

Darwin and the others: the reception of Poli's *Testacea* outside Italy and other recent discoveries about the Molfetta scientist

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Abstract: Contrary to what believed previously, Giuseppe Saverio Poli's *Testacea Utriusque Siciliae* experienced a wide (and appreciated) recognition already in the first half of the XIX century outside Italy, although the treatise had a limited circulation inside it. The reputation of Poli as the founding father of malacology came just from such recognition, counting – in addition to G. Cuvier and A. de Férussac – even Charles Darwin among Poli's admirers.

Recent discoveries about this and other Poli's works will be discussed, including some novel biographical news related to one of the most influential figures of the Enlightenment in the Kingdom of Naples.

Keywords: Giuseppe Saverio Poli, malacology, geology, Charles Darwin, Alexander von Humboldt.

1. Introduction

One of the most influential figures of the Kingdom of Naples between the end of the XVIII and the beginning of the XIX century was Giuseppe Saverio Poli, a well-renowned scientist from the Apulian town of Molfetta. As assessed in a previous work (Esposito 2017), it was just through the agency of Poli that the basic roots of the scientific thought penetrated effectively (and long-lasting) in the most important Kingdom of Italy (and one of the most important ones in Europe). This motivated a thorough study of the life and work (both strictly scientific and non-scientific) of this intriguing character, a preliminary part of it having been reported in the mentioned work. Here we give an account of further results achieved mainly (but not limited to) again in archival sources, regarding both Poli's biography and his scientific work, with particular reference to his masterpiece about malacology, that is *Testacea Utriusque Siciliae*. Further unexpected novelties will be in order.

2. Some novel biographical insights

Precious historical sources for the life of Giuseppe Saverio Poli have been – almost exclusively – biographical (and hagiographical) accounts written just after his death in

1825 by people who knew him personally,¹ so that a number of otherwise unknown facts and anecdotes have come to light about the Molfetta scientist. However, it is quite evident that, by relying “only” on those sources, some mistakes and misunderstandings are unavoidable, so that it is certainly preferable to complement information from those accounts with that coming from other written sources, mainly archival ones. In a previous work (Esposito 2017) we already documented about some results in this direction, and we certainly refer the reader to it for a solid starting point but, in the following, further interesting results will be highlighted.

Born in Molfetta in October 28, 1746 by Vitangelo Poli and Eleonora Corlè, after a study trip in Padua and elsewhere in Italy, Poli came to Naples in 1771, where he got the master degree (“dottorato”) in Medicine on November 3 at the Naples’ *Collegio dei Dottori* (see Fig. 1):

Testamur nos Sub.ptus Prior Almi Collegij Med.mo et unus ex duodecim d.ni Collegij examinasse in Ph.a et Med.ma Mag.no d. Iosephum Xaverium Poli Civit.s Melphicti Pro.e Bari, [?] reperisse aptum et idoneum ad gradu Doctoratus et in d.nis [?]btatibus ascendente et in fidem. Datum Neap. in edibus d.ni Almi Collegij hac die 3 M.s 9bris 1771.

Ricca Prior

Franciscus Cafasso unus ex duodecim (Naples, St. Arch., Coll. Dott., f. 156).

