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A Polemical Piece by Alberto Fortis: *Memoria sopra l'isola di Corzola*

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Memoria sopra l'isola di Corzola, a report that the natural historian and travel writer Alberto Fortis delivered at a meeting of the Accademia di Scienze Lettere e Arti in Padua on December 12, 1782, which was published by Professor Žarko Muljačić, details Fortis' stay on the island of Korčula. The reason for this stay was the theories of Neapolitan scholar Ciriaco Minervini on the allegorical meaning of Homer's epics and the volcanic origin of Korčula. In this paper Fortis' report will be presented as a polemical and didactic text and will be supplemented with certain information about the circumstances in which it was written.

Key words: Alberto Fortis, Korčula, Ciriaco Minervini, Homer, Ulysses, allegorical interpretation of myths, vulcanological theses, autooptical examination.

The paper continues from the article entitled *Memoria sopra l'isola di Corzola*¹ by Professor Žarko Muljačić, one of the last of his pieces about Alberto Fortis.² Professor Muljačić devoted almost half a century of research to the Paduan natural historian and travel writer, supplementing the generally known information about Fortis, author of *Viaggio in Dalmazia*, who is to be credited with the European fame of the so called *Morlacks* and of the poem *Hasanaginica*,³ with a series of discoveries, new information and analyses⁴ illuminating Fortis as the researcher into the eastern shores of the Adriatic and careful student of not only the natural, but also, and specially, the anthropological and anthropic characteristics of the area that he visited. His attention having been drawn by historian of science Luca Ciancio, Professor Muljačić took an interest in the *Memoria* and having obtained a

¹ The standard Italian form is Curzola.

² Cf. Muljačić 2004, pp. 17-19, 20-42, reprinted in Muljačić 2011, pp. 239-265.

³ After Goethe and Herder, who launched the poem into European literary orbit, it was particularly fascinating to the Romantics. Cf. Bešker 2002, pp. 120.

⁴ Most of Muljačić's articles about Fortis are gathered in Muljačić 1996 e Muljačić 2011.

copy of the manuscript (kept in the archives of the Paduan Accademia Galileiana di Scienze Lettere ed Arti) published it, thinking it an important testimony of the geography, natural features, history and social conditions on the island, as well as yet another contribution to knowledge about Fortis as researcher and scientist.⁵ Muljačić's edition of the *Memoria* is furnished with an extensive historical and philological commentary.⁶ From this aspect, we shall add certain information that Professor Muljačić did not have at his disposal. It shows the *Memoria* to be a polemical text, in the area of both methodological issues and with respect to the concrete scientific hypothesis formulated by Fortis' contemporary, Abbot Minervini.

Fortis presented *Memoria sull'isola di Corzola* at a session held on December 12, 1779 by the Paduan Accademia di Scienze, Lettere e Arti,⁷ a fellow of which he had been elected in spring 1780. At the time of the election he was carrying out archaeological and geological research in the vicinity of Naples. Travelling to Padua did not figure in his immediate plans, and during the summer he went on with his research, moving first to Calabria and then to Sicily. In September he sailed for Dubrovnik, staying there for six weeks. Although he set off for Venice on October 23, because of bad weather, he did not arrive there until a month and a half later. He gave his inaugural address to the Accademia on December 14, 1780.

The stay on Korčula, which probably lasted from December 14 to December 20, 1779, was part of the previous Fortis journey to Dalmatia, which had Dubrovnik as its ultimate and most important destination. As early as 1770, Fortis had expressed an interest in visiting Korčula, drawn by information about fossil remains on the island.⁸ When he stepped on island ground nine years later, the initial occasion had been backed by other reasons.

The *Memoria*, 33 large handwritten sheets, corresponding to 15 printed pages, consists of 7 chapters, and seems to be an exemplary application of instructions for field research, as formulated in the *Notizie preliminari* a supplement to the first edition of the *Saggio d'Osservazioni sopra l'isola di Cherso ed Osero* (1771).⁹ To a great extent it repeats and reproduces, in reduced form, the plan characteristic of the *Saggio d'Osservazioni sopra l'isola di Cherso ed Osero* (except where the *Saggio* departs from the *Memoria*), a book published in 1771, the first report of Fortis on his travels to the Eastern Adriatic. In the *Memoria* he gives information about the physical geography and composition of the soil of the island of Korčula, analyses

⁵ Cf. Muljačić 2011, pp. 239-241, and Muljačić 2011, a, pp. 273- 274.

