

VON HUMBOLDT DAY – GENOA 1ST OCTOBER 2019
250th ANNIVERSARY OF THE BIRTH OF ALEXANDER VON HUMBOLDT

CRISTINA CARBONE¹, SARA FERRANDO¹, LORIS GALLI*¹

¹DISTAV, Università degli Studi di Genova, Corso Europa 26, I-16132 Genova, Italy.

* Correspondence: loris.galli@unige.it

EDITORIAL

The famous German naturalist Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859) greatly influenced the future course of many branches of natural history. Despite the important cultural legacy that he left us, although his name has been attributed to the important ocean current that flows north along the western coast of South America, to a mineral (Humboldtite), to numerous plant (e.g. the Indian Fabaceae belonging to genus *Humboldtia* or the American *Salix humboldtiana*) and animal taxa (from the American snails belonging to family Humboldtianidae, to the Humboldt squid, or the Humboldt penguin), Alexander von Humboldt is very little known even among professionals in the various fields of natural sciences. His adventurous life and his valuable works have been described by some authors and it is beyond our purposes to propose here a brief summary about. Among the others, we warmly recommend to the readers who are interested in deepening von Humboldt's biography to read the exhaustive book

Andrea Wulf, 2015. The invention of nature: the adventures of Alexander von Humboldt, the lost hero of science. John Murray Press (Hodder & Stoughton), London. XIX + 472 pp.

On October 1st, 2019, in order to celebrate this eminent scientist on his 250th birth anniversary, our Department organized an open conference dedicated to him (von Humboldt Day), supervised and coordinated by Cristina Carbone, Loris Galli, Carlo Montanari and Mario Petrillo, and under the patronage of the Genoa Municipality.

The multifaceted nature of Alexander von Humboldt shines through clearly from the issues dealt by the various speakers. Gian Franco Frigo inaugurated the morning session with a detailed discussion on von Humboldt's concept of nature and about his approach to natural sciences from the philosopher's point of view. Agnese Visconti described the conceptual path that connect von Humboldt's idea of nature and natural monuments to the landscape protection principle expressed in Article 9 of the *Constitution of the Italian Republic* passing through *Weimar Constitution*. Alexander Di Bartolo outlined how the approach of the Italian Catholic circles towards von Humboldt's work changed after 1860 and hypothesized a probable reason for this change. Federico Focher shown the influence of Alexander von Humboldt's books on the scientific vocation of Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace. Francesco Mezzalana illustrated von Humboldt's influence on the iconographic approach to the nature. Francesco Surdich, moreover, presented the results of his bibliographic research on the importance of von Humboldt's journeys on the geographic culture in Italy. Some more specific presentations could be related to this last topic: the talks of Marco Capello and Mario Petrillo on the Humboldt

Current and the relative Italian oceanographic expeditions, the presentations of Laura Federico e Federica Zaccarini on the contribution of von Humboldt as a mining inspector to the geological knowledge of the Ligurian Apennine and of the platinum mines in the Caucasus, respectively, and the short communication of one of us (L. Galli) on the traceability of the principles of Biogeography to von Humboldt's holistic approach. Giovanni Covone, finally, outlined a picture of astronomical knowledge in von Humboldt's time, highlighting his contribution to this science.

We gathered the proceedings of “von Humboldt Day” in this monographic volume of our Journal, with the hope of stimulating the curiosity of the readers about the important and fascinating figure of Alexander von Humboldt.

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