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THE SLAVONIC DIMENSION OF TRIESTE AS AN IMPERIAL PORT-CITY, 1751 – 1914

The first visible Slavonic presence in Trieste dates back to the mid-18th century, when some Illyric families responded to the invitation Maria Theresa had issued to merchants of Greek faith, to settle in the Porto Franco and make the most of both economic and religious privileges. “Illyric” was the name that had come to prevail in the Habsburg administration since the early 18th century for the Southeastern Slav population of the Greek rite. Within the Greek religious community in Trieste, congregated around the newly-built St. Spyridon church, there were soon enough Greeks and Illyrics who took to competing for hegemony. The Austrian administration settled the dispute in favour of the Illyrics, as was to be expected, given the special loyalty of the Illyric Mitropolija and the Illyric regiments to the crown. At the time, Illyric merchants in Trieste were mostly engaged in high-risk trade, which allowed some of them to quickly amass great fortunes while the less fortunate went under. A fleeting but meaningful chapter of Trieste’s intercourse with the Slavonic world was the repeated appearances of the Russian navy in the port’s waters during the Napoleonic wars. All in all, the main feature of the Illyric community in Trieste was that of a confessional “nation”, well-rooted and visible in the local institutions of mercantile self-government, but at risk of being sidelined because of its limited numbers. The population of Trieste had seen impressive growth in the second half of the 19th century, fuelled initially by the arrival of poor or landless peasants from Slovenian Carniola, and then by migrants mainly from Istria and from Italy, attracted to Trieste by job opportunities in the nuovissimo port under construction. In the face of the rising Slav/Slovenian presence in the city, Austrian censuses (based on Umgangssprache) recorded a steady decline of Slovenian percentages. Such trend was suddenly and dramatically reversed in the 1910 census, showing that the immigrants were by then making the most of the Slovenian alternative to Italian assimilation.

Key words: Habsburg Trieste, Slavs in Trieste, Illyric merchants, Russian fleet, sub-urban Slavism, Carniolian emigration, Slovenian associationism, Italian assimilation, Italian nationalism, Austrian censuses

The Slavonic presence in the imperial port-city of Trieste over two centuries had two dimensions – one visible and the other invisible. How one prevailed over the other at different points in time was not related to some intrinsic quality of the groups of people inhabiting the city: it depended instead on the attitudes of these groups and above all, on the mental categories of the observers, be they rival groups, political authorities, or even professional historians. Suffice it to say that the vibrant national struggle in the final decades of Habsburg rule in the city was about the Slovenians’ ambition to assert their visibility in the urban spaces.

1. Illyric merchants for the Porto Franco

But let us start from the beginning. The first visible Slavonic presence in Trieste originates somewhere in time around mid-18th century. Thirty years earlier, Emperor Charles VI had attempted to vitalize Trieste, then hardly more than a village of fishers and smugglers

with an impoverished patriciate, by granting it the status of Porto Franco and promising freedom of trade to anyone who chose to settle in it (including criminals and bankrupts). Sadly, the hoped-for take-off in trade did not take place. At considerable financial cost, the state started work on some infrastructure, reclaiming the salt flats right out of the walls of the old town and offering up for sale the land so reclaimed. But there still was a shortage of human capital.

In 1749, having got over the anxieties of the War of Succession, Maria Theresa re-launched her father's plan, and promulgated an "Instruction" aimed at stimulating and regulating the development of the port and town of Trieste¹. It was an impressive package of public works, which also contained what we might call a software component, regarding the freedom of worship that was granted to those non-Catholic merchant communities that would immigrate to the town. In those very months, the court offices were receiving pressing petitions from the Serbian Metropolitan and other Serbian church dignitaries in Austrian territories asking for the renewal of the old Leopoldine charters of religious privilege issued to the Serbs who had escaped to Habsburg territories 60 years earlier, as an incentive to immigrate to mercantile Trieste. And so it was that two years later, explicitly stating that her purpose was to make the town and its port grow, Maria Teresa granted freedom of worship and of communitarian organization to immigrants of non-united Greek-oriental religion.

Some explanation is needed here. In no Austrian document of those years will we find the word "Serb" or "Serbian". In Trieste, religious freedom was granted to the Greeks as a confessional group, but throughout the Mediterranean and also in the minds of Maria Theresa's counsellors, Greek was a synonym for merchant. In Trieste, the Slav-speaking Greeks were called "s'ciavoni" by the people, and "Illyrics" or "Graeco-Illyrics" by the Austrian authorities. The word "Illyric" had a classical origin with a territorial meaning. But at a certain point in the late Middle Ages, a semantic shift began whereby the word Illyric was no longer used to describe the territory of the classical age, but denoted instead the peoples who inhabited those areas in the early modern age: as a result, Illyrics came to mean Southern Slavs, but more precisely Catholic Southern Slavs, the simple reason being that the "Illyric" concept had originated mainly in the humanistic-Dalmatian intellectual area. There was a further development in the 17th century in the minds and writings of those Catholic-Reform clergymen (themselves mostly Croatian-Dalmatian) whose Uniate perspective led them to emphasize the symbolic connections and compatibilities between the two confessional traditions rooted in *Illyricum*. What's more, such "interconfessional Illyrism" could be useful in fostering the integration of the *Militärgrenze* Orthodox into the Habsburg Empire². The final step was the assigning of the Illyric name to the Southern Slav population of Greek rite in the Habsburg environment, and this took place at the turn of the 17th century when the new appellative was simultaneously employed by a Serbian diplomat and commander and a Croatian historian and philologist, and then received into the