⁶ Cf. Muljačić 2011, pp. 239-265, note.

⁷ Founded by a decree of the Venetian Senate of March 18, 1779, uniting the Accademia dei Ricovrati (founded in 1599) and the Accademia di Arte Agraria (founded in 1769). In 1997 it was renamed the Accademia Galileiana di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti in Padova. <http://www.accademiagalileiana.it/>, 2016.

⁸ Cf. Muljačić 1996, pp. 28-29.

⁹ As mentioned by Domenico Caminer in his review of the book. Cf. *L'Europa letteraria*, Dicembre 1771, p. 78. Muljačić 1998, pp. 39-40, 149-150. The *Memoria* is published on pp. 181-188. Cf. also Giurgevich 2008, pp. 4, 13-14, 30-45.

the meaning of its ancient name (interesting to Romance studies, is the Croatian name Karkar, assumed to have a Dalmatian predecessor derived from the earlier Greek name of the island, Κορκύρα),¹⁰ describes the characteristic animal species, the jackal (*Zakal*) and the "malefic reptile" the viper named *poskok*.¹¹ Apart from that he puts forward assumptions about the distant past of the island, speaks briefly of its later history (stressing "l'assedio sostenuto dalle Donne Corzolane nel 1571 contro la formidabile flotta Turca", 2011: 260) mentions a number of renowned persons who had been born on the island¹² and reports on the current „state and manners of the island“, particularly the custom of exhuming corpses. These two insular investigations of Fortis, that on Cres and Osor, and that on Korčula, have similar characteristics. Both of them have primarily a scientific nature, covered a limited area and lasted a limited period of time. Both the *Saggio* and the *Memoria* are characterised by expressive linearity and stylistic concision. Still, in *Memoria*, the natural history materials, mostly to do with geology, much outweigh the anthropological, to which only two chapters out of the twelve making up the work are devoted.¹³

It can be observed that from the end of the 1770s, Fortis gradually gave up on travel notes of an encyclopaedic type in favour of more scientific and specialised reports.¹⁴ However the prevailingly specialised character of the *Memoria* was constrained by the fact that his stay on the island and his writing of the text had an immediate and urgent research cause, and, from the very beginning, a polemical motivation concerning the areas of the natural sciences, particularly of geology. As he mentions himself at the beginning of the *Memoria*, the propositions put forward by Abbot Minervini about the allegorical character of the Homeric epics and the volcanic origins of the island of Korčula, which Minervini had equated with the island of Korkira or Scheria ruled by king Alcinoüs where the

¹⁰ Cf. Muljačić 2011, p. 245, n. 22.

¹¹ Which he inaccurately calls a half-snake and lizard, and falsely imagines the product of the fancy of the inhabitants. (Fortis 2011, pp. 257-258; also the nn. 64-67).

¹² They were Giovanni Petreo, general and senior official at the court of the Spanish kings; the "famed lawyer" Niconizio; Antonio Rosaneo author of a poem in Latin about the siege of Korčula in 1571; Pietro Canavelli, i. e. Petar Kanavel(ov)ić, poet, theatre writer, translator of Guarini and Tasso; Jacopo Sallicich, poet, natural historian and antiquarian; and Pier-Barnaba Ferri, learned philologist and antiquary. For these figures, cf. also Gliubich, 1836, pp. 226, 250, 270, 272, 290, 292, Muljačić 2011, pp. 260-261, nn. 83-90, also for the listing of other bibliographical sources. In both *Saggio d'Osservazioni sopra l'isola di Cherso ed Osero* and *Viaggio in Dalmazia*, Fortis presents leading figures from the places that he visited.

¹³ We give the title: *Sistema vulcanico-omerico dell'ab. Minervino occasiona il viaggio di Corzola; Descrizione generale dell'isola, e sua litologia; Lapidefatti dell'isola; Pietre, e marmi; Ricerche sul licnite degli antichi; Scheletri di pesci fossili; Origine del nome di Melena che portò l'isola; L'acque montane origini dell'isole del nostro mare. Sbagli di sommi uomini rilevati; Acque sotterranee; Descrizione dello Zakal; Stato attuale e costumi del paese. Conclusione*. Fortis 2011, passim.

