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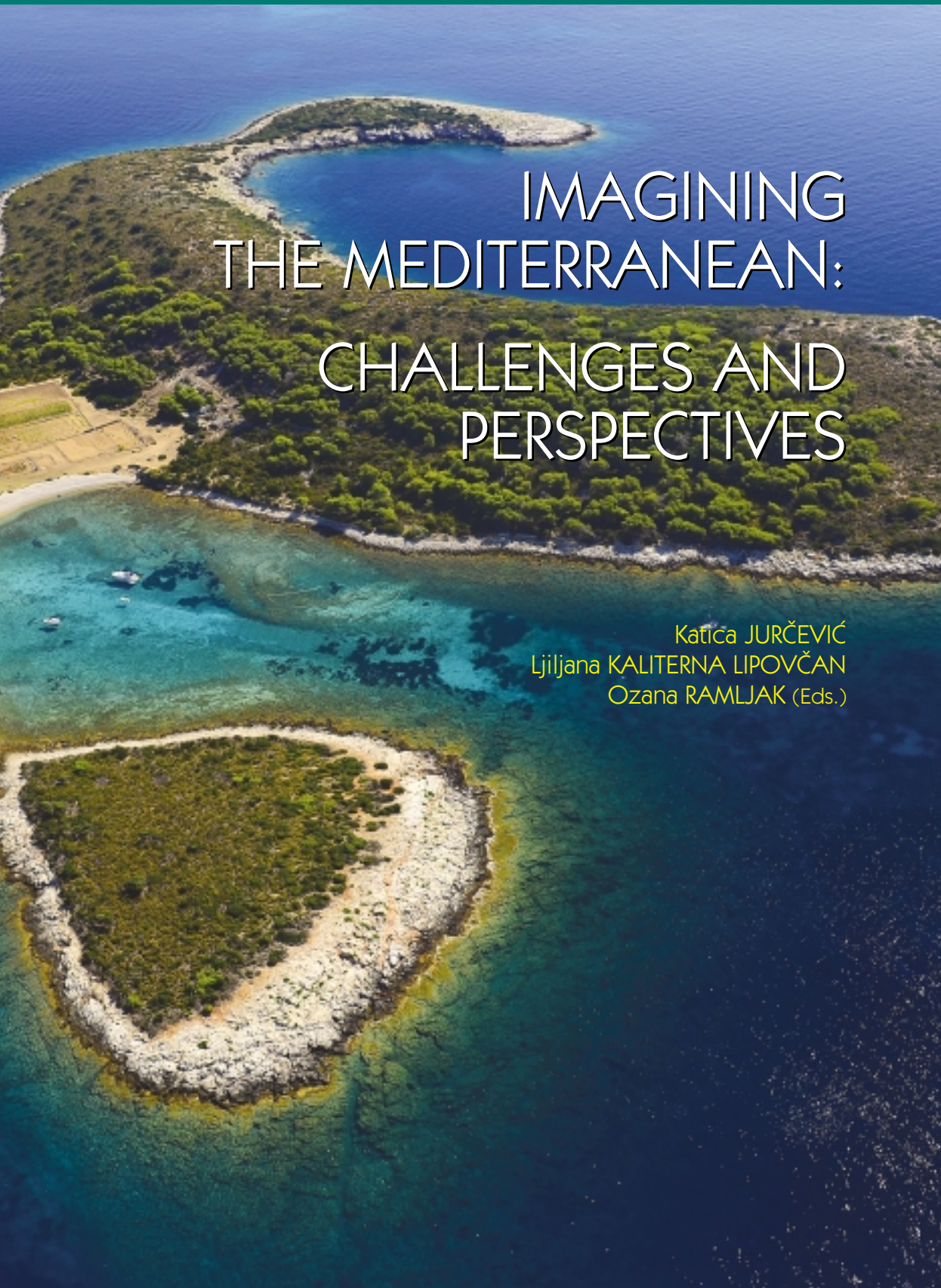

IMAGINING THE MEDITERRANEAN: CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES

