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PRIVATE LETTERS, PUBLIC INTERESTS

THE ROLES OF THE PUBLISHED SCIENTIFIC
CORRESPONDANCE IN CENTRAL AND
SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE

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Enlightenment,
University of Edinburgh

15 July 2019



Philipp Hackert (1737-1807), Vesuvius eruption in 1774
(courtesy by Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Kassel).

QUESTIONS:

- What were the editors' strategies in selecting the scientific (mineralogical) letters to be published?
- Which audience was targeted?
- What functions did the printed letters perform in the public space?
- How did the foreign editors select the letters to be translated?
- Who were the translators and which audience was targeted in a foreign context?

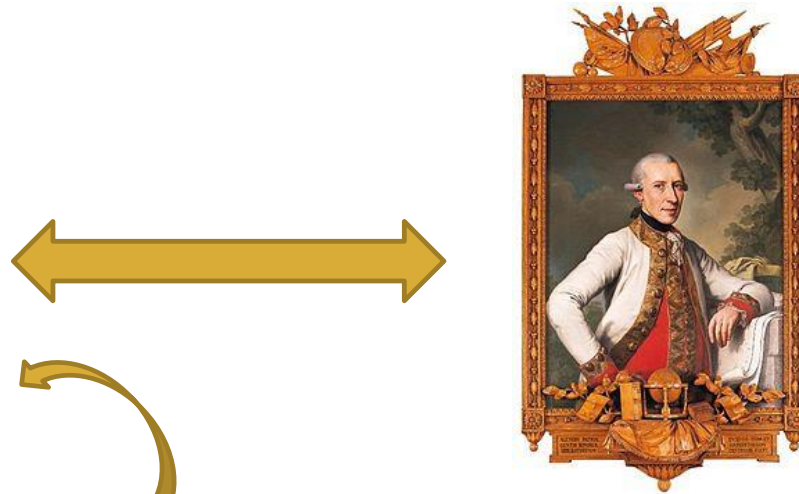
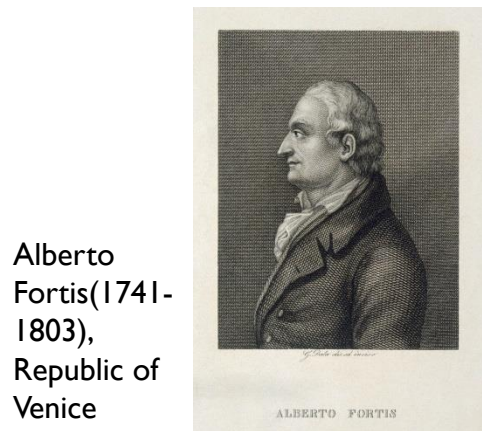
-reconstruction of the past cultural practices or sociohistorical contexts related to the transmission of information by using published correspondances as data
-the strong performative potential of published pletters



Courtesy by Wellcome Collection

TWO CASE STUDIES FROM CENTRAL AND SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE

