

The Argonauts – A World Cultural History of the Antiquity

by

Dr. Christine Pellech

e-mail: christine.pellech@chello.at

After publishing my first book “The Odyssey – an ancient circumnavigation of the globe” it was clear to me that I had to write another one concerning the Argonauts. After all, the Odyssey was not suspended in an empty space – on the contrary it was an integral part of the voyage of the Argonauts.

Furthermore, the overwhelming number of descriptions handed down by Apollonios of Rhode Island in his masterpiece “Epos of the Argonauts” has been the subject of many different interpretations. In fact this was a challenge for a large number of scientists – as well as for me. As I had traced back the Odyssey through the Phoenicians to the Egyptians, I had to ask myself if this could also apply to the Argonauts. This was easy to clarify: Apollonios of Rhode Island had been educated in the Alexandrian Library in Egypt where he had written his masterpiece in its first performance. And if his knowledge originated from Egypt, we have to answer the question if the Golden Fleece was a real animal-fur or if it was just a synonym for a coded mythological motif. After considerable research I have come to the following conclusion: In the conception of the old Egyptian mysticism the fur was a symbol of an intermediate stage between death and rebirth. The ram symbolises the two masculine basic forces – Re and Osiris – the expression of the spiritual force and the capacity of procreation. The golden colour of the fur is only a supplemental indication of the sun.

As the old Egyptians endeavoured to the reborn after death in the beyond, the theft of the Golden Fleece – the daily rebirth of the god of the sun – was a guarantee to live on in the hereafter. But if the fleece of the golden ram didn't really exist and was only a coded motif for the old Egyptian way of thinking, it was then impossible to rob the fleece. But which declaration must now be taken as a basis for the journey?

The voyage of the Argonauts presents an excellent background. There the world history of civilization. Including the whole knowledge concerning different countries, their inhabitants, the seas and the possibilities of navigation were described. And the key necessary for the interpretation of the Argonauts' voyage lies in the beginning of the Odyssey. Homer gives the decisive indication near the nymph Calypso which is situated in Southern Arabia: The navel of

the sea. The navel in Egyptian mysticism means the prime origin of men. So the navel of the sea represents the beginning of men on the sea – the start of navigation.

Out of the declaration of the river and of the “Argo-departure”, a strait, we can deduce that the voyage of the Argonauts started in Mesopotamia. From there the oldest descriptions concerning sea-faring have been transmitted. It is essential now to mention that the journey of the Argonauts can be divided into three parts. The first one represents the circumnavigation of the world by the East, the second the circumnavigation by the West – exactly described in the *Odyssey* – and finally the third – a poor description – the sailing around Africa. But we have drawings from Herodotus concerning the navigation around Africa by the Phoenicians commissioned by the Pharaoh Necho. Now I would like to concentrate on the first voyage, the voyage to the East. The voyage to the West is analysed in the other papers concerning the *Odyssey*.

The place from where they begin sailing is Mesopotamia. The journey leads them first through the Persian Gulf to the Argo-departure, a strait, the Strait of Hormus. Then they sail in the Indian Ocean and continue their navigation in the direction of the East. They sail along the Asiatic coast to India, which is one of the oldest trade routes of mankind. This route must have been known in all the old maps, but it cannot be reproduced anymore in detail. Only through the roaring canyons of Ossa and Olympus was it possible to point to the origin of the Indus from the Himalaya. Archaeologically the trade relations between Mesopotamia and the culture of the Indus Valley were proved by the discovery of the seals of the Indus Valley civilization.

At the island Lemnos, which is the next station, the sailors can see a peak of the “Thrace Athos”, the Himalaya. Herodotus describes “Thrakien”, the territory of the Scythes, in the east of anterior India, bordered in the East and in the South by the sea. There they land on the holy island of the Maldives at the equatorial-channel. There the cultures of the sun, which have been the ancient high cultures, had their holiest places. Furthermore Thor Heyerdahl found in the museum of Lothal (the culture of the Indus-valley) a large number of cowrie-shells, which have only have originated from the Maldives. He also discovered ceramics and Neolithic pottery under the sea, which hint at the territory of the South China Sea, the Malayan peninsula and the Philippine Islands, and this was already two thousand years before Christ.