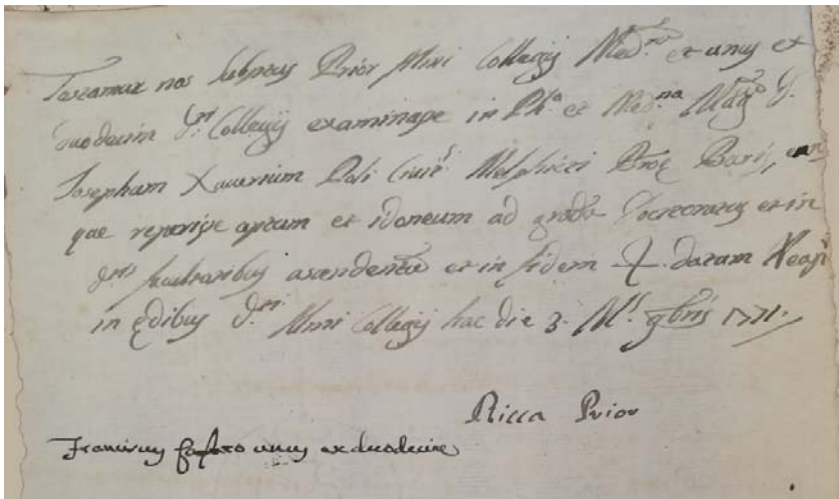


Fig. 1. The oldest document kept in Naples regarding Giuseppe Saverio Poli, i.e. the degree certificate for his doctorate in Medicine, dated November 3, 1771 (courtesy of the State Archive of Naples).

¹ See, for example, (Gatti 1825, Giampaolo 1825, Olivier Poli 1825, Morelli di Gregorio 1826).

2.1. *Physicist in Naples and abroad*

Despite this degree (and even before his accomplishment), his scientific interests were centered mainly about physics, with particular reference to the current debate about electricism. To those years, indeed, several works of him appeared in the literature about *La formazione del Tuono, della Folgore e di varie altre Meteore, spiegata giusta le idee del Signor Franklin* (Poli 1772), *Riflessioni intorno agli effetti di alcuni Fulmini* (Poli 1773), and *Continuazione delle riflessioni intorno agli effetti di alcuni Fulmini* (Poli 1774). The interest in these topics persisted for several years, even when Poli travelled abroad in 1779-1780, in Germany, Netherlands, France and England. Less known (to his “historical” biographers) papers of this period are those concerning *Congetture sulle tempeste che sogliono succedere alle Aurore Boreali* (Poli 1778) and *Su una straordinaria Aurora Boreale* (Poli 1799). It is probably just the recognition of the value of such works that opened to Poli the doors of the major scientific academies of Europe, including the election in 1779 to Fellow of the “Royal Society” of London: the honor to be a “home member” of such Society was reserved to very few non-British people. Later in those years, when coming back to Naples, Poli again disserted in 1784 upon electricism with the *Osservazioni fisiche concernenti l'elettricità, il magnetismo, e la folgore* (Poli 1788) at the “Neapolitan Royal Academy of Sciences and Belle Lettres”.

The main aim of his journey abroad was to acquire instruments on behalf of the King of Naples for the scientific cabinet of the “Royal Academy” of the King Ferdinand Battalion, so that Poli naturally came in contact with the major physics instrument makers, such as Dollond, Ramsden, etc. However, even in this case, he was not at all a passive “student”. In Esposito, Schettino (2014) it is recounted – for example – the intriguing story of the spreading of Atwood’s Machine with an “additional” device suggested by Poli, aimed at a better operation of the machine, which was always included in later copies of the machine, although with no reference to Poli.² Similar intrusions in the physics of instrument making are testified by a couple of published (but, again, not very well known to Poli’s “historical” biographers) letters *Sopra una correzione di Dollond all'Equatoriale* (Poli 1780a), addressed to Prince Francesco Pignatelli in Naples, and *Su di un nuovo Micrometro di riflessione* (Poli 1780b), addressed to the astronomer Joseph Jérôme de Lalande in Paris.

2.2. *Collections and Museums*

It probably dates back to his journey abroad also Poli’s interest in collections, not only strictly related to physics instruments, but even to all aspects of natural history. In this respect, it is quite interesting that, already in 1787, he opened to visitors in Naples his own Museum of Natural History, which then appeared in the official list of *Musei particolari* (private special museums) in the *Calendario e Notiziario della Corte*, i.e. the *Royal Almanac of the Kingdom of Naples*. It was the only Museum of Natural History

² Poli mentioned the “improvement” only in his *Elementi di Fisica Sperimentale* (Poli 1781) but, despite the amazing success of this textbook, that was not widely recognized, probably because – apart George Atwood and his circle – Atwood’s Machines employed throughout Europe did invariable contain Poli’s lever.