¹ Aleksander Panjek, "Chi costruì Trieste. Edilizia, infrastrutture, mercato immobiliare e servizi tra pubblico e privato (1719-1918)", in: *Storia economica e sociale di Trieste (SEST)*, II, *La città dei traffici 1719-1918*, eds. Roberto Finzi – Loredana Panariti – Giovanni Panjek, Trieste 2003, 648.

² Here I am following the lesson of Zrinka Blažević, *Ilirizam prije ilirizma*, Zagreb 2008, 214-291.

³ *Ibid.*, 291-335.

ruler's charters³. So it was that the Orthodox Slavs in Habsburg territory, previously called "Valachi" or "Rasciani", began to be called Illyrics, just like the church led by the newly settled Metropolitan of Karlowitz with its seven bishoprics along the Military Frontier, and the Illyric *Hofkanzlei* (then *Hofdeputation*) established in Vienna to deal with Illyric affairs, not to mention an Illyric printer's establishment in Vienna, complete with an Illyric censor.

It would be wrong to think that the rather artificial nature of their name had a blurring effect on the identity of the Illyrics of Trieste. Archival sources such as naturalization acts or testamentary dispositions⁴ show they had a very clear awareness of their territorial origins (mostly Ottoman Sarajevo and Herzegovina, Ragusa, Venetian *Boka kotorska*) and community belonging. In their newly-acquired homeland, the Illyrics were organized, so to speak, as the "Slavonic section" of the Greek confessional nation, and as is easy to imagine, the coexistence of the two groups within the same church (built with common capital in addition to a loan from the Queen/Empress) was troubled by the question of the language of liturgy and of the care of souls. The quarrel between the Greeks and Illyrics to decide who should have control over the common St. Spyridon's church lasted twenty years and was eventually resolved by the Austrian authorities, in 1781, in favour of the Illyrics. Once a reimbursement plan for the expenses involved had been agreed upon, the Greeks had to pick up their things and leave, and in a few years they built a church of their own just a few hundred meters from St. Spyridon. This outcome might seem surprising were we merely to look at the relative importance of the two groups in Trieste, where the Greeks easily outstripped the Serbs, both in terms of population and the value of their trade. But the Illyrics were in a position to put forward a different and not exactly mercantile argument, namely the ecclesiastic and military services they provided to the Sovereign, in the form of the Illyric Metropolitan in Karlowitz and the Illyric regiments at the Military Frontier⁵.

Apart from their privileged relationship with the Austrian government, the Illyrics were very visible in town because of their contribution to the high-risk trade of Trieste port. The most prominent merchant in town at the time, Iovo Curtovich, who had started his career as a porter, was able to build himself a huge mansion, right in the middle of the new Borgo Teresiano, facing the port, and from it he moved his flotilla between Amsterdam and Smyrna, with expeditions to Philadelphia and China, not even turning his nose up at the "dirty job" of picking up goods from the ports of the Levant hit by epidemics⁶. As an old man, it fell to his lot to be taken hostage by Napoleon's occupying troops as a guarantee for the payment of the extraordinary charge levied on the town: but after all, this was just one of the minor inconveniences of being a member of the Triestin economic élite.

But high-risk trade was not always rewarded with money and success. Just think, for example, of the sad case of Filippo Cetcovich. He was one of the most prominent members of the Illyric community and a member of the Church Chapter. In 1814, he wound up his business and though still young, he made his will. In his preliminary dispositions,

⁴ Marco Dogo, "Narod pobožnih trgovaca. Srpsko-ilirska zajednica u Trstu, 1748-1908", in: *Svetlost i senke. Kultura Srba u Trstu*, ed. Marija Mitrović, Beograd 2007, 79-87 (cyr.).

⁵ *Ibid.*, 72-73.

⁶ His was the first ship ("La città di Vienna") to sail from Trieste for the Far East: Walter Markov, "La Compagnia asiatica di Trieste (1775-1785)", *Studi Storici*, II/1, 1961, 3-28.

he contrived to leave a 200-florin charitable bequest to the town's Hospital, to the poor of the Illyric nation, to St. Spiridon's Church in Trieste and to St. Nicholas' church at Boka kotorska. To his heirs – his wife and six children – he left two houses, some ownership shares in cargo boats, and some credits. But, alas!, warned the testator, in the accounts register the executors would find

many debts caused by the numerous adversities that have stricken me in the past critical circumstances, that is to say,

- by *paper money* [that is, the paper florin or banco-zettel the Austrians started to print in the late 1790s, thereby fuelling widespread inflation],

- by *sea privateers*, corsairs [mainly licensed by the British during the Napoleonic Wars],

