

*Il Morlacchismo d'Omero*

Julije Bajamonti

Traduzione in lingua inglese a cura di

Adriana D'Amato

## *Il Morlacchismo d'Omero* by Julije Bajamonti<sup>1</sup>

Julije Bajamonti (1744-1800) from Split, was a doctor by profession and he belonged to a wealthy family, perhaps of Jewish origin, the Bajamontes (Sephardi Jews). He represented one of the most educated, versatile and progressive personalities of the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century in Dalmatia<sup>2</sup>. A true encyclopaedist and versatile writer, tireless researcher and prolific author, he was also a scientist and doctor, man of letters, linguist, translator, ethnographer, historian, musician and composer, chemist, scholar in economics and even agronomist. As a politically liberal and philosophically-existentially educated Volterian, Bajamonti was close to many Italian and Croatian intellectuals and he struck up a real friendship with Alberto Fortis, an Abbot and naturalist from Padua. In so doing, he contributed personally to gathering valuable information about the customs and habits of Morlachs from Dalmatian Zagora, as on many occasions he had the chance to guide him through the Dalmatian Hinterland<sup>3</sup>. He probably also contributed to the publication of the well-known popular ballad *Hasanaginica*, included in the report *Travels into Dalmatia* by Fortis in 1774<sup>4</sup>. Bajamonti was deeply concerned with ancient Dalmatian literature, particularly from Dubrovnik, and Bosnian literature. He studied ecclesiastic Slavic language, popular melodies and traditional popular poetry, and then he intertwined his curiosity with folklore with a careful philological-literary analysis dealing with topics of the recent questions about Homer, the subject of his shrewd linguistic observations.

---

<sup>1</sup> My warm thanks to a close friend of mine, prof. Silvio Ferrari for his constant and valuable help he gave me on this occasion.

<sup>2</sup>On the life and works of Bajamonti, see mainly the wide essay of I.MILCETIC, *Dr. Julije Bajamonti I njegova djela*, Rad JAZU, 1. 192, pp. 97-250, which is a reference monograph, the result of documentary and bibliographic research made by Milcetic at the Split Archaeologic Museum. Moreover, see below Z.MULJACIC, *Splitski knjizevnik Julije Bajamonti*, *Mogucnosti*, 10,1955, pp.795-800; ID., *Novi podaci o splitskom knjizevniku Juliju Bajamonti*, *Priloziza KJIF*, 1961, 1.27, n°1-2, pp. 45-53; V.MORPURGO, *Incontri e dialoghi fra Alberto Fortis e Giulio Bajamonti*, *Studia Romanica et Anglica Zagabrensia*, 1970-71, 29-32, pp. 481-492; I.MIMICA, *Julije Bajamonti i folklorna knjizevnost*, in *Otvorenost stvaranja*, Split, 1978, pp. 75-133; ID., *Rasprava "Il morlacchismod'Omero" Julija Bajamontia*, *Mogucnosti*, 23, 1976, pp. 645-657 = *Otvorenost stvaranja*, Split, 1978, pp. 135-159, until the recent article of M.DRNDARSKI, *La scoperta del vero Omero di Giulio Bajamonti*, *Italica Belgradensia*, IV, 1995, pp. 105-119. In this complete bibliography there several, articulated works which constitute conference proceedings dedicated to Bajamonti and taking place at Split on October 1994 can be mentioned: *Splitski polihistor Julije Bajamonti. Zbornik Radova*, Knjizevni Krug, Split, 1996.

<sup>3</sup>Bajamonti travelled a lot and visited the isles of Kvarner, coasts of Dalmatia, Dubrovnik, Bosnia-Herzegovina and particularly proceeded to Livno and Travnik. See V.MORPURGO, *Incontri e dialoghi*, cit. pp. 481-492, observations by I.MIMICA, *Julije Bajamonti i folklorna knjizevnost*, cit., pp.75-133 and J.VINCE—PAULLA, *Julije Bajamonti-etnograf,etnolog?*, in *Splitski polihistor Julije Bajamonti*, cit., pp. 220-229.

<sup>4</sup>Z. MULJACIC, *Od koga je A.Fortis mogao dobiti tekst Hasanaginice*, in *Radovi Razdio lingvisticko-filosofski* (7), 1972/73, Zadar, 1973, pp. 277-289 and I.MIMICA, *Mjesto Julija Bajamontia u hrvatskoj usmenoj knjizevnosti*, in *Splitski polihistor Julije Bajamonti*, cit., pp. 199-218.

Bajamonti's personal archives are currently found in several institutions in Split, Venice, Trogir and Zadar. In particular, Ivan Milcetic used part of these, currently kept in the Archaeological Museum in Split<sup>5</sup>, to write his first and fundamental study about this versatile character<sup>6</sup>, who is still little known and studied, above all in Italy<sup>7</sup>. A new interest in his rich cultural and scientific production has recently been revived, with the publication of the Acts of a conference about his life and works in Split in 1994<sup>8</sup>.

The article *Il Morlacchismo d'Omero* (The Morlacchismo of Homer), appeared in the March edition of *Nuovo giornale enciclopedico d'Italia* in 1797, published in Venice three years before his death, and represents in a chronological order the last literary work of his entire wide cultural production, which began as long ago as 1767 when he was only twenty-three years old with some lyrical poems<sup>9</sup>. This article-dissertation is an original and fascinating text, which follows the established practice of cultural illuminist journalism comparing oral epic poetry and the customs of the inhabitants of Dalmatian Zagora, the Morlachs, with epic poems by Homeric rhapsodists. In this paper Bajamonti, who was concerned both with the study of Croatian popular songs and with subjects of the recent Homeric philological issues, ascertains a number of similarities between features of the epic poems performed by 'guzlari', similar to that of ancient Greek bards, and generally of Homeric civilization, drawing from the parallelism between certain mechanisms of Morlach society and the Achaean archaic world.

As a passionate expert of Dalmatian folklore and well known in pre-romantic European cultural panorama and in the rediscovery of popular roots, Bajamonti also transcribed some lyrical poems and ballads, or parts of them, in Stokav dialect with Ikav pronunciation and ballads from the Dalmatian coast. He also produced two Italian translations of Croatian popular songs and he reported integrally three arias of folk songs (*Canto delle fanciulle di Travnik*, *Canto dei Giannizzeri* and *Canto dei Cadi*), collected and transcribed in Travnik in 1780, as two fragments conserved in the XII chapter of his book reveal, *Diario d'una gita in Bossina*, a journal which was almost completely lost.<sup>10</sup> His careful melographic notations and interest in folkloric musical production are some of several activities of Bajamonti as a musician and musicologist, as testified by a number of his compositions and detailed studies, which

---

<sup>5</sup>A. DUPLANCIC, *Ostavstina Julija Bajamontija u Arheoloskome muzeju u Splitu i prilozi za njegov zivotopis*, in *Splitski polihistor Julije Bajamonti*, cit., pp 13-79.