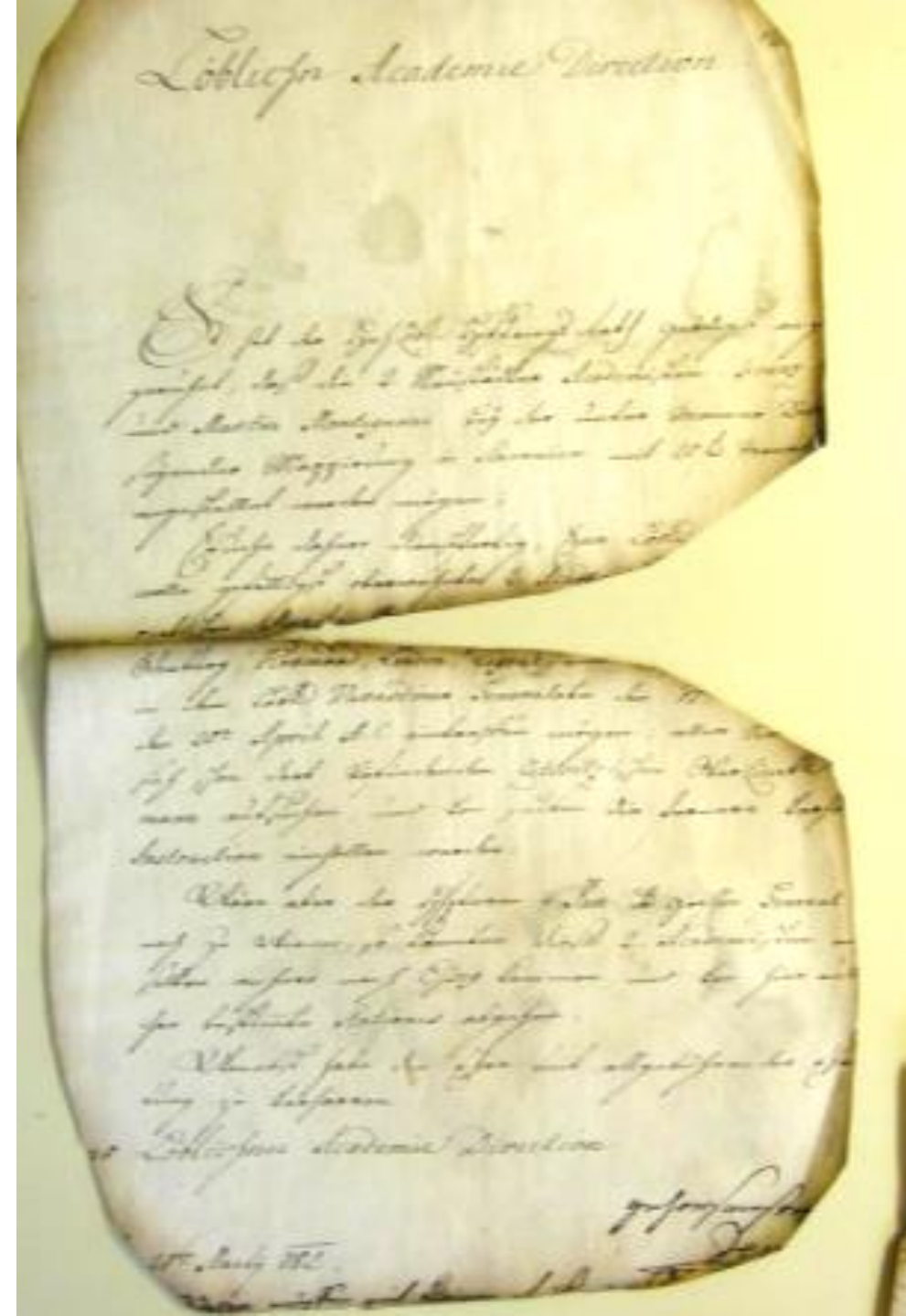
the addressees or correspondents of eminent European mineralogists— two members of the LEARNED ARISTOCRACY



**NETWORK
RESEAU**

A COMMON POINT - MISSING CORRESPONDANCES

- **IGNAZ VON BORN** – ca. 30 and something letters preserved in his recipients archives
- **FRANZ JOSEPH KINSKY** - a dozen of letters to his recipients; a couple of hundred half-burnt and severely damaged letters at the War Archives in Vienna; some letters at the Archive of the National Library in Prague; saved excerpts from the letters to his wife during the military campaign in 1788 (a description of the Croatian lands)
- **ALBERTO FORTIS** – ca. 1687 letters to his recipients; none to Tomo Bassegli with whom he made a *grande tour* to Switzerland
- **TOMO BASSEGLI** – just one letter to Alberto Fortis preserved



KINSKY'S DISCOVERY OF AN EXTINGUISHED VOLCANO - 1773



High-born Count!

It is impossible to spread the knowledge of natural history in a country in which **the first aristocracy** does not find pleasure in this useful science. The naturalist must see and examine the objects which he wants to know, and listen to nature in its workshops... However, those who have the ability and the courage to deal with this knowledge are mostly lacking in the goods of fortune But who **among our nobility** has ever even thought of encouraging talents to seek out, bring together, and make known the treasures, which the open-handed nature has so extensively allocated to the spacious Austrian states?