- by the burdensome and disproportionate *war contributions* [imposed by the French upon the town of Trieste on three occasions],

- by the *loss of my 30,000 piastres* of capital in the company in Smyrna,

- by the loss of the capital I had in the company with Giorgio Merchich [*bankrupted* a couple of years earlier],

- by the loss of 1,000 cetvert of *wheat from Taganrog* [that means that Filippo Cetcovich had lost some two hundred metric tons of wheat, which incidentally equals the cargo of a medium-tonnage brigantine at that time],

while, on the opposite side, my credits are mostly uncertain...⁷

2. The Russian and Serbian connection

Until around 1830, Triestin maritime trade was seriously affected by the raids of Barbary and British corsairs. In 1759, during the Seven Years' War, a Sovereign Resolution urged ship-owners along the Austrian Littoral to arm their vessels in order to actively defend themselves against the corsairs with Prussian patent. The only one who answered the call was the Illyric Giovanni Vojnovich, who had come to Trieste some ten years before from Venetian Boka kotorska; he entrusted a ship (probably the only corsair ship in Austrian maritime history) to his nephew Demetrio⁸. The following year, Demetrio set out in chase towards the Levant, and joined battle off Smyrna with the corsair ship "Lancashire Witch"; he captured it, took its English captain Charles Ratcliffe prisoner and hanged him⁹. As a reward, the Austrians decorated him and charged him with readying two frigates for the

⁷ Dogo, "Narod pobožnih trgovaca", 98-99.

⁸ Fulvio Caputo – Roberto Masiero, *Trieste e l'Impero: la formazione di una città europea*, Venezia 1988, 114-115.

⁹ Franz A. J. Szabo, *The Seven Years War in Europe: 1756-1763*, Harlow 2008, 295-296.

defence of the port of Trieste¹⁰. The task took some years, and when it was completed the two frigates no longer served their purpose for lack of actual threats, so they were sent to Leghorn to be sold¹¹. There, in 1774, the Russian fleet was making a stop on its way back from the Russo-Turkish war: one of Demetrio's cousins, a certain Marko Ivanovich Vojnovich, was serving in it. He had enlisted a few years earlier, at the time of the Orlov brothers' legendary naval expedition. Marko bought the two frigates at a knock-down price, and had them made seaworthy¹². He was later to be given commands in the Russian Navy in the Caspian and Black Seas.

The relationship of Trieste with the Russian navy did not end there. During the Napoleonic Wars, a Russian naval squadron made an appearance in the port of Trieste on three occasions. The first time, in 1800, it was commanded by one Nikola Vojnovich and was carrying the Habsburg princess Maria Carolina, Queen of the Two Sicilies, to safety¹³. Six years later, after the Peace of Pressburg, a Russian flotilla aimed its cannons at the town of Trieste in order to get some cargo ships released. While negotiation were being held, Russian officers were allowed to go ashore in civilian clothes and were given free theater tickets¹⁴. The Russian fleet's third visit to Trieste came after the Treaty of Tilsit, and this time it was forced to lie at anchor for more than two years because of the British sea blockade. One of the Russian officers wrote: "We have made many acquaintances in Trieste, but excepting Slavs who received us like blood-relatives, we rarely availed ourselves of invitations of others", and he added that it was not a matter of anti-Russian prejudice, but rather of the tight-fisted hospitality practiced by the non-Slav inhabitants of the town¹⁵.

But this sketch of the Slavonic dimension of merchant Trieste in the early 19th century would be incomplete without a document that fittingly represents the link between business and culture. It is a partnership contract between the brothers Jovo and Demetrio Chircovich, written in Cyrillic in 1805 and stipulating how much capital, goods, and ships they share. The contract had to be translated into the business language of the Porto Franco in order to be registered at the Commercial Court. The Italian version of the contract bears an inscription at the foot of the text: "Faithfully from word to word I myself translated, Dositheo Obrad., master of languages". For those who may not know him, Dositelj Obradović is an extraordinary figure: a polyglot traveller, an essayist, a poet, the author of a pedagogic novel, he would end his days (1811) as a sort of minister of Education in the government of insurrectional Serbia. Perhaps his mastery of Italian language was not

¹⁰ Ugo Cova, *Commercio e navigazione a Trieste e nella Monarchia asburgica da Maria Teresa al 1915*, Udine 1992, 55-71.

¹¹ Though theoretically part of the armed forces, in 1797 the tiny Austrian Navy was transferred to the civil administration of the Port of Trieste and assigned coastguard tasks. It was manned with Italians and Croats from Dalmatia and South Slavs from the *Militärgrenze*: Claudia Reichl-Ham, "Le origini della Marina Austriaca", *Bollettino dell'Ufficio Storico della Marina Militare*, (Settembre) 2012, 131.

¹² Cova, *Trieste e la libera navigazione sul mare fra il XVI e il XIX secolo nelle carte governative dell'Archivio di Stato di Trieste*, Trieste, 2014, 88-96.

