



Goethe's Italian Journey and the geological landscape

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Over 220 years ago Johann Wolfgang von Goethe undertook a nearly two-years long and fascinating journey to Italy, a destination dreamed for a long time by the great German writer.

During his journey from Alps to Sicily Goethe reflects on landscape, geology, morphology of "Il Bel Paese", sometimes providing detailed descriptions and acute observations concerning the great and enduring laws by which the earth and all within it are governed. He was an observer, with the eye of the geologist and landscape painter, as he himself stated, and therefore he had a 360 degree focus on all parts of the territory.

From the Brenner Pass to Sicily, Goethe reflects on landscape, contrasting morphologies, the genesis of territories, providing detailed descriptions useful for reconstructing the conditions of the territory and crops of the late 18th century. His diary is a description of the impressions he received from the country and its people, mingled with reflections upon art, science and literature. Goethe studied mineralogical and geological phenomena and drew up notes on the life of the people, the climate and the plants.

On various scientific occasions and, in particular, within the framework of the Italian Association "Geologia & Turismo", of the Working Group "Geomorphosites" of the International Association of Geomorphologists and the International Year of Planet Earth, the opportunity to re-examine Goethe's travels in Italy from a geological viewpoint was recognised.

In the present paper an attempt was made to reproduce the geotourism itinerary ante litteram of the writer to Italy, one of the most important tourist destination worldwide, thanks to its rich cultural and natural heritage and the outstanding aesthetic qualities of the complex natural landscape. This project was essentially conceived with a twofold purpose. First of all, an attempt was made to reproduce the journey of a great writer, as an example of description of landscape perceived and described as "integrated", meaning integration between natural components, including geological, biological and anthropogenic elements, climate, history, architecture, literature etc. Secondly, Goethe's scientific intuitions (in this case the geological ones) were compared with the evolution of scientific knowledge up to most recent times, which at times confirm what Goethe had already realised. This project is based on the description of the stages of his journey, in the light of modern results of investigations carried out in geology, geomorphology, mineralogy etc. This research is grateful for the contributions of many geologists from various universities and Italian research institutions from the Alps to Sicily.

Goethe's Italian journey as revisited in this paper aims to stimulate the interest of the reader in the "geological" component of the environment in which we live by means of an "integrated" approach.