¹⁴ Cf. Ciancio 1995, pp. 641-644.

encounter of Odysseus and Nausicaa took place, led him to visit Korčula without any further delay.¹⁵

Ciro Saverio Minervini – whose thesis Fortis wanted to check out with autooptical examination, i.e. with a „research into the island with his own eyes“¹⁶ was connected to him by their joint scientific interests and similar ideological views, as well as by feelings of respect and friendship. Member of the Society of Jesus, onetime secretary of the Sacra Rota, Minervini was opposed to the Church's acquisition of material privileges. In 1761 he settled down in Naples, where he attended meetings of Enlightenment and Masonic circles. He wrote numerous works of history, philology and geology.¹⁷ As a lawyer and scientist with a distinguished reputation, he occupied important administrative positions. In 1779 he was elected a member of the newly founded Reale Accademia delle Scienze e belle Lettere in Naples, and then of the Accademia dei Fisiocratici in Siena and the Academy in Fossano.¹⁸

Minervini was host to Fortis while he sojourned in Naples, in the spring of 1780.¹⁹ They visited the most vital and most distinguished intellectual circle in town, gathered together in the villa of the Di Gennaro brothers. Their epistolary contacts and exchange of opinions about issues that interested both of them (which in Minervini's setting were particularly topical), such as the interpretation of mythology and matters of geological history had been started a few years earlier. In 1778 Minervini had published the pamphlet *Dell'etimologia del Monte Vulture. Lettera al signor abate d. Domenico Tata*,²⁰ which had created quite a disturbance in scholarly circles. Minervini accepted the thesis of Domenico Tata (professor of physics and mathematics at Naples University) of the volcanic origin of Mt Vulture and was a champion of the theories of plutonism, which thought fire and volcanic activities the main causes of the changes that the earth's crust had experienced over the course of time. With his reasoning, Minervini also positioned himself within the

¹⁵ Cf. Fortis 2011, pp. 242-245.

¹⁶ "ispezione visiva dell'isola", Ciancio 1995, p. 20. For the direct eyewitness procedure and the influence of medical sciences and other disciplines on geological research, cf. *ibid* 1995a, pp. 8, 20-21, 37-41, 49-57, 92-94.

¹⁷ Most of his writings are lost. We give several titles related to the problem area that he discussed with Fortis: *Dissertazione della connessione delle antiche lingue d'Italia con le orientali ed in particolare con le indiane; Dissertazione del viaggio d'Ulisse dall'isole Eolie alle spiagge degli Osci; Dissertazione de' vari cambiamenti dell'orbe terracqueo e delle loro cause; Indagini e considerazioni sulle correnti del mare Adriatico, Dell'etimologia del Monte Vulture. Lettera al signor abate d. Domenico Tata, Memorie degli scrittori della storia naturale del Regno di Napoli*. cfr. Palamara 2010, p. 20.

¹⁸ For more details about Minervini and a more extensive bibliography, cf. *ibid.*, pp. 18-21, and Andreoni 2003, pp. 107-111.

¹⁹ Muljačić 1996, pp. 48, does not mention Minervini's name among the persons Fortis in one letter mentions having seen during his first stay in Naples in 1771 as the companion of Lord Hervey. The letter is kept in the British Library.

²⁰ Expounded or formulated in the *Lettera sul monte Vulture a sua eccellenza il signor d. Guglielmo Hamilton dell'abate Domenico Tata*, published in 1778.

set of what was called the Homeric question, which intellectuals from the south of Italy had come to accept as their own particular scholarly appanage.²¹ Minervini denied the existence of Homer as an individual and claimed that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were allegorical poems relating to natural phenomena resulting from underground fires.²² He located their homeland in the city of Siri in Lucania, and attributed them to the priests who were the followers of Pythagoras.²³

In Minervini's interpretation, the search for the hidden meaning of the „ancient tales“, a characteristic and vital tendency in the European exegetic tradition, which in the eighteenth century was subordinated to natural sciences and connected with the problem of the history of the earth, was merged with a second, typically southern Italian, theme: the study and re-evaluation of ancient Italic civilisation (a study that was by no means devoid of ideological and political connotations).²⁴

The scholarly public accepted Minervini's constructions mainly with doubtfulness and disapproval.²⁵ The most virulent and derisory critic was Ferdinando Galiani, to whose attack published anonymously in the *Gazette universelle de la littérature* Fortis reacted, praising Minervini's "ingegno... buona fede.. notizie", although he had not shared his viewpoints, and for the opinion about Homer invoking the precedents of Vico and Hardouin.²⁶

