

## THE ARGONAUT LEGEND AND THE EXPLOITATION OF ITS TOURISM POTENTIAL IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF VRHNIKA, SLOVENIA

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**ABSTRACT:** *This article focuses on two topics: 1) the Black Sea-Adriatic variant of the Argonaut return journey in scholarly accounts of antiquity, and 2) the possibilities for the development of tourism, based on this very legend, in the municipality of Vrhnika, the town in central Slovenia, the Roman emporium of Nauportus, associated with the Argonauts. Consequently, the first section of the article provides a survey of those scholarly accounts from antiquity which support the idea of the Argonaut return journey from the Black Sea via the Danube and other rivers to the Adriatic Sea, while the second section studies the implications of the legend for the development of tourism in Vrhnika and its surroundings. The interest of ancient writers in the emporium of Nauportus, the eponymous river and the area itself was primarily stimulated by the commercial and military objectives of the Romans which resulted first in their occupation of Nauportus and then in the foundation of Emona, modern Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia. Modern Vrhnika nowadays endeavours to develop diverse, high-quality, sustainable and ecologically acceptable tourism activities many of which owe a considerable portion of their appeal to the Argonaut legend.*

**Keywords:** *Argonaut return journey, the Nauportus River, Vrhnika (Nauportus), Argonaut Days, tourist strategies.*

### The Black Sea-Adriatic variant of the Argonaut return journey and its afterlife in the scholarly accounts of antiquity

The voyage made by the Argonauts from Greece to mythical Colchis (modern Georgia) on the shores of the Black Sea, in search of the Golden Fleece, and their return journey have captivated the human imagination in all ages. The first part of the Argonaut itinerary, the voyage to Colchis through Bosphorus and Dardanelles, does not seem to have been regarded as a matter of scholarly dispute in antiquity, but the return of the Argonauts tended to be a rather controversial affair, as suggested by the accounts of various maritime and fluvial routes, allegedly taken by the Argonauts on their way back to Greece, which were given by distinguished Greek poets and scholars (Šašel Kos 2009: 120-122).<sup>1</sup> The version which had eventually eclipsed all the others was

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1 For different versions of their return journey, see, for example, Kostas Kalachanis. THE RETURN VOYAGE OF THE ARGONAUTS ACCORDING TO ARGONAUTICA ORPHICA. Proceedings of Scientific Conference Timeless Greece, University of Patras, Ancient Olympia, International Olympic Academy, 28-31/8/2016 (to be published, in Greek and English); [http://www.academia.edu/28370756/THE\\_RETURN\\_VOYAGE\\_OF\\_THE\\_ARGONAUTS\\_ACCORDING\\_TO\\_ARGONAUTICA\\_ORPHICA](http://www.academia.edu/28370756/THE_RETURN_VOYAGE_OF_THE_ARGONAUTS_ACCORDING_TO_ARGONAUTICA_ORPHICA) Proceedings of Scientific Conference Timeless Gree

produced by Apollonius of Rhodes, the Alexandrian scholar from the 3rd century BC, who claimed in the fourth book of his *Argonautica* that the Argonauts on their flight from the angry Colchians had sailed into one of the mouths of the Danube in the Black Sea and then continued their journey upstream the same river, an influx of which, according to Apollonius, lead them into the Sea of Cronus (Adriatic Sea). As the king's son Apsyrtos, Medea's brother, in his pursuit of the Argonauts blocked the entire Adriatic coast, leaving unoccupied only the two Brygean islands (Cres and Lošinj in the Kvarner Gulf), Jason and Medea resorted to the murder of Apsyrtos to confuse the pursuers.<sup>2</sup>

The frightened Colchians, who decided not to return to Colchis and face the wrath of their king after their failed mission, settled on the shores of the Adriatic: on the Istrian peninsula, where they supposedly founded the city of Pula, on the island of Cres where they founded the town of Apsoros, mod. Osor, both in mod. Croatia, on the southern Adriatic coast where they founded Ulcinj (Colchinium) in mod. Montenegro, and the ancient city of Oricum at the foot the Ceraunian Mountains in Epir, modern Albania (Gordeziani 2010-2011: 48-49).<sup>3</sup> The Argonauts, by contrast, were eager to arrive in their homeland as soon as possible, which they eventually accomplished after numerous setbacks and delays.