¹³ Dmitrii Fedotoff White, "The Russian Navy in Trieste. During the Wars of the Revolution and the Empire", *American Slavic and East European Review*, VI/3-4, 1947, 25-28.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 30-33.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 33-34.

quite beyond any doubt, because the quality of his translation from the Illyric language is attested to one line below by the parish priest of St. Spiridon's church: "That the above mentioned deed has been faithfully and exactly translated from word to word from the Illyric language, I myself bear witness, Vincenzo Rachich".¹⁶

The Slavonic dimension in Trieste was clearly visible, then, and even given institutional form as an "Illyric nation". In the organs of mercantile self-government, the Illyrics were represented roughly in proportion to their economic weight, alongside the Greeks, the Jews, the Lutherans and the Calvinists, besides the Catholics, of course. And all of them would communicate among themselves and with foreigners in Italian, as a legacy of the lingua franca in the Adriatic and the Levant. From the demographic point of view, the non-Catholic minorities altogether accounted for 8.8% of the population in 1775¹⁷, with the Illyrics around 1% at that time.

3. Sub-urban Slavism and Italian urban assimilation

However, the population of Trieste was growing rapidly thanks to immigration, and merchants were but a tiny fraction among the newcomers as compared with the huge number of porters, building workers, all sorts of artisans, apprentices, labourers, housemaids and seamen (the latter always being scarce in Trieste). Recent studies of historical demography show that 40% of the immigrants were aged between 19 and 25 years, that they had a high fertility rate, and that they came mainly from Carniola, from the province of Gorizia and from Istria both coastal and inland¹⁸. This was the human basis of Trieste's urban development, which is measurable by the 27,500 inhabitants registered in 1795 as compared with the 6,500 of thirty years earlier¹⁹.

Here some explanation might be useful. The territorial reach of the municipality of Trieste remained almost unchanged throughout the last two centuries of Austrian rule – and because of the surrounding hills, is not much different even today. Within it, however, there were three distinct zones at the time of the imperial port-town, each with its own fiscal and administrative regime: the town in a narrow sense, consisting of the old medieval settlement and the new districts surrounding it, built mostly on reclaimed land; the outlying districts, which were rural but contiguous to the town, like agricultural appendages; and finally, up yonder on the plateau, the countryside also called "rural territory" or simply "the territory". In those years, along with the migratory movement coming from outside, there were shifts in the population within the municipality itself, namely, 1. from the suburban districts towards the port with its job opportunities, and 2. from the hamlets on the overhanging highland (that is, the so called "territory" or simply countryside) towards the kitchen-gardens of the semi-emptied districts²⁰. This is what, in the past, historians of

¹⁶ Dogo, "Narod pobožnih trgovaca", 89, 92.

¹⁷ Roberto Finzi, "Trieste, perché", in: *SEST, I, La città dei gruppi 1719-1918*, eds. Finzi – Panjek, Trieste 2001, 53-54.

¹⁸ Andrea Sponza, "La popolazione di Trieste nel censimento del 1775", in: *Trieste e l'Adriatico. Uomini, merci, conflitti*, eds. Daniele Andreozzi – Carlo Gatti, Trieste 2005, 111-112.

¹⁹ Claudio Visintini, "La crescita urbana", in: *SEST, I*, 250-251.

²⁰ Elio Apih, "La storia politica e sociale", in: *Trieste* (a cura di Elio Apih), Roma – Bari 1988, 15.

a militantly Italian cultural imprint called “sub-urban Slavism” in a demeaning sense. But the expression has recently been used again by post-nationalist historians because of its descriptive efficacy, inasmuch as it implies the recognition of an objective fact, namely, that the demographic growth of Trieste was fed by the Slavonic peoples of the highland²¹.

This double immigration flow was to have perceivable effects in town, of course. In 1761, a high-ranking Austrian officer remarked that, apart from the immigrant Greek and “Aleman” merchant groups, who spoke Italian anyway, three different languages were spoken in the town: Italian, Triestin (that is, the bastardised Italian used by the populace), and Slavonic, in the two variants of Slavonian-Illyric and Slavonian-Carniolinian, the latter being in turn subject to German and Friulan lexical corruptions²². Until their order was abolished in 1773, the Jesuits would teach catechism and preach in the “Carniolian” language²³. In 1776, two senior members of the civic administration and of the merchant class recommended that in Trieste, for the needs of justice, trade, shipping, and preaching, as well as for the announcement of sovereign acts to the people, the use of the Italian language and of the “Slavonic or Illyric” language, as well as German, should be guaranteed²⁴. In 1777, Governor Zinzendorf split the single Catholic parish in Trieste into two parishes, one for the Old Town and the other for the New Town²⁵, and recommended that in the latter, the priests should be able to speak “Carniolinian”²⁶. Thirty years later, in 1807, an Austrian officer just passing through Trieste took note that in the Old Town, Sunday sermons were held in Italian, while those in the New Town were held in German and in Carniolinian²⁷. These are just a few examples of many signs of a Slavonian-Carniolinian presence in the town, a presence that we would nowadays conventionally call Slovenian, and that would not have attracted any particular attention or comment in those days because it concerned the church alone and the care of its souls. In the town of Trieste, the fate of so-called “Slav urbanism” (*urbanesimo slavo*)²⁸ was simply that of assimilating into the Italian environment, with no strain involved and even with a favourable disposition on the part of the subjects themselves. One important exception to this sort of assimilatory determinism must be mentioned, however: that of the “Slav by choice” Sigmund-Žiga Zois, the son of a wealthy Triestin Stock Exchange merchant from Bergamo, who after spending his childhood in Trieste and studying natural sciences in Italy, settled in Ljubljana, where he became an active patron of Slovenian culture for thirty years²⁹.

