

# »Out to Sea, Hungarians!« History, Myth, Memories. Fiume 1868–1945

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This article follows more than twenty years after my first publications about Fiume (Rijeka in Croatian), the first syntheses of the last hundred-plus years, and it gives me the opportunity to rethink and synthetize my past research without essentially changing some of my original ideas and to enrich them with some more recent ones. I discuss Fiume as having reflected different, sometimes antagonistic social processes ranging from liberal tendencies and multiethnic coexistence to nationalistic divergent forces, but on the whole, later disruptions were caused not so much by internal forces as by external, international processes. As an Italianist, in this article I have sought to reconstruct some of the characteristics of Fiume during the years 1868–1945, mostly in relation to Italian and Hungarian culture, society and history, with the hope that the main aspects would be covered by other scholars with a Croatian perspective. Nevertheless, I have followed most carefully all the studies I could get a hold of and include them in my research.<sup>1</sup>

## The Birth of the Myth of the Hungarian Sea

The title of the article stems from a quotation, published by Lajos Kossuth in 1846, which has become part of the collective Hungarian public imagination.<sup>2</sup> Kossuth, one of the leading Hungarian politicians of the Age of Reforms (1825–1848), wrote about the necessity of constructing a railway to connect Fiume with Hungary. The slight adaptation of the original title could be considered to be the birth of the myth of the

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<sup>1</sup> I refer to studies by art historians such as inter alia Daina Glavočić et al.: Arhitektura historicizma u Rijeci [The Architecture of Historicism in Rijeka]. Rijeka 2002 and to meetings in which I participated such as that organized by the universities of Rijeka and Zagreb and Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest in 2003. See Irvin Lukežić (ed.): Rijeka i mađarska kultura / Rijeka (Fiume) es a magyar kultúra. Međunarodni znanstveni skup, Državni arhiv u Rijeci, 3.–4. listopada 2003. Zbornik radova [Rijeka/Fiume and Hungarian Culture. Proceedings of the International Academic Conference at the State Archives in Rijeka on 3rd and 4th October 2003]. Rijeka 2004 and Csaba Kiss Gy. (ed.): Fiume és a magyar kul'túra [Fiume and Hungarian Culture]. Budapest 2004. See also Ivan Jeličić: The Waizen Family and Young Leo Valiani in Fiume. In: Leo Weiczen Valiani. Fuman, European, Revolutionary, Historian. A Special Issue of Časopis za povijest zapadne Hrvatske / West Croatian History Journal 10 (2015), pp. 25–41; Ilona Fried: Leo Valiani and Arthur Koestler – A Friendship for Life. Letters between 1942 and 1953. In: ibid., pp. 131–142. See also Andrea Ricciardi: Leo Valiani. Gli anni della formazione. Tra socialismo, comunismo e rivoluzione democratica [Leo Valiani. The Formative Years. Between Socialism, Communism and Democratic Revolution]. Milano 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Among my main monographs, see Emlékek városa. Fiume [City of Memories. Fiume]. Budapest 2001; Fiume. Città della memoria [Fiume. City of Memories]. Udine 2005; Fiume. Budapest 2004.

Hungarian sea for a landlocked country with no coast in modern times.<sup>3</sup> Fiume, connecting the Balkans, Central Europe and the Italian peninsula and situated on a narrow flatland at the foot of the Julian Alps, became the Hungarian sea. For centuries, it had no viable roads through the mountains surrounding the Kvarner Bay but only narrow paths. This sort of isolation from the mainland also meant defence, so that it managed to avoid Turkish rule. Later on, Fiume came under the seigneur of the Habsburgs and in 1717 it obtained the status of a free port from Charles III, like Trieste.<sup>4</sup> Empress Maria Theresa placed Fiume under Croatia in 1776, but three years later she attached Fiume directly to the Crown of Hungary as "corpus separatum". The intention behind this decision was to develop Hungarian agriculture, promoting commerce with its products through the port. During the Napoleonic Wars, French troops occupied the region and it was only in 1822 that the town's former status was restored. The Hungarian Diet (Parliament) discussed the question of constructing a railway. In the 1830s and 1840s two outstanding politicians, the adversaries István Széchenyi and Lajos Kossuth, both elaborated such plans in order to promote commerce for the growing Hungarian economy and the enlargement of the port also began. Nevertheless, the construction of the railway was postponed for a while because of the Hungarian revolution of 1848–1849. During the revolution, Fiume became part of Croatia. The local population aimed to restore its old status, probably seeing better prospects for the town's development. After the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867, there followed a Croatian-Hungarian Settlement, a pact that meant that the town of Fiume was to belong as "separatum coronae adnexum corpus" to the Crown of Hungary until further disposals. This pact remained in force for fifty years until the end of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in 1918.<sup>5</sup>