<sup>6</sup>I MILCETIC, *Dr. Julije Bajamonti i njegova djela*, cit., pp. 205-250.

<sup>7</sup>For the relationships between the Dalmatian author and Vico, see the study by S. ROIC, *Giulio Bajamonti, un vichiano dalmata*, in *Bollettino del Centro di Studi vichiani*, XXIV-XXV, 1994-1995, pp. 195-203.

<sup>8</sup>*Splitski polihistor Julije Bajamonti. Zbornik Radova*, Split, 1996.

<sup>9</sup>G. BAJAMONTI, *Il morlacchismo d'Omero*, in *Nuovo Giornale Enciclopedico d'Italia*, X, Venice, March 1797, pp. 77-98 (Split Archaeological Museum, 44 d 25/3), then published in *La Voce Dalmatica*, Zadar, 1861, II, n°20.

<sup>10</sup>Cfr. I.MILCETIC, *Julije Bajamonti*, cit., pp.132-149; I.MIMICA, *Julije Bajamonti i folklorna*, cit., pp. 83-101e M.DRNDARSKI, *La scoperta del vero Omero*, cit., pp. 107-111.

went from theory to music pedagogy, made when he was Kapellmeister of the Cathedral of Split<sup>11</sup>.

*Il Morlacchismo d'Omero*, a truly brief essay on ethnography and at the same time on literary aesthetics, is understood if it is set in its natural cultural context, that is the European context which was characterized by: the influence of French scientific-illuminist literature, the emblem of which was *Encyclopaedia*<sup>12</sup>; the influence of Vico's applied philosophy with so many observations on the interpretation of Homeric epic poetry<sup>13</sup>; impressions from pre-romantic poetry, such as Melchiorre Cesarotti's Ossianism; finally, the Romantic interest in collecting documents about archaic, oral, popular traditions from marginal and less known areas of Europe, such as the Balkans. However, all this material can not be separated from the close and prolific relationship between Bajamonti and the Abbot Alberto Fortis. This naturalist and ethnologist from Padua, who was the author of the well known *Travels into Dalmatia* (1774), continually recognizes his debt to the intellectual from Split who offered, on many occasions, relevant information and an irreplaceable collaboration for his folkloric and ethnographic researches, often by guiding him. Moreover, Fortis expresses admiration mixed with true affection towards him<sup>14</sup>. The article on Morlach issue was preceded by at least two of Bajamonti's ethnographic works, namely *Storia della peste che regnò in Dalmazia negl'anni 1783-1784*, a treatise published in Venice in 1786 and *Lettera del signor dottor Giulio Bajamonti sopra alcune particolarità dell'isola di Lesina*, published in 1790 and addressed to his friend, the Abbot Alberto Fortis. There are pictures of the pastoral society of Morlachs, precisely Black Vlachs in both works: in the former, they are the subject of a careful description regarding their mentality and superstitions, in contrast with the analytic and scientific approach used by the author who, as a doctor and scientist, wants to identify the causes of the outbreak of plague in Dalmatia at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century; in the latter, the work deals with customs of a patriarchal and static society, almost stuck in timeless antiquity.

Therefore, *Il Morlacchismo d'Omero* represents a further stage of this intellectual, who then increases the value of his ethnographic work also by drawing upon his philological heritage and classical culture. He also participates in debates on the origin and nature of Greek epics through the comparison between the Morlachs' world and the Homeric world, after Richard Bentley, the Abbot Hédelin d'Aubignac and Vico. Indeed, according to Bajamonti, the correspondence between the lifestyle

---

<sup>11</sup> M.GRGIC, *Dr. Julije Bajamonti, glazbenik*, in *Splitski polihistor Julije Bajamonti*, cit., pp. 87-116.

<sup>12</sup> I.PEDERIN, *Intelektualna suvremenost u liku Julija Bajamontia (L'illuminismo come habitus mentis del fisiocrate di Spalato Giulio Bajamonti)*, in *Splitski polihistor Julije Bajamonti*, cit., pp. 81-86.

<sup>13</sup> Z. MULJACIC, *La fortuna di G.Vico in Croazia*, *Forum Italicum*, II,4, 1968, pp. 605-611.

<sup>14</sup> For correspondence between Fortis and Bajamonti, see I.MILCETIC, *Dr. Julije Bajamonti i njegova djela*, cit., pp. 205-250, V. MORPURGO, *Incontri e dialoghi tra Alberto Fortis*, cit., pp. 481-492 and the important and complete monograph by Z.MULJACIC, *Putovanja Alberta Fortisa po hrvatskoj i Sloveniji (1765-1791)*, Split, 1996, pp. 70-101 and 119-139.

of ancient Greeks and his contemporary Morlachs derives from the integrity and antiquity of both cultural worlds, which are almost provocatively specular to each other in their wildness. From the outset of the article, the explicit reference to Giambattista Vico, who participated in what was to become the well known “Homeric question” over the authorship of epic poems, highlights Bajamonti’s cultural background, influenced by Vico’s evolutionism which is the basis of his ethnological thought. Therefore Bajamonti, as a pre-romantic intellectual, set Homer in Illyrian or ‘schiavonesca’ world. He creates an interesting analogy between Morlachs and Achaeans and claims: “Although I do not believe that Homeric things are of the Morlacchi alone, still I sustain that today the Morlacchi nation and no less Morlacchi poetry are the most analogous to Homeric taste<sup>15</sup>”.

However, the versatile author from Split does not make a simple literary comment and his originality lies precisely in the fact that he places this innovative parallelism, which is to become a truly cultural, even cloying trend (the so-called *morlachomania* which spread for few decades all over Europe<sup>16</sup>), in a scientific and clearly rationalist illuminist context.

*Sull’asciugamento della campagna d’Imotski nella Morlacchia veneta e sulla regolazione delle sue acque* (1781), his short treatise, seems to suggest that the text of the well known *Hasaginica* or *The Mourning Song of the Noble Wife of the Hasan Aga*, which was written in the land of Imotski during Bajamonti’s stay in that region, was found by Bajamonti himself in order to translate it or to get help for translation. He then gave the Abbot Fortis this text, after guiding him through Morlach regions and gathering sources and documentary material, which was indispensable for the incisiveness and rapid success in Europe of *Travels into Dalmatia*.

This work was published in 1774, when Bajamonti was only thirty years old. *Il Morlacchismo d’Omero* was published in 1797, that is twenty-three years later. Therefore, these two intellectuals can really be said to have pursued each other during their lives. Bajamonti’s work precedes Fortis’, whereas a direct confrontation between Bajamonti and the well known Abbot and traveller from Padua is inevitable.

