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Sul mare brillavano vasti silenzi: Immagini di Trieste nella letteratura serba

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well as some interview scenes where the sound quality got in the way of understanding the dialogue.

This documentary film represents a valuable contribution to the study of the early immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe and their hardship and experiences in building this country.

The film is distributed by Byzantia, 8313 E. San Simon Dr., Scottsdale, AZ 85258, tel. 480.609.7349.

University of Wisconsin, Madison

Marija Mitrović. *Sul mare brillavano vasti silenzi: Imagini di Trieste nella letteratura serba. Trieste: Il ramo d'oro, 2004, pages 242.*

Reviewed by *Radmila J. Gorup*

This is not the first book that explores the connection between the Serbs and their culture and the Italian port-city of Trieste. In 1987, the *Yugoslav Review* in Belgrade published a monograph written by Dejan Medaković and Đorđe Milošević entitled *Serbs in the History of Trieste. Vast Silences Gleamed on the Sea: Images of Trieste in Serbian Literature* edited by Marija Mitrović, professor at the University of Trieste, is a collection of letters, travelogues and fragments from larger works written by Serbian writers about Trieste. In a long and well documented introduction, the author discusses the role the city of Trieste played in the development of Serbian literature.

Trieste is an important city, both in trade and culture. It is also a city with a border identity. It is well known that many local writers and poets (Umberto Saba, Italo Svevo, Giuseppe Carducci, Eugenie Montale and others), as well as foreigners (James Joyce, Stendhal, and others), wrote about it. What is not so well known is that the city of Trieste holds an important place in Serbian literature as well. The question of what attracted Serbian writers to the city of Trieste instead of other European cultural centers is very intriguing. After all, Trieste was never a printing center like Venice, nor the administrative center of the Habsburg Empire like Vienna.

In the beginning of the 18th century, a colony of rich Serbian merchants was established in Trieste. They built beautiful palaces and adorned them with figures from the Serbian past. Italian writers who wrote about Trieste's art and architecture do not mention the presence of Serbs in the history of the city. In contrast, Serbian writers wrote about Trieste and its influence on Serbian pre-Romanticism (see Pavić, 1995, *History of Serbian Literature*, vol. IV) and

culture in general. It is well known that at the end of the 17th century many noted Serbs such as Zaharije Orfelin (1726-1798), Dositej Obradović (1739-1812), Pavle Solarić (1779-1821), Joakim Vujić (1779-1847), Vićentije Rajić (1750-1818) and others spent time in Trieste. Vuk Stefanović Karadžić, the Serbian language reformer and folklorist, wrote from Vienna to the Serbs in Trieste asking them to subscribe to the *Novine serbske*. Many Serbian men of letters worked in the Serbian church of St. Spiridon, the second largest Serbian church in the world. Others, like Dositej Obradović and Joakim Vujić, the father of Serbian theatre, were tutors to the children of wealthy merchants of Trieste.

Mitrović distinguishes three phases and three types of texts that Serbian writers wrote on Trieste. The first phase covers the period between 1720 and 1850, during which time Serbian writers traveled to Trieste to establish contacts with local merchants of Serbian origin to ask for their help and offer them books. More than sixty copies of Vuk Karadžić's dictionary of 1814 were sold in Trieste. In this period, numerous books, mostly school textbooks, were written in the city, such as the *Illiric—Italian Dictionary (Besjednik ilirsko-italijanski)* in 1810, an Italian grammar for the “Illyrian” youth in 1783, Pavle Solarić's *New Secular Geography (Novo graždansko zemljoopisanije)*, the first ever written in Serbian (published in Venice in 1809), Joakim Vujić's *New Geography (Noveise Zemleopisanie)*, published in Buda in 1825) and others. In his letter to Haralampije Mamula, the parish priest of St. Spiridon in Trieste, Dositej Obradović outlined his humanistic program for the Serbs. Lukijan Mušicki wrote an ode to the Serbian benefactors of Trieste in 1835. Petar Petrović Njegoš, the prince bishop of Montenegro, visited Trieste fifteen times.

The second phase extends from 1850 to 1918. In the second half of the 19th century Trieste was a large port-city, the second largest in the Mediterranean after Marseilles. When the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes was established in 1918 and Trieste became a part of Italy, it lost its importance as a commercial port.

In the beginning of this second phase, the Principality of Serbia was establishing its cultural institutions. The Serbian elite, intellectuals and merchants, traveled to Trieste, no longer to ask for help but out of curiosity, to visit a neighboring country. They came to Trieste feeling as though they were visiting their city and a city that likes their people.

In the third phase, which began in 1918 and continues to the present, the city of Trieste presents itself as a literary *locus*, the place where novels and short stories written by Serbian writers take place. In this phase, Trieste is no longer only featured in letters and travelogues but it has become a privileged

place, a protagonist in *belles-lettres*. After World War II, Trieste also became a commercial Mecca for Yugoslav visitors.

By studying the images of Trieste in Serbian literature one can see certain correspondences between descriptions found in the 18th century travelogues and those in the novels written later. In fact, there exists Serbian literature which is focused on Trieste. From Miloš Crnjanski and Ivo Andrić, two modernist writers after World War I, to Bora Ćosić and Radomir Konstantinović, to the younger writers Radoslav Petković, Mira Otašević, Dragan Velikić, Goran Milašinović, and others, Trieste appears as a source of inspiration and a backdrop against which their works take place.

After the fall of communism, Trieste found itself featured yet again in Serbian literature. At the time when Serbian cities became imperiled, Trieste was depicted as a flourishing multicultural and multilingual place, an urban center in which not only daily but also cultural needs could be realized. This is clearly seen in the works of Radomir Konstantinović and Goran Milašinović. The idea of Trieste as a literary *locus* presents these writers with an opportunity to dwell on themes of the encounter between different cultures, languages, houses, foods, flags, etc. The image of Trieste created in the last decade is particularly important. Serbian novels dealing with Trieste touch on different themes relevant for the contemporary Serbian situation: mythologizing of the past, postponement of the present and the future in the name of the past, the image of a border city which changed its allegiance to a state several times, etc.

A selection of texts which follow the introduction include poems dedicated to Trieste by Pavle Solarić, Petar Petrović Njegoš and Saša Jelenković, travelogues and letters by Dositej Obradović, Joakim Vujić, Dr. Vladan Đorđević, the founder of the Red Cross in Serbia, Svetislav Vinaver, and others, as well as fragments of Serbian prose writing by Miloš Crnjanski, Ivo Andrić, Bora Ćosić, Radoslav Petković, Dragan Velikić, Mira Otašević, Radomir Konstantinović, and Goran Milašinović, all translated into Italian by the author.

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