of the time in that Kingdom, in addition to that of the “Royal Military Academy” (“*Collegio della Nunziatella*”), to which Poli himself likely contributed, and that of Vesuvian rocks owned by Gaetano de Bottis (Calendario 1787). Later on, in 1804, when the Bourbons finally set up a Real Museo di Storia Naturale (which was, effectively, a mineralogical museum), they unhesitatingly chose Poli as its first Superintendent and Director:

Essendosi degnata la Maestà del Re di costituirmi Soprintendente e Direttore del Real Museo di Storia Naturale collocato per ora nell'Edificio del SS. Salvatore, mi ordinò con Real Carta in data de' 26 dello scaduto Settembre ch'io proponessi qualche soggetto idoneo, che mi servisse di ajuto sotto l'immediata mia dipendenza, avendo riguardo alle altre incombenze Sovranamente affidatemi, come altresì quegli'Inservienti al Real Museo che crederò necessarj; e nel tempo stesso le provisioni che da me si giudicheranno convenienti sì per questi che per quello.

E siccome S.M. nel citato Real Dispaccio m'incarica inoltre ch'io proponga qual dote mensile possa essere necessaria al Real Museo, limitandola all'importo delle provisioni, alle spese necessarie per l'ordinaria custodia e manutenzione del Museo, ed a piccoli acquisti che venga l'occasione di fare; così avendo io ponderato siffatte cose, ho rilevato che all'infuori di ducati settantadue mensuali occorrenti per le provisioni del Custode, del sotto Custode e del Barandiere, potranno essere sufficienti per ora altri venticinque ducati il mese per gli oggetti testé indicati, tranne quelle spese che potrebbero occorrere per avventura in fatto di accomodi di fabbriche di qualunque genere. Sicché la dote mensile della parte del Real Museo attualmente esistente potrebbe ascendere in tutto a cento ducati il mese, riducendola a un numero intero; riserbandomi giusta l'ordine impostomi da S.M. nella detta Real Carta di proporre gli acquisti maggiori che si presenteranno, e di domandarne l'approvazione ed il corrispondente pagamento (Naples, St. Arch., Seg. St. Casa Reale, f. 1272).

Even other collections by Poli later converged in Bourbons State museums, giving way, for instance, to the establishment of the Botanical Garden and of the Zoological Museum. Here, however, we highlight the fate of the important numismatic collection of Poli that, after his death, in 1836 was incorporated in the “Real Medagliere” (“Royal Medal Collection”):

Per effetto di precedenti disposizioni di S.M. dee essere deportato nel Real Museo Borbonico il medagliere lasciato dal defunto Comm. Poli, giusta la descrizione fattane per comando delle M.L. dagli Abati Federici e Caterina.

A fin di completarsi il lavoro della classificazione di tutte le medaglie e monete esistenti nel R. Museo, a cui queste di Poli debbono essere aggiunte, e per potersi al più presto aprire al pubblico questa preziosa collezione è assolutamente necessario che si mandi subito ad effetto la consegna e il trasporto dell'indicato medagliere, tuttora esistente nel R. Palazzo (SAN, Ministero degli Affari Interni, Primo Inventario, f. 1011, p. 10).

Bari	
Giuseppe Saverio Poli	Letterato assai conosciuto. Istruttore di Sua Altezza Reale
Tommaso de' Azzo	Consigliere della Suprema Corte di Sicilia
Francesco Antonio Rugga	Spedito in Parigi nel 1792 a causa della Rivoluzione, attualmente in Sicilia
Francesco Gaetano Spetti	Di nobili Affari in Anversa, ora in Sicilia, ora in Palermo, ora in Napoli, ora in Altamura, ora in Avigliano
Domènico Blazzo	3° anni solo
Luigi de' Azzo	Consigliere della Suprema Corte di Sicilia
Francesco de' Azzo	Consigliere della Suprema Corte di Sicilia
Giuseppe de' Azzo	Spedito alla Corsica nel 1792, ora in Sicilia, ora in Palermo, ora in Napoli, ora in Altamura, ora in Avigliano

Fig. 2. Results of the elections to the Constitutional Parliament of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies for the district of Bari (1820): the first place is for Giuseppe Saverio Poli, “Letterato assai conosciuto. Istruttore di Sua Altezza Reale” (courtesy of the State Archive of Naples).

