup>115</sup> Jupiter has earlier promised the Romans an "empire without end" (*imperium sine fine*, 1.278). Roman generals continuously added new and varied lands to Rome's dominion and competed intensely for command of certain illustrious wars, such as that against the eastern potentate Mithridates. Leaders of the early empire took care to at least claim military ability. Augustus disguised his queasiness and lack of skill by relying on other generals like Agrippa to direct his military encounters. He disguised his ineptitude with self-congratulating monuments like the Augustan Forum. Tiberius' authority came in large part from his connections with the German legions and backing he had there; his successor, though he presented himself as "Father of the Armies," waged wars against the Ocean instead of actual foes (Suet. *Cal.* 46). The celebration of triumphs was also very relevant to Seneca's time: since 19 BCE the right to celebrate them had been restricted to the imperial family.<sup>116</sup> This greatly limited the number of spectacles Seneca's generation would have witnessed and increased how impressed they would have been with Claudius'. The awarding of special cognomina to honor conquerors of certain areas and the emphasis on taking care of an ancestor's manubial dedications shows just how important a role in which military honor played in Roman life.

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<sup>115</sup> *Tu regere imperio populos, Romane, memento / (hae tibi erunt artes), pacique imponere morem, / parcere subiectis et debellare superbos*, 6.851-3.

<sup>116</sup> The imperial family staged only five triumphs in the ninety years after Balbus' triumph in 19 BCE, a drastic decrease from Late Republican numbers. See Beard (2007) 68-70 for more on this restriction of triumphal practices.

Such dependency on others and the focus on military glory and its paraphernalia would have plagued Stoic sensibilities regarding the benefits of self-reliance, the uselessness of military strength, and the allure of material possessions. Seneca would first have condemned Claudius' and Jason's excessive reliance on others and consequent mistreatment of these accomplices: in a discussion of friendship, he warns both those who avoid friends and those who seek friends only for their usefulness (*Ep. Mor.* 48.2). Seneca also denounces military activity, wishing that those who enjoy luxuriant food would realize that "the cook is as superfluous to them as the soldier."<sup>117</sup> However, Seneca cannot stay away from military matters entirely. In *Epistulae Morales* 66, he shows that soldiers can be glorious if they fight without fear in the face of death, and urges his readers to be "soldiers" in fighting their way toward Stoic virtue. Furthermore, Seneca frequently discusses wealth and the issues that arise from the improper use of it; such concerns were highly relevant to the pursuit of luxuriant triumphs and ostentatious spoils. Seneca's general belief is that luxury harms both body and soul: "At first, luxury began to desire superfluous things, then harmful things, and in the end enslaved the soul to the body and ordered it to serve its desires."<sup>118</sup> It is thus unsurprising that Seneca admonishes the Argonauts for being "plunderers of foreign gold" and that Medea uses a "shining necklace whose gold the brilliance of gems adorned" to overthrow the Corinthian royalty. Such finery can be deadly indeed.<sup>119</sup>

In their unavailing attempts to convince others that they do indeed possess military skill, Jason and Claudius simply show how precarious their reigns actually are.

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<sup>117</sup> *Iam supervacuum sciet sibi cocum esse quam militem*, 90.15.

<sup>118</sup> *Primo supervacua coepit concupiscere, inde contraria, novissime animum corpori addixit et illius deservire libidini iussit*, 90.19. For more of Seneca's opinions on this topic, see *de Vita Beata* 12.4, *Naturales Quaestiones* 3.17.2-18.1, *de Tranquillitate Animi* 7.2, and *Epistulae Morales* 7 and 95.

<sup>119</sup> *Raptor externi...auri*, 613; *monile fulgens, quodque gemmarum nitor / distinguit aurum*, 573-4.