Apollonius' account of the Argonaut return journey, based on the erroneous notion of the bifurcation of the Danube, where one of the river's influxes allegedly ends its course in the Adriatic Sea, was criticized by many of his scholarly successors already in antiquity. For example, the Greek geographer Diodorus Sicculus (flourished in the 1st century BC) argued in his *Bibliotheca historica*, universal history, with reference to the Argonaut Black Sea-Adriatic variant of return journey that there were in fact two different Ister rivers, the one flowing into the Black Sea and the other one discharging itself into the Adriatic somewhere in the land of the Histri, i.e. in the peninsula of

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[ce University of Patras Ancient Olympia International Olympic Academy 28-31 8 2016 to be published in Greek and English](http://doi.org/10.5169/seals-13263)), retrieved on 15 January, 2018. See also Fritz Wehrli. Die Rückfahrt der Argonauten, Zeitschrift: Museum Helveticum: schweizerische Zeitschrift für klassische Altertumswissenschaft = Revue suisse pour l'étude de l'antiquité classique = Rivista svizzera di filologia classica, 12 (1955), 154-157; <http://doi.org/10.5169/seals-13263>, retrieved on 15 January, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> For the ancient Greek variants of the murder of Apsyrtos, see Ketevan Nadareishvili (Tbilisi). *The Myth of Apsyrtos in the Ancient Sources*, *Phasis, Greek and Roman Studies*, 13-14 (2010-2011), 60-72; [http://dSPACE.nplg.gov.ge/bitstream/1234/145383/1/Phasis\\_2010-2011\\_N13-14.pdf](http://dSPACE.nplg.gov.ge/bitstream/1234/145383/1/Phasis_2010-2011_N13-14.pdf), retrieved on 15 December, 2017.

<sup>3</sup> On this occasion I feel obliged to share with the reading public a first-rate source on the geography of the Adriatic: Vjerman Brezak, Filip Budić, Ana Katarina Gorički, Marina Stipić, Barbara Pavlek, GRČKA MITOLOGIJA I HRVATSKA OBALA JADRANA. Zagreb, Centar za interdisciplinarno istraživanje stare povjesti, 2016.

Istria.<sup>4</sup> In the first century BC when Diodorus was writing his universal history, Istria was a much better known geographic entity than in the age of Apollonius two centuries earlier because the wars the Romans fought with the Histri, whom they eventually conquered in the second century BC, resulted in more realistic geographical insights into this peninsula, both its coast and hinterland. Apart from that, the sources of the Danube were discovered during Tiberius' expedition into the regions north of the Alps in 15 BC (Sonnabend 2007: 83), which had all together contributed to a better understanding of the flow and the characteristics of this longest European river.

Strabo (63/64 BC – c. 24 AD), another distinguished scholar, also argued that the Danube does not flow into the Adriatic Sea.<sup>5</sup> In his voluminous work *Geographica*, he describes among others Istria and the Adriatic coast, mentioning the islands Apsyrtides (Cres and Lošinj in the Kvarner Gulf) as well (2.5.20). One of the tribes, the alleged descendants of the Colchians, were the Histri, mentioned above, the references to their Colchian origin being made also by Pliny the Elder (23-79 AD) in his *Historia Naturalis* (NH. 3. 23. 19) and by Pompeius Trogus, the first century BC, whose influential work *Philippic Histories and the Origin of the Whole World and the Places of the Earth* (*Historiae Philippicae et Totius Mundi Origines et Terrae Situs*) was only partially preserved by M. Iunianus Iustinus, active in the third century AD.<sup>6</sup>

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4 [The Library of History of Diodorus Siculus](http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Diodorus_Siculus/4C*.html#ref35), Book IV, 56, Vol. II, the Loeb Classical Library edition. Harvard University Press, 1933, p. 527; [http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Diodorus\\_Siculus/4C\\*.html#ref35](http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Diodorus_Siculus/4C*.html#ref35), retrieved on 21 January, 2018: 7. We must not leave unrefuted the account of those who state that the Argonauts sailed up the Ister<sup>35</sup> river (Danube) as far as its sources and then, by its arm which flows in the opposite direction, descended to the Adriatic Gulf. 8 For time has refuted those who assumed that the Ister which empties by several mouths into the Pontus and the Ister which issues into the Adriatic flow from the same regions. As a matter of fact, when the Romans subdued the nation of the Istrians it was discovered that the latter river has its sources only forty stades from the sea. But the cause of the error on the part of the historians was, they say, the identity in name of the two rivers.

5 [The Geography of Strabo](http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Strabo/1C*.html), published in Vol. I. of the Loeb Classical Library edition, 1917; [http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Strabo/1C\\*.html](http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Strabo/1C*.html), retrieved on 27 March, 2018: ... that the Pontus would then have been confluent with the Adriatic in some places, for the reason that the Ister, as he supposes, branches off from the Pontus regions and thus flows into both seas, on account of the lie of the land. But neither does the Ister rise in the Pontus regions (on the contrary, it rises in the mountains above the Adriatic), nor does it flow into both seas, but into the Pontus alone, and it branches off near its mouths only. However, this mistake of Hipparchus is shared with him by some of his predecessors, who supposed that there was a river of the same name as the Ister, which branched off from it and emptied into the Adriatic, and that the tribe of Istrians, through whose territory this Ister flows, got their appellation from it, and that it was by this route that Jason made his return voyage from the land of the Colchians (Book 1, Ch. 3, 15, p. 213).

