

**A FAIRY PHANTOM
DOES AGAPITO'S 1802 BOOK ON VILENICA
EXIST?**

**ALI OBSTOJA AGAPITOVA KNJIGA O VILENICI
IZ LETA 1802?**

TREVOR R. SHAW¹

Izvleček

UDK 551.44:929 Agapito G.

Trevor R. Shaw: Ali obstoja Agapitova knjiga o Vilenici iz leta 1802?

Avtor sklepa da pogosto omenjene Agapitove knjige o Vilenici "La Grotta di Corgnale" sploh ni. V prispevku je avtorjeva razlaga za to trditev.

Ključne besede: zgodovina speleologije, Slovenija, Kras, Vilenica, Agapito.

Abstract

UDC 551.44:929 Agapito G.

Trevor R. Shaw: A fairy phantom - does Agapito's 1802 book on Vilenica exist?

It is concluded that the often-cited La Grotta di Corgnale, by Agapito, does not exist. A possible explanation for the error is suggested.

Key words: history of speleology, Slovenia, Kras, Vilenica, Agapito.

¹ Old Rectory, Shoscombe, BATH BA2 8NB, U. K.

A very early book about the cave Vilenica has been frequently referred to for nearly a century, but there has been considerable doubt whether it ever existed. This is the supposed La Grotta di Corgnale, written by G. Agapito and published in 1802.

Girolamo Agapito was born in 1783 at Buzet in Istria and educated at Koper (Faraone 1994). Of his several publications, *Le Grotte di Adlersberg, di S. Canciano, di Corniale e di S. Servolo...*, published in 1823, is the best known.

The earliest reference traced to Agapito's 1802 book occurs in a bibliography of caves in and near the classical Karst, published in *Alpi Giulie* (Anon. 1897). Here it is listed as "Relazione, della grotta di Corniale, di Girolamo Agapito, in 16°, Trieste, 1802". No part of this entry was printed in italics, as book titles elsewhere in the text were, so "Relazione, della grotta di Corniale" must be a description of its subject and not its actual title, indicating that the book itself had not been seen. The sources of the information in the list include, according to a footnote, "notizie vocali fornitaci gentilmente, de soci e non soci" (verbal information kindly supplied by members and non-members [of the *Societa Alpina delle Giulie*]).

Later in the same year Boegan (1897b) cited the 1802 book in the same words, "Relazione della grotta di Corniale - Girolamo Agapito", but this time italics have been used so that, by the convention of that article, the description of the book appears as a true title.

When the book is next listed, in a bibliography for the Istrian region (Parona et al. 1923, p. iii), its title has become *La grotta di Vileniza detta di Corniale*, published at Trieste. A few years later *Duemila Grotte* (Bertarelli and Boegan 1926) referred to "Agapito, G., *La grotta di Corgnale*, Trieste, 1802", translating the former name into Italian which is not normal practice in that book. This latest form of the title has continued to be cited to the present day (e. g. Kranjc 1995).

Despite these many statements that the 1802 book by Agapito does exist, there are also many places where it might have been expected to be mentioned but was not. Agapito's own book of 1823 does not refer to it. Boegan (1897a) points out a measurement error in Agapito's 1823 description of the cave, but does not there mention any earlier book by him. Three bibliographies do not include it. The *Austrian Literatur-Anzeiger* (Anon. 1880) does not contain it, but it has only two entries for the cave anyway. Gratzky (1897) omits the cave from his bibliography altogether. Herak et al. (1976) do not list it, but their references for that period are very sparse. Much more significant is its absence from the careful and comprehensive annotated bibliography of the cave by Faraone (1993).

It is noticeable that none of those who refer to the book quote extracts from it or derive information from it. Nor is the total number of pages or any other physical fact about it given. Even the title is written in three forms in

successive publications. In every case it is only its existence that is mentioned, with no indication that the book itself has been seen.

So, does the book in fact exist? Was it ever written? This author has never met anyone who has seen a copy. The major national libraries and karstological libraries of the world have no copies. Neither the Biblioteca Civica nor any other library in Trieste has any record of the book (dr. Anna Rugliano, pers. comm. 1994).

