For the Introduction

Namesto uvoda

A Few Remarks Concerning the *archaiologia* of Nauportus and Emona: The Argonauts

MARJETA ŠAŠEL KOS

Greek historians and geographers denoted by the word *archaiologia* the ancient history of a town or a region. This is usually taken to include myths concerning the foundation and origins of different places and customs related to the oldest known facts from the history of a country, for which we today often use the expression 'mythological story'. The word 'mythology' itself, a compound of *mythos* and *logos*, reveals a contradictory content. While *mythos* means a story delivered and transmitted by words – one not yet written down and fixed as a text – the second element, *logos*, has many meanings, but the most common is that of a written word or a doctrine based on rational thinking. 'Mythical beginnings' – which may be invented at any time and for any reason – are, so to speak, the irrational side of history: not yet history proper. The 'ancient history' of the Nauportus–Emona region is closely connected with the story of the return journey of the Argonauts. The Argonauts were the heroes who belonged to the generation before the Trojan War; the *Chronicle* of St Jerome (Eusebius) dated their expedition to the year 1270 (55b, ed. Helm). They are associated principally with Thessaly, but partly also with central Greece and the Peloponnese. The main extant sources for the story are Pindar's *Fourth Pythian*, the *Argonautica* of Apollonius of Rhodes (third century BC) and Apollodorus. The epic was retold under the Flavian emperors by Valerius Flaccus, who, although he introduced some inflections making obeisance to Rome's position as a supreme power, imitated Apollonius, as did most of the poets who composed *Argonautica* after him.

The main facts of the story may be summarized briefly. King Pelias of Iolcus (modern Volos in Thessaly, beneath Mt Pelion), perhaps the leading Mycenaean settlement in Thessaly, sent the legitimate heir, Jason – in order to get rid of him – to recover the fleece of a golden ram. On it Phrixus and Hele, the children of Athamas, one of the previous Thessalian (or perhaps Boeotian) kings, had once fled from their stepmother Ino to Aia, the kingdom of Sun, ruled by the king Aeetes. Aia was associated from early times with Colchis at the eastern end of the Black Sea; the story is evidently related to the first Mycenaen explorations of the Black Sea coasts before the period of the Greek colonization by Miletus and other Greek *poleis* from

the seventh century BC onwards. With the help of Athena, the miraculous 'talking' ship Argo was built. The greatest heroes of the age joined Jason in his expedition; they numbered about fifty, and although the crew lists differ widely, they all include twenty-seven heroes, who must therefore figure in the original story; among these are Hercules, Hylas, Orpheus, the Dioscuri, Peleus (father of Achilles) and Theseus. The greatest difference between the Homeric epics and the story of the Argonauts is the possession by many of the latter heroes of supernatural powers. Several adventures occurred already on the way to Colchis, the last being the passage of the Argo through the Clashing Rocks, Symplegades, at the entrance to the Black Sea. Aeetes made Jason accomplish challenging tasks in order to obtain the Golden Fleece, such as ploughing with fire-breathing bulls and killing the dragon who guarded it. He performed all of these with the aid of the king's daughter, the sorceress Medea, with whom he afterwards fled from Colchis.[1]

The itinerary of the Argonauts from Thessaly to Colchis corresponded more or less to the traditional commercial route leading to the Black Sea. The story is significant for various reasons, not least because it reflected on what was Greek and what was 'other', or foreign. In the main, ancient authors viewed the expedition as a reflection of the age of colonization and expansion, or, more simply, as a search for gold (Strabo, 1.2.39, cf. 11.2.19). The return journey, however, is much less straightforward. Accounts of it vary widely, taking the Argonauts to almost all of the then known world. Apollonius, who is the best authority on the Argonauts, had the opportunity to choose between several itineraries: one was that of Hesiodus, Pindar, Hecataeus and Antimachus (ca. 400 BC), which led by way of the Phasis River, the Ocean, or the Red Sea, Libya and the Aegean. The alternative route was that of Sophocles, Euripides, Herodotus and probably Callimachus, which led across the Black Sea, the Bosphorus and the Hellespont, thus corresponding more or less to that of the outward journey. Two of Apollonius' most important sources were Timaeus, an early Hellenistic historian from Sicily, and the Hellenistic geographer Timagetus, author of the work *On harbours*. According to these authorities, the Argonauts returned along a large river that flows into the Black Sea (either the Tanais = the Don, or the Ister = the Danube), arriving eventually at the Pillars of Hercules (by Gibraltar) and proceeding across the western Mediterranean via Tyrrhenia, Corcyra and Libya.

