# PREFACE

Opusculum dilectissimae uxori Rosemariae filioque Alexandro

 dedicatum

This commentary’s first manifestation was a handwritten manuscript completed at University College London during the period 1972–4. It then tracked the path of the technological revolution from typewriter to first PC until the beginning of the 1980’s, when it was laid aside, almost completely, under the exigencies of career and family.

Apollonius Rhodius, however, has always been with me and so when I retired in 2009, he was first on the list of unfinished business. I was lucky to find at the University of Nottingham, two very patient and talented supervisors, Patrick Finglass and Helen Lovatt, who first gently made me aware of all the new developments in Classical research that I had missed in the interim and then did their best to disentangle my first convoluted attempts to update my original commentary. Helen helped me to understand something of the methodologies and critical language that Classical scholars now use when discussing ancient literature and in Patrick, I was fortunate to have as a guide and mentor someone *quo non praestantior alter* in the elucidation of and commentary on ancient Greek texts.

In some ways, technology has greatly aided the work of commentators. The parallels are easier to find (*Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*), much secondary literature can be checked online and classical researchers are blessed by the existence of a range of essential databases. However, the work of interpretation is still difficult and especially so in the case of a poet as quicksilver and enigmatic as Apollonius. His poem which can be read primarily as a quest or adventure story – at least that is how it seemed to me, when I first found E. V. Rieu’s translation a very long time ago – raises a whole series of questions about its characters, its content and the style and nature of the Greek in which it is written. What, for instance, are we to make of Jason, the hero of the poem, who in terms of superficial appearance seems to be the equal of the Hellenistic princes who came after Alexander and yet is constantly afflicted by self-doubt? There is also the matter of a dominant female character such as Medea who, while often seeming at conflict with herself, might be based both on Euripides’ heroine and the powerful women that Apollonius would have encountered at the Ptolemaic court. Finally, how are we to understand and interpret the written language of a poet whose knowledge of his native literature would have been deep, critical and profound, while having at his command the resources of one the first great libraries?

The *Argonautica* raises many such issues and the commentary attempts to answer some of them, as this part of the poem is read as a continuous entity. The introduction which follows might have had many sections but it seemed better to try to explain the text as the reader progresses through it, fully in a tradition that Apollonius might have recognised.

If such an attempt is, in any way, successful, it owes a great debt to people already mentioned, but in a special way to Rosemary, *docta utriusque linguae*, who retyped the original UCL manuscript and then had the indescribable patience to wait outside various learned doors at Nottingham while matters were under discussion, to Alexander our son, *doctus* in an entirely different sphere, who at a vital moment wrote a computer program that changed Times New Roman into New Athena Unicode, and to our granddaughter (and her mother) who even at the age of fourteen months was able to lay a finger (*mirabile dictu*) on an overlooked typo