Fortis also, just like Minervini, and in line with the dominant orientation of the day, thought the reading of myths and ancient accounts in terms of scientific allegories a legitimate procedure of scholarly research.²⁷ In the *Saggio d'Osservazioni sopra l'isola di Cherso ed Osero* he expressed his belief that the history of the voyage of the Argonauts revealed the existence, in ancient times, of the riverine links between the Danube and the Adriatic,²⁸ and in *Memoria geografico-fisica intorno la vera situazione dell'isole Elettridi degli antichi*, which on January 10, 1782 he read to the Padua Academy, interpreted the myth of Phaeton as a "veiled" depiction of changes brought about by volcanic activity that had shaped the area of the Euganian and Beric hills.²⁹

²¹ In connection with this Cesarotti talks of the "Homeric ardour" that lasted from the most ancient times to his epoch, and that were disseminated by many prominent persons (Vico, Gravina, Garofolo ecc.), because of which "Naples can be called a Homeric colony". Cfr. Andreoni 2003, p. 105. For a detailed account of the interpretation of Homer's epics in Fortis' century, cf. Ferreri, 2007, pp. 165-266.

²² "... poemi allegorici e riferibili agli eventi naturali cagionati da' fuochi sotterranei". Minervini's words in a letter to G. Ciaccheri, reproduced in Andreoni 2003, p. 171.

²³ For Minervini's arguments and his position in the cultural complex of his time, see *ibid.*, pp. 111-116, 124-137, 167-173.

²⁴ Cf. *ibid.* pp. 42, 107 e 111-112.

²⁵ For more about the reactions to Minervini's theses, see *ibid.*, pp. 117-124.

²⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 176-177.

²⁷ He stated this expressly, paraphrasing verses by Dante: „Mirate la dottrina, che s'asconde / Sotto il velame de' racconti strani". Fortis 1771, p. 13.

²⁸ Cf. *ibid.* pp. 1-9, 13-16, particularly pp. 122-135.

²⁹ Cf. Andreoni 2003, pp. 177-178.

But their methods and research priorities did not conform. Minervini was much more interested in mythology and ancient history. He was no traveller and did his field research only in areas around Naples, relying mainly on philological reconstructions and literary sources, which he rarely evaluated critically. Fortis, although he did rely on legend and traditional narratives (often on etymology as well), privileged empirical methods: field observation, material evidence, direct testimonies of reliable informants.

From Fortis' correspondence with the librarian of Siena University, Ciaccheri, it can be seen that the exchange of opinions, always in epistolary form, between Fortis and Minervini on the "Volcanic-Homeric" theory of the latter,³⁰ came in the course of 1779, after the publication of *Lettera etimologica*, preceding Fortis' stay in Naples. Fortis declared to his correspondent that he respected Minervini and appreciated his "vasta erudizione, e la felicità di alcune delle sue deduzioni".³¹ He added to him, though, that he had not passed over in silence his reservations relating to those parts of the theory interpreting geological phenomena and that, hence, concerned the opinions on the existence or non-existence of Homer. However, he did not consider this last question of primary importance.

Fortis informed the learned audience of the Paduan Academy about Minervini's volcanic-Homeric theory as formulated in *Dell'etimologia del Monte Vulture* in the first chapter of his *Memoria sull'isola di Corzola*. He adds to it information taken from another text of the Neapolitan scientist, unfinished and unpublished, which had been drawn to his attention by the latter.³² From the correspondence with Ciaccheri it can be concluded that he came by it during 1779. The text in question, *Saggio della religione dei pagani e delle loro favole sacerdotali*, was meant to be a further elaboration of geological and Homeric theories put forward in *Dell'etimologia del Monte Vulture*.

To back up his propositions, in that work Minervini quotes considerations "intorno alla fisica costituzione dell'isola di Corzola" and in addition asked Fortis to give information about the geological composition of Pelješac Peninsula. This gave the Paduan natural scientist a good reason finally to visit Korčula, taking more trouble about it than Minervini had expected. Minervini often constructed his theses by mere speculation on the basis of bookish sources and had already preconceived this theory as well.

In a letter to Ciaccheri Fortis mentions his attempts to dissuade Minervini: „Gli scrissi con ingenua gioivialità qualche volta e sempre con veracità creanzata“.³³ In

³⁰ Fortis 2011, pp 242. In connection with the Minervini-Fortis correspondence, which is lost, Andreoni refers to the articles of Muljačić and Ciancio. Cf. 2003, pp. 204, n.2.