6 *HISTORIARVM PHILIPPICARVM T. POMPEII TROGLIBRI XLIV IN EPITOMEN REDACTI*, XXXII, III, Justin, *Epitome of Pompeius Trogus* (1886). Preface to the online text. This text was authored by Roger Pearse, Ipswich, UK, 2003, 13-16; <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/justin.html>, retrieved on 5 January, 2018.

However, Strabo also pays considerable attention to the hinterlands of the northern Adriatic coast and other inland areas, recognizing a strategic importance of Vrhnika (Nauportus) which he refers to as Pamportus, in the central part of mod. Slovenia as a site of commerce where the merchandise from the rich Roman city of Aquileia on the eastern border of Italy was transferred via the south-western part of mod. Slovenia: the Ocra pass (Razdrto) below Mt. Nanos (the Roman Ocra Mons) and Postojna to the boats and ships at Vrhnika and transported via the Ljubljana (the Nauportus River) and the Sava to Illyria and Pannonia,<sup>7</sup> **and further east to the Danube region** (4.6.10). **Even though he does not mention the Argonauts in this context, his account is highly valuable as it reveals an increasing importance of central Slovenia in the first centuries BC and AD. This geographic interest, however, was stimulated by the intensified Roman military preoccupation with this area after the foundation of Aquileia in 181 BC. The recently founded colony on the eastern border of the Roman republic immediately faced the hostility of the neighbouring tribes, Carni and Taurisci in particular, who sensed that the new Roman colony would in the foreseeable future lay its hands on the lucrative trade route stretching from Aquileia to the Black Sea. The strategic position of central Slovenia in this vibrant commercial activity is confirmed also by Pliny the Elder who, in addition, established an unambiguous link between the Argonauts and central Slovenia, arguing that the Argonauts sailed also along the Sava and the Nauportus which derived its name from the Argonaut transport of their ship Argo across the Alps.**<sup>8</sup>

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7 The Geography of Strabo. Literally translated, with notes, in three volumes. London: George Bell & Sons. 1903; <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0239%3Abook%3D4%3Achapter%3D6%3Asection%3D10>, retrieved on 5 January, 2018:

*Ocra (Razdrto) forms the lowest portion of the Alps, where they approach the territory of the Carni, and through which they convey the merchandise of Aquileia in waggons to Pamportus. [Ober-Laibach in Krain] This route is not more than 400 stadia. From thence they convey it by the rivers as far as the Danube and surrounding districts, for a navigable river [the river Laibach] which flows out of Illyria, passes by Pamportus, and discharges itself into the Save, so that the merchandise may easily be carried down both to Segesta, and to the Pannonians, and Taurisci. See also Barbara Zlobec, Poročila antičnih geografov o severnem Jadranu. Od Hekataja do Plinija starejšega, ZGODOVINSKI ČASOPIS, •53 (1999), •1 (114), 11-32; [http://www.zgodovinskicasopis.si/pdf/Digital-archiv/ZC\\_1999\\_1.pdf](http://www.zgodovinskicasopis.si/pdf/Digital-archiv/ZC_1999_1.pdf), retrieved on 17 January, 2018.*

8 The reference is most probably made to the non-Alpine Dinaric mountain range on Slovenia's border with Italy and spanning towards the southeast of Slovenia.

His account (NH. 3. 22. 18) also reflects the expanded knowledge of the area which the Roman and Greek scholars possessed in the first century AD: "That this region [Istria] takes its name from the river Ister which flows from the Danube, also called the Ister, into the Adriatic opposite the mouth of the Padus, and that the sea which lies between them is rendered fresh by their waters running from opposite directions, has been erroneously asserted by many, and among them by Nepos even, who dwelt upon the banks of the Padus. For it is the fact that no river which runs from the Danube discharges itself into the Adriatic. They have been misled, I think, by the circumstance that the ship Argo came down some river into the Adriatic sea, not far from Tergeste; but what river that was is now unknown. The most careful writers say that the ship was carried across the Alps on men's shoulders, having passed along the Ister, then along the Savus, and so from Nauportus, which place, lying between Æmona and the Alps, from that circumstance derives its name."<sup>9</sup> Like Strabo, Pliny the Elder also recognized the significance of the trade route leading first by land from Aquileia to Nauportus, and then from Nauportus via the two rivers, the Ljubljana (the Nauportus) and the Sava, to the Danube and further to the Black Sea (Braccini 2011: 107; Šašel Kos 2017: 16-17).