²¹ Marco Breschi – Aleksej Kalc – Elisabetta Navarra, “La nascita di una città. Storia minima della popolazione di Trieste, secc. XVIII-XIX”, in: *SEST*, I, 149.

²² Paolo Merkü, “La presenza slovena nella città preemporale”, in: *SEST*, I, 289.

²³ Marta Verginella, “Sloveni a Trieste tra Sette e Ottocento. Da comunità etnica a minoranza nazionale”, in: *SEST*, I, 446.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 441.

²⁵ Liliana Ferrari, “Le chiese e l’emporio”, in: *Storia d’Italia: Le regioni all’Unità a oggi. Il Friuli-Venezia Giulia*, eds. Finzi – Claudio Magris – Giovanni Miccoli, Torino 2002, 242.

²⁶ The Catholic Bishop Petazzi was in favour of using Carniolian in both parishes: Breschi – Kalc – Navarra, “La nascita di una città”, 195.

²⁷ Rienzo Pellegrini, “Per un profilo linguistico”, in: *SEST*, I, 295.

²⁸ Carlo Schiffrer, *Le origini dell’irredentismo triestino (1813-1860)*, Udine 1978, 46.

²⁹ Verginella, “Sloveni a Trieste”, 445.

Meanwhile, by the end of the 18th century, Trieste had acquired the territories, the populations and the merchant marine of Venice; it kept them until 1806 (when the town reached the figure of 33,000 inhabitants), lost them to the French and took them back at the end of the Napoleonic Wars. Many Dalmatian seamen, both sailors and officers, became naturalized Austrian subjects in Trieste and added their numbers to a purely virtual dimension of invisible and irreversibly assimilated Slavism.

After the Napoleonic storm, Trieste found itself part of a phantom Kingdom of Illyria named after the French Illyric Provinces, whose territory contained a predominantly Slav Catholic population. The town itself, however, was returned to the self-government of the merchant class, led by a recognized Italian-speaking and cosmopolitan élite of Borsa merchants³⁰. Among its members were some of the most prominent exponents of the Illyric community, and they contributed to the growth of the port-town in two ways: by opening new sea routes to the Black Sea and especially to Odessa (the exporting of Russian corn being the new big trade³¹), and by investing their capital, still in visibly Slavonic business institutions such as "Società slava" and "Banco illirico"³², along with German, Italian, Jewish and Greek capital, in that huge insurance and navigation company that was the Austrian Lloyd. Financial volume, steam power, the safety of seafaring and not least the connection of the port with the Austrian railway network conferred a new dimension to the trade of Trieste³³. The old merchant-adventurer type survived in just a couple of intriguing individuals who both had links to their Illyric nation, to Russia, and to the corn trade with the Black Sea. One of these was Spiridon Gopceвич, who in the 1850s had an impressive town-house built for himself in the middle of Trieste, with a facade depicting four figures drawn from the history or the myth of the Kosovo polje battle. During the Crimea War, Gopceвич lost all his money in a gigantic failed speculation on exporting Russian corn³⁴. The other figure was Drago Popovich, who owned a merchant fleet that sailed between Trieste and the Azov Sea. At the outbreak of the Crimean War, out of devotion to Russia he refused to collaborate with the English and French, and suffered reprisal at their hands. His fortunes recovered after the war, and he became a distinguished member of the city's mercantile institutions, even being elected to the Municipal Council by a "Slavic" coalition³⁵. Curiously enough, his son Eugenio was to become a Garibaldinian and an Italian irredentist³⁶.

Just like the dimension of trade companies, so the demographic dimension of the town was changing. The Illyric community held on, with its 250 members, but in the meanwhile the town had grown from 36,000 inhabitants in 1818 to 66,000 in 1846 – by now it was a city. Were it not for the church of St. Spyridon and the numerous buildings erected by

³⁰ Apih, "La storia politica e sociale", 28-29.

³¹ Alessio Fornasin, "La Borsa e la Camera di Commercio di Trieste (1755-1914)", in: *SEST*, II, 179.

³² Francesco Basilio, *Le assicurazioni marittime a Trieste ed il centro di riunione degli assicuratori*, Trieste 1911, 77; Loredana Panariti, "Assicurazione e banca. Il sistema finanziario triestino (secc. XVIII-XIX)", in: *SEST*, II, 414-415.

³³ Sara Basso, "Trieste: un porto, una città tra Impero Austro-Ungarico e Mediterraneo", *Storia urbana* XXXI, 120/121, 2008, 171.

³⁴ Dogo, "Narod pobožnih trgovaca", 112.

³⁵ Robi Sturman, *Le associazioni e i giornali sloveni a Trieste dal 1848 al 1890*, Trieste 1996, 44.