Their hopelessness drove them to attempt risky machinations that succeeded only with the help of others. This reliance on others, and the practice of blaming them when things went wrong, was something Seneca had probably witnessed firsthand. Emperors habitually used “scapegoats” to perform risky endeavors. Jason tricks Medea into giving up her family, friends, and homeland to help him, and then denies any responsibility for the villainies that their agreement leads to. He abandons his collaborator when the opportune time arrives and comes to his new associates with clean hands. Claudius too likely relied on scapegoats, as his advisor Seneca knew, though it was not until writing the *Apocolocyntosis* that he could make any negative associations clear. It is difficult to ascertain from the sources who was actually responsible for the malpractices of the imperial household. Narcissus, Messalina, and these other condemned figures may actually have merited their chastisement. But they may also have been merely instruments in Claudius’ plots. In the military scene, for instance, had Aulus Plautius not succeeded in the original invasion of Britain, the fault would have been pushed entirely onto him, leaving the emperor unscathed. Face to face with these wretched scapegoat figures, and perhaps in danger of becoming one himself, Seneca could easily have seen Claudius as another *ingratum caput*.

## VI. Conclusion

In the initial opposition to their rule, strained relationships with their families, interactions with the outside world, and attempts to shine in the military realm, both Claudius and Jason must confront some of the most important aspects of successful ruling. The specific similarities examined in the previous sections support earlier scholarship suggesting that the tragedies, or at least the *Medea*, were written during Seneca's tenure as an advisor-tutor in Claudius' household. The issues he would have constantly encountered there offered him a real-life glimpse of a ruler at work, an opportunity he could not have ignored as he composed dramas about mythological leaders. In fact, how well these similarities line up occasionally casts doubt on the assumption that Seneca was only making these connections subconsciously. The evidence cannot prove where along this spectrum Seneca's actions fall—either that he purposefully arranged these correlations, or that he had no such aspirations but was naturally shaped by his own experiences with the difficulties of rule—but it is still worth examining the evidence to see what precedents may exist for such intentions.

Possible motivations for Seneca to deliberately relate their situations include offering Jason as a positive example for Claudius and other leaders to follow, showing how much worse Claudius could have been (if Jason is presented negatively), or illuminating for citizens how difficult a position Claudius was in to garner sympathy for him. Furthermore, Seneca may have just found these similarities interesting and strengthened them for the effect they might have had on his audience. Although the fourth would be impossible to prove and the third difficult, motivations involving Jason acting as a positive or negative example for the emperor can be investigated. Other works

of Latin literature, particularly biography, likewise concern themselves both with evaluating the morality of their subject and providing exempla for their audience. Examining representations of morality and Roman practices of hypothetical conjecturing may shed light on Seneca's intentions.

Though ancient Romans in general must have enjoyed critiquing their emperor's every move as thoroughly as people do today with their own leaders, Stoics were particularly keen to evaluate the merits and virtues of those in positions to set examples to so many people. Assessing how well Jason and Claudius live up to Roman codes of virtue can determine how successful they both are and whether Seneca sees any connections between them; furthermore, knowing that Seneca cared this much about the virtue of the current ruler makes it more plausible that he purposefully shaped his depictions of Jason. Seneca alludes to characteristics for good rulers throughout his works, but relies on another Stoic philosopher, Posidonius, for his most detailed description of the ultimate ideal ruler (90.5):

*illo ergo saeculo quod aureum perhibent penes sapientes fuisse regnum Posidonius iudicat. Hi continebant manus et infirmiore a validioribus tuebantur, suadebant dissuadebantque et utilia atque inutilia monstrabant; horum prudentia ne quid deesset suis providebat, fortitudo pericula arcebat, beneficentia augebat ornabatque subiectos. officium erat imperare, non regnum. nemo quantum posset adversus eos experiebatur per quos coeperat posse, nec erat cuiquam aut animus in iniuriam aut causa, cum bene imperanti bene pareretur, nihilque rex maius minari male parentibus posset quam ut abiret e regno.*

In the age which they call "Golden," therefore, Posidonius concludes that rule belonged to the wise. They restrained their soldiers and protected the weaker from the stronger, they advised for and against matters, and showed which things were useful and useless. Their foresight made provision so that nothing was lacking for their citizens, their valor kept away danger, and their kindness increased and honored their subjects. Their duty was ruling, not their kingdom. No one tested how much power he might have against those through whom he had begun to have power, nor did anyone have an inclination or reason for it, since they obeyed

well the one ruling. The king was able to threaten those misbehaving with nothing greater than exile from the kingdom.