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Jelka VINCE PALLUA

CROATIAN ISLANDS VIS AND CRES AS PARADIGMS OF MEDITERRANEAN ISLAND STUDIES

Abstract

The Mediterranean is one of the three main parts of the world (the other two being the Scandinavian and American part), where at the end of the 20th century island studies developed — the so called nisso(no)logy, a multidisciplinary satudy with islands as its focus. From that time, the growth of academic writing on islands has increased. Many Western mainlanders' concepts about islands — such as isolation, peripherality, insularity, small size, small society, dependence, fragility, paradise, archaic, conservative, remote, uninhabited etc. — can be qualified as uncritical and as taking for granted powerful, yet colonial images. In this contribution, two Croatian islands — Vis and Cres — are considered as the paradigms of Mediterranean island studies. The contribution is mostly based on the testimonies of Western mainlander, Italian theologian, naturalist and famous explorer and traveler, abbot Alberto Fortis from Padua, Italy, who, at the end of the 18th century, visited the eastern part of the Adriatic Sea. Based on Fortis' colonial mental geography/ethnography of the islands Vis and Cres, and imaginative mapping of ourselves and others, the author of the article gives answers to some of the crucial contemporary island-studies concepts as reflected when (re)thinking (Mediterranean) islands. Besides the well-known examples of islands like Trobriand, Samoa or Andaman Islands, known to have paved the way for the birth of cultural anthropology, the Croatian island of Cres is revealed as the one to have grounded the Adriatic foundation for European ethnology/cultural anthropology presented here as a newly introduced science in 18th century Europe.

Key words: *island studies, Mediterranean islands, island/mainland, the Adriatic, mental geography/ethnography, peripherality*

The Mediterranean is one of the three main parts of the world (the other two being the Scandinavian and American part) where island studies developed — the so-called *nisso(no)logy*, a multidisciplinary science with islands as its focus. From the end of the 20th century, the growth of academic writing on islands has increased. It has been noticed that island studies have been directed by outside forces and not *by* islanders themselves or *with* them, but *of* them. The preposition *of* reminds us of a similar designation concerning well-known concepts such as "anthropology *in* the Mediterranean" and "anthropology *of* the Mediterranean", a differentiation put forth by anthropologist David D. Gilmour some 30 years ago. Let me point out that our Mediterranean Islands Conference host, the island of Vis, is one among 718 islands and 389 reefs in the Adriatic Sea — the "small Mediterranean", as famous French historian Ferdinand Braudel-called it.

In island studies or the "study of islands on their own terms," as G. McCall defined it (1994, p.106), the need for taking the islanders' narrative into consideration and to shift focus from the mainland to the island is stressed. Many Western mainlanders' concepts about islands — such as isolation, peripherality, insularity, small size, small society, dependence, fragility, paradise, archaic, conservative, remote, uninhabited etc.[1] — can be qualified as uncritical and as taking for granted powerful, yet colonial images.

In this contribution, two Croatian islands — Vis and Cres — are considered as the paradigms of (Mediterranean) island studies. The contribution is mostly based on the testimonies of Western mainlander, Italian theologian, naturalist and famous explorer and traveler, abbot Alberto Fortis from Padua, Italy, who, at the end of the 18th century, visited the eastern part of the Adriatic Sea, its coast with the hinterland, as well as many islands, including the islands of Vis and Cres. Fortis described his travels and explorations in two books. The second book,*Viaggio in Dalmazia/Travels into Dalmatia* (Venice, 1774), is a world-famous book translated into many languages. However, his first book *Saggio d' osservazionisopra l' isola di ChersoedOsero/Essay of the observations about the islands of Cres and Lošinj* (Venice, 1771), has not been translated from Italian into any other language and was therefore not much discussed, especially not by cultural anthropologists.[2] This gave me an opportunity to be the first to come to some quite interesting conclusions (Vince Pallua, 2007, pp. 135-146).

How are the most common concepts of remoteness and peripherality reflected in the writings of Alberto Fortis when (re)thinking (Mediterranean) islands? Are these two concepts essentially related concepts, that is, concepts that are comprehensible only with reference to the "near" and the "central"? Can remoteness and peripherality ever be experienced internally, or are they simply projections from the outside?