Komorní hůrka (Kammerbühl) volcano near the Czech town of Cheb

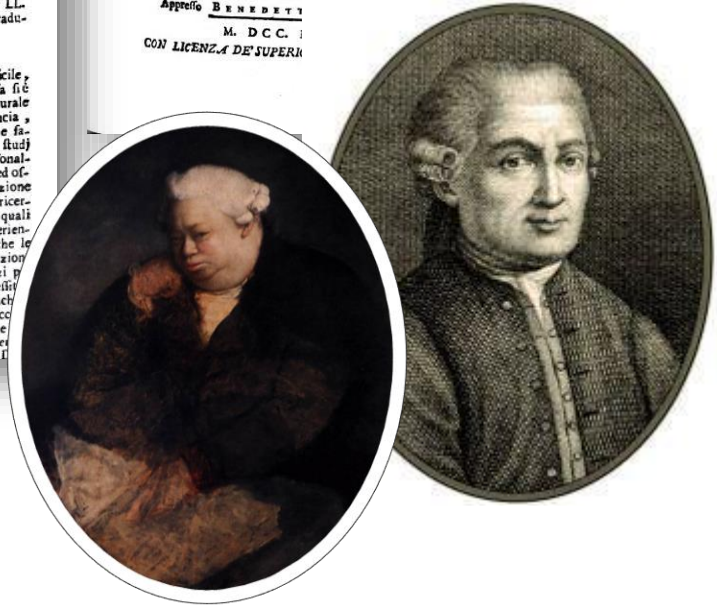
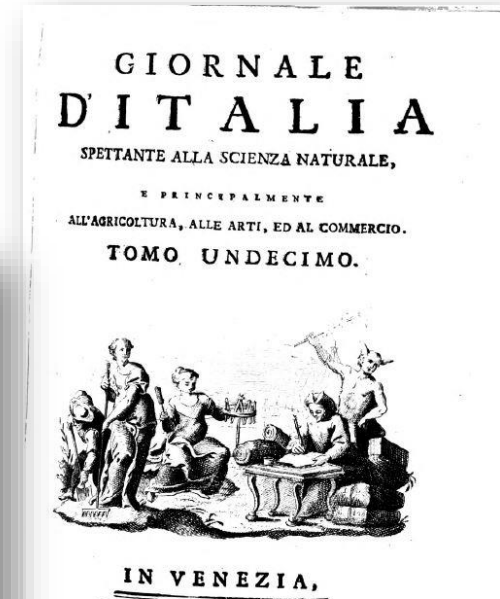
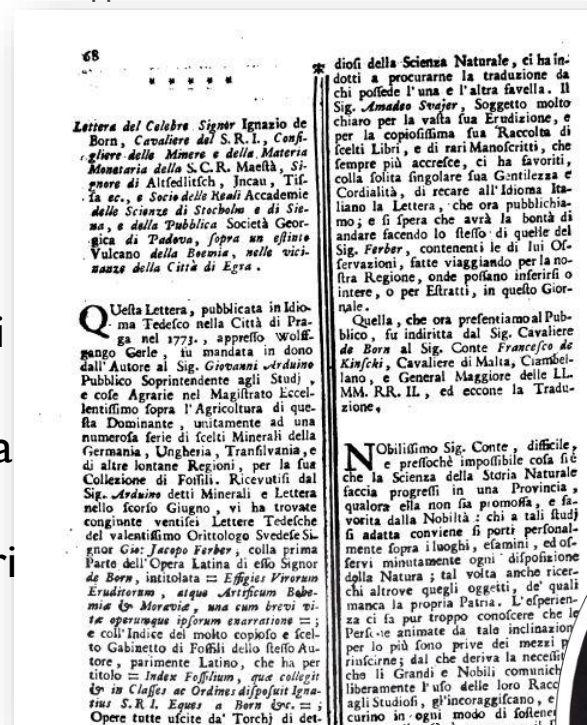


2. TRANSLATION IN *GIORNALE D'ITALIA SPETTANTE ALLA SCIENZA NATURALE* - 1775

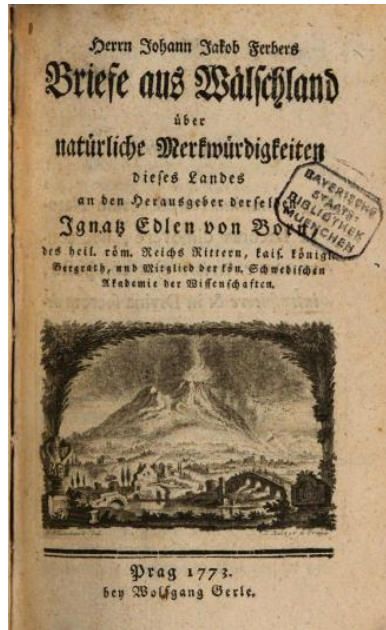
„Lettera del Celebre Signor Ignazio de Born, cavaliere del S.R.I., Consigliere delle Miniere e della Materia Monetaria della S.C.R. Maesta, Signore di Altsedlitsch, Incau, Tissa ec., e socio di Stocholm e di Siena, e della Pubblica Società Georgica di Padova, sopra un estinto vulcano della Boemia, nelle vicinanze della Citta di Egra”, *Giornale d'Italia spettante alla scienza naturale, e principalmente all'agricoltura, alle arti, ed al commercio*, In Venezia, appresso Benedetto Milocco, t. II, pp. 68-76.