It may be noted also that in the year of its supposed publication Agapito was only 18 or 19 years of age, and so was unlikely to have written such a book.

If Agapito's 1802 book does not exist, how can so many references to it be explained?



Fig. 1: The title page of Trevisani's book (reproduced by permission of the Biblioteca Civica, Trieste).

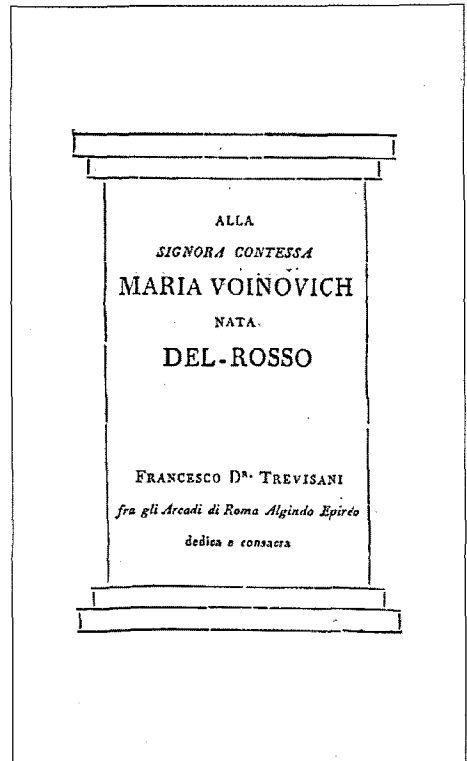


Fig. 2: The author's name is given on the dedication page of his book, 'La Grotta di Vileniza, detta di Corniale' (reproduced by permission of the Biblioteca Civica, Trieste).

First of all, another book about the Vilenica cave was published in 1802 - La Grotta di Vileniza, detta di Corniale, a poem by dr. Francesco Trevisani, published in Trieste as a small volume of 23 pages (Figs. 1 and 2). It was cited (with the title abbreviated) in Anon. (1897) and Boegan (1897b). Duemila Grotte (Bertarelli and Boegan 1926) did not include it, but it is listed accurately by Parona et al. (1923, p. cxliv), who also list Agapito's supposed book of the same year under the identical title.

It does seem exceedingly likely, though unprovable, that the person who provided the information for the first entry for the Agapito book (Anon. 1897), was confusing Agapito, as the author of the 1823 book containing a section on Vilenica, with Trevisani's book of 1802. The references then gradually gained respectability and authority. In Boegan's (1897b) article the use of italics provided a quotable title, and Boegan's name in a citation implied reliability. One the book was listed in Parona's bibliography and in the standard reference book Duemila Grotte, its existence became widely accepted.

While non-existence can never be proved, it does seem almost certain that there never has been a Vilenica book of 1802 by Agapito. If so, it is another phantom book of the karst, like Herberstein's *De Admirandis Rebus Naturae* of the 16th century (Shaw 1994). Perhaps, after all, it was produced by a vila (fairy) of Vilenica.

REFERENCES

- Agapito, G., 1823: *Le grotte di Adlersberg, di S. Canciano, di Corniale e di S. Servolo, la miniera di mercurio d'Idria, il lago di Cirknitz, le terme di Monfalcone, antichita Romane d'Aquileja e Pola, ed altri notevoli oggetti nelle vicinanze di Trieste.*- Vienna, A. Strauss; Trieste, P. Schubart.
- Anon. 1880: *Literatur-Anzeiger.*- Wien (5) (pp. 4-5).
- Anon. 1897: *Cenno bibliografico per lo studio delle grotte e caverne nel nostro Carso.*- Alpi Giulie 2 (1) : 8-10 (p. 8).
- Bertarelli, L. V. & Boegan, E., 1926: *Duemila grotte...*- Milano, Touring Club Italiano (p. 332).
- Boegan, E., 1897a: *La grotta di Corniale (continuazione).*- Alpi Giulie 2 (3) : 34-36 (p. 34).
- Boegan, E., 1897b: *La grotta di Corniale (continuazione e fine).*- Alpi Giulie 2 (5) : 57-58 (p. 58).
- Faraone, E., 1993: *Agli albori del turismo speleologico Triestino: la Grotta Vilenizza di Corgnale (Vilenica jama - Lokev).*- Simposio Internazionale sulla Protostoria della Speleologia, Citta di Castello - 13/14/15 Settembre 1991 : 51-60.
- Faraone, E., 1994: *Girolamo Agapito: 150 anni dalla sua morte.*- *Progressione* (31) : 59-60.