³¹ Quoted in Andreoni 2003: 175). The statement of his respect and friendly feelings for Minervini is given in Andreoni, 2003: 176. For other details about the Fortis-Minervini relationship, cf. *ibid.*, pp.175-177.

³² This can be concluded from a passage in the *Memoria*: „... e le ricerche da esso fattemi intorno alla fisica costituzione dell'isola di Corzola“ (which does not reveal in what form or on what occasion). Fortis 2011, p. 242.

³³ Stated in Andreoni 2003, p. 176.

the *Memoria* he was much less apt to give way. In a paragraph of great rhetorical tension (where he links enumeration, antithesis, anaphora and polysyndeton) he resolutely points the finger at the methodological insufficiency of the Neapolitan scholar.

Minervini's claims that che „un poeta chiamato Omero non visse mai ... che tutti i nomi degli Eroi Greci e Trojani furono emblematici, e niuno d'essi appartenne giammai ad uomo vivente; che l'Isole, i fiumi, i monti de' quali v'è fatto menzione portano denominazioni tratte dalle fisiche qualità loro; che i due Poemi attribuiti all'immaginario Omero altro non sono che una circostanziatissima Storia Naturale delle rivoluzioni, e degli scombussolamenti sofferti dalla esteriore corteccia del Globo nostro, particolarmente nella Troade, nell'estrema parte d'Italia, nella Dalmazia, e nel vicino mare" (2011: 242), put him among those „antichi, e moderni gravissimi Critici" who did not pay attention to the aids necessary for scientifically correct research, that is, to material testimonies (in this particular case, to Parian marble, coins, inscriptions in stone) or to historical sources (Herodotus).³⁴

Presenting Minervini, that is, conveying his own self-presentation, Fortis lists a whole series of hyperboles: „annunziò sollemente, tutte queste ed altre molte proposizioni ... verrebbero da lui provate con tanto indubitabile chiarezza, ed evidenza, che dovranno immancabilmente arrendersi tutti gli uomini di giusto criterio forniti, e non guasti dalle prevenzioni, ... persuaso non solo ma convinto come di una verità fondamentale ... „ (2011: 243). But these hyperboles are brought down to earth in the continuation of the text, in which Fortis clearly expounds his disaffected viewpoint, calling Minervini's hypotheses „proposizioni di strana apparenza" and pointing out that they are formulated only „a forza di confronti e di ricerche etimologiche" (2011: 243), accordingly, in an inappropriate and insufficient manner.

After that, Fortis registers Minervini's methodological evolution, his acceptance of empirical research, that, naturally, he approves: „pensò molto ragionevolmente alla necessità di convalidare colle osservazioni di fatto le ipotesi Geologiche appoggiate alla nomenclatura Omerica, cui fece derivare dalle più antiche, e remote lingue orientali"; „Riconoscendo in Ulisse la personificazione della violenza de' fuochi sotterranei ... trovavasi l'erudito uomo premuroso di acquistare notizie precise del paese a cui stima di poter provare che il simbolico viaggiatore abbia approdato dopo d'aver fatto vela dall'Isoletta di Calipso" (2011: 243).

Still, in the light of the previous context, Minervini's initiative appears belated: undertaken after he had worked out his theses in detail and subordinated to statements that he had formulated on the premise of hypothetical historical-philological reconstructions. „Per sapere di certo se la violenza de' fuochi sotterranei personificata in Ulisse... venisse all'Adriatico, lo varcasse, e facesse

³⁴ Cf. Fortis 2011, p. 242. To this he adds – in Cesarotti's manner – “almost universal agreement” if with certain reservations.

trasporti di montagne, squarciamenti di terre, sovversioni di tratti vastissimi di paese ... faceva d'uopo", insists Fortis, „o che il Signor Minervino si mettesse in mare, o che chiedesse notizie a quelli fra' suoi amici che conoscevano il paese" (2011: 243). Fortis implies that information obtained via third parties, in order to be methodologically well founded and scientifically pertinent had to precede the elaboration of hypotheses (at least in the advanced stage that we find in Minervini).