Questa lettera, pubblicata in idioma tedesco nella città di Praga nel 1773, appresso Wolffgango Gerle, fu mandata in dono dall'Autore al Sig. Giovanni Arduino pubblico soprintendente agli studi, e cose agrarie nel Magistrato Eccellentissimo, unitamente ad una numerosa serie di scelti minerali della Germania, Ungheria, Transilvania, e di altre lontane regioni, per la sua collezione di fossili. ... La lusinga nostra che la versione italiana degli scritti alemmani de' lodati due celebri mineralogisti sia per riuscir grata a' nostri dilettranti e studiosi della scienza naturale, e ci ha indotti a procurarne la traduzione da chi possiede l'una e l'altra favella.” (p. 68)

Amadeo Sv

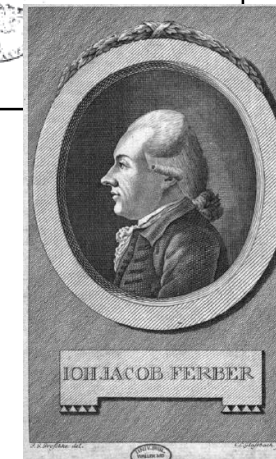
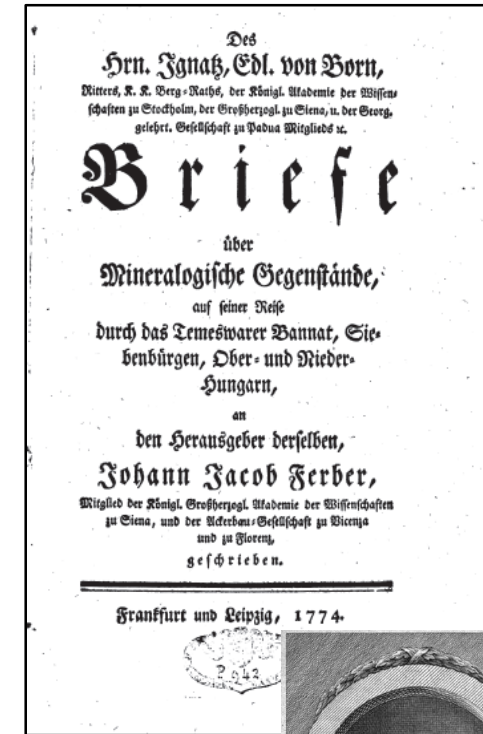


THE MEDIATION OF THE SWEDISH NATURALIST JOHANN JAKOB FERBER (1743-1790)



“The letters he wrote to me, as often as he had collected sufficient material, seemed to me attractive and instructive enough to make them public. Although I have obtained the consent of my friend for this project with difficulty, I nevertheless expect from his friendship with me that he will the less disapprove this my enterprise because I know that he is happy to offer his hand to everything that can serve the dissemination of knowledge in natural history. And this is certainly what the publication of his observations serves for.” (Ignaz von Born, *Preliminary report*)

-a mineralogical examination of Italy - NEW!