Vis, our MIC host island, is taken here as a reference point for the questions above.[3] In the chapter of "Viaggio" dedicated to the island of Vis (Fortis, 1984, pp. 244-249), the well-known island studies' notion of *peripherality*, being part of Fortis' colonial mental geography, is clearly visible in the statement that "a lot of time was stolen from him by ... the ignorance and mistrust of backward people in the low-populated

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[1] E. Stratford lists some other notions that can be connected with the possible essence of islands: "absolute entities (...) territories, territorial, relational spaces — archipelagos, (inter)dependent, identifiable, relative spaces — bounded but porous, isolated, connected, colonized, postcolonial, redolent of the performative, imaginary, vulnerable to linguistic, cultural, environmental change, robust and able to absorb and modify… utopian and dystopian, tourist meccas, ecological refugia" (Stratford, 2003, p. 495)…

[2] Both books are cited later in an abbreviated form as "Viaggio" and "Saggio". "Saggio" is a book which contains 18 chapters (169 pages written in 18th-century Italian), dealing with archaeology, epigraphy, etymology, history, ethnology, demography, economy, mineralogy etc. It is kept in the National University Library in Zagreb under the register number R VI-8-159.

[3] Like many other Adriatic islands (the coast and the hinterland), Fortis described Vis in "Viaggio", whereas in "Saggio" he described just the islands of Cres and Lošinj, the so called Apsyrtides.

areas distant from Italian culture" (Fortis 1984, p. 244). Similar mental mapping of the islands, the stereotypical perception of them as being peripheral, distant and therefore backward, can be clearly seen in the case of Vis by the seemingly limiting geographical manifestation of the sea as an obstacle, a barrier, a category re-examined in contemporary island studies. Still, Fortis emphasized the onetime splendor and primacy of this island, although, as he says, in the Illyrian Sea, Vis is not the biggest island and is the most distant island from the mainland.[4] He points out that Greek and Roman geographers unanimously gave this island primacy among the islands of the Illyrian Sea. They praise Vis, mentioning that it is a Syracusan colony and a maritime and trading center from ancient times (Fortis, 1984, p. 244). In contemporary island-studies terminology, the notions of *distance* from the mainland and of *independence* from the mainland have been greatly discussed. Fortis points out that, as a Syracusan colony, Vis was independent from the original homeland (Fortis, 1984, p. 245), thus giving us the answer to the question above.

Within the Island/Continent relationship, let me continue with J. Božanić's consideration that explains the notion of independence, the very same attitude of islanders "on their own terms", a phrase already connected with island studies at the beginning of the paper:

> We should get acquainted with the Island: its odors, sounds, its regulations — the law of the Island. It seems to the Continent that it understands the Island, since the Island is, the Continent thinks, small and is the piece of land broken off the Continent. The Island, on the other hand, is self-sufficient and not trying to understand the Continent. The Island doesn't perceive itself as being a detached piece of the Continent. It is the whole land (Božanić, 2010, 119).

It is not necessary to explain why the famous and somewhat witty anecdote is a good continuation of Božanić's reflection on the island's independent focused self-perception, or the autonomous perspective of an island/islanders as being in the "center of the world". To draw a parallel, we have all heard of the anecdote about meteorological news published in a British newspaper about Europe (mainland/the Continent) being cut off from the British Isles by a dense fog and not the other way around, which would imply Britain being cut off from Europe.

After dealing with the notion of peripherality of islands, it is important to recognize that it is the International Small Island Studies Association which was recently very active in striving against the colonial perspective of islands as being peripheral, remote, isolated and (therefore) backward.[5]

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[4] Therefore, obviously considerably detached from the mainland by the sea, the possible barrier, obstacle.

[5] Although in island studies the shift from "explorer-discoverer-colonist" to "custodian-steward-environmentalist" was made, the same colonizing disposition ... and the narrative not enough *by*, *for* or *with* islanders, but one *of* and *about* them remained (Baldacchino, 2008, p. 49). Nev-

Having determined the former independence of Vis, Fortis raises the question of Vis in his own time — in the 18th century — stating that he found Vis dependant on the nearby island of Hvar, this time claiming that it "never had the chance to be an autonomous body" (Fortis, 1984, p. 246). The need to compare an island not (only) with the Continent, but with another island has been emphasized in contemporary island studies (i.e. Baldacchino, 2007, p. 14), and also in the context of geography. As Dahl and Depraetere (2007, p. 64) point out:

> Geographers remind us of the fractal nature of islands: with larger magnification, what may have been a small island off a mainland itself becomes "the mainland" for even smaller islands. Moreover, during the last several years there was the initiative to shift our fixation upon boundaries, dichotomies and borders: land and sea, island and mainland and even from the connections between "island and island". The syntagm "thinking with islands" has been put forward towards the syntagm "thinking with the acrhipelago", the notion that unsettles static tropes of singularity, isolation, dependency and peripherality (Pugh, 2013, p. 9).