2.3. Serving the Kingdom of Naples

Political (in broad sense) activity carried out by Poli was not less important than his scientific involvement, as testified by all his “historical” biographers mentioned above. However, if it was well known to them that Poli was the preceptor of the Crown Prince Francis I, and that he was charged of a number of important court assignments, nevertheless the details of them were almost always unknown, as well as some equally relevant positions in the Bourbon Kingdom. In the following, we just enumerate few unrecognized or less known data of which we became aware in our archival studies.

Though a very appreciated person already in the last decades of 1700s, the fortune of our author increased without appreciable arrest after his return in Naples from Palermo, where he followed the Bourbon Court in its short exile in 1799 – due to the instauration of the Parthenopean Republic. Indeed, in 1803 Poli became Commander of the “Royal Military Academy” (*Nunziatella*) and, the subsequent year, auditor of the theatrical works in Naples (March 14, 1804) (SAN, Ministero della Polizia Generale, f. 40, p. 39).

Returning from the second exile (due to French domination) to Palermo with the Bourbons Court (1806-1815), in 1816 he was elected member of the “Reale Istituto d’Incoraggiamento alle Scienze Naturali” (becoming its President in 1819) (SAN, f. 939, p. 5), while in 1817 was honorary member of the “Accademia Ercolanese di Archeologia” and of the “Academy of Sciences” in Naples (SAN, f. 544).

In 1820, following the disorders in the Kingdom aimed at establishing a constitutional monarchy, the King Ferdinand I of the Two Sicilies was forced to grant the Constitution and create a Constitutional Parliament with democratically elected members. However, the King managed to have also trustworthy people in that assembly and, among the others (see Figure 2), on November 20 of that year Poli became State Councillor in the Constitutional Parliament (An. 1820).

Finally, just one year before his death, Poli was also charged (Almanacco 1824) as member of the “Giunta della Real Biblioteca Borbonica” (Council of the Royal Bourbon Library) and “Ufiziale alla immediatazione di Sua Altezza Reale Francis I” (Official to the immediacy of His Royal Highness), following his beloved Prince in his journeys throughout the Kingdom.

The fame, and even the affection, for Giuseppe Saverio Poli did not come to an end with his passing on April 7, 1825. The “Società Reale Borbonica” organized a commemoration for him on July 25, while a special commemoration session was delivered at the “Real Istituto d’Incoraggiamento” in Naples on September 25, with the reading of the praises by several authors (SAN, f. 2044, p. 184). Just the day after (September 26), a selection of books from the catalogue of the Poli library was entered in the private Royal Library of the King Francis I (who on January 1825 succeeded his father Ferdinand), to the order of the same King, who paid quite a large sum of money to Poli’s heirs (SAN, f. 320, p. 1276).

Still in 1858, a circular oil painting of Poli by the painter Francesco Salice was exported abroad upon commission of an unknown admirer (SAN, f. 369-II, p. 75).

3. *Molluscorum classis verus fundator*

Notwithstanding the striking success of the textbook *Elementi di Fisica Sperimentale* (Poli 1781), with its 23 new editions and reprints (Esposito 2017), likely the most important scientific contribution by Poli is its outstanding work *Testacea Utriusque Siciliae eorumque Historia et Anatome tabulis aeneis illustrata* on comparative anatomy and classification of mollusks in the Kingdom of Two Sicilies, in three volumes (Poli 1791, 1795, 1826). It is widely recognized to have effectively laid the foundations of malacology (Temkin 2012) but, as well, it is widely assumed that it had a quite limited circulation that prevented a full recognition by scholars at that time. However, this is apparently in sharp contrast with the fact that, as already pointed out (Esposito 2017), Poli’s *Testacea* was acknowledged by some of the major scientists of the XIX century, including Charles Darwin (1854). In the following we will show that the assumption of a limited circulation of the text is, indeed, not at all well founded, by reporting a num-

ber of quotations, summaries and even simple acknowledgments from different countries in Europe, covering the time period of the whole century.