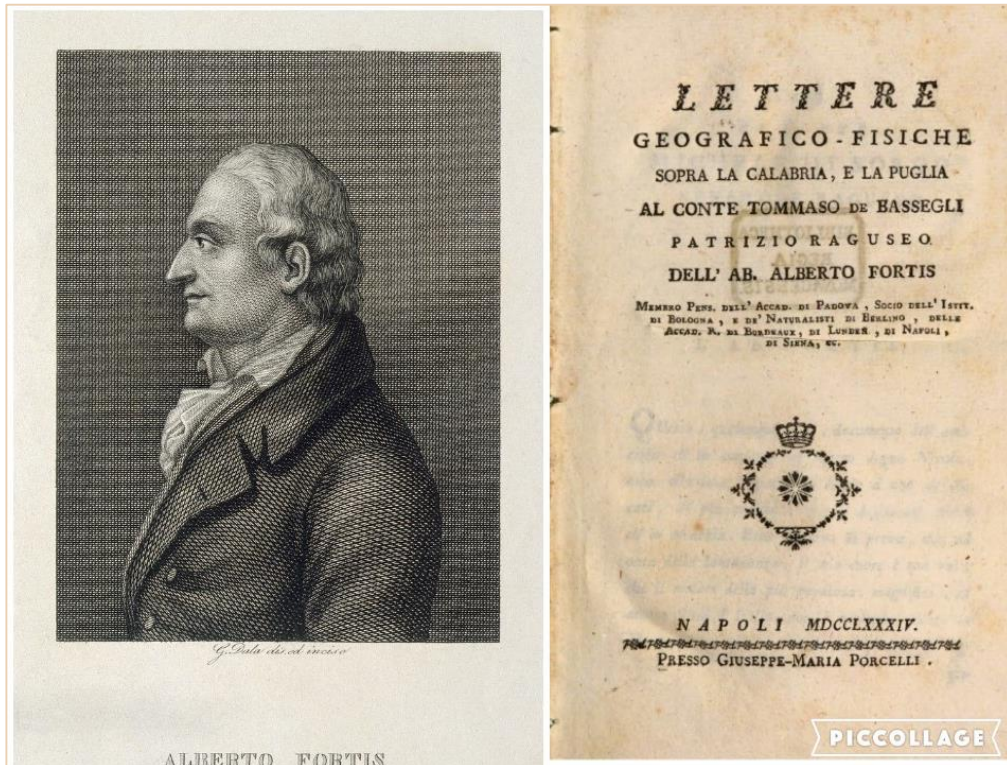


“Although I must confess that I have not received permission from you for this purpose, regardless of my urgent requests, although I believed that I was entitled to claim it after the rights of retribution.” (Johann Jacob Ferber)

Courtesy of Uppsala University Library-Waller Collection.

PROPOSAL FOR THE ENRICHMENT OF THE KINGDOM OF NAPLES - 1784

- letters dedicated to the Dubrovnik (Ragusa) senator Miho Sorokočević (Michele Sorgo) and addressed to his nephew Tomo Bassegli
- the potential of the exploitation of the saltpeter, a key component of gun powder, at Pulo di Molfetta



AL CONTE MICHELE DI SORGO SENATORE RAGUSEO L'AB. FORTIS.

«Questo, qualunque siasi, documento dell'amicizia ch'io conservo al vostro degno nipote, esca alla luce fregiato col nome d'uno de'più cari, de' più antichi, de' più desiderati Amici ch'io m'abbia. esso vi serva di prova, che, ad onta della lontananza, il mio cuore è con voi;» (Alberto Fortis)



TRANSLATION – THE CENSORED LETTERS PUBLISHED-1786-1788

Gegenwärtige Briefe sind den freunden der Naturgeschichte darum bisher unbekannt geblieben, weil der Verfasser nur 50 Exemplare davon für seine Bekannte hatte abdrucken lassen. In dieser Uebersetzung sind noch Briefe (der erste und der vierte) hinzugekommen, die der Verfasser handschriftlich mitgetheilet hat, und denen man es bald ansehen wird, daß sie schwerlich durch irgend eine italienische Censur hätten gehen können. ... Uebrigens haben Kenner und Freunde der Naturhistorie die Bekanntschaft mit deisen Briefen einem Manne zu danken, dem sie schon so viel neues, gründliches und nützlichendes in ihrem Fache danken: ich meyne den herrn Hofrath von Born in Wien, der sie mir zur uebersetzung mitgetheilet, und den mineralogischen Theil der letztern durchgesehen und berichtigen hat.

Present letters have remained unknown to the friends of natural history, the author had only fifty copies of them for his acquaintances printed. In translation the letters (the first and the fourth) have been added which the author has given in writing, and to which one will soon see that they scarcely pass any Italian censorship. By the way, connoisseurs and friends of natural history have to know the acquaintance of the letters to a gentleman they already thank so much new, thorough and useful in their field, the gentleman Hofrath von Born in Vienna, who will translate the letters communicated and rectified the mineralogical part of the latter. In my acquaintance



Friedrich Schulz
(1762-1798), author
and editor in
Wieland's *Teutscher
Merkur*

“If you return home to the delight of your family with the healthy mind and body and enriched with useful knowledge, to promote the public good of your native city, or to live for the sciences in philosophical peace; if your courage sinks, due to all the obstacles which one moment jealousy, the next sleepiness, and sometimes natural republican inconstancy put in your way, I hope you will act as Pomponius Atticus would: to let the applicants apply, to let the ambitious forge plans, and to let the rank-addicts strive for the rank, while you are constantly tracking down the course and nature of nature with peace and serenity in your heart.”
(Alberto Fortis to Tomo Bassegli, First letter,)