There are a variety of words that one could pluck out of the section for use as “ideal virtues” for a ruler—they be *sapientes* and have *prudencia, fortitudo, beneficentia*, and so on. But such a diffuse conglomeration of beneficial characteristics, while helpful for understanding Stoic ideals, is not very useful for judging Jason and Claudius. A more focused or structured group of virtues is necessary to evaluate them.

Unfortunately, trying to find a solid “canon” of virtues by which to assess them is equally problematic.<sup>120</sup> Greek moral philosophers had proposed a set of four virtues for the ideal leader: ἀνδρεία (bravery), σωφροσύνη (temperance), δικαιοσύνη (justice), and φρόνησις/σοφία (wisdom); Cicero rendered these in Latin as *fortitudo, temperantia/continentia, iustitia, and prudentia/sapientia*. Stoics like Seneca generally accepted this canon of the major virtues, and believed that all other virtues were subcategories of them.<sup>121</sup> The Augustan Clipeus Virtutis proposes a different canon consisting of *virtus, clementia, iustitia, and pietas*; however, these do not all appear together ever again in the rest of Latin literature and inscriptions. Instead, future emperors employed whichever virtues most fit their needs most, leading to a wide variety of options not comprising any canon. Meanwhile, in writing his direct evaluation of the emperors, Suetonius chooses his own canon (clemency, civility, liberality, and restraint of luxury and lust, though some variety of actual terms applies to each concept) for their assessment. The “canons” of both the Greek philosophers and Cicero were used in

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<sup>120</sup> The various works of Wallace-Hadrill are most enlightening for understanding imperial virtues. His article “The Emperor and his Virtues” provides much of the following information on different “canons,” which Wallace-Hadrill encourages be rejected as such. “Virtues and Vices,” in *Suetonius: The Scholar and His Caesars*, is also helpful for understanding Suetonius’ interpretation and use of imperial virtues.

<sup>121</sup> As would be expected, these virtues are some of those noted by Posidonius, but this list of virtues is solid and focused, unlike Posidonius’ rambling description, so they are more worthwhile and easier to use.

rhetorical compositions praising leaders and philosophical works called *Peri Basileias*, precursors to medieval “Mirrors of Princes,” showing their relevance for the practical evaluation of leaders. Unfortunately, there is little overlap between the various canons, as only *iustitia* reappears. While no clear canon of ideal virtues seems to exist, this exercise still offers tools for searching Seneca’s works. However, his use of these terms in the tragedies in general is unhelpful. *Virtus*, *pietas*, and forms of *ius* or *iustus* appear with some regularity, although rarely are frequent in the same works and none particularly in *Medea*. *Iustitia* is once personified in *Medea* (440) but never mentioned beyond that, and *clementia*, *fortitudo*, *temperantia*, *continentia*, *prudentia*, and *sapientia* do not appear in any of the tragedies. Given this dearth of specific terms through which Seneca might be subtly encouraging the emperor or linking him to Jason, it is necessary to adopt a more holistic approach.

Masters of rhetoric, Roman scholars engaged in “what if” conjecturing that could suggest that Seneca was using Jason as an example of what Claudius might have been like. Examples of such imagination are quite varied, including theater in general, the invented letters of the *Heroides*, and certain rhetorical exercises which involved putting speeches into the mouths of famous characters. Quintilian describes this last practice as follows (*Inst. Ora.* 3.8.53-4):

neque ignoro plerumque exercitationis gratia poni et poeticas et historicas, ut Priami verba apud Achillem aut Sullae dictaturam deponentis in contione...frequentissime vero in iis utimur ficta personarum, quas ipsi substituimus, oratione, ut apud Ciceronem pro Caelio Clodium et Caecus Appius et Clodius frater, ille in castigationem, hic in exhortationem vitiorum compositus, alloquitur.

I am not unaware that poetic and historical matters are frequently set forth for the sake of practice, such as the words of Priam to Achilles or Sulla’s resignation from the dictatorship in the assembly...very frequently we use an invented speech

of characters whom we ourselves have substituted in, so that in Cicero's *Pro Caelio* both Caecus Appius and her brother Clodius address Clodia, the former to reprimand her for her vices and the latter to exhort her to them.