## A Growing Economy and a Multiethnic Society

The number of inhabitants in the town grew rapidly. The new residents arrived mainly from the Italian regions of Marche and Veneto, while others came from Germany, Austria and Hungary – some of them of Jewish origin, mainly from Hungary and East-Central Europe. All of them could easily find a job or start an enterprise and attain a decent standard of living. They got to like the town and many of them settled there permanently. Hungarians arrived mainly after 1868; many of them were state employees or merchants. Some of them stayed in Fiume only provisionally, while others settled there. In the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the port of Fiume also became an important for the growing emigration to America.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the majority of the population spoke Italian. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>, Fiumians quite often spoke three or four

<sup>3</sup> See "Tengerhez magyar! El a tengerhez!" [To Sea, Hungarian! Out to Sea!]. In: Hetilap 1846, Nr. 8, 27.1.1846, quoted by NF [Ney Ferenc] as "Tengerre magyar!" [Out to Sea, Hungarians!], which became a byword. Fried: Fiume. Città della memoria, p. 27, Fried: Emlékek városa, p. 365.

<sup>4</sup> Following the decrees of 1717, 1719–20, 1725 and 1729–30. See Aladár Fest: Fiume története [The History of Fiume]. In: János Sziklay, Samu Borovszky (eds.): Magyarország Vármegyéi és Városai. Fiume és a Magyar-Horvát Tengerpart [The Counties and Cities of Hungary. Rijeka and the Hungarian-Croatian Coast]. Budapest 1896, pp. 49–93.

<sup>5</sup> See also William Klinger: Un'altra Italia [Another Italy]. Ed. by Diego Redivo. Fiume, Trieste, Rovigno 2018, pp. 197–206; Raoul Pupo: Fiume città di passione [Fiume, City of Passion]. Bari, Roma 2018.

languages: Italian, Croatian, German and increasingly Hungarian. Those speaking Italian mainly spoke the town's dialect.

Although the Hungarian population increased in number, it remained proportionally much smaller than the main nationalities in town: in 1891 the ethnic groups among a population of 30,000 people were divided as following: 44% Italian, over 36% Croatian, 9.4% Slovenian, 5% German and 3.6% Hungarian. In 1910, out of a population of 49,806 people (1,314 of them soldiers), 24,212 were Italian, 48.6%, 12,926 Croatian, 25.9%, 6,493 Hungarian, 13%, 2,387 Slovenian, 2,135 German, 425 Serbian, 240 English, 238 Czech-Moravian, 192 Slovakian, and 137 Romanian, along with 291 from other nationalities.<sup>6</sup>

The town was a melting pot for different cultures: those settling in Fiume soon acquired a Fiumian identity that was shared until the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; there did not seem to be much consideration of ethnic origin. According to a law from 1882, one could obtain Fiumian citizenship after two years' permanent living in the town, and with it the right to vote – although this was connected, in conformity with state laws, to ownership of property or education, and women were excluded. For instance, the family of Mayor Michele Maylender (1863–1911), a lawyer and the founder of the Autonomist Party, arrived about ten years before his birth from Hungary.<sup>7</sup> He became one of the leading figures of local public life in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and also the leader of the Autonomous Party founded in 1896.