The most advanced science of the Enlightenment period ascribed to visual experience, to finding out by personal observation, the function of the epistemological basis of scientific truth and accepted field investigation, direct observation of the object studied, as the chief research method leading to knowledge. This then absolutely required the scientist's presence in the places that were the object of his interest. The investigation journey thus became a component of research and a necessary moment in the revival of science. „Visitare per chiarirsi del vero", emphasises Fortis in the *Memoria* (2011: 252). The travelogue portion follows the exposition of Minervini's thesis and the critical evaluation of its well-foundedness. Subsequently, the text, along with its mainly descriptive component, has above all the characteristics of a polemically toned scientific discussion and a lesson on method. This is the reason why verbs of movement, characteristic of the travelogue genre, are concentrated in the initial part of the text. For Fortis did not have the intention to expatiate about his movement around the island. The rapid alternation of verbs of motion - *presi terra a Blata, continuando la traversata dell'isola, gite intraprese, passai a visitarne, costeggiai, scesi, internandomi* - is there for the sake of the evidentiary component of the text; the function of these verbs is to signalise the fulfilment of the basic preconditions for the conduct of methodologically sound scientific research. As Fortis says: „Queste indagini moltiplicate mi posero in istato di asserire..." (2011: 246). The actual method is described in a series of lexemes that signify visual perception: *trovai, si rende osservabile, v'è apparenza, l'occhio avvezza ad esaminare, troviamo, verificata cogli occhi proprj, ò veduto, ò riconosciuta, aspetto, sin dal primo colpo d'occhio ... mi è sembrato indicare, Chiunque à l'occhio abituato allo spettacolo che presentano le diramazioni de' monti guardate dall'alto delle maggiori Alpi, trovasi in istato di giudicare con sicurezza ... e sa distinguere ... , io ho costantemente osservato, notare, osservazioni replicatamente estese, una delle prove più evidenti ...* (2011: 245-255 passim).

Fortis opposes direct observation of concrete physical circumstances to „theories spun in the comfortable calm of the study",³⁵ and to belief in others' theories not checked out by one's own observation. He adduces the example of his celebrated fellow-citizen Vitaliano Donati, who was deviated by a fragment of Hymnos Skios in connection with the mineral composition of Korčula.³⁶ In the chapter *L'acque montane origini dell'isole del nostro mare. Sbagli di sommi uomini*

³⁵ „teorie fabbricate nell'agiata tranquillità del Gabinetto" (2011: 253). Empirical science is here opposed to speculative method.

³⁶ In his work *Saggio di Storia Naturale dell'Adriatico*. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 250-251 (also nn. 45-46).

*rilevati*³⁷ Fortis' polemical barbs are aimed at two well known French naturalists, du Buffon and la Condamine, who were guilty of having expressed an opinion about the characteristics of certain natural phenomena without having gone to the place where they were located and subjecting them to visual confirmation.³⁸

La Condamine committed still more serious methodological errors, which threatened the value of the practice of immediate observation: he visited the Apennines but did it "with prejudices" and therefore "saw everything but the truth" and wrongly ascribed them volcanic origins.³⁹ In accord with this, instructions about method are enriched with a new moment, which is signified by the characteristic Enlightenment metaphors: „Ma è poi ancora più vicino all'impossibile che un uomo di qualunque merito e valore egli sia, possa ben osservare, quando si mette a farlo con delle prevenzioni. In tal caso non si vedono mai le cose nel vero lume, né co' veri colori" (Fortis 2011: 253).

Fortis collected information about natural phenomena that he came upon on Korčula and also from the inhabitants of the island as well, but he was not apt to accept them without the confirmation of a credible and well-educated man.⁴⁰ He does not mention a single Korčula native who possessed those characteristics (unlike the *Saggio*, where he named his informants). Describing the island and its inhabitants, Fortis uses his usual expressions: "alpestre, incolto e povero ... paese", „L'ignoranza e la povertà vi regnano in compagnia, l'infingardaggine, la stupidità presiedono agli affari di quegli abitanti" (2011: 262)⁴¹ In his eyes they deserved blame for their inability to ensure their own productive independence: "si lasciano portare anche le cose di prima necessità dai Sabbioncellini, sudditi di Ragusa" (2011: 262).⁴²

In the *Saggio* he used similar expressions to describe the Croatian commons,⁴³ and in an epistle to Elisabetta Caminer he expressed himself similarly about the southern Italian peasants.⁴⁴ Here he criticizes the "popolo rustico" and the

³⁷ Fortis 2011, pp. 253-255.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 246. For these two scientists, cf. Muljačić 2011, p. 249, n. 41, p. 254, n. 8. For de Buffon's vulcanist theory, cf. Ciancio. 1955, pp. 149-151.

³⁹ Criticisms of de Buffon and de la Condamine are part of a wider debate between the vulcanist and neptunist geologists. For more details and for Fortis' views, cf. ibid., pp. 128-161.