---

<sup>15</sup> G. BAJAMONTI, *Il morlacchismo d’Omero*, cit., p.78

<sup>16</sup> For a wide overview of the cultural and social phenomenon of ‘morlachomania’, see M. STOJKOVIC, *Morlakizam*, Hrvatsko Kolo, X, 1929, pp. 254-273, A. CRONIA, *La conoscenza del mondo slavo in Italia. Bilancio storico-bibliografico di un millennio*, Padua, 1958, pp.303-309 and 331-333 and E. VIANI (edited by), *Alberto Fortis. Viaggio in Dalmazia*, Venice, 1987, pp. 9-32 (introduction by G. PIZZAMIGLIO). We have simply to look at the partial or integral translations of *Viaggio in Dalmazia* by Fortis, produced over three years from 1775 to 1778, and several imitations which drew inspiration from the ethnographic sections dealing with Morlachs, such as: the Arcadian and Ossian-like novel by the countess Giustiniana de Wynne-de Rosenberg Orsini *Les Morlaques* (1788), then translated in Italian in 1798, see R. MALXNER, *Traductions et imitations du roman ‘Les Morlaques’*, RES, 32 pp. 64-79, *Corinne* (1807) by Madame de Staël, the adventure novel *Jean Sbogar* by Charles Nodier (1818) which take place in Illirya, *Guzla* by Prosper Mérimée (1827) and other Illyrian, Dalmatian-Croatian-Herzegovinian stories, as well as popular and well known versions of the ballad *Hasanaginica* by Herder in his *Volkslieder*, by Goethe himself, Grimm brothers and Walter Scott know, up to the historic-philological collection of *Canti illirici* by Tommaseo (1841-42), influenced by Giulio Bajamonti.

From the outset of his treatise *Il Morlacchismo d'Omero*, Bajamonti demonstrates he is acquainted with topics regarding the challenging Homeric question dealing with the identity of Homer, the origin of songs by rhapsodists and the nature of the popular poems *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Moreover, he shows explicitly how influential his studies on Giambattista Vico are, who is suddenly mentioned and called “a great heretic”, who accepted “not completely” the existence of Homer, “as he thought of him to be not a precise man, but to represent the idea of the heroic nature of Greek men who celebrated their achievements”<sup>17</sup>. In fact, Bajamonti reveals a rather contradictory stance, as he expounds views on aesthetics inspired by Vico, namely the oral phase of human history and the popular spirit of epic poetry, but rejects the theory of Homer as a symbol and not as a real poet and moreover. He also considers the opinion of the Neapolitan intellectual Minervino to be groundless, who argued that Homer never existed and his name referred only to the title of a book<sup>18</sup>.

Generally speaking, Bajamonti can be said to be a supporter of Vico’s philosophy and he directly and openly adopts opinions expressed by this Neapolitan philosopher, though with a little variation. Even though Bajamonti’s primary concern is the spread of philological-aesthetic theories about Homer, above all in Germany, his true aim is not to add a new and original theory to the debate on the Homeric question, but rather to demonstrate affinity between Homeric poems and Dalmatian Morlach folk songs from the point of view of style and content. Bajamonti himself asserts that: “My argument should spur and be helpful for some skilful man from Dubrovnik whenever he would make a translation of Homeric texts in Illyrian language, as I intend to establish that the Homeric poems are in Morlacchi taste, and that the Morlacchi would find in them the manners and customs of their country”<sup>19</sup>.

Bajamonti proves to be very acute in identifying the principal issues of the Homeric question, namely the fact that Homeric poems would have certainly derived from an oral, natural and popular collection of rhapsodies and the fact that instead of a single bard, who gathered songs before the spread of writing in Greece, there would have been perhaps several authors of poems and generations of regional poets.

Therefore, the object of the interest of the intellectual from Split and what he means when he says ‘*schiaionesca Homer*’, are now clear. As a witness of Morlach poetic compositions during rural feasts in Dalmatia, he expresses his disappointment by

---

<sup>17</sup>G.BAJAMONTI, *Il morlacchismo d'Omero*, cit., p.77. In addition to *Principi di Scienza nuova* by Vico (1725, or 1730) and the treatise by Bajamonti, see the well-known *Prolegomena ad Homerum* by August Wolf in 1795, which however the Split author does not seem to know. It is necessary to point out that the Homeric approach of Bajamonti belongs to a very rich and vivid Dalmatian cultural context: indeed, translators of Homeric works of the 18<sup>th</sup> century include two Latinists from Ragusa, Raimondo Cunich, who in 1776 translated in Latin *Iliad*, and Bernardo Zamanja, who in 1777 published a Latin version of *Odyssey*. Bajamonti himself, by paraphrasing Ragusa, notices that ‘*in Dalmatia only does this city use the Illyrian language and, by distinguished itself by Latin poetry, gave to this literary republic the first complete version of Homer in Latin verses as befitted to original*’. Moreover, about 1730, the poet from Ragusa, Ignjat Durdevic had previously written three treatises in which he tried to demonstrate that Homer was just an idea, a symbol and, instead, the true author of the poems was the philosopher Pythagoras.

<sup>18</sup>G.BAJAMONTI, *Il morlacchismo d'Omero*, cit., p.77.

<sup>19</sup>G.BAJAMONTI, *Il morlacchismo d'Omero*, cit., p.78.

emphasizing the fact that Morlach *pjesme* and *popivkigne* never had editors or clients who would make the preservation and tradition of written works over time possible just like Pisistratus and Aristarchus did in Greece. If Morlach poems were written and handed down, as in the case of Homeric poems, the whole Illyrian folkloric cultural heritage and not only the well known ballad *Hasaginica* by Fortis, would certainly be much better known and appreciated<sup>20</sup>. The ‘schiavenesca’ Homer is to Bajamonti like the Celtic Ossian to Cesarotti. His acquaintance with the structure of Homeric poems suggests a comparison between Homer and Morlach poems, through the examination of frequently occurring repetitions, the composition of verse, the layout of rhythms, the use of so called *formole comuni* and heroic epithets, everything that Bajamonti himself defines as *poetic Morlachism*<sup>21</sup>.

The second part of the treatise deals with *moral Morlachism* and its forms, contents and manners or habits with a wide range of detailed examples of behaviour, drawn from several episodes from the *Iliad* and some of them from the *Odyssey*: the Achens’ strong tendency for wrath and violence; their tendency for drunkenness and wild voracity; their passion for banquets and great celebrations; their marked theatrical reactions and gestures; their preparation of great roasts and *solenni gozzovigliate*; their overriding sense of family honour; brotherhood and convivial camaraderie. Bajamonti demonstrates the strong affinity between these examples of behaviour and the Morlachs’ morality<sup>22</sup>.