However, the Roman army was even more aware of the strategic importance of the area and its fluvial potential, especially in the first centuries BC and AD. In this period, the Roman army heavily relied on the fluvial routes leading deep into the rebellious areas of Illyria and Pannonia, especially during Octavian's campaigns against the Illyrians (35-33BC), with Nauportus having a vital function in these military operations as a river port (Šašel Kos 2011: 112-113). However, after the subduing of the areas in question, the Romans started building land roads as well. The Roman road from Aquileia, over the pass Ad Pirum (Hrušica, Slovenia) to Emona (modern Ljubljana), the new Roman colony, was probably built in the age of Augustus. The construction of this land road was fully justified, providing a shorter and safer travelling alternative than the earlier, prehistoric and mostly riverine route, which could be dangerous and hardly navigable at certain locations, as suggested by excavated altars dedicated to various water gods.<sup>10</sup> Emona gained prominence as a result of this new chain of land roads, which, on the other hand, led to the

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9 Pliny the Elder. *The Natural History*, eds. John Bostock, M.D., F.R.S., H.T. Riley, Esq., B.A. London, 1855; <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0137%3Abook%3D3%3Achapter%3D22#note19>, retrieved on 27 March, 2018.

10 Marjeta ŠAŠEL KOS. Savus and Adsalluta. *Arheološki vestnik* (Arh. vest.) 45, 1994. 99-122; <https://www.dlib.si/stream/URN:NBN:SI:DOC-2F9RTIOX/04a9218c-42ff-4375-acab-183a9aab86b9/PDF>, retrieved on 29 March, 2018.

corresponding decline of Nauportus (Istenič, 2009: 860-861). In addition, Emona was an important trading post on the Amber Road,<sup>11</sup> and, apart from that, it managed to win recognition as the most eastern city of Italy.<sup>12</sup> Its importance is further confirmed by two Greek writers from the fifth century, Zosimus, a high imperial official, and Sozomen, a church historian, who both attributed the foundation of Emona to Jason and the Argonauts, deriving their knowledge their from the historian Olympiodorus (the first half of the 5th century), "who himself was following a poet, Peisander of Laranda, active in the first half of the 3rd century and the author of a lost poem entitled *Heroikai Theogamiai*." (Braccini 2011: 108).

When Sozomen refers to the final victory won by the emperor Constantine I over his rival Maxentius, he points out that it was Italy, especially its eastern part along the Eridanus river (the Po River), which greatly benefited from Constantine's victory which brought religious freedom to the Christian inhabitants of Italy. On this occasion, he refers to the hitherto unidentified river Aquilis, as the river which led the Argonauts via the Po River into the Adriatic after their winter stay, as he puts it, "on the shores of Italy", where they founded Emona:

"When Constantine succeeded to the same government, the affairs of the churches became still more brilliant; for when Maxentius, the son of Herculius, was slain, his share also devolved upon Constantine; and the nations who dwelt by the river Tiber and the Eridanus, which the natives call Padus, those who dwelt by the Aquilis, whither, it is said, the Argo was dragged, and the inhabitants of the coasts of the Tyrrhenian sea were permitted the exercise of their religion without molestation.

When the Argonauts fled from Æetes, they returned homewards by a different route, crossed the sea of Scythia, sailed through some of the rivers there, and so gained the shores of [Italy](#), where they passed the winter and built a city, which they called Emona. The following summer, with the assistance of the people of the country, they dragged the Argo, by means of machinery, the distance of four hundred stadia, and so reached the Aquilis, a river which falls into the Eridanus: the Eridanus itself falls into the Italian sea."<sup>13</sup>

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11 Felix Teichner. FROM AQVILEIA TO CARNVNTVM: GEOGRAPHICAL MOBILITY ALONG THE AMBER ROAD : De AQVILEIA a CARNVNTVM: movilidad geográfica a lo largo de la ruta del ámbar, *Veleia*. 30 (2013), 43-73; <http://www.ehu.es/ojs/index.php/Veleia/article/viewFile/11208/11949>, retrieved on 10 December, 2017.

12 MarjetaŠašel Kos. [Colonia Iulia Emona – the genesis of the Roman city](#). *Arheološki vestnik*, 63, 2012, 79-104, [http://av.zrc-sazu.si/pdf/63/AV\\_63\\_2012\\_Sasel\\_Kos.pdf](http://av.zrc-sazu.si/pdf/63/AV_63_2012_Sasel_Kos.pdf), retrieved on 5 November, 2017.