Beside its peculiar features, Fiume was a rather characteristic multiethnic town of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, the majority of the population belonging to the Empire's smallest ethnic group: Italian. Fiumian culture readily assimilated new arrivals. It was a rather atypical situation: the governmental centre was about 500 kilometres away, while the town was surrounded by Croatia, which stood under the jurisdiction of the Hungarian Crown and had a population that mainly lived from agriculture and supplying the town's newly founded industries with workers. Between 1868 and 1914, Fiume experienced an extremely prosperous period within Hungary, with a growing economy and vigorous cultural and social achievements, and it became the third-fastest developing town in Hungary after Budapest and Miskolc. Its population increased from 13,000 in 1868 to 50,000 by 1914. Large investments were financed or co-financed by the state, such as transport, the opening of the new railroad connecting Budapest and Fiume (via Zagreb) in 1873, the enlargement of the port, storehouses at the port, shipping companies etc. These achievements maintained the loyalty of the town towards the Hungarian state. Of the private enterprises, the most important was the Whitehead torpedo factory, which opened in

<sup>6</sup> See data referring to 1910 in Révai nagy lexikona. Az ismeretek enciklopédiája [Révai's Great Lexicon. The Encyclopedia of Knowledge]. Vol. 7: Etelka – Földöv. Budapest 1913, pp. 552–558, here: p. 555, cited in Fried: Emlékek, pp. 68–69.

<sup>7</sup> The Autonomist Party claimed greater autonomy for the town instead of the centralizing tendencies of the Hungarian government headed by Dezső Bánffy. Maylender was elected mayor in 1897 and was in office for a short time. He was reelected in 1901. In his later years, he withdrew from politics and worked on a five-volume study on the Italian academies, which was published posthumously under the title *Storia delle Accademie d'Italia* [History of the Italian Academies]. 5 vol. Bologna, Trieste 1926–1930. In 1911, Maylender returned to politics and was elected deputy for Fiume at the Hungarian Parliament but suffered a sudden death in the Parliament building.

1874. The main industries after 1868 were the oil refinery, the rice husking and starch factory, the wood and furniture trade, the wheat elevator, the shipbuilding industries, the cocoa and chocolate factory, the brick factory, the tobacco factory, the cognac distillery, a pasta factory, the Smith and Meynier paper factory, the Ossoinack barrel and chest factory, and a tannery.<sup>8</sup> In 1911, Hungarian engine- and shipbuilders were incorporated and the armament industry developed. The biggest warship of World War I was built there. By 1913–14, the port of Fiume became the tenth-busiest port in Europe. In those years its annual growth was superior even to that of Trieste, which nevertheless remained the most important port for Hungarian commerce.

Tolerance seemed to be a central issue for religious groups. Fiume, a rather secular commercial town, had a majority Catholic population. The census of 1910 indicated a total 49,806 inhabitants, of whom 45,130 were Catholics, 1,696 Jewish, 1,123 Calvinist, 995 Orthodox and 311 Lutheran.<sup>9</sup> The Jewish population expanded particularly in the 1870s and 1880s, mostly Hungarian-speaking newcomers joining those with a mainly Italian and Spanish background. Due to the specific policy of the Habsburg Empire and then of Austria-Hungary, the Catholic clergy in Fiume was mainly Croatian. Under Austria-Hungary, Fiume belonged to the diocese of Senj, a situation that went against the grain for the Italian population. In 1920, the Pontifical Delegate Celso Costantini noted "the religious indifference and apathy of the town".<sup>10</sup>

As for its social background, Fiume, like Trieste, had no nobility to speak of, but a capitalist middle class to direct it. Only a slight élite emerged, some among them English and French property owners. Social differences were not strongly felt. People had similar activities in their leisure time, moved about in a relatively limited space, and inevitably met.<sup>11</sup> Boatswains for instance, although at the top of the working-class hierarchy, had the habit of going to the opera on Saturday. Hungarian governors were mostly aristocrats, and many of the chief employees also lived somewhat apart from the rest of the inhabitants.<sup>12</sup>

Given these multilingual and multicultural foundations and common economic interests, Italian and Hungarian customs came somewhat closer to another over the years. Aladár Fest, when talking about the way of living, assumed that Italians were more withdrawn than Hungarians, who seldom received visitors and preferred meeting friends outside their homes on public occasions. Young men were not welcome in the homes of young girls unless they were fiancés or already considered

<sup>8</sup> Aladár Fest, Sámuel Holek: Fiume ipara [Fiume's Industry]. In: *Fiume és a magyar-horvát tengerpart*, pp. 261–274.