Other similarities between the Morlachs’ characteristics and Homeric heroes also arise from funeral customs, several aspects of everyday life, simple clothes indicating a kind of rough confidence, physical strength and robustness, the capacity to sustain efforts and the practice of throwing rocks and stones each other. So many other blows with stones described by Homer, which are perhaps other Morlach-like bravery, as Bajamonti firmly underscores by referring to several textual examples from the *Iliad*<sup>23</sup>.

Therefore, at the end of his essay, Bajamonti asserts that “The fact of following step by step all Morlach matters described by Homer would take too long. The comparison I made here are enough to demonstrate the Morlachism of this poet”. The following passages of his argument convincingly enable an analogical comparison of

---

<sup>20</sup>Bajamonti applied himself a lot to the collection and translation of Croatian folk songs he knew from his several travels throughout Dalmatia, Dubrovnik, isles of Kvarner and Bosnia up to Travnik and Livno and he experienced the performance of songs by *guzlari*, the storytellers similar to the Homeric rhapsodists. Transcriptions made by Bajamonti, which are very interesting from the linguistic and also technical music point of view, are reported in I.MILCETIC, *Dr. Julije Bajamonti i njegova djela*, cit., pp. 132-149 (*Homer, Hrvatske narodne pjesme i muzika*) and I. MIMICA, *Julije Bajamonti i folklorna književnost*, cit., 82-101. See also the fragmentary *Diario di una gita in Bossina*, written in 1780 after Bajamonti made a journey to Travnik with a Venetian delegation, which deals with Bosnian folk songs, music instruments such as *guzla*, and melodies of popular tradition. It also includes the transcriptions of musical notes, of which see observations in I.MIMICA, *Julije Bajamonti i folklorna književnost*, cit., pp. 97-101 and 129 and M. DRNDARSKI, *La scoperta del vero Omero*, cit., p.107.

<sup>21</sup>G.BAJAMONTI, *Il morlacchismo d’Omero*, cit., p. 85.

<sup>22</sup>G.BAJAMONTI, *Il morlacchismo d’Omero*, cit., p. 85-93.

<sup>23</sup>G.BAJAMONTI, *Il morlacchismo d’Omero*, cit., p. 95

poetic-stylistic structures, above all of formulaic verse and epithets, but also of the commonplaces of popular epics. Nevertheless, this description well documented through textual references to Homeric poems lacks examples taken directly from Morlach poetry. This lack is replaced by frequent references to Morlach customs and the nature of oral poetry at that time, but his notes refer only to passages by Homer.

In the end, the Split intellectual exalts the figure of Homer, traditionally considered a 'divine poet', as well as the vigour and strength of Morlach popular poetry. By following the model outlined by Vico and praising Homeric characters' "*vivid sensation and robust imagination*", he links them to primitive braver Morlachs without hesitation. He definitely follows the cultural and aesthetic assumptions of pre-romanticism and European romanticism, that is the debate on the nature of popular poetry and artistic poetry, and specifically Rousseau's observations on the relationship between nature and civilization and primitivism. Finally, the essay begins with a quotation by Vico and ends with Vico's considerations, thus it responds to a kind of planned circular composition.

As already stated, Bajamonti's interest in Morlach customs, by way of the Homeric interpretative model, intertwines with detailed descriptions the Abbot Alberto Fortis made in his *Travels into Dalmatia*. The process of describing Dalmatian Morlach characteristics made by the naturalist from Padua can be understood only if, starting from the assumption that Bajamonti plays a central role as a source of information, two important aspects are considered: on the one hand, the purpose of emphasizing the fact that the Venetian government had to run territories of Dalmatia, by adopting a new policy on development and investment of resources and projects, and by resisting tempting pointless colonial exploitation. On the other hand, the way in which the whole work is produced, which clearly suggests how the approach to the study of that remote and, to some extent, primitive part of Europe was influenced by certain intellectual prejudices especially from Rousseau's philosophy, according to Fortis<sup>24</sup>. Indeed, the conception of humankind and relationship between state of

---

<sup>24</sup>Morlachs or black Vlachs have left significant traces on Balkan geography. Indeed, Valahia is the region between Transylvania, Moldavia, Bulgaria, Dobruja and Banat, where there are mostly Romanians, who are descended from the tribes of Dacia, and Thracian-Illyrian communities, which mingled with Turanian tribes which came under Roman dominion. There have been traces of Latin Vlachs since 9th century living south of the Danube and in the Carpathian area near Slavic people and Caucasian Avars. The spread of the Vlachs was great in the southern regions of Balkan peninsula and above all in Greece, where vlachoi, who are the Slav Vlasi, currently represent the inhabitants of central and northern mountain regions. The term vlachos has taken on a specifically negative connotation and it means rude, boor (cfr. *vlachiko phersimo* = course and rough manners). According to P.SKOK, *Etimologijski rjecnik Hrvatskoga ili Srpskoga jezika*, JAZU, III, Zagreb, 1973, pp. 606-608, term Vlah, in Yugoslavian regions Vlasi mostly mean Serbians, who Venetian people thought to be Slavs arriving at the border areas from the closest regions under Turkish domination; to Croatians, *Vlah* was and is still today synonymous with *stanovnik Srbin pravoslavac*, that is Serbian Orthodox inhabitants living in so called Krajina; moreover, to Muslims in Bosnia Vlah stands for Christian and particularly Orthodox. A.FORTIS, in his *Travels into Dalmatia*, cit., I, pp. 44-50, talks about the ethnic origin and the etymology of the name Morlachs, whom he also called *Vlassi* and identified as the inhabitants of the Dalmatian inland (which largely corresponds to Krajina up to the Adriatic coast); but, he rejects the derivation from *mavros*= black, and, instead, rather naively proposes the para-etymology *Moro-Vlassi*, as the term *Vlahi* means powerful people coming from the sea, as in Slavic languages *more* means sea.

nature and civilization behind the ideal of *bon sauvage* or ‘good savage’ significantly affects the interpretative analysis of Morlach culture and society, as the fifth paragraph from *On the moral and domestic Virtues of the Morlacchi*, the ethnographic section of his work, first shows<sup>25</sup>.

In his work, Fortis mitigates the better known, but only vaguely spread in Western Europe, Morlach character, typical of a backward population which is of course considered on the fringes of civilization. Then he asserts that “the morals of a Morlack, at a distance from the sea coast and garrisons, are generally very different from ours. The sincerity, truth, and honesty of these poor people, not only in contracts, but in all the ordinary actions of their life, could be called simplicity and weakness among us. It is true, that the Italians, who trade in Dalmatia, and the littoral inhabitants themselves, have but too often taken advantage of this integrity; and hence the Morlacchi are become much more diffident, than they were in former times<sup>26</sup>”.