⁴⁰ Cf. Fortis 2011, pp. 253.

⁴¹ This remark is one of Fortis' commonplaces. Another one we find on p. 251: „Non mi è stato possibile l'ottenere d'esser condotto precisamente al luogo d'onde sogliono trarne. Il sospetto, che accompagna mai sempre l'ignoranza, chiude purtroppo spesso le vie di soddisfarsi ai viaggiatori Naturalisti, ne' paesi semi-barbari. Sarebbe assai meglio l'aver che fare con uomini selvaggi del tutto".

⁴² The toponym Sabbioncello corresponds to the Croatian Pelješac.

⁴³ "una greggia magra e stupida di brutta, povera e infingarda gente". Fortis 1771, p. 40. Cf. also ibid., p. 121.

⁴⁴ Speaking of the inhabitants of Corato in Apulia: „Il popolo minuto vi è poi, come in tutta la Provincia, lacero, sucido, mendico, e fornito delle male qualità morali... „. Fortis 1774, p. 153.

„rozzi abitanti dell'Isole Dalmatiche“ (2011: 262, 263). Still, we can assume the presence of some reliable informant,⁴⁵ although in the text the author does not refer to one in any way.

From this informant, or from several of them, or perhaps also from a bookish source – and not on the basis of direct experience – probably comes the narrative about the superstition of vampirism and the rite of the exhumation of corpses, rich in horrid details, in which the barbarian peasants took part together with the priests, who were still more reprehensible: „i barbari villani insieme cogli ancor più condannevoli preti“ (2011: 262-263). To some learned source he probably also owes information of erudite character about the island.

Fortis gives recognition to Minervini's erudition and his competence in questions of the volcanological structure, by which his hypotheses concerning the journey that was taken by Odysseus on his return to Ithaca could be confirmed.⁴⁶ But the visit *in loco* showed how poorly founded his theories were. On the island and in the neighbouring areas, Fortis found no trace of volcanic activities, not any „apparenza di sovversioni operate dal fuoco sotterraneo, o vestigi d'esterna conflagrazione“ (2011: 245). Apart from that, Minervini's theses, „which were based on etymological assumptions, lost much of their probability“ when Homer's text – whether it was understood literally or figuratively – is compared with the physical circumstances on Korčula.⁴⁷ Fortis lists them in a tone of „naive joviality“: on Korčula there is no river in which any real or allegorical Nausicaa might have been doing her washing; the distance to Euboea was too great for it to have been covered in one day; there is no road at all; and the region is so savage, uncultivated and backward that even with the utmost exertion of the fancy he could not imagine it as the seat of Alcinous' luxurious capital.⁴⁸

The rejection of Minervini's theses as a result of Fortis' eyewitnessing of the island, practising the direct research procedure inseparable from the achievement of scientifically valid results – as Fortis intends to show and thinks that he has shown by travelling to Korčula – although it is incontestable, is still to an extent mitigated by various euphemistic devices: „palliative“ verbs and nouns, and inverting the perspective in Sophist manner. „Se al mio dotto corrispondente non riuscisse la soddisfazione d'aver fatto naturalista l'autore dell'Odissea, egli potrà consolarsi, o vendicarsi di esso col disfarlo da geografo“ (2011: 264). He proposes a compensatory objective to Minervini: „Nella contraddittoria inesattezza Omerica delle posizioni de' Luoghi e nelle assurde indicazioni de' corrispondenti punti del Cielo egli avrà delle armi validissime contro coloro, che la venerazione

⁴⁵ Not necessarily living in the island. Cf. Fortis' acknowledgements to Trifone Wrachien of Venice and dr. Gennari of Padua in the *Saggio d'Osservazioni sopra l'isola di Cherso ed Osero*, pp. 31-32

⁴⁶ Fortis 2011, pp. 244-245.

⁴⁷ For this and the next quote concerning Fortis' criticism of Minervini, cf. *ibid.*, pp. 263-264.

⁴⁸ Cf *ibid.*, pp. 263-264. Fortis' argumentation is strengthened by the suggestiveness of the rethorical scheme he employs, based on antithesis and anaphora. .

giustamente dovuta agli antichi spingendo sino alla superstizione ed al fanatismo, vogliono darci Omero non solo per gran Poeta, com'era veramente, ma ancora impeccabile ed onniscio" (2011: 264).