13 *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Liber 1, Caput 6. Translated by Chester D. Hartranft. From Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vol. 2. Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Buffalo, NY:

This version of events is repeated in *Historia Ecclesiastica Tripartita* by Epiphanius-Cassiodorus in the sixth century,<sup>14</sup> which, in turn, is also found in the chronicle by Freulphus of Lisieux from the ninth century, even though in a different historiographical context.<sup>15</sup>

If Sozomen completely ignores contemporary Emona in his account, Zosimus, on the other hand, shows much more interest in contemporary history of the town, associating Emona with Alaric who made his way from Epir through Pannonia to Venice in 408, staying at Emona for a while, and on this occasion Zosimus makes a learned digression with reference to the distant past of the town. It is necessary to point out, though, that this account of Alaric's activities is full of geographical mistakes which reveal the writer's lack of first-hand knowledge of the area (Scavone 1969: 19-20; Bratož 2014: 328-329), and consequently, we can only speculate about Alaric's exact whereabouts in the year 408:

"[5.29.1] About the same time, Stilicho was informed that Alaric had left Epirus, and having passed through the defiles that form a passage from Pannonia to Venetia, had pitched his camp at a town called Emona, which is situated between Upper Pannonia and Noricum. It would not be impertinent to notice what is remarkable concerning this town and its origin.

[5.29.2] It is said, that the Argonauts, being pursued by Aeetas, arrived at the mouth of the [Ister](#) by which it discharges itself into the Pontus, and deemed it their best resource to proceed up that river against the stream, by the help of oars and convenient gales of wind, until they should approach nearer to the sea.

[5.29.3] Having effected this, and arrived at that place, they left a memorial of their arrival there, which was the building of the town. Afterwards placing their ship, the Argo, on machines purposely constructed, they drew it four hundred stadia, as far as the sea-side, and thus arrived at the Thessalian

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Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1890). Revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight; <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2602.htm>, retrieved on 29 March, 2018.

14 Cassiodorus Vivariensis Abbas - *Historia Ecclesiastica Vocata Tripartita*, Liber 1, Caput 7, col. 890-891, Migne. Patrologia Latina 69 (1848); [http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/02m/0485-0585\\_Cassiodorus\\_Vivariensis\\_Abbas\\_Historia\\_Ecclesiastica\\_Vocata\\_Tripartita\\_MLT.pdf](http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/02m/0485-0585_Cassiodorus_Vivariensis_Abbas_Historia_Ecclesiastica_Vocata_Tripartita_MLT.pdf), retrieved on 25 July, 2017.

Désirée Scholten. *The History of a Historia. Manuscript transmission of the Historia Ecclesiastica Tripartita by Epiphanius-Cassiodorus*, MA Thesis. Utrecht University, July 2010; [http://cmp.oeaw.ac.at/PDF/thesis\\_desiree\\_scholten.pdf](http://cmp.oeaw.ac.at/PDF/thesis_desiree_scholten.pdf), retrieved on 20 July, 2017.

15 Freulphus Lexoviensis. *Chronica*, Liber 2, Caput 16, col. 659-660, Migne. Patrologia Latina 100 (1875); [http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/02m/0780-0853\\_Freulphus\\_Lexoviensis\\_Episcopus\\_Chronicorum\\_Tomi\\_Duo\\_MLT.pdf](http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/02m/0780-0853_Freulphus_Lexoviensis_Episcopus_Chronicorum_Tomi_Duo_MLT.pdf), retrieved on 10 August, 2017.

shore, as is related by the poet Pisander, who has comprehended almost the whole story in a poem called *The Heroic Marriages of the Gods*.<sup>16</sup>

To summarize, central Slovenia's associations with the Argonauts are found in various scholarly accounts of antiquity from the first to the fifth century AD, and the Argonaut legend in turn opens numerous possibilities for the Slovenian tourism to exploit these references to Slovenia's distant past. This consequently raises a very urgent question of how such traditions are being exploited in the Slovenian tourism and this issue, in my opinion, should be raised in all the Slovenian strategic documents which identify and formulate the objectives and priorities in this rapidly growing business branch. The scope of this article, however, is extremely narrow, focusing exclusively on those tourism activities, performed in the municipality of Vrhnika, which most systematically exploit tourism potentials derived from this part of the Argonaut legend associated with the town of Vrhnika and its surroundings.