Apollonius opted for a combination of all three versions – but in his

---

[1] Literature concerning the Argonauts is extensive; see, for example, Alain Maurice Moreau, *Le mythe de Jason et Médée*, Paris 1994; one of the latest monographs is: Paul Dräger, *Die Argonautika des Apollonios Rhodios. Das zweite Zorn-Epos der griechischen Literatur* (Beiträge zur Altertumskunde 158), München, Leipzig 2001, with further bibliography.

own peculiar way.[2] Rejecting the erroneous idea that the Colchian river Phasis communicated with the Ocean, and consequently rejecting the first version, he made the Argonauts go down the Phasis along the southern coast of the Black Sea as far as the promontory Carambis, which corresponds to the second itinerary. From there, he made them regain the Adriatic by way of the two arms of the Danube; Timagetus was the only known writer before him who assigned this itinerary to the Argonauts. According to Timagetus, however, they would have ended up in the western Mediterranean, whereas according to Apollonius, they emerged into the Adriatic. Apollonius wished to include in his poem the Adriatic legends concerning the killing of Apsyrtus and the ensuing foundation of several cities by the Colchians.[3] From the northern Adriatic he made the Argonauts reach the western Mediterranean along the Eridanus, which he identified with the Padus (= Po), and along the Rhodanus (=Rhône), which was regarded by Timaeus as the second arm of the Danube. As far as Corcyra the Argonauts then followed the itinerary of Timaeus and, partly, Homer. From that point they travelled to the Peloponnese, from where they were ejected to Libya, continuing the itinerary of Hesiodus, Pindar and Antimachus. They finally reached Thessaly via Crete.[4]

Apollonius was a poet and by virtue of that was allowed to invent anything. The historical truth counted for little in such epics – and this holds true also for Homer and other poets. However, it is always fascinating to analyse what is the historical kernel of the Greek legends, because if there were absolutely no reality behind them, they would not have existed. Apollonius wished to be systematic: to collect all the reminiscences of the return voyage of the Argonauts that had been documented before him. He did not wish to sacrifice any regions mentioned in earlier accounts except ones that he regarded as incredible – i.e., those along the Tanais, the northern Ocean and the Mediterranean west of the Rhodanus. However, his own account, a *summa* of all the previous ones, similarly lacks credibility; it is composed of bits and pieces that fit together badly. There is no rational connection between the Adriatic and the Rhodanus, or between Corcyra and Libya. Apollonius was thus forced to resort to divine interventions and violent tempests. His composition lacks unity, but he was pleased to present a complete list of the Argonautic legends that reflected his erudition. Fairy tales and

---

[2] Paul Dräger, Vier Versionen des Argonautenmythos, *Études classiques* (Publications du Centre univ. de Luxembourg) 5, 1993, 25–45.

[3] Radoslav Katičić, Podunavlje i Jadran u epu Apolonija Rođanina (Le bassin danubien et l'Adriatique dans l'épopée d'Apollonios de Rhodes), *Godišnjak* 7, *Centar za balkanološka ispitivanja* 5, 1970, 71–132 (= Id., *Illyricum mythologicum*, Zagreb 1995, 31–114).

[4] Émile Delage, *La Géographie dans les Argonautiques d'Apollonios de Rhodes* (Bibl. des Universités du Midi 19), Bordeaux, Paris 1930.

science are intermingled; he perhaps never visited any of the places that he described. One finds giants with six arms, Clashing Rocks, the gardens of the Hesperides with golden apples, etc., although his locations have the merit of precision: he placed Calypso in the southern Ionian Sea, Circe on the Italian (Ausonian) coast, Scylla and Charybdis in the straits of Sicily. Pliny the Elder criticized the lack of scientific detail in Apollonius's geography, as seen, for example, in the division of the Danube into two arms, the placing of an Amber Island, Electris, at the mouth of the Eridanus, and the non-existent communication of the latter river with the Rhenus and Rhodanus (the Rhine and Rhône).