³⁶ Ennio Maserati, "Eugenio Popovich D'Angeli tra Italia e Montenegro", in: *Trieste, Austria, Italia tra Settecento e Novecento: studi in onore di Elio Apih*, ed. Marina Cattaruzza, Udine 1996, 219-222.

Illyric merchants in the Theresian and Josephin districts, this element of the Slavonic dimension of Trieste would have slipped towards invisibility. But there was another Slavonic component in the city at the time, much more significant in numerical terms, which was the concern of the local Catholic church alone. The fact that from 1830 to 1914 the local church was led by an almost unbroken series of Slovenian bishops perhaps tells us something about the idea that the Austrian government in Vienna had of the Catholic flock in the diocese of the Littoral which also included Gorizia and Istria. As a result, around the middle of the 19th century, after the Mass had been celebrated in the four churches of the city of Trieste, the sermon was delivered in Italian, in Italian and Slovenian, and on the last two in Italian, Slovenian and German³⁷. Such a situation could provoke some “social annoyance” (as Lilianna Ferrari has wittily written³⁸), because of the massive presence of rustic and suburban Slovenes in the churches of the city center, but in the eighteen-fifties, the matter was still devoid of political implications. Things were changing fast, however.

4. Slovenian urban visibility in Slavonic clothes

In 1848, the liberal-moderate Pietro Kandler provided the arguments in support of the *Italianity* of Trieste, just at a time when the possible incorporation of the city into the German Confederation was under discussion. According to Kandler, Austrian surveys on the “language spoken in the family” showed that Italians made up 75% of the *urban* population of Trieste as against a meager 11% of Slavophones and 12% of Germans. If the “territory” where the Slavophones were more numerous were to be added, the latter would still amount to no more than 25% of the population of the entire commune. On the other hand, Kandler wrote, “the Slav language has never ascended to a learned language amongst us”³⁹. At the administrative level, the corollary was to be: Italian language in the offices and schools, Slav schools for the countryside⁴⁰. But at that particular moment, the most bitter contrasts were with the Germanophile party, and the Slav question was set aside⁴¹.

Although nobody realized it at that time, the turning point had been reached when in October 1848 a “Slav society” (*Slavjanski zbor*, then *Slavjansko društvo*) was set up in Trieste promoted not, as one might imagine, by romantic philologists and men of letters, but by sturdy exponents of mercantile cosmopolitanism, they themselves Slovenes, Croats, Serbs, Czechs, which was quickly joined by more than 300 new members⁴². For some time, the society was able to publish a journal entitled “The Slav Patriot” (*Slavjanski rodoljub*, then

³⁷ Rolf Wörsdörfer, “Cattolicesimo ‘slavo’ e ‘latino’ nel conflitto di nazionalità. La disputa per la lingua liturgica e di insegnamento nelle diocesi adriatiche dell’Austria-Ungheria, dell’Italia e della Jugoslavia (1861-1941)”, in: *Nazionalismi di frontiera. Identità contrapposte sull’Adriatico nord-orientale 1850-1950*, ed. Cattaruzza, Soveria Mannelli 2003, 133-134.

³⁸ Ferrari, “Le chiese e l’emporio”, 255.

³⁹ Quot. in: Pellegrini, “Per un profilo linguistico”, 297.

⁴⁰ Schiffrer, *Le origini*, 117.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 139.

⁴² “For the first time in the circles of mercantile cosmopolitanism, the Slavonic element took up collective visibility regardless of the respective religious community”: Cattaruzza, “Il primato dell’economia: l’egemonia politica del cetto mercantile (1814-60)”, in: *Storia d’Italia*, 174.

Jadranski Slavjan)⁴³. After Constitutional life was resumed in Austria in 1860, Trieste saw an ever-increasing number of initiatives of Slovenian associationism aimed at fostering Slavic solidarity: reading rooms, cultural circles, sports clubs, people's meetings on the highlands (*tabori*), and finally in 1874, the creation of the "Edinost Political Society" (Unity), which had its headquarters downtown, was headed by a lay leadership with a minor Catholic component, and had a Slovenian and Yugoslav (South-Slav) national orientation. A few years later, "Edinost" became also the name of a newspaper, at first periodical and then daily. All this was financed by the Slovenian middle class, with a Croat junior partner, which was gradually emerging onto the Triestin scene. There followed the phase of "organized economy" according to the Czech model⁴⁴: trade associations, rural savings funds, banking institutions and finally a real large-scale bank, the "Jadranska" (1905), whose money would flow between Trieste, Prague, Ljubljana and all along Dalmatia⁴⁵. Such a course of cultural and socio-economic success was crowned by the construction of a polyfunctional building in the Theresian district, the "Narodni dom", designed by Maximilian (Max) Fabiani, the best architect then in circulation.