For example, the later writer Augustine relates how as part of his schooling he was required to take part in rhetorical exercises involving "speaking the words of Juno when she was enraged and grieving that she was not able to turn the king of the Teucrians away from Italy, although [he] had never heard that Juno said this."<sup>122</sup> Particularly given Seneca's training in rhetoric, such practices suggest that the tragedian might have considered Jason an ersatz Claudius figure whose reactions to their common troubles presented an alternate reality to Claudius' own responses through which the emperor might be judged.<sup>123</sup> If Romans were accustomed to considering the possibilities of what could have happened in different historical and mythological circumstances, they may more readily have grasped connections between Jason and the current emperor.

If Seneca were consciously utilizing the tragedy as an example for or a criticism of the emperor, Jason should be a (nearly) faultless, moral, and wise leader, exhibiting as many of the Stoic-approved virtues as possible to be a fitting model for Claudius. However, his abject failure in this regard makes a purposeful connection less likely. Comparatively, both leaders succeed and fail at different elements of their shared struggles in ruling. Jason exhibits selflessness in giving up his wife and own desires for the good of his children and Corinth, but flounders in attempting to perform military endeavors or not be totally overshadowed by others. Claudius' treatment of outsiders was a more competently-handled element of his reign, although the situation with his wives and heirs went less smoothly. Needless to say, neither fulfills Posidonius' guidelines for a

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<sup>122</sup> *Ut dicerem verba Iunonis irascentis et dolentis quod non posset Italia Teucrorum avertere regem, quae numquam Iunonem dixisse audieram, Conf. 1.17.27.*

<sup>123</sup> For Quintilian's assessment of the use of this practice in rhetoric, see *Inst. Ora.* 9.2.30-1.

good ruler, and each lacks the majority of the assortment of suggested virtues. The fact that, at the end of the play, Seneca's readers are torn between supporting the wronged yet vicious Medea and the pitiful yet harsh Jason further shows that Jason is not a clear-cut example of good leadership. On the other hand, that Jason sometimes bests Claudius in overcoming the challenges to his position argues that he was also not meant to improve support for Claudius by showing how terrible a ruler in their position could have been.

Regardless of his specific intent, Seneca was too cautious a writer to state his connections so boldly. Authors of such works could secure deniability by situating their events in long-past, mythological, and foreign settings, not places in which one would typically search for Roman connections. Other questionable materials, such as the substance of Roman comedy, also took place in foreign locales to keep such depravities dissociated from Rome. Such deception, if indeed Seneca's connections were purposeful, was sincerely necessary when dealing with powerful and dangerous Roman emperors.

While a purposeful connection between Claudius and Jason remains questionable, it is at least possible to say that Seneca was subconsciously influenced in his presentation of Jason's difficulties by what he witnessed in working with the imperial family. Seneca's Jason faces more numerous and challenging hardships than his literary precedents, and these changes bring him more closely in line with the emperor himself. Perhaps the natural connections between the two leaders even drew Seneca toward retelling the Medea myth in the first place. The strength of these connections also helps substantiate claims for a later Claudian-era date for the tragedy. At the outset of Claudius' principate, as Seneca languished in exile, awaiting his return to public life, an intimate understanding of these specific and crucial elements of the problems of ruling is

not as likely to have made an appearance. Only close connections to those in a position like Claudius' could have afforded Seneca the insights that appear in his tragedy.

Problems of ruling well-known to the early Julio-Claudians are as much a part of mythological Corinth's politics as those of Seneca's own time. The finesse and understanding with which Seneca addresses Jason's needs and dilemmas show that he was acutely aware of what ruling actually entailed. As an advisor, Stoic, and concerned citizen, he painted a picture of a struggling leader, letting his art explore the rulers' difficulties and perhaps even offer suggestions. Although the other accounts of Claudius' reign are further removed from the emperor's lifetime, these matters are for Seneca much more personal and important. In contrast to the highly anti-Claudian tone of the *Apocolocyntosis*, *Medea* reveals what could have been an earlier, more hopeful optimism for the improvement of Claudius' principate. However, from his unwillingness to heed Seneca or the morality and conventions of his time, Claudius grew into the despised monster Seneca would later portray him as. Living in the midst of a Medean story himself, Seneca, ever advising, cannot help but write a tragedy where his own circumstances leak into his literature, where history and mythology are blurred, and where, as in his own life, a happy ending is but a fleeting hope for both ruled and ruler.

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