We thus arrive in the northern Adriatic, where we confront Pliny's claim that indeed "there was no river that would flow from the Danube to the Adriatic Sea. In my opinion, the writers were deceived by the fact that the ship Argo went down to the Adriatic on a river not far from Tergeste, although it is no longer known which river. More diligent writers report that it was transported across the Alps; it arrived there from the Danube, then via the Savus and the Nauportus River, whose source was located between Emona and the Alps, and which for this reason acquired its name" (N. h. 3.128). However, the sources of the Danube were not known at the time of Apollonius, and Pliny's criticism of him is anachronistic. It is known that Apollonius confused the bay of Tergeste and that of Kvarner (Quarnaro), regarding them to be one and the same.[5] Pliny could no longer identify the river that flowed into the Adriatic, it could have been the Arsia (Raša), Ningus (Mirna), or Timavus (Timavo), but any identification is entirely hypothetical. Pliny found in his sources an association of the Nauportus (modern Vrhnika) with the Argonauts, probably on account of the false etymology of the name: *navis* (*naus* in Greek) = the ship, and *portare* = to carry. The real etymology of the toponym Nauportus, transmitted by Strabo in the accusative as *Nauponton* or *Pamporton*, is much more complicated;[6] the name may be related to Celtic *portorium*, a levying of tolls and other duties by the local Taurisci at this important *emporium* about half way between Aquileia and Segesta/Siscia (modern Sisak).[7] From Aquileia cargo was transported on waggons to Nauportus, where it was transferred to boats and conveyed down the rivers Nauportus/Emona (= Ljubljanica) and Savus (= Sava) to the flourishing Pannonian market

---

[5] Carlo Corbato, Gli Argonauti in Adriatico, *Archeografo Triestino* 101, ser. 4, 53, 1993, 171–184: 177.

[6] Marjeta Šašel Kos, *Nauportus*: antični literarni in epigrafski viri (Nauportus: Literary and Epigraphical Sources), in: J. Horvat, *Nauportus (Vrhnika)* (Dela 1. razr. SAZU 33), Ljubljana 1990, 17–33 (pp. 143–159).

[7] Jaroslav Šašel, Keltisches *portorium* in den Ostalpen (zu Plin. n.h. III 128), in: *Corolla memoriae Erich Swoboda dedicata*, Graz, Köln 1966, 198–204 (= Id., *Opera selecta*, Ljubljana 1992, 500–506).

centre at Segesta/Siscia, and further downstream to the Danube and to settlements along this river. Later, when Nauportus had ceased to be such an important settlement as it had been at the end of the Republican period and in the early Principate, Emona (modern Ljubljana) became associated with the Argonauts, and Jason was regarded as its founder. This connection is reported by the Greek historian Zosimus (fifth/sixth century AD), who wrote that Alaric, who had earlier, at the head of his Visigoths, invaded Greece and Epirus, marched into Italy (this occurred in AD 408) and immediately broke through the narrow passes leading from Pannonia to Venetia, "and pitched camp at Emona. This town lies between Upper Pannonia and Noricum. It is worthwhile telling what is known about this town and how it came to be founded in the first place. They say that the Argonauts, being pursued by Aietas, anchored at the mouths of the Danube, where it flows into the Black Sea. They decided it would be best to go on even against the current and row up this river with a following wind until they came nearer to the sea. They carried out this plan, and when they came to this place, they commemorated their arrival by founding this city. Then putting the Argo on a contrivance and hauling it four hundred stades to the sea, they anchored off the Italian shores, as the poet Peisander [from Laranda] tells, who has written an almost universal history in his work entitled 'Marriages of Gods and Heroines'"(5.29.1–3).[8] These data were accepted uncritically by the earliest researchers into the history of the Carniolan (Slovenian) lands, notably Johann Weichard Valvasor, who boasted that Emona was a settlement predating Rome itself, founded by Romulus some five hundred years later.[9] The source consulted by Zosimus for these years was the *History* of Olympiodorus (from the beginning of the fifth century AD); Zosimus doubtless took the story of the foundation of Emona from the latter account. A similar story is transmitted also by a late Roman ecclesiastical historian, Sozomenus (1.6.5), and by a Byzantine ecclesiastical historian, Nicephorus Callistus (beginning of the fourteenth century AD; 7.50: *PG* 145. 1329 D – 1331 A).[10]