Obviously, this rapid progress of the Slovenes towards full urban visibility was not just a matter of cultural awakening and growing self-confidence. The Slovenian national movement was politically loyal to Austria, but in Trieste it had to deal not so much with the impartial Austrian *Statthalter*, as with the local administration, and the latter was hegemonised by a liberal-national Italian party which was grimly determined to prevent Slav presence within the town perimeter from becoming visible through external signs such as municipal representation, state schools, toponomy, surnames ending in -ič, and census reports. The stage had been set for this in 1850, when Trieste was awarded for its loyalty in the storms of 1848 with a special Statute, which made the traditional mercantile autonomy of the town more extensive by granting broader administrative and political prerogatives⁴⁶. And after a decade of absolutism, the leadership within the institutional framework of municipal autonomy shifted from the old cosmopolitan Italoophone group to the new group of Italian national-liberals⁴⁷. Thanks to high census suffrage, these latter were able to keep control of the local administration for decades under the banner of *autonomism*⁴⁸.

⁴³ Milan Pahor, *Slavjanska sloga. Slovenci in Hrvati v Trstu. Od austrougarske monarhije do italijanske republike*, Trst 2004, 14-15; Idem, "Gli sloveni e i croati dalla monarchia austroungarica alla repubblica italiana", in: *Hrvati u Trstu – I Croati a Trieste*, ed. Damir Murković, Trieste 2007, 48-49.

⁴⁴ Verginella, "Sloveni a Trieste", 462 ff.

⁴⁵ Pahor, "Gli sloveni e i croati", 62-65.

⁴⁶ Cattaruzza, *Trieste nell'Ottocento. Le trasformazioni di una società civile*, Udine 1995) 30; G. Panjek, "Una 'commercial officina'", 331.

⁴⁷ Cattaruzza, "Il primato", 179.

⁴⁸ Anna Millo, "Un porto fra centro e periferia (1861-1918)", in: *Storia d'Italia*, 208.

5. Italian autonomism and “jammed” assimilation

As Slovenian associationism gained ground, Italian liberal-nationalists grew increasingly obsessed by fear of Slav *encerclement* and above all of Slav *infiltration* in the city⁴⁹. In order to fight it, they had recourse to every unscrupulous lever of local power⁵⁰, including a massive effort to advance monopolistic Italian elementary education in urban districts, particularly in those areas where the Slovenian population was growing apace⁵¹. In this way, what had been a spontaneous process of assimilation was turning into planned policy⁵². Of course, the “territory” remained untouched for the time being, but with upcoming universal suffrage, the men in the countryside, too, were to acquire political weight. And finally, the incessant quarrels of the Italian administration with central government⁵³ were moving the *Statthalter* away from his impartiality towards the national struggles in Trieste.

Such were the crucial points of a sequence of events that has been narrated many a time. At the level of interpretation, it seems to this writer that everything turned on one fundamental issue and a long-term trend, namely, that the growth of Trieste from a fishermen’s hamlet to a large city in the space of a century and a half was fed by a steady flow of immigrants from the neighboring regions, which were largely Slav-speaking (Slovenian and secondarily Croat). Over the years, this immigration would “dissolve” into the town because of the pervasiveness of Italian as the trade language and the assimilating power of Italian culture. Sometime around the end of the 19th century, these assimilation mechanisms got stuck, because for the first time, the immigrants were offered an alternative to natural, inevitable assimilation. This alternative had to do with identity, but was underpinned by a solid socio-economic base, and namely, the network of Slovenian associations. The genesis of this interpretative nucleus as regards Italian “assimilative power” can be traced back to the studies of Carlo Schiffrer on Italian irredentists in Trieste⁵⁴, while the idea of a “jamming” was formulated almost simultaneously in the 1980s by Elio Apih and Marina Cattaruzza⁵⁵. Thereafter, the latter convincingly documented and developed the idea of a “jammed assimilation”⁵⁶, an idea then received into the works of Marta Verginella⁵⁷.

⁴⁹ Verginella, “La comunità nazionale slovena e il mito della Trieste slovena”, *Qualestoria*, XXXV/1, 2007, 107.

⁵⁰ Apih, “La storia politica e sociale”, 79.

⁵¹ A. Panjek, “Chi costruì Trieste”, 708-710.

⁵² Cattaruzza, “Slovenes and Italians in Trieste, 1850-1914”, in: *Ethnic Identity in Urban Europe*, VIII, *Comparative Studies on Governments and Non-Dominant Ethnic Groups in Europe, 1850-1940*, ed. Max Engman, Dartmouth 1992, 204; Pavel Stranj, *La comunità sommersa: gli sloveni in Italia dalla A alla Z*, Trieste 1992, 72; Millo, “Un porto”, 294; Daniele Andreozzi, “L’organizzazione degli interessi a Trieste (1719-1914)”, in: *SEST*, II, 210-123.

⁵³ Helmut Rumpfer, “Economia e potere politico. Il ruolo di Trieste nella politica di sviluppo economico di Vienna”, in: *SEST*, II, 86.

⁵⁴ Schiffrer, *Le origini*, 161.

⁵⁵ Apih, “La storia politica e sociale”, 61; Cattaruzza, “Sloveni e italiani a Trieste: la formazione dell’identità nazionale”, *Clio*, XXV/1, 1989; Idem, “I conflitti nazionali a Trieste nell’ambito della questione nazionale nell’Impero asburgico: 1850-1914”, *Quaderni Giuliani di Storia*, X/1, 1989.