Vis was one of the many islands that Fortis had chosen for his travels in the second half of the 18th century during his several trips to Dalmatia described in the previously mentioned book *Viaggio in Dalmazia*, 1774. But Cres, the island that he visited during his first travel to the eastern Adriatic coast and described three years prior to Vis, has, as I have shown (Vince Pallua, 2007), a special place among all the Adriatic islands that he visited.

One has to bear in mind that Fortis' travels were undertaken in the age of Enlightenment when the Adriatic Sea became a conscious ethnographic boundary, a dividing line between the Italians and the Slavs, and simultaneously that between Western and Eastern Europe. At the same time, the Adriatic was the boundary between civilization and primitive customs, the customs of "others", which the Enlightenment found on the Eastern shores of the Adriatic in the customs of the *Morlachs/Morovlachs*,so exotic to Europe, whom Fortis met for the first time on the island of Cres.[6]

It was on the island of Cres, in the northernmost part of the Adriatic Sea, that Fortis' "discovery of the Morlachs" (later much more in Dalmatian hinterland) paved the way for the European "discovery of Dalmatia", which led to the birth of European ethnology/cultural anthropology. This is in concordance with G. Baldacchino's, one of island studies' leading scholars, direct emphasis that it was the islands which have paved the way for the birth of disciplines such as (cultural) anthropology and biogeography

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ertheless, Nadarajah&Grydehoj (2016) point out that *Island Decolonization*, a special thematic section, represents a step in the direction of island studies as a decolonial project and a vital contribution to understanding how decolonization might be understood and, as a result, recognizing the myriad ways of breaking with the colonial trappings still present in the 21st century (Nadarajah&Grydehoj, 2016, p. 441).

[6] The notion of *morlachism* was coined as a consequence of the European fascination with these primitive but noble savages, so modern at that time.

(Baldacchino, 2006, p. 3). The most famous fieldworks on islands — Malinowski's on the Trobriand islands and Radcliffe-Brown's on the Andaman islands (both in 1922), Margaret Mead's on Samoa (in 1928) etc. — were undertaken nearly a century and a half after Fortis'.[7] Arjun Appadurai's interpretation of islands can partially explain the above statement about islands paving the way for the birth of cultural anthropology: "Islands are platforms for the emergence of national identity and for the affirmation of cultural specificity: critical resources, especially in the context of sweeping globalization and the death of cultures and languages. As prototypical ethno-spaces, islands have spearheaded the study of the production of locality" (1996, p. 180). Besides, due to their geographical segregation from the mainland, as M. Blagaić Bergman emphasizes, islands perfectly corresponded to the research paradigm of even more distant and exotic communities which dominated cultural anthropology at the beginning of the last century (2014, p. 1). But even nowadays, such exoticism and mythical representation of the islands efficiently attracts tourists within the travel and tourism industries.

Fortis was not only involved with the birth of cultural anthropology, but also with biogeography, the field of study whose birth Baldacchino (2006, p. 3) connected with the islands as well. Namely, Fortis' initial impetus to come to the other end of the Adriatic was his original geological, mineralogical, paleontological and entomological curiosity with interest in fossils, minerals, seaweed, shells and insects. This initial interest was later transformed into an ethnological/anthropological one when his book about Cres and Lošinj grew into a study about the population of these islands, the traditional culture and their way of life. During his stay on Cres and Lošinj, Fortis matured politically, stopped being merely a neutral observer and became interested in the conditions and ways of life of the islanders and their traditional culture. It was Cres where he ceased to call himself "viaggiatore naturalista"/"traveler naturalist" right on Cres. The political, economic and historical impressions from that trip to Cres have shaped the motives of later "Argonautic research ventures in Dalmatia" by sea and land which paved the wayfor the "discovery of Dalmatia".