---

[8] Translated by Ronald T. Ridley ([Zosimus] New History, a translation with commentary [Byzantina Australiensia 2], Canberra, 1982, 114); the Greek text consulted: François Paschoud, Zosime, *Histoire nouvelle*. Tome III 1ere partie (livre V). Texte établi et trad. par F. P. (Collection des Universités de France, Assoc. G. Budé), Paris 1986, 41–42.

[9] On this claim, see Jože Kastelic, Antična zgodovina v Valvasorjevi *Slavi vojvodine Kranjske* in njeni ilustratorji (Die Geschichte des Altertums in J. W. Valvasor's *Die Ehre des Hertzogthums Crain* und ihre Illustratoren), in: *Vita artis perennis. Ob osemdesetletnici akademika Emilijana Cevca / Festschrift Emilijan Cevc*, ed. A. Klemenc, Ljubljana 2000, 315–340: 326, 328.

[10] Rajko Bratož, *Grška zgodovina* [Greek History] Ljubljana, 2003², 245–249.

Argo's Return Voyage / Povratek ladje Argo, from / iz: Apollonios Rhodios, *The Argonautika. The Story of Jason and the Quest for the Golden Fleece*, translated, with introduction and glossary by Peter Green, Berkeley, Los Engeles, London 1997, Map 5.

Argonavti: mitična preteklost
Navporta in Emone

POVZETEK

V kratkem prispevku o argonavtih je najprej povzeta zgodba teh grških herojev (med njimi so bili poleg Jazona in vrste drugih, manj znanih junakov – posadka jih je štela okoli 50 – še Herakles, Hilas, Orfej, oba Dioskura, Ahilov oče Pelej in Tezej), ki so se pod vodstvom Jazona odpravili iskat zlato runo v daljno Kolhido, kjer bi morali najprej premagati zmaja, ki je čuval runo. Kralj Pelias iz tesalskega Jolka je namreč Jazona, ki je bil legitimni dedič tesalskega prestola, poslal opravit tako težko nalogo, da bi se ga za vselej znebil. Argonavti so s čudežno govorečo ladjo Argo srečno pripluli na cilj in opravili poslanstvo s pomočjo kraljeve hčere, čarovnice Medeje, ki jim je pomagala iz ljubezni do Jazona in je z njimi tudi zbežala.

Za naš, jugovzhodnoalpski in severnojadranski prostor je pomembna legenda o vrnitvi argonavtov, ki jo je zapisal Apolonij z Rodosa. Od Črnega morja naj bi se vračali po Donavi in nato po Savi in Ljubljanici; ta pot odraža védenje o starih trgovskih poteh, ki so vodile čez Balkanski polotok v Italijo. Medtem ko so zgodnji grški geografi in zgodovinarji (npr. še Teopomp) napačno menili, da se Donava z enim krakom izliva v Jadran, pa enciklopedist Plinij Starejši to napačno predstavo kritizira in poudarja, da onkraj izvirov reke Navport (Ljubljanice) ni rečne povezave do Jadrana. Argonavti so se znašli pred Alpami (po antičnem pojmovanju je bil prelaz pod Nanosom »najnižji del Alp«) in pri današnji Vrhniki ustanovili Navport, od koder so morali ladjo Argo prenesti do morja. Poznejši, poznoantični avtorji Jazonu niso pripisovali ustanovitve Navporta, katerega pomen se je po obdobju julijsko-klavdijske dinastije v drugi polovici 2. stoletja po Kr. zelo zmanjšal, temveč ustanovitev Emone (Ljubljane), ki je bila tedaj na tem prostoru najpomembnejše mesto, zadnja italska kolonija pred mejo s Panonijo.