3.1. In Italy from abroad

Apparently strange, it was just in Italy (outside the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies) that the recognition of Poli's *Testacea* took place a bit later with respect to the rest of Europe. Andres considered it as "one of the most perfect works" appeared in the specialized literature:

In questo genere possiamo ben compiacerci d'aver veduto sorgere a nostri di la grand'opera de' testacei delle due Sicilie del dotto ed accuratissimo Poli, nella quale gareggiano la copia e scelta delle conchiglie, la sodezza della dottrina, l'evidenza e giustezza delle descrizioni, la verità e bellezza delle figure, la finezza dell'incisione, la proprietà de' colori, e l'eleganza e magnificenza della stampa; e tutto concorre a rendere l'opera del Poli *Testacea utriusque Siciliae* una delle opere più perfette, che sieno in questo genere venute alla luce (Andres 1813).

The late recognition in Italy probably denotes that Poli's *Testacea* revealed itself to Italian scholars (partly) through the agency of non-Italian scientists. In his dissertation about the Italian malacological bibliography, Bonola indeed wrote that:

Per questo metodo il Poli guadagnossi il nome di "Molluscorum Classis verus fundator" tributatogli dal Meckel nella dissertazione sui Pteropodi; M. De Blainville giudica il libro: "Ouvrage remarquable et qui fait époque dans la science puisque c'est depuis son apparition que la classification générale des mollusques et celle des bivalves ont suivi une marche rationnelle" (Bonola 1839).

3.2. Acknowledging Poli's *Testacea* in Germany, France and England

The first quotation of *Testacea* (to the best of our knowledge) can be found in the famous Wiedemann's *Archiv für Zoologie und Zootomie* (Wiedemann 1800), where quite a large *Auszug des anatomischen und physiologischen Theils der Geschichte der Sicilianischen Schaalthiere von Poli* was reported. This abstract was later referenced in the *Catalogue of Scientific Papers* (1867) compiled by the "Royal Society" of London, thus contributing to disseminate Poli's work in the English-language world.

In 1816, a number of shellfishes described (exclusively or almost exclusively) by Poli were catalogued in the French *Dictionnaire des Sciences Naturelles* (1816, tome III; tome VIII) and, just one year later, the biologist Georges Cuvier largely acknowledged Poli's description of several *testacea* in his *Le regne animal*, even when referring to "his own" species:

Les Orbicules (*Orbicula*. Cuvier). Ont deux valves inégales, dont l'une ronde et conique ressemble, quand on la voit seule, à une coquille de patelle; l'autre est plate et fixée aux rochers. L'animal (*Criopus*. Poli) a les bras recourbes en spirales comme celui des lingules (Cuvier 1817).

Nos mers en produisent une petite espèce (*Patella anomala*, Müll. Zool. Dan. V, 2-6. *Anomia turbinata*. Poli. XXX, 15).

Still in 1818, the renowned *Isis, oder Encyclopädische Zeitung* edited by the German naturalist Lorenz Oken (1818) reported a 40 pages-length summary of Poli's *Testacea*, which was as well later referenced by the "Royal Society" of London.

The texts mentioned (in German and French) likely acted as "primary" sources for the impressive Poli's malacological work, whose relevance was easily recognized by a number of "secondary" authors. In the following we limit ourselves just to report a certainly incomplete list of textbooks and essays quoting Poli's *Testacea* during 1800s:

- Schweigger A.F. (1820). *Handbuch der Naturgeschichte der skelettlosen ungegliederten Thiere*. Leipzig: Dyk'schen.
- Babel F. (1829). *Ueber den Einfluß des Gefäß-Systems auf die Blutbewegung*. Wien: Bauer.
- Geiger P.L. (1829). *Handbuch der Pharmacie*. Heidelberg: Osswald.
- Burmeister H. (1836). *Handbuch der Naturgeschichte*. Berlin: Enslin.
- von Schubert G.H. (1837). *Die Geschichte der Natur*. Erlangen: Palm und Enke.
- Carus C.G. (1838). *Traité élémentaire d'Anatomie comparée*, tome I. Bruxelles: Meline.
- Brüggemann C. (1842). *Die Naturgeschichte in getreuen Abbildungen, mit ausführlicher Beschreibung derselben*. Burmer. Leipzig: E. Eisenach.
- Perty M. (1843). *Allgemeine Naturgeschichte als Philosophische und Humanitätswissenschaft für Naturforscher, Philosophen und das höher gebildete Publikum*. Bern: Fischer.
- Siebold C.T., Stannius H. (1850). *Nouveau manuel d'Anatomie comparée*, second part. Paris: Roret.
- Agassiz L. (1854). *A general catalogue of all books, tracts, and memoirs of Zoology and Geology*, vol. 4. London: The Ray Society.
- Bronn H.G. (1862). *Die Klassen und Ordnungen des Thier-Reichs*. Leipzig: Winter'sche.
- Claus. C. (1868). *Grundzüge der Zoologie*. Marburg: Elwert'sche.