It was this new interest that later led him to the Morlachs who had been reported on so extensively by European scholars and whom Fortis first met on the island of Cres. It was, let me reiterate, at the time of the Enlightenment that the Adriatic transformed itself into a distinct ethnographic entity dividing the Italians from the Slavs and Eastern from Western Europe. Moreover, Fortis anticipated the seeds of future ethnological concepts such as "custom", "tradition", "misuse of tradition" and "cultural relativism". At this time, he was, as was all of Europe, fascinated by the exotic and primitive customs of the Morlachs (in "Viaggio" a whole chapter is named *"I costumi dei Morlacchi"/"The Customs of the Morlachs"*). For Europe, Dalmatia was the European "other",

[7] Not to mention Fortis' contemporaries J. J. Rousseau and Ch.-L. Montesquieu, famous representatives of Romanticism, who wrote about the inhabitants of the Caribbean (or Persia) just on the basis of their imaginary travels to these parts of the world.

a non-European civilizational as a whole. In the midst of the old continent — Europe, the primitive other — barbarians were found, similar to those outside Europe, be they Persians, Caribbean, or Hotentots. The Adriatic thus became a subject of mental cartography/imaginative mapping of ourselves and others, the dividing line between "us" and "them", the West and the East. In the multitude of primitive "others", the Morlachs were closest to Europe. All this required was just crossing the Adriatic, "discovering" Dalmatia, as Fortis did, and grounding the Adriatic foundations of European ethnology and cultural anthropology.

Fortis, as we have seen, explored this part of the Adriatic at the end of the 18th century. It was a time when the islands were not viewed as places detached in time and space from the modernity of the mainland. Namely, as J. R. Gillis stresses:

> Until the end of the 19th century there was no perception of detachment and distance of the islands similar to the one today. Until then islands were the object of research, discovery, conquest by adventurers and seamen, as well as fixed points on trade routes. A radical shift was caused by the introduction of the railroad because it was no longer necessary to transport goods by sea. Through the development of technology and the steamboat in the 19th century, islands became more connected. However — paradoxically — regular ship connections did not narrow as much as they widened the notion of distance between the island and the mainland (...) Regular contact with outsiders influenced, namely, an increase of the perceived differences between them and the islanders. The physical isolation was overcome, however "cultural insularity" developed (Gillis, 2004, p. 119, p. 127 — after Blagaić Bergman, 2014, p. 21).

Islands later became imaginative *loci* of primordial, autochthonous forms of life — places of the return to the past.[8] In such a perspective, islands have, to put it metaphorically, become "ethnographic museums" or "the museums of miracles" in the open air. In the Croatian context, to paraphrase some thoughts of Croatian sociologist Ivan Rogić, Croatian civil modernization was characterized, contrary to the European one, by the paradoxical continentalisation which contributed to the affirmation of the already defined peripheral status of islands. Islands thus became an ethnological store and a privileged domain that had a special place in national memory, atlases of fossils of well-advanced social and cultural evolution. Islands emerge from the stigmatic identity of the frontier place only when used for some defensive frontier strategy. The island of Vis, among all Croatian islands, is the best of such examples — from its iden-

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[8] The famous caricaturist Srećko Puntarić wittily used the image of the Croatian touristic motto "Mediteran kakav je nekad bio"/"The Mediterranean as it once was" by presenting a dissappointed tourist in a Dalmatian hotel complaining about the deficiency of electricity and water, just "as it once was."

[9] The importance of this battle for the identity of Vis was recognized by ethnology and cultural anthropology as well (cf. Bermanec, Katić, Oroz & Škrbić Alempijević, 2007).

tity of the spot of the famous Battle of Vis in 1866[9] to the one of a cohabitation with the army in the second half of the 20th century (Rogić, 1994, pp. 438-440).

On the basis of Fortis' mental geography/ethnography of the islands Vis and Cres, the imaginative mapping of ourselves and others, answers to some crucial contemporary island studies concepts as reflected when (re)thinking the (Mediterranean) islands have been given. After well-known examples of islands like Trobriand, Samoa or the Andaman Islands, known to have paved the way for the birth of cultural anthropology, the Croatian island of Cres is revealed as the one to have grounded the Adriatic foundation to European ethnology/cultural anthropology presented here as a newly introduced science in 18th-century Europe. One should ask the question if island studies can be perceived as a legitimate new science as well. It must be stressed that it has been agreed that island studies cannot necessarily be considered a new science or discipline, perhaps not even as a discipline-in-waiting: island studies need not have a distinctive methodology but they need to have primarily an inter-, or even trans-, disciplinary focus of critical inquiry and scholarship (Baldachino, 2006, p. 9). The variety of the disciplines in the sections offered at the Mediterranean Islands Conference on Vis was therefore on the right track.

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