Bajamonti shares the same thought when he talks about moral Morlachism, customs of good and skilful Morlach warriors, xenia or hospitality of families within the clan, banquets, collective rituals and the sacred respect for a man’s word. Fortis emphasizes certain qualities of these people. These qualities can be said to be a stereotype of barbarians, especially western barbarians such as Celts and Germans in Greco-Roman ethnographic literature, and at the same time of Homeric heroes. These qualities are generosity, hospitality and deep-rooted pride<sup>27</sup> as well as an archaic and sacred conception of friendship, linked however to a choleric and violent nature, superstitious customs<sup>28</sup>, a never-ending inclination towards revenge that passes from one generation to another through blood feuds<sup>29</sup> and the practice of always being armed<sup>30</sup>. However, despite a number of cultural and social observations, also

---

<sup>25</sup> A.FORTIS, *Travels into Dalmatia*, cit., I, pp. 53-56.

<sup>26</sup> A.FORTIS, *Travels into Dalmatia*, cit., I, pp. 53-54. The simplicity and sincerity of Morlachs Fortis identified are very similar to descriptions of Celts made by Greek authors such as Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca Historica*, V 26-27 and Strabo, *Rerum Geographicarum*, IV 4,2, who defined Celts *phylon aploun kai ou kakoethes*, that is simple and not at all bad men, although they appear inclined to wrath and intemperance by nature; moreover, see description, made by Tacitus in *De origine et situ Germanorum*, XXII 4, of Germans as *gens non astute nec callida*, unable to deceive and always ready to show themselves to be genuine and honest, sometimes even naïve.

<sup>27</sup> A.FORTIS, *Travels into Dalmatia*, cit., I, pp. 53-56.

<sup>28</sup> A.FORTIS, *Travels into Dalmatia*, cit., I, pp. 61-64

<sup>29</sup> A.FORTIS, *Travels into Dalmatia*, cit., I, pp. 59-61

<sup>30</sup> A.FORTIS, *Travels into Dalmatia*, cit., I, p. 82. Morlachs too, who lived in isolated villages and “in their breeches, they carry all their necessary implements, such as, one or two pistols stuck in behind, and before, a very large knife, which they call Hanzar, with the handle of brass, set round with false stones”. They are pictured as armed savages in accordance with the spectacular image of siderophorountes or armed populations described by the Greek historian Thucydides, according to whom, since ancient times, all Greeks were always armed. This custom was still alive among contemporary barbarians and, reflecting the way of behavior of ancient and not fully civilized Greeks, current barbarians. See Thucydides, *The History of Peloponnesian War*, I 4-6; as for Celts, see observations of Posidonius at the university of Trieste, *Deipnosophisti*, IV 151, 152d and IV 154a-c and, for Germans, see observations of Tacitus, *De origine et situ Germanorum*, XI 3, XIII 1 and XXII 1. For the wildness and marginality, which characterizes north-western populations, that is Epirus, Aetolia, Acarnania, Illyria, and are already identified in Greek sources, and the persistence of these social and behavioural aspects also in Balkan lines from the same regions, as well as characteristics of *Agraioi* or wild people, a western Greek population, see C.ANTONETTI, *Agraioi et Agrioi. Montagnards et bergers:*

idealizing considerations, such as the following, emerge from Fortis' *Travels*: "Innocence, and the natural liberty of pastoral ages, are still preserved among the Morlacchi, or at least, many traces of them remain in the places farthest distant from our settlements. Pure cordiality of sentiment is not there restrained by other regards, and displays itself without any distinction of circumstances. A handsome young Morlach girl, who meets a man of her district, on the road, kisses him affectionately, without the least malice, or immodest thought<sup>31</sup>".

As for music and the performance of folk songs, Bajamonti underlines the fact that in Morlach *pjesme* there are frequently common formulae and epic epithets useful for the rhythm and composition of the work, just like in rhapsodies of Aachen bards<sup>32</sup>. Moreover, as Fortis mentions, there was always a musician among the Morlachs, "with an instrument called *guzla*, which has but one string, composed of many horse hairs. The tune, to which these heroic songs are sung, is extremely mournful, and monotonous, besides, they bring the sound a little through the nose, which agrees perfectly well with their instrument; the verses of the most ancient traditional songs are of ten syllables, not rhymed<sup>33</sup>".

Fortis clearly states that he translated Morlachs' heroic poems into Italian and that he has included one of them in his journal. In a letter to John Stuart, Earl of Bute, who is the addresser of the part of *Travels* about Morlachs, Fortis asserts that "I very readily allow, that they can not be put in competition with the poems of the celebrated Scotch bard, which we have lately had the pleasure of seeing translated into our language, with true poetical spirit, by the Abbe Cesarotti, and republished in a more complete form, through the generous bounty of a noble countryman of the bard, who patronizes learning in all parts of Europe. Yet the Morlach poetry is not destitute of merit; and has, at least, the simplicity of Homer's times, and serves to illustrate the manners of the nation. The Illyrian language I also well adapted to poetry and music; being harmonious, and abounding with vowels; and yet it is almost totally abandoned, even by the civilized nation who speaks it<sup>34</sup>".

---

*un prototype diachronique de sauvagerie*, in DHA, 13, 1987, pp. 199-236 with interesting observations on ancient 'savage' Greeks and, later on, *Vlachi*.

<sup>31</sup> A.FORTIS, *Travels into Dalmatia*, cit., I, p. 64-65

<sup>32</sup> Moreover, the Split intellectual points out in his work *Diario d'una gita in Bossina (chapter XII)*: 'inhabitants of Bossina also perform Illyrian songs, both decasyllabic heroic poems and other poems with different metres, and they use a lot *tambure*, that is a kind of small guitars with a long and narrow neck'. See I. MIMICA, *Julije Bajamonti i folklorna književnost*, cit., p.130.