<sup>9</sup> See Fried: *Fiume. Città della memoria*, p. 102.

<sup>10</sup> See Antonio Scottà (ed.): *I territori del confine orientale italiano nelle lettere dei vescovi alla Santa Sede 1918–1922* [The Territories of Italy's Eastern Border through the Letters of the Bishops to the Holy See 1918–1922]. Trieste 1994, p. 332, quoted in Fried: *Fiume. Città della memoria*, p. 102. See also my interview with the Jesuit monk Sergio Katunarich. In: *ibidem*, pp. 347–348. Katunarich emphasizes the religious tolerance prevalent in the city: "The ecumenical spirit was not yet in fashion, but it would have found its natural habitat in Fiume." (Lo spirito ecumenico non era ancora di moda, ma Fiume avrebbe trovato il suo terreno naturale.)

<sup>11</sup> Anna Millo has noted the same about Trieste. See Anna Millo: *L'élite del potere a Trieste. Una biografia collettiva 1891–1936* [The Influential Elite in Trieste. A Collective Biography 1891–1936]. Milano 1989.

<sup>12</sup> Ágnes Ordasi has published articles on different aspects of Fumian microhistory. See e.g. Egan Lajos naplója – Impériumváltások Fiumében a kormányzóhelyettes szemével (1918–20) [Lajos Egan's Diary – Imperial Transitions Through the Eyes of the Deputy Governor (1918–20)]. Budapest 2019.

such. Italians on the other hand thought of Hungarians as more reserved and less sociable. Memories show Fiumian people to be open-minded, full of temperament, with a love of entertainment. They were most fond of going to inns in the environs at the weekends. The town numbered 165 inns in 1896, 10 hotels and restaurants and 17 cafés. Furthermore, there were 17 jeweller's, 37 barber's and 265 tailor's shops.<sup>13</sup> Little is related about women, although the wives of the leading people had an important role in public life heading different institutions and societies for beneficiary purposes. There were also amateur writers among them. A profession open to women was, of course, teaching. Gemma Harasim, a talented primary school teacher went to university in Florence as early as 1907. She strongly criticized the Hungarian education system in her articles published in *La Voce* there. She stopped teaching after her marriage to Giuseppe Lombardo Radice, a well-known intellectual and later antifascist. There were a lot of – mainly Croatian – women among factory workers, principally in the tobacco factory. Society was more open compared to its contemporary Italian counterpart; it was quite normal for women to go to a café to meet friends there, which was quite unlikely to happen in Italy. Hungarian law allowed divorce from 1896 onwards, so until 1924, as long as Hungarian law remained in force, people could settle in Fiume, acquire citizenship and obtain a divorce. The governor appointed by the king was in charge of the naval affairs of the whole coastline; Hungarian laws and the Hungarian educational system were in force. The town was directed by the local council, headed by the mayor elected by the town, but nominated by the government, and the official language of the city administration was Italian. There was thus a certain dualism in administration on the town and the national government levels. Most schools were in the hands of the local authorities. The economic prosperity, the good education system and health service, urban development, and the boom in the construction industry in the decades following the Hungarian–Croatian Settlement filled both the Fiumians and the distant Hungary with pride. Since he did not speak Hungarian, on festive occasions Mayor Giovanni de Ciotta (1824–1903, in office 1872–1896) expressed his sympathies by donning the ceremonial attire traditionally worn by Hungarian noblemen. This apparently harmonious relationship changed by the 1890s, when the Hungarian government introduced more nationalistic politics and tried to cut down on the autonomy of Fiume.<sup>14</sup> As a reaction, tendencies towards a broader autonomy in the town increased.