⁵⁶ Cattaruzza, “Slovenes and Italians”.

⁵⁷ Verginella, “Sloveni a Trieste”.

Table 1. The population of Trieste (the city + suburban districts + the "Territory")⁵⁸

1857	104,707
1869	123,098
1880	144,844
1890	157,466
1900	178,599
1910	229,510

Just a few words by way of conclusion. As can be seen in Table 1, the population of Trieste more than doubled over half a century. The figures regard the entire municipality of Trieste, comprising both the city and the rural areas, with the latter being the outlying suburban districts and the "territory". The count is not entirely homogeneous and accurate, due to variations in the counting of non-Austrian subjects residing in the city, of whom there were at least 30,000 (mostly Friulians) by 1910: this figure should be deducted from the total of 229,000. Even so, the population growth is astonishing, and recent demographic research has established beyond any doubt that such growth was due to immigration. In any case, the city alone would have been incapable of sustaining such growth, given that average life expectancy at the beginning of the 20th century continued to be around the same as in the last two centuries, i.e. a meager 29 years⁵⁹. The flow of immigration into Trieste consisted of two waves, the first of which was a "push" type in the years between 1860 and 1900, fuelled by poor or landless peasants from Slovenian Carniola: the second wave was a "pull" type, starting in the early 1890s as a result of work on the new and then on the *nuovissimo* port, on the second railway connection, and also of the great expansion in the shipbuilding and iron and steel industries – incidentally, these ventures were both promoted and supported by the Vienna government with massive financing⁶⁰. This second wave drew migrants mainly from Istria and from Italy. As a consequence of this double migratory flow, of the 229,000 residents in the municipality of Trieste in 1910, about 35% turned out to have been born "outside".

And what was the language of all these people? Here, the Austrian language censuses come to our aid, with all the due reservations we must have regarding their limited ability to account for the phenomenon of bilingualism, and with the warning already given by Elio Apih thirty years ago, and more recently by Pieter Judson⁶¹, that the Austrian state was interested in ascertaining linguistic areas in a functional sense, and not in quantifying nationalities – although everywhere in the empire, nationalist activists interpreted the issue differently.

⁵⁸ Source: Cattaruzza, "I conflitti nazionali" (based on: Pierpaolo Luzzatto Fegiz, *La popolazione di Trieste*, Trieste 1929).

⁵⁹ Breschi – Kalc – Navarra, "Storia minima", 103.

⁶⁰ Cattaruzza, "Slovenes and Italians", 193; Werner Droebisch, "Il ruolo di Trieste tra i porti marittimi e fluviali austriaci (1719-1918)", in: *SEST*, II, 364-365; G. Panjek, "Una 'commercial officina'", 332; Rumpler, "Economia e potere politico", 114.

⁶¹ Apih, "La storia politica e sociale", 71; Pieter M. Judson, "L'Autriche-Hongrie était-t-elle un empire?", *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, LXIII/3, 2008, 563-596.

Table 2. 1846 – 1910: Percentage of Austrian subjects living in Trieste and using the following languages as *Umgangssprache* (language used for communication, language of daily life)⁶²

	German	Italian	Slovenian	Total Austrian subjects
1846	10.5	58.8	31.5	80,300
1880	4.0	74.2	21.8	119,506
1890	4.9	74.7	20.0	132,381
1900	5.7	78.3	15.7	148,465
1910	6.2	62.3	29.8	188,681

Table 2 is particularly revealing. Let us leave aside the data for 1846, which predate the “scientific” phase of Austrian censuses. But something certainly seems to have happened around the turn of the century. In 1900, the aggressive national policy of the local administration was starting to bear fruit, and this was probably emphasized with the help of still compliant Austrian officials. By 1910, however, just ten years later, about 30,000 inhabitants of Trieste have transferred what we might call their “linguistic loyalty” from Italian to the Slovenian language.

Table 3. 1910: Percentages of the Trieste population, according to *Umgangssprache*⁶³

Language	Municipal census	Revised by the <i>Statthalter</i>
German	5.1	6.2
Bohemian	0.3	0.3
Polish	0.1	0.1
Rutenian	0.0	0.0
Slovenian	19.4	29.8
Serbo-Croatian	0.7	1.3
Italian	74.5	62.3
Romenian	0.0	0.0
Magyar	0.0	0.0

At this point, the importance of what has been called the *jamming* of the assimilation mechanism can be seen even more clearly. Actually, the data suggest not only that assimilation got stuck, but that a brand-new phenomenon of “dissimilation” had intervened. As for the overall Slavonic dimension of Trieste, some 2,000 Serbo-Croatian speaking inhabitants of Trieste should be added to the number (mainly Croats), whose identity and above all, socio-economic aims and problems, at that time and in those circumstances, were closer to those of the Slovenians.

⁶² Source: Cattaruzza, “Slovenes and Italians”.

⁶³ Source: Diego de Castro, “La revisione luogotenenziale del censimento austriaco del 1910 a Trieste”, *Rivista italiana di Economia Demografia e Statistica*, XXXI, 147.