<sup>33</sup> A.FORTIS, *Travels into Dalmatia*, cit., I, p. 82

<sup>34</sup> A.FORTIS, *Travels into Dalmatia*, cit., I, pp. 88-90. Fortis addresses Lord John Stuart directly, to whom this work is dedicated, and the Illyrian text he mentions is the well known *Canzone dolente della nobile sposa d'Asan Aga*, transcribed in original Serbian language (*Xalostna pjesanza plemenite Asan-Aghinize*). This ballad is set in Turkey; Asan is a Turkish captain and the story takes place in Imotski, in northern Dalmatia on the border with Herzegovina. It was immediately successful as in 1775, one year after the publication of *Travels into Dalmatia*, it was translated as *Klaggesang von der edlen Frauen des Asan Aga, aus dem Morlackischen* by Goethe and Herder, who in 1778 included it in their work *Volkslieder* with three other Morlach folk songs. Moreover, this and other Morlach poems aroused the interest of several important European intellectuals who discovered the exotic and primitive world of Morlachs (see the 15th note on text): Charles Nodier who, affected by descriptions made by Fortis, set his novel *Jean Sbogar*, a pirate described as a 'simple aventurier morlaque', in Dalmatia; Sir Walter Scott, who translated these poems in English;

The reference to “the simplicity of Homer’s times”, with regard to songs performed by Morlach guzlari or bards, and the reference to Cesarotti, who attended the literary salon of Fortis’ mother with other professors from Padua University, are certainly related to the typical pre-romantic taste and search for a genuine and original poetic feeling<sup>35</sup>, which the intellectuals found both in Macpherson’s lyrical poems attributed to the legendary Scottish bard Ossian and later translated by Cesarotti, and in the Homeric epics which had been the subject of a careful and passionate reevaluation in the aesthetic-philosophical observations by Vico. Therefore, the ethnographic framework established by Fortis and dealing with Morlachs has to be placed in this intellectual context. In his personal interpretation, the simplicity of primitive, good and guileless people described by Rousseau may be associated with ancient Homeric values, which have been recently at the centre of a renewed enthusiastic interest of a large part of European culture. Indeed, Niccolò Tommaseo makes a vague reference to *Morlacchismo d’Omero* by Julije Bajamonti in his essay *Italia, Grecia, Illirio, la Corsica, le Isole Ionie, la Dalmazia*<sup>36</sup>.

Therefore the description by Fortis and partly the spirit of the essay by Bajamonti seem to be characterized by the principle of *bon sauvage* or good savage and, to a certain extent, inspired by pessimistic resignation typical of Tacitus’ *De origine et situ Germanorum* and the primitiveness of Morlachs. Their totally unacceptable features, such as roughness as a sign of their brutality and filthiness, are after all emphasized as aspects of an early stage of purity and innocence which is, by this time, lost

---

Prosper Mérimée, whose collection of tales in 1827 was entitled *Guzla*, with reference to Morlach stringed instrument and he also wrote three other Morlach tales, namely *Le Heyduque mourant*, *Le Ban de Croatie* and *Le fusil enchante*; finally the Grimm brothers too. Along with these authors, Dalmatian Niccolò Tommaseo too included this well known poem and other texts in his collection *Canti popolari illirici*. However, Fortis had already transcribed in his work *Saggio d’osservazioni sopral’isola di Cherso ed Osero* two folk songs, examples of Dalmatian poetry, namely the song of Milos Cobilich and that of Vuko Brankovich. These folk songs represent examples of translation influenced by Ossianism, spread by Cesarotti and appreciated by the same patron as Fortis’, Lord Stuart.

<sup>35</sup> For comparison between Ossian poems, see what has been said about Native Americans and particularly the tribal bards in *Observations générales sur les Indiens ou Sauvages de l’Amérique du Nord, suivies d’un vocabulaire de la langue des Miamis, tribu établie sur la Wabash*, in *Ouvres*, II, 1796-1820, Paris, 1989, p.393, an essay by French illuminist Volney, which is also *article V* within *Tableau du climat et du sol des Etats-Unis*, a work published in 1803 describing Volney’s three years journey in United States (1795-97). The author claims that : ‘Aussi est-ce réellement à cette idée simple et rustique que l’art divin de la poésie doit son origine: et c’est par cette raison que ses premiers essais, ses plus anciens monumens sont des contes extravagans de mythologie, de dieux, de génies, de revenans, de loups-garoux, ou de sombres et fanatiques tableaux de combats, de haines et de vengeances; tels que les chants des Bardes d’Ossian et d’Odin, j’ose dire même du chantre de la colère d’Achille, quoiqu’il ait eu plus de connaissances et de talent; tous contes et tableaux analogues à l’esprit ignorant, à l’imagination déréglée et aux moeurs farouches des peuples chez qui ils se produisent’. Moreover, Serbo-Croatian guzlari or guslari are the subject of careful analysis made by M. Parry, who tried to compare the typically formulaic style of Balkan ballad-singers, still operating in the 1930s, with the style of Homeric poems: see M.PARRY-A.B.LORD, *Serbo-Croatian Heroic Songs*, Cambridge, 1954 and A.B.LORD, *The Singer of Tales*, Cambridge (Mass.), 1960. Moreover, see J.M.FOLEY, *Traditional Oral Epic: the Odyssey, Beowulf and the Serbo-Croatian return Songs*, Berkeley, 1990 and A.B.LORD, *Epic Singers and Oral Tradition*, Ithaca, 1991, pp. 104-132.

<sup>36</sup>N.TOMMASEO, *Italia, Grecia, Illirio, Corsica, Isole Ionie, Dalmazia*, Torino, 1855, in *Edizione Nazionale delle Opere di Niccolò Tommaseo, II, Scritti editi e inediti sulla Dalmazia e sui popoli slavi* (edited by R.CIAMPINI), Florence, 1943, p.333: “In a paper of Vicenza [sic], after the first half of the past century, I do not know who wrote something about *Il Morlacchismo d’Omero* which, if you put aside the strange title, represents a divination. Mountains of Dalmatia rather than Ionian Islands are Homeric”.

because of the progress of civilized world. The reference to improvised Morlach bards, who recited epic poems, brings out, in a very archaic world like the Dalmatian inland, a remote and pragmatic poetic and cultural world linked to the legendary childhood of humanity which many European intellectuals believed they saw in Homeric poems and marginal area of Europe, that is Balkans, Scandinavia, Scotland and Ireland. Following the studies by Julije Bajamonti and Alberto Fortis which found common aspects in the Homeric world and in the 18th century Morlachs social reality, some aspects of Slavic culture, which had been ignored so far and which, according to Herder, had been waiting for a long time to awake, rapidly spread in Western Europe<sup>37</sup>.

The observations and above all Fortis' and Bajamonti's approach to the Morlach world are significantly parallel and complementary to the descriptions made by an outstanding figure in the cultural Venetian context of the second half of 18th century, namely Carlo Gozzi. In the ninth chapter of his *Memoirs*, an autobiographic literary journal which is characterized by slight traces of melancholy mingled with tones of harsh polemic, he talks about Morlach customs from Dalmatia<sup>38</sup>. However, in the descriptive framework created by Gozzi there is the clear purpose to repudiate the apologia of Morlachs and their presupposed innocence which emerges from the Abbot Fortis' journal by countering the moralistic ethnography of *Travels into Dalmatia* with a merciless report in which Morlachs look like wild savages. Indeed, from the outset, Morlachs are portrayed as having wild character traits which become the Leitmotiv of the whole story. As for the recruitment and embarkation of troops comprising Slavic contingents which made garrisons in Italy on the behalf of Venetian government, Gozzi talks about "wild beasts, wholly destitute of education" and he asserts that "to reason with them is the same as talking in a whisper to the deaf"<sup>39</sup>.