## Political Conflicts and Nationalism

The growing nationalism in Hungarian politics by the 1890s was more or less parallel to divergent nationalistic forces elsewhere. The existence of the new-born nation states, among them Italy in 1870 and Serbia in 1882, also had an effect on the ethnic groups of the Dual Monarchy. Actually, in Fiume the autonomist, irredentist

<sup>13</sup> Fest, Holek: Fiume ipara, p. 261–274.

<sup>14</sup> See also Péter Techet: Verzahnung kirchen- und nationalpolitischer Frontlinien in Fiume/Rijeka: 'Liberale' Ungarn und Italiener zur Zeit des ungarischen 'Kulturkampfes' (1894/1895). In: Bernhard Bachinger, Wolfram Dornik, Stephan Lehnstaedt (Hgg.): Österreich-Ungarns imperiale Herausforderungen. Nationalismen und Rivalitäten im Habsburgerreich um 1900. Göttingen 2020, pp. 295–312.

movements arrived later than in other parts of the Dual Monarchy – also compared to Trieste – and were less strongly felt.<sup>15</sup>

Some societies and associations were founded aiming at strengthening national identities, although quite often they had to conceal such aims under the cover of other activities such as sports, for the sake of obtaining permission from the authorities. In 1904–1905, Giovine Fiume (Young Fiume in Italian) was founded by young Italian irredentist students. Irredentism may have come through contacts with students they met at universities in Vienna or in Graz. One of the key issues for young irredentists and nationalists was the Italian Risorgimento. They considered themselves heirs of the ideas of Giuseppe Mazzini. Frano Supilo, a leading Croatian autonomist, was so influenced by Mazzini that he established contacts in Italy.<sup>16</sup> He published his first political pamphlets in Italian in Fiume and from 1900 his newspaper *Novi List* in Fiume, until it was banned by the government.<sup>17</sup> The Autonomous Party of Fiume, in stark contrast to the Hungarian government, published its paper *La Difesa* in Sušak (Sussak in Italian), the Croatian town directly across the small river Fiumara (later Eneo in Italian, Rječina in Croatian). Because of the lack of land and high rents in Fiume, some enterprises and also private people moved to Sušak. Nevertheless, there were contacts and communication between the different societies. Hungarian teachers at the grammar school such as Sándor Kőrösi and Aladár Fest were among the first scholars to study the town's history. Fest himself was on the editorial board of the monumental collection of documents on the history of Fiume collected by Giovanni Kobler.<sup>18</sup> Later, history became one of the chief issues for proving either the Slavic or the Italian origin of the population in the town. In any case, it seems as if everyday coexistence had been much easier even in periods in which political tensions were growing stronger. Remembering the town, Leo Valiani, a great historian, noted that Fiume had not been deeply involved in politics; the only important political question had been if Fiume was to be autonomous.<sup>19</sup> Roberto Bazlen, recalling history of Trieste, declared how the Habsburg domination and oppression – in the case of Fiume one could say that of Hungary – were nothing to compare to what the rest of the 20<sup>th</sup> century had in store.<sup>20</sup>

The centralizing tendencies of the Hungarian government by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century were also introduced via the educational system. The law in the Dual Monarchy

<sup>15</sup> See Ilona Fried: Colloqui milanesi con il Senatore Leo Valiani (1993–1997) [Talks in Milan with Senator Leo Valiani (1993–1997)]. In: Metodi e Ricerche. Rivista di Studi Regionali [Methods and Research. Regional Studies Review] 18 (1999) 2. pp. 11–16.

<sup>16</sup> Leo Valiani: La dissoluzione dell'Austria-Ungheria [The Dissolution of Austria-Hungary]. Milano 1966. Revised ed. Milano 1985, pp. 40–49.

<sup>17</sup> See Sergio Celli: Giornalismo e stampa periodica a Fiume (1813–1947) [Journalism and Periodicals in Fiume (1813–1947)]. In: Rivista di Studi Fiumani 5 (1957) 1–2, p. 35; Ordasi Ágnes: Egy betiltott kisebbségi lap. A fiumei La Difesa története (1898–1901) [A Banned Minority Newspaper. The History of La Difesa in Fiume (1898–1901)]. In: Pro Minoritate (2019) 5, pp. 59–85.