### **Argonauts related tourism activities in the municipality of Vrhnika**

Today's Vrhnika, the former Roman emporium of Naportus, is located about 25 km southwest of Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia. Even according to Slovenian standards, Vrhnika is a relatively small town with just under 9 000 inhabitants. The town of Vrhnika is aware of its historical roots, as shown by a ship in the municipal coat of arms, functioning as a memorial of the times when the river transport played the main role in the prosperity of the settlement,<sup>17</sup> and the ship in the coat of arms could symbolize the Argo ship as well. The local variant of the Argonaut legend, preserved at Vrhnika, adds some additional details to the traditional Black Sea-Adriatic variant of the legend. Thus, according to the local traditions, the Argonauts sailed along the Danube, the Sava and the Ljubljanica to the Močilnik, the source of the Ljubljanica River. In a state of rage, because of the mighty cliffs that hindered their voyage, and because of the recognition that they would no longer be able to use a fluvial route, Jason hit the cliff with his fist, the imprint of which is still visible today. The locals refer to the cliffs in question as Devil's rocks. The Argonauts

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16 The translation of [Zosimus' New History](#) offered here was printed in 1814 by W. Green and T. Chaplin in London, and was probably prepared by J. Davis of the Military Chronicle and Military Classics Office. The translator is anonymous. The text was found at [Tertullian.org](#). The notes were added by [Jona Lendering](#); <http://www.livius.org/sources/content/zosimus/zosimus-new-history-5/zosimus-new-history-5.29/>, retrieved on 29 March, 2018.

17 <http://vrhnika.si/index.php>, retrieved on 27 March, 2018.

dismantled the ship at the source of the Ljubljanica River and transferred it to the Adriatic Sea on their shoulders.<sup>18</sup>

That the inhabitants of Vrhnika are fully aware of the significance of the Argonaut legend is confirmed by various tourism and non-tourism related activities in the municipality. Thus, the knowledge about the Argonauts begins to circulate already in a kindergarten, as seen in the summer of 2015, when the Kindergarten Vrhnika organized a series of activities for preschool children, named *The summer with the Argonauts*, where the kindergarten familiarized the children through the games with the Argonaut legend. The account of activities given by the educators who organized the event is the following: "We emphasize primarily interesting and lively activities, while encouraging the relaxed spending of summer in the company of peers. We familiarized the children with the legend of Jason's fist and the crew of the Argo ship, called Argonauts. We watched the eponymous cartoon, which helped the children to understand better the legend read to them. We connected the legend of Jason with the home town of Vrhnika (Močilnik) and in this way we became acquainted with the meaning of the local coat of arms. From the waste material, the children made a real Argo ship, which they decorated with a coat of arms. They retraced the voyage of the Argonauts by going along the "sensual path" (the path based on various sensory perceptions), made of water and natural materials collected by the children in the vicinity of the kindergarten (branches, leaves, pinecones, spruce needles, rocks, soil, sand). Thus they made the "arduous" journey from Vrhnika to the Adriatic Sea (water-bowls, pools)."<sup>19</sup>

The awareness of Vrhnika's alleged Argonaut origins continues to be raised in a local primary school as well, even though less intensely than in the kindergarten. Thus, in a very cursory manner, the Primary School Ivan Cankar presents the history of Vrhnika on its web page.<sup>20</sup> The Argonauts themselves are mentioned only in passing, in two sentences. They are given the credit for the foundation of Vrhnika, and the ship in the municipal coat of arms, according to the web page, represents the Argo ship. The activities organized at the Kindergarten Vrhnika as well as the website of the Primary School Ivan Cankar show that the recognition of Vrhnika as an Argonaut settlement is firmly anchored in Vrhnika's school environment, which contributes, at least indirectly, to the locals' awareness of the Argonaut legend as one of the most recognizable attributes of Vrhnika and its surroundings.

On the other hand, there are signs that Vrhnika's position as a tourist destination is gaining grounds on a national scale as well. For example, Vrhnika

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18 <http://www.visitvrhnika.si/si/o-vrhniki/zanimivosti-vseh-vrst/argonavi-na-vrhniki>, retrieved on 27 March, 2018. The translations of all the Slovenian web sites quoted in the footnotes have been made by the author of this article.

19 <http://vrtec-vrhnika.si/zabica/poletje-z-argonavi>, retrieved on 27 March, 2018.

20 <http://www.osivanacankarja.si/predstavitev-vrhnike>, retrieved on 27 March, 2018.

with its surroundings is mentioned in the rubric *The most beautiful trips around Slovenia* as a destination worth visiting and where the Argonaut legend is duly retold. The Argonauts are at Vrhnika understandably closely connected to the Ljubljanica River, more specifically its sources, in particular Veliki Močilnik, as those sites where the so-far uninterrupted fluvial return journey beginning at the mouth of the Danube eventually came to an end. Veliki Močilnik, if we faithfully translate the account on the website, "is located below the 40 meters high precipitous walls, also called the Devil's rocks. On the rocks at Veliki Močilnik, you can see the imprint of Jason's fist. According to the old narrative, the Argonauts are supposed to have founded Vrhnika. Under the leadership of Jason, they sailed along the river Ljubljanica and Sava from the Black Sea. When they reached the source of the Ljubljanica River in this place, the ship had to be dismantled and transported by land to the coast of the Adriatic Sea. Today, their ship is depicted in the municipal coat-of-arms of Vrhnika."