The following observations are very interesting: "I was present at the review of these Anthropophagi; for indeed they hardly merited a more civilized title. It took place on the beach of Zadar under the eyes of the Provveditore, with ships under sail, ready for the embarkation of the conscripts. Pair by pair, they came up and received their stipend". He goes on with references to Morlachs' customs: "in their marriages, their

---

<sup>37</sup> Cfr. J.G. HERDER, *Idee per la filosofia della storia dell'umanità*, edited by V. Verra, Rome-Bari, 1992, p.328

<sup>38</sup> See C.GOZZI, *Memorie inutili*, edited by G.Prezzolini, Bari, 1910 and C.GOZZI, *Memorie inutili* with Introduction and Notes by D. Bulferetti, Torino, 1923. This work was printed in Venice in 1797-98, that is the period that dramatically marked the end of the Republic of Venice, whereas *Morlacchismo d'Omero* by Bajamonti was published in 1797. In its first part, it deals with the education and military experience the author had in Dalmatia from 1741 to 1744, that is when Fortis was born. Bajamonti had the opportunity to visit Dalmatian inland regions where Morlachs lived, after he arrived at Zadar and was charged with his first military and engineering commissions.

<sup>39</sup> See C.GOZZI, *The Memoirs of Count Carlo Gozzi*, I, cit., p. 66. Elsewhere in his works, Gozzi disparages Morlach dwellings as lairs or caverns or stables and Morlachs as wild peasants and beasts. While describing *kolo*, a popular dance, he recalls that they "sing I do not know what of their songs in dog-like way, and do strange dances by holding hands' and they seemed 'like indomitable, wild and irrational rams". He asserted that he saw rough and barbaric customs, especially in countries where "peasants are all merciless, superstitious and insensitive to rational beasts" and lived in nests. In Montenegro, Morlachs used to sleep in beds that looked like kennels.

funerals, their games, they preserve the customs of pagan antiquity. Reading Homer and Virgil gives a perfect conception of the Morlacchi<sup>40</sup>”. Once again, the traditional cultural background of a man of letters of the 18th century appears with naturalness and spontaneity, especially because the comparison between the wild world of Morlachs and the primitiveness of classic epics and above all some of its powerful images clearly emerge from Gozzi’s work.

The mythological comparison with Lestrigoni of *Odyssey* is precise: indeed, Morlachs were known for as nomad shepherds having wild character and great physical stature. Characters described by Odysseus as “not similar to humans but to giants<sup>41</sup>”, are themselves remembered as shepherds practising cannibalism, who stuck Odysseus’ fellows like fishes and then they ate them. Moreover, Gozzi asserts that “one of their- referring to Morlachs- pastimes is to balance a heavy piece of marble on the lifted palm of the right hand, and hurl it after taking a running jump. The fellow who projects this missile in a straight line to the greatest distance, wins. One is reminded of the enormous boulders hurled by Diomedes and Turnus<sup>42</sup>”.

The grotesque and paradoxical comparison made by Gozzi between Morlachs and the wild world of cannibals and Lestrigoni is not only a resolute and unambiguous intention of denigrating and clearly criticizing Fortis’ thesis<sup>43</sup>, but it can also indicate the presence of an albeit banal cultural archetype, freely interpreted, which has characterized the ethnographic writing since the previous century. The character of the giant and that of Cyclopes form, mostly in the European imagination, the

---

<sup>40</sup> C.GOZZI, *The Memoirs of Count Carlo Gozzi*, cit., I, pp. 67-68.

<sup>41</sup> Cfr. *Odyssey*, X 80-124.

<sup>42</sup> C.GOZZI, *The Memoirs of Count Carlo Gozzi*, cit., I, p. 68. This image refers to a well known episode from the *Odyssey*, IX 480-486, which describes the wrath of Polyphemus who, blind and mocked by Odysseus who managed to escape with his friends from the cave, violently removes the top of a big mountain and throws it in sea next to the ship of the Greek hero which is then sunk and washed ashore. An unusual iconographic image can be said to be found also in description of Cimbric before the battle of Vercellae described by Plutarch in his work *Life of Marius* XXIII section 4. Perhaps, the influence of Posidonius of Apamea, a Greek historian, on this description can be seen where Cimbric warriors are explicitly compared to giants who, with extreme violence, rip hills and throw eradicated trees and pieces of rock with lots of ground into the river. Moreover, in *Iliad* and *Aeneid* heroes often fight and throw each other rocks and stones like bullets. In *Iliad*, V 302-310, for example, Diomedes takes a big rock that not even two men together could pick up and he by himself makes it whirl easily against Aeneas. In *Aeneid*, X 693-701 Mezentius hits his adversary’s face with a rock, *saxo ingenti fragmine montis*. In this regard, a precise reference to Morlachs is found in P.MATVEJEVIC, *Mediterranski Brevijar*, Zagreb, 1987, translated by S. Ferrari as *Mediterraneo. Un nuovo brevario*, Milano, 1991, p.77: “Directly after the first mountain range the link with sea seems to be lost, as land becomes inland which is usually little practical and here and then rougher. People have different habits, sing different songs, such as for example Balkan gänge’, compete in a different way, by throwing stones from their shoulders and by playing šiješete, a game. They consider people living near sea as more or less incomprehensible strangers, and for this reason Morlachs are called Vlaji or Vlasi”.

<sup>43</sup> C.GOZZI, *The Memoirs of Count Carlo Gozzi*, cit., I, p. 73. The author clearly states: “Many writers would have written and printed more significant reports, and the Abbot Alberto Fortis, a man of considerable intellect and similar daring. Tireless in observations and discoveries considered valid and useful, he made very important and significant discoveries concerning the inhabitants, sea, mountains, lakes, rivers and countries of these regions. They are printed and everyone can read and trust them, like others did”. However, Gozzi clearly does not consider either valid or useful the discoveries made by Fortis. On the contrary, he criticizes them with sarcasm and tries to prove they are unsustainable and ingenuous.

paradigm of bestiality and monstrosity in opposition to civilization<sup>44</sup>. However, during the 17th century, this paradigm increasingly spread all over Europe among ancient sources over primitive people.

The character of Cyclopes, with all the heritage of philosophical-sociological concepts, is itself the origin of a number of descriptions of savages, above all from the New World, that is America. Gozzi may have not had the intention to use this paradigm and to adapt it to recent ethnological discoveries while writing his introduction to Dalmatian Morlachs' customs. Probably, the classic Homeric archetype of wild ferocity was enough to identify non-civilized people, but certain similarities require at least to be investigated.