We do not know how Minervini reacted to Fortis' discovery nor what effect the words of the *Memoria* had on him (supposing, as is realistic, that he found out about them). It seems that his friendship with Fortis was not hurt, if between 1784 and 1787 he was among those who took his part in the conflict about the new plant for extracting saltpetre in the vicinity of Molfetta.⁴⁹

The *Memoria* remained unknown to the public until it was found by Luca Ciano about fifteen years ago. It undoubtedly contained many elements of direct immediacy and of general interest, but Fortis did not attempt to give it a wider audience for reasons that we can only guess at.⁵⁰ In any case, after 1782, Fortis no longer wrote travelogues about Dalmatia, nor did he return to Dalmatia (except accidentally).⁵¹ after his last stay in Dubrovnik in 1783.⁵² In his biography, in the years that preceded the fall of the Venetian Republic, came the following: his service as a mineralogist for Ferdinand II Bourbon; his five-year stay in Venice (1791-1796), and when the crisis of Enlightenment reformism was in full cry, his departure for Paris in 1796.

⁴⁹ The clash ended with Fortis' defeat. Cf. Ciano 1955a, pp: 202-210, Andreoni 2003, p. 177.

⁵⁰ Muljačić mentions a possible motif for the lack of expansion of the *Memoria*, at least before 1797, by an allusion to the incapacity of the Venetian government to root out vampirism, which they could not have been pleased with. Cf. 2011, p. 262, n. 2.

⁵¹ The ship with which he had journeyed from Manfredonia to Venice had been forced to seek shelter in several places along the Dalmatian coast, and also in Poreč. Cf. Muljačić 1996, p. 155.

⁵² Muljačić ascribes this fact to the change of his strategy as scientist and engaged author, that is, his conviction that by working close to the centre he could more effectively affect conditions in the periphery. Cf. 1996, p. 131. Fortis would keep up regular epistolary links with his Split and Dubrovnik friends. He went with Miho Sorkočević to Paris in 1796. Cf. 1996, p. 130-139 (also the notes). To date the manuscript of the work about Dubrovnik, which, as it seems Fortis had heralded in a letter to G. Bizzarri, written in Bologna in 1803, has not yet been found. Cf. Muljačić 1952, p.126.

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Jedan polemički spis Alberta Fortisa: *Memoria sopra l'isola di Corzola*

U članku je Fortisovo tekst o Korčuli prikazan kao polemički i didaktički spis te se iznose okolnosti koje su dovele do njegova nastanka. Profesor Žarko Muljačić prvi je objavio Fortisovo izvješće *Memoria dell'Isola di Corzola* što ga je autor pročitao na sjednici padovanske Accademia di Scienze Lettere e Arti 12 prosinca 1782. godine. U tekstu Fortis iznosi svoja zapažanja o otoku Korčuli na kojemu je proveo petnaestak dana. Onamo je otputovao na molbu svoga prijatelja, napuljskog znanstvenika Cira Saverija Minervinija, kako bi provjerio njegovu tvrdnju da Korčula odgovara antičkome otoku Skeriji, gdje je vladao Alkinoj i gdje je njegova kći Nausikaja sreća Odiseja. To bi primjenom alegorijskog tumačenja mitova na teorije o postanku zemlje, što je u to vrijeme bila općeprihvaćena znanstvena metoda, značilo da je otok Korčula vulkanskog podrijetla. Za Fortisa je to bila prilika ne samo da upozna novi dio Dalmacije, o kojemu iznosi niz prirodoslovnih, arheoloških i etnoloških podataka, nego i da Minervinija i druge kabinetske znanstvenike, tvorce spekulativnih, apriorističkih teorija, pouči o nužnosti istraživanja *in situ* i autooptičkog postupka. Ta dva momenta naglašena su uporabom odgovarajućih verbalnih oblika: nizom glagola koji označavaju kretanje i izrazima, nerijetko metaforičkima, koji se odnose na osjetilno iskustvo vida. Fortis nije našao potvrde za Minervinijevu tezu (prema kojoj je bio skeptičan i prije provedenog istraživanja). Protuargumente, utemeljene na stvarnome stanju otoka, iznosi u ulomku čijoj dojmljivosti doprinose i učinci *dispositio*. Istodobno, želeći zadržati Minervinijevo prijateljstvo, ublažava njihovu kategoričnost eufemizirajućim izrazima i sofističkom argumentacijom.

Ključne riječi: Alberto Fortis, Korčula, Ciro Saverio Minervini, Homer, Odisej, alegorijsko tumačenje mitova, vulkanološke teze, autooptičko ispitivanje.