- I. So far, everything said, told and read confirms Vrhnika's awareness of the importance of the Argonaut legend, which is a good preparation for the main tourist event associated with the Argonauts, the *Argonaut Days*, which are held in Vrhnika in the second half of June: "The multi-day festival named *The Argonaut Days* directs the visitors' attention to the long and varied history of the place and the important role of Vrhnika as a junction of water and land routes. Each year in June, the Argonauts return to Vrhnika with Jason and Medea, whom visitors can meet at both the opening and at the individual later events. The program of the festival is designed in the sense of "something for everyone" and includes over 40 cultural, ethnological and gastronomic as well as entertaining, children and sports events." Apart from that: "The grand opening is a real eye-full which delights both the eyes and ears. The artistic program and the arrival of the Argonauts at the scene are complemented by dance-music inserts, and the highlight of the evening is the lighting of the Argonaut fire." What is more: "The highlight of the entire festival is undoubtedly a music and entertainment event the *Night at Vrhnika*, within which many Slovenian and foreign musicians attract visitors from near and far. The Vrhnika sports park is filled to the last corner and at midnight Vrhnika is illuminated by magnificent fireworks."<sup>21</sup>

Within the *Argonaut Days*, there is also the *Argonaut Marathon*, a cycling marathon of recreational character, which takes place every year in June, when various groups of cyclists are directed to cycling routes of different lengths: "The best prepared and the most stubborn are directed to the 80 km

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21 <http://www.visitvrhnika.si/si/kaj-poceti/tradicionalne-prireditve/argonavtski-dnevi-noc-na-vrhniki/o-argonavtskih-dnevih>, retrieved on 27 Marh, 2018.

track named the *Argonaut Marathon*, whereby registered cyclists make a total climb of 920 meters above sea level. A 63 km marathon, also called the *Small Argonaut Marathon*, with a total climb of 600 meters, is suitable for medium-sized and persistent participants. Families and less prepared cyclists go to the 32 km long *Family Argonaut Marathon*, ridden along the Marshes routes and roads, and the children marathon *Argonavtek* (Little Argonaut) is ready for the youngest.<sup>22</sup> Another important sporting event is the *Argotlon*; so in the Vrhnika Sports Park, organizers have prepared a completely new obstacle course for all adventurers and the lovers of adrenaline activities for the third consecutive year, also within the framework of the *Argonaut Days* at Vrhnika. In 2017, approximately 11 km of a running track was filled with 40 physical obstacles.<sup>23</sup>

- II. The *Argonaut Days* are held under the patronage of the Ivan Cankar Institute for Culture, Sport and Tourism Vrhnika, the central institution in Vrhnika in charge of tourism activities in the municipality. In 2016, the institute designed the *Strategy of the marketing of Vrhnika as a tourist destination 2016-2020*, functioning as the basic strategic document for the activities and events designed by the institute in the field of tourism.<sup>24</sup> On its initial pages, the *Strategy* defines the vision, strategic goals, priority areas of action and presents the action plan until 2020. The document aims to emphasize the identity of Vrhnika as a tourist destination, which is the basis for defining the identity of Vrhnika as an umbrella trade mark, increasing its visibility and serving as a basis for formulating strategic promotional guidelines (p. 3):

What is the role of the Argonauts in this strategy?

The Argonauts appear for the first time at the very beginning of this 72 pages long document, on p. 19, in the section entitled *5 OF THE LARGEST ADVANTAGES* [from a marketing point of view]: 1. More recognizable symbols, icons or stories that have the concept of "NAJ" (the prefix used for superlative adjectives) in themselves: Ivan Cankar,<sup>25</sup> the Argonauts, the Ljubljana and the sources of the Ljubljana River, the oldest wooden wheel in the world and other outstanding archaeological finds, some of which stand

22 <http://www.visitvrhnika.si/si/kaj-poceti/tradicionalne-prireditve/argonavtski-dnevi-noc-na-vrhniki/program/argonavtski-maraton>, retrieved on 27 March 2018.

23 <http://www.visitvrhnika.si/si/kaj-poceti/tradicionalne-prireditve/argonavtski-dnevi-noc-na-vrhniki/program/argotlon>, retrieved on 27 March, 2018.

24 <http://zavod-cankar.si/userfiles/zavod-cankar.si/dokumenti/Turizem/2016%C5%BE/Strategija%20tr%C5%BEenja%20Vrhniko%20kot%20turisti%C4%8Dne%20destinacije.pdf>, retrieved on 27 March, 2018.