Ugo Grozio, who widely used a comparative method for the analysis of American native cultures and European barbaric cultures, such as Germans and Scythians described in Greek and Latin historiographical sources, did not hesitate to assert that in 1625 Indians from Florida lived *Cyclosum more e sine communi imperio*<sup>45</sup>, that is "according to Cyclopes' customs and without a common authority". Vico firmly insisted on the idea of *imperi paterni ciclopici*, that is "under the government of ancient Cyclopes", which he identified as the first stage of civil and social development of humanity in his analysis of stages of several human associations within a community<sup>46</sup>. From this clearly emerges the modern sociologic usage of the Homeric figure of Cyclops as a primitive man *sylvestris vivendi modus*, which is even to be found in Plato<sup>47</sup> and Aristotle<sup>48</sup>, as Landucci clearly explains<sup>49</sup>.

The interesting idea that a convenient traditional point of reference in literature like Homeric Cyclopes can be associated with primitive and brutal people was also shared by philosophical treatises, which affected Grozio's *ius naturale* or natural law and Vico's philosophy of history. Indeed, both the polemicist Gozzi, who does not at all believe in good and simple nature of Morlachs, and Fortis, who, on the contrary, pictures them in a very liking way, typical of European intellectual fascinated by the exotic, have found certain very cyclopean features of Morlachs from Dalmatia, by always keeping in mind reference categories established by intellectuals of the second half of the 17th century. However, this fact should not seem so absurd. Morlachs or

---

<sup>44</sup> In classical Greece, Cyclopes becomes an ambivalent symbol, not entirely negative and absolutely unclassified as a kind of bests as it is, however, in the Homeric epics. Indeed, Cyclopes, as described by Euripides in his play, can be understood as 'bad savage' in contrast with the city and its rules, the polis as emblem of order and the creator of civil and cultural progress. On the contrary, Cyclopes can be also considered as 'a good savage' who personifies the strongly utopian myth of escape from civilization. For discussions about these topics, see observations in F.TURATO, *La crisi della città e l'ideologia del selvaggio nell'Atene del V secolo a.C.*, Rome, 1979, pp. 69-88 and 105-112.

<sup>45</sup> See H.GROTIUS, *de jure belli ac pacis*, II 2,1. Elsewhere, in *de jure*, II 2, 2, Grozio declares that "antiquissimae artes agricultura et pastura in primis fratribus apparuerunt: non sine aliqua rerum distributione. Ex studiorum diversitate aemulatio, etiam caedes: ac tandem cum boni malorum consortio contaminarentur, vitae genus giganteum, id est, violentum, quale est eorum quos cheirodikas Graeci vocant".

<sup>46</sup>G.B. VICO, *La Scienza Nuova*, 582. For the definition of primitive cyclopean society, see observations by G.B. VICO, *La Scienza Nuova*, 296, 338, 547, 557, 962, 1005 and *La Scienza Nuova Prima*, 55, 56, 134, 482.

<sup>47</sup>Cfr. PLAT., *Laws*. 680b-e.

<sup>48</sup>Cfr. ARISTOT., *Politics*. 1252b 7.

<sup>49</sup>Cfr. S.LANDUCCI *I filosofi e i selvaggi 1580-1780*, Bari, 1972, pp.278-280.

*Vlach* or, according to Greek terminology, *Mavrolachoi* or black *Vlachoi*, seem to be characterized by the same specific features as all *Vlachoi*. A *Vlachos* is still called in Greece *o oresibios kai nomas poimen, agroikos, axestos, apolitisto sand choriates*, that is to say “a man who lives high up in the mountains, a nomad, rough, coarse and rude shepherd, who is uncivilised, uneducated and unmannerly<sup>50</sup>”. The lexical similarities with the Homeric description of Cyclopes are almost awkward: indeed, Polyphemus, who lives isolated in caverns of mountains, is like a *oresitrophos*<sup>51</sup> lion that works in the mountains, and, as is well known, a shepherd looking after his flock<sup>52</sup>; he is *agrios* and, in his primitiveness he does not know justice and civilization<sup>53</sup>; he is violent and, since he used to live *apoprothen* or away from others, he knows no social world; finally he is a true apolitical, that is uncivilized and then asocial<sup>54</sup>. However, this essay does not aim to conclude with the anachronistic equivalence between *Vlachos* or *Morlach* and Cyclopes. It only aims to highlight with this last observation deriving from a series of ideas, how the Homeric archetype, which included images, characters and situations and which received considerable attention in Western European culture, still remains in ethnography of the late 18th century. In some of its essential aspects this archetype does not differ much from those of Greek-Roman historiographical literature.

Therefore, the world of *Morlachs* from Dalmatia had two crucial witnesses who arrived at completely different conclusions. Fortis adapted them to the model of *bon sauvage* which, moreover, he combined with the literary and philosophical ideal of simplicity and authenticity of Homer’s time that were to dominate European Romanticism. On the contrary, Gozzi wrote a kind of parody of the work by the Abbot from Padua. For the sake of polemic, he emphasized negative and primitive features which, according to him, emerged from the explicit parallelism observed in Homer’s and Virgil’s works. Finally, however, neither Fortis nor Carlo Gozzi gave up making the comparison with archaic Greek features, namely those of Homeric civilization which inspired Julije Bajamonti’s *Morlacchismo d’Omero*, an aesthetic-literary work which is so full of ideas and observations to be accepted within the wider context of Italian and European cultural debate on the nature of popular poetry<sup>55</sup>.

---

<sup>50</sup>Cfr. D.B. DIMITRAKOU-MESISKLI, *Mega Lexikon holis tis Hellinikis Glossis*, Athens, 1954, pp. 1427-1428; and *Dizionario Greco moderno-Italiano*, edited by Istituto Siciliano di Studi Bizantini e Neellenici, Rome, 1993, pp. 207208.

<sup>51</sup> *Odyssey.*, IX 292

<sup>52</sup> *Id.*, IX 181-189.

<sup>53</sup> *Id.*, IX 215

<sup>54</sup> *Id.*, IX 189

<sup>55</sup>See L.WOLFF, *Venice and the Slavs. The Discovery of Dalmatia in the Age of Enlightenment*, Stanford, 2001, especially the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter ‘Public Debate after Fortis: Dalmatian Dissent and Venetian Controversy’. For its review, see E.IVETIC in *Studi Veneziani*, n.s. XLVIII (2004), pp. 383-388. Thanks to prof. Giuseppe Trebbi (university of Trieste) for his kind bibliographic references.

This text is the result of a report presented during the Seminar *Itinerari adriatici. Dai portolani ai reportages*, which took place in Trieste on 13-14 June 2006. A printed version is being made for Acts.