3.3. A mystery unveiled: *The Paper Nautilus*

Tough the documented success, *Testacea Utriusque Siciliae* was not the only naturalist work by Poli that was widely recognized outside Italy. Quite a similar sort was reserved to the last scientific work by the Neapolitan scientist, which was very promptly divulged abroad by the two French G. Cuvier and A.M.C. Duméril:

Le chevalier Poli, dans la séance du 14 décembre 1824, a lu à l'Académie des sciences de Naples, un Memoire sur le Nautile ou l'*Argonauta Argo* de Linné. Ce mollusque connu depuis la plus haute antiquité, et qu'Aristote a parfaitement décrit,

quant à la manière dont il navigue à la surface de la mer dans les temps calmes, a fixé l'attention des naturalistes de toutes les époques, et a été pour eux un problème bien difficile à comprendre, et qu'ils se sont essayé à l'envi de résoudre (Annales des Sciences Naturelles 1825).

The “attention of naturalists” rested, indeed, on Poli's work on the Paper Nautilus, to the point that the news of it was later relaunched³ by the Baron de Férussac in the *Bulletin des Sciences Naturelles et de Géologie* (1825), and finally reported in the *Catalogue of Scientific Papers* (1867) compiled by the “Royal Society” of London.

It is particularly interesting, also for biographical and historical reasons, to read the account of Poli's talk of December 1824 given in the minutes of the “Royal Academy of Sciences” of Naples:

Cotesto mollusco pescato presso alle rive di Posillipo dalla Maestà del Re nostro Signore [Francis I], fu trasmesso del tutto vivo all'autore [Poli], e l'istessa M.S. gli diede un largo campo non solo di esaminarlo accuratamente in tutte le sue parti, ma (avendolo conservato per qualche tempo nella R. Peschiera di Portici) di osservare le particolarità a tutti ignote riguardanti la sua generazione. Vide egli il meccanismo onde le uova cacciate dall'utero dell'animale attaccavasi mano mano al suo guscio, e lo sviluppo giornaliero dell'embrione in ciascun uovo, in cui ebbe anche la sorte di scorgere chiaramente per mezzo del microscopio abbozzata la sua navicella, ond'è che resta dimostrato ad evidenza che la conchiglia si genera nell'uovo insieme coll'animale. Quindi rendesi chiaro l'errore di coloro i quali pretendono che siffatta conchiglia non appartenga al mollusco dell'Argonauta, ma che sia da esso usurpata, non altrimenti che il *Cancer Bernardus* s'impatronisce e vive nelle conchiglie di altri molluschi. Quistione che viene risolta dall'autore anche con altri argomenti.

L'altra gran quistione che si agita grandemente tra i Naturalisti è quella se cotesto animale sia o no naturalmente attaccato alla sua conchiglia. Il Sig.r Poli assicura col fatto, che non ha veruna sorta di legame: e poichè in questa posizione non potrebbesi affatto produrre il successivo accrescimento della conchiglia, dimostra egli con validi argomenti come ciò possa addivenire.

In forza delle sue accurate e reiterate osservazioni, smentisce egli alcune bubbole che sonosi spacciate sul detto altrui intorno ad alcune parti che erroneamente sono state attribuite a cotesto animale, e sono in disamina altre particolarità di simigliante natura: ond'è che per tal modo la storia dell'Argonauta Argo non ha bisogno di ulteriore schiarimento (SAN, f. 2039, p. 176).