25 Ivan Cankar, the greatest Slovenian playwright and writer (1876-1918).

out even on a global scale. 2. Already established and accepted programs of guided tours (Ivan Cankar, the Marshes, the Source of Ljubljana, Ancient stories and Vrhnika). 3. Proximity to Ljubljana (the capital) and good accessibility (proximity to the motorway). 4. High quality website entitled *Visit Vrhnika*. 5. Cooperation with Ljubljana and its tourism organizations established.

The document has set an ambitious goal to transform Vrhnika by the year 2020 into a first-class tourist destination by designing the programs, p. 25, "which will be the basis for natural and cultural heritage, as well as sport and recreation, which will be complemented by good, authentic culinary offer of the inns in Vrhnika. ... The basic guide in the development, integration, promotion and marketing of the tourism offer is the creation of modern, diverse, high-quality, sustainable and environmentally friendly programs based on innovative and high quality integrated tourism products and services with high added value and high user satisfaction ... The *Argonaut Days* will become recognizable throughout the country and will be established as one of the biggest events. Consequently, new jobs will be created as a result of the increase in volume of tourism and, the town will be developed on a larger scale as well."

Then the Argonauts appear again on pp. 30-32, where the document raises a question of what can Vrhnika offer in terms of tourism, what are the main advantages, characteristics, elements of its tourism offer and the icons, where the differentiation from other (competitive) destinations can be most convincingly underlined? The document suggests the following options: 1. The Ljubljana as a river of seven names, numerous springs, countless treasures (ancient archaeological finds) and many-faceted nature. 2. Extremely rich history, full of stories and finds (from the old age to the new era). 3. Mythology of the Argonauts (Jason, Argonauts, Argo ship, imprint of Jason's fist, *Argonaut Days*, possibility of the attachment to the dragon legend - dragon puppies). 4. Ivan Cankar as the greatest Slovenian playwright and writer. 5. The intersection of the Ljubljana Marshes and the Karst region, and these arguments are repeated again on p. 36: Source / source of life • Historical link • World-renowned finds • the Marshes, wetlands (the wheel, Argo) • the Mirna • Fishing tourism • Karst river (7 names) • Contact of the Marshes and the Karst region • Connection with Ljubljana • Navigation • Argonauts. The *Strategy*, however, recognizes the problems threatening to obstruct this sustainable vision of tourism: Legal bans • Dirt • Springs no longer in their primeval form • Private interests • Springs are not visible / appealing in most seasons • The name of the river (Ljubljana) does not correspond to the name of the town (Vrhnika) as it did in the past when the designation *Nauportus* covered both the river and the settlement. • The river is not regulated.

In addition, the document on p. 43 emphasizes that it will be necessary to do more for the visibility of Vrhnika's coat of arms, saying: "The Ljubljana, which is to be elevated by communication activities, is to be communicated through the Argonauts and through the icon of the Argo ship. The Argo ship is an icon that is already part of the municipal coat of arms. Nevertheless, many residents do not understand or know its background, story, history. This can be an opportunity for the inhabitants to learn through the story, in a pleasant and attractive way, what constitutes the basic municipal symbol - the coat of arms."

This survey of non-tourism and tourism activities reveals that Vrhnika is fully aware of the implications of the Argonaut legend for the recognizability and prestige of the municipality, which is evident also in the promotion of the legend through pre-primary and primary school educational activities. In the field of tourism, the Argonaut legend is systematically covered by the *Argonaut Days*, a multi-day festival, which consists of numerous events and which is supported by the Ivan Cankar Institute for Culture, Sport and Tourism Vrhnika, which has also provided a theoretical base for further development of the Argonauts related tourism activities in its *Strategy of the marketing of Vrhnika as a tourist destination 2016-2020*.

In conclusion, the central part of modern Slovenia with its web of rivers and land roads connecting Italy and the Adriatic region with the Black Sea won recognition already in antiquity, with Emona and Nauportus as the two settlements having a significant role in the Argonaut legend. These outstanding traditions present a golden mine of opportunities for active, intelligent and well-read tourism workers willing to focus on specialised, sustainable and cultural tourism, presenting therefore a viable alternative to notorious mass tourism. It can be argued that from this point of view, Vrhnika's determination to base a considerable part of its tourism offer on its associations with the Argonauts is a step in the right direction.

### Notes on the author

The Slovenian scholar Dr **Alenka Divjak**, assistant professor, is a medievalist scholar, her PhD topic being Old Norse literature. In addition to this research field, she also does research in late antiquity and hagiography. As a lecturer of the professional terminology in the English language at the college of higher education at Novo mesto Grm – Centre of Biotechnics and Tourism, Slovenia, she also discusses tourism issues, primarily from a historical and educational perspective.

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