- Gratzy, O., 1897: Die Höhlen und Grotten in Krain.- Mitt. des Musealvereines für Krain 10 (5) : 133-174.
- Herak, M., Magaš, B., Sarić, A. & Habe, F., 1976: Contribution to the bibliography of karst of Yugoslavia (1666-1974).- Krš Jugoslavije 9 (3) : 81-225.
- Kranjc, A., 1995: The beginnings of cave tourism in former hereditary lands Carniola and (Lower) Styria.- Caves and Man Proc. International Symposium on the occasion of the 70th anniversary opening to the public of the Demänovská cave of Liberty 4 - 8 October 1994 Demänovská dolina - Jasná, Liptovský Mikuláš: 62-66 (p. 66).
- Parona, C. F., Sacco, F. & Battaglia, R., 1923: Materiali per la bibliografia geologica, idrologica, speleologica, paleontologica e paleoetnologica dell' Istria e regioni finitime. Mondovi.
- Shaw, T. R., 1994: Baron Herberstein on the Cerknica karst lake - a phantom book of the 16th century?- Acta Carsologica, 23: 349-357.
- Trevisani, F., 1802: La Grotta di Vileniza, detta di Corniale.- Trieste, G. Weis.

ALI OBSTOJA AGAPITOVA KNJIGA O VILENICI IZ LETA 1802?

Povzetek

Že skoraj sto let pogosto citiramo staro knjigo o Vilenici, a že dolgo obstojajo tudi dvomi, da je bila v resnici sploh tiskana. To je domnevna "La Grotta di Corniale" avtorja G. Agapita, izdana 1802.

Girolamo Agapito je bil rojen 1783 v Buzetu v Istri in se šolal v Kopru. Izmed njegovih del je najbolj znana "Le Grotte di Adlersberg, di S. Canciano, di Corniale e di S. Servolo..." , tiskana 1823.

Prva omemba njegove knjige iz 1802 se pojavi v bibliografiji o jamah klasičnega Krasa in soseščine (Anon 1897), torej 95 let po tem, ko naj bi knjiga izšla. Nekateri podatki, ki jih navaja bibliografija, so izrecno dobljeni od različnih pomočnikov in takrat niso bili preverjeni. Ta navedba iz 1897 je najbrž vir, po katerem je bila knjiga kasneje citirana, vendar pod dvema malce različnima naslovoma, Boeganovim (1897 b) in v bibliografiji Istre (Parona et al. 1923) ter 1926 v Duemila grotte.

Tako je bila Agapitova knjiga iz 1802 sprejeta v strokovno literaturo, čeprav ni nobenih dokazov, da je kdo izmed teh avtorjev knjigo sploh kdaj videl. Tudi z resnim iskanjem po narodnih in regionalnih knjižnicah ni bilo mogoče odkriti niti enega izvoda. Še več, Agapito je bil 1802 star šele 18 ali 19 let, razlog več, da ta knjiga ni bila nikoli napisana. Pač pa je izšla druga knjiga o Vilenici 1802. To je pesnitev dr. Francesca Trevisanija, izdana v Trstu, z omembo avtorjevega imena šele na strani s posvetilom. Na naslovnici ni imena avtorja, v čemer je morda vzrok, da so knjigo nepazljivo pripisali Agapitu, za katerega se je vedelo, da je kasneje pisal o tej jami.