Moreover the Argonauts travel from India to the East and arrive at the Chersonesos, which Herodotus describes as a mountain range in the south-east corner of Asia, stretching to the sea. This voyage was difficult, but not impossible.

The next station is the "Dolionen" on an island before "Phrygien". Herodotus describes the migration of the "Phryger", formerly called "Briger", from Europe across the whole of Asia to China. The "Dolionen" have their residence in Taiwan.

From here the Argonauts reach their next destination: the "Bebryker", who are the inhabitants of Japan. In the "Konjiki", the oldest Japanese history of the empire, I found the myth which was mentioned in the epos of the Argonauts. It tells of a fight against the king of the Bebryker, which everyone who passed by this land had to engage in. I have deduced these fights as the traditional Sumo-wrestling. In the case of the Argonauts the fight ended with the death of the king of the Bebryker. After that they travel across the Bosphorus, the straight, the "Bering-Straight", to America.

Their next destination is the prophet Phineus. The latter lives at the seaside, behind it is a mountain-range. On the peak of the mountains live the "Harpyien", the birds which steal the prophet's food. As the people with whom Phineus lives together make sacrifices to honour Sirius, we can determine their geographical position: the mountain-range with the Harpyien are the Andes with their colonies of birds. Sirius, which stands there at the zenith – the reason for the sacrifices – has his position at the 22nd degree of latitude – south latitude.

Phineus directs the Argonauts through the "Symplegades", the moving rocks, which we find also in the Odyssey as the "Plankten", Tierra del Fuego. After sailing around South America they sail in a northerly direction – the mainland must be on the right side – and pass by Africa. By the Southern Equatorial Current (Passat-Drift) they reach Brazil, where the seer warns them of the reefs which extend in front of the coast – identical with the Sirens in the Odyssey.

They travel along the American coast to the north and meet the "Mariandyner" in the St. Lawrence River Valley. This passage is similar to the underworld of the Odyssey. Here we come to know that the death of the king of the Bebryker (Japan) is already known. Furthermore the Mariandyner have already conducted war a few times against the Bebryker, because of the occurrence of iron. As I heard recently, the "Ogam-writing", whose existence

in northern Europe and at the Ontario-Sea has been proved by Barry Fell, was also found in Japan! In the Epos of the Argonauts the relations have already been described.

The heroes make their way again from the American coast to the South to the Thermodon, the Amazonas. "No river can be compared to the Thermodon because no other river sends out so many waters". Amazonian tribes with female culture live in the river-system and the territory is also called as such in the Epos: the Amazonian. Then they travel to the Rio de la Plata and from there to the Rio Parana, where Kolchis is located and from where the Golden Fleece is stolen.

The flight goes round Africa in the Indian Ocean back again to the "Straight of Hormus", to the Persian Gulf. That is where the circumnavigation of the world ends in the direction of the East.

But now they have to visit Circe. Therefore they have to sail to the islands of the Lofots along the coast of Norway. So they sail round Africa and reach Circe. There we find the connection to the Odyssey – the circumnavigation of the earth in the direction of the west, which ends in the Red Sea in Egypt with the king Alkinoos.

From there a rather poor description of a circumnavigation of Africa has been transmitted, a description which we discover again with Herodotus. But more interesting is the passage where the ship is carried across the desert by the Argonauts. The territory where this takes place is situated in West-Africa to the "Triton-Sea" (today's Schott el Djerid in Southern Tunisia). The march on foot cross the desert indicates that the Phoenicians already knew caravan routes through the Sahara – similar to the present day ones.

Finally I would like to add that the Epos of the Argonauts by Apollonios of Rhode Island represents a part of the history of world culture, which has been certainly transmitted by the Old Greeks but has not been understood by the latter. The knowledge, which forms the basis of all this, shows us a mosaic-picture composed over the centuries, mediating the knowledge of the world of the Old Egyptians.

Books by Christine Pellech:

“Die Odyssee – Eine antike Weltumsegelung”; 2011; Verlag König.

„Die Argonauten – Eine Weltkulturgeschichte des Altertums“; 2011; Verlag König.

**„Die Entdeckung von Amerika: Der Kulturdiffusionismus in neuer Sicht“; Volume 1,2;
be printing; Verlag König.**