4. Geological influences

A certainly less known (if not at all unknown) aspect of Poli's scientific work concerned geology. His contribution to this branch of science was not limited to the known

³ “Ainsi l'histoire de l'Argonaute est complètement éclaircie, et l'opinion émise par M. de Férussac est confirmée par l'observation directe du célèbre Poli” (*Bulletin des Sciences Naturelles et de Géologie* 1825).

Memoria sul Tremuoto (Poli 1806) – written to detail the violent earthquake in Central and Southern Italy of July 25, 1805 –, where he also speculated about possible explanations of the seismic phenomena. Poli, indeed, did make several experiments and researches about the Mount Vesuvius that caught the attention of the famous German naturalist and explorer Alexander von Humboldt.

In the travel diary for his 1799-1804 journey, later published in different languages (Humboldt 1814), we find two references to Poli's observations. The first one just concerned the height of Vesuvius:

It was the eruption of 1794, which caused the great inequality of the two brinks of the crater; this unevenness was 71 toises in 1805. Mr. Poli found Vesuvius, a short time before, 606 toises in height (Humboldt 1814).

Instead, the second reference was more “geological” in nature, regarding the composition of lavas:

It is nevertheless asserted, that lavas including fragments of granite have been found on the elevated plain of Retama. M. Broussonet informed me, a short time before his death, that, on a hill above Guimar, fragments of mica-slate, containing beautiful plates of specular iron had been found. I can affirm nothing respecting the accuracy of this observation, which it would be so much the more important to verify, as Mr. Poli, of Naples, is in possession of a fragment of rock thrown out by Vesuvius, which I found to be a real mica-slate. Every thing that tends to enlighten us with respect to the site of the volcanic fire, and the position of rocks subject to its action, is highly interesting to geology (Humboldt 1814).

Interesting enough, in both cases the German naturalist – who, evidently, personally knew Poli – acknowledged his “accuracy” in doing science and, more importantly, adopted Poli's results.

Even more intriguing is the unexpected fact that Poli's results about *Testacea* had, as well, influenced geological studies. The President of the “Geological Society” of London, G.B. Greenough, already in 1819 recognized that:

Poli has found, in the bay of Naples, many shells, and Maratti, many zoophytes and madrepores, which are usually considered to be the productions only of distant seas. These discoveries, however, do not take away from the marvelous; they only keep it in the back-ground. The resemblance between the Sub-Appennine fossils and the recent shells of the Mediterranean and Adriatic, if established, is a coincidence, extraordinary indeed, but fortuitous; for it is evident, that these fossils were interred at the period in which strata were deposited, at a period when the relative positions of land and sea were different from what they are at present; when perhaps the Adriatic and Mediterranean were not in existence (Greenough 1819).

Poli did not, evidently, practice about geology (apart from the *Memoria sul Tremuoto*), but it is nevertheless interesting that his accurate experimental observations – practiced in different areas of science – did have a non-negligible influence in scholars through-

out Europe. Later in 1800, indeed, we still find (secondary) references to such “geological influences”:

- *Abhandlungen des Kaiserlich-Königlichen Geologischen Reichsanstalt* (1870). Wien: K.K. Geologischen Reichsanstalt.
- Davidson T. (1886). *A monograph on the British fossil brachiopoda*, vol. VI. London: The Paleontological Society.

5. Conclusions

We continued the search for and study of possible archival sources concerning Poli's life and work. In the present contribution, in addition to novel, interesting biographical information, we have pointed out how the results obtained by Poli in his natural science investigations – not limited to mollusks, but including geological studies as well – were well received by scholars all over Europe, the influence of those results extending throughout the XIX century. The emerging picture about the Molfetta's scientist is then getting rid of apologetic (or anti-apologetic) encrustations, which for too much time has not allowed the appropriate recognition of one of the most influential scientific contributors in the Kingdom of Naples. The modernization of the most important Italian state in the course of XIX century was just a result of the scientific and – more in general – cultural substrate prepared by Giuseppe Saverio Poli.

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