<sup>18</sup> Giovanni Kobler: Memorie per la storia della liburnica città di Fiume [Remembrances for the History of the Liburnian city of Fiume]. Fiume 1896.

<sup>19</sup> Fried: Colloqui milanesi con il Senatore Leo Valiani.

<sup>20</sup> Roberto Bazlen: Intervista su Trieste. In: Scritti. Il capitano di lungo corso. Note senza testo. Lettere editoriali. Lettere a Montale [Interview About Trieste. In: Writings. The Sea Captain. Notes Without Text. Editorial Letters. Letters to Montale]. Ed. by Roberto Calasso. Milano 1984, pp. 242–246.

declared that “any citizen has the right to take part in elementary and secondary education in their mother tongue,”<sup>21</sup> which was important due to the high number of non-Hungarian subjects in Hungary, but the number of schools teaching in the languages of the different ethnic groups diminished throughout the country from the 1880s onwards. As language was considered one of the key issues for national identity, the government openly practised an assimilative policy in Fiume too, introducing Hungarian, originally only an optional choice among foreign languages, as the language of instruction in the grammar school (only for boys) instead of Italian. In spite of the importance the town attributed to the use of their languages, after 1875 the policy gradually changed. The government began to nominate far more Hungarian teachers than local ones, and they took governance of schools away from the town, putting them in the hands of the ministry. The town’s Croat grammar school moved to Sušak in 1896, that is, to Croatia. From 1881 onwards, a Hungarian curriculum was introduced in schools, with slight modifications due to the special conditions of the town.<sup>22</sup>

Nevertheless, at the turn of the century, everyday conflicts rarely amounted to more than a skirmish. Contacts with Hungary mostly deteriorated during World War I, after Italy entered the war. The Hungarian government even deported suspects to two camps in Hungary, to Sülysáp (today’s Tápiósüly), where 129 of them died of malnutrition and epidemics and to Kiskunhalas, where far fewer Fiumians survived.<sup>23</sup>

## Artistic and Cultural Life

Secondary school teachers played an important role in the social and cultural life of the town. They were authors of school textbooks, translators, members of social, cultural and scientific societies. The headmaster of the secondary grammar school Aladár Fest became also one of the editors in chief of the newspaper *Magyar Tenger* (Hungarian Sea in Hungarian) published from 1893 in Hungarian and in Italian in Fiume. The high standard of the Hungarian education system was later acknowledged by Silvino Gigante, an irredentist who after 1924 became a headmaster and thanks to his good knowledge of Hungarian also a translator of Hungarian literary works such as those of Ferenc Molnár and Ferenc Körmendi.<sup>24</sup> As in Trieste, there was no university in Fiume, so young people attended universities in Budapest or, from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, increasingly in Italy. Either way, students of law were obliged to take the Hungarian exam before being able to practise their profession. Of the Italian universities, students chose Florence, Padova and Bologna. There were great works of town planning and construction of both public and private buildings, attracting several architects in the town, including Alajos Hauszmann, one of the most prestigious Hungarian architects, commissioned with planning the

<sup>21</sup> Fried: Emlékek városa, p. 135; Fried: Fiume. Città della memoria, p. 155.

<sup>22</sup> Fried: Emlékek városa, pp. 135–142; Fried: Fiume. Città della memoria, p. 155–165.

<sup>23</sup> István Végső: Olasz áldozatok Halason? [Italian Victims in Halas?], [https://nagyhaboru.blog.hu/2015/11/11/olasz\\_aldozatok\\_halason](https://nagyhaboru.blog.hu/2015/11/11/olasz_aldozatok_halason), 17.3.2020.

<sup>24</sup> Gigante was the translator of inter alia Ferenc Molnár: I ragazzi di via Pál [The Paul Street Boys]. Milano 1938, and of Körmendi, also of the greatest success of Ferenc Körmendi: Un'avventura a Budapest [An Adventure in Budapest]. Milano 1932.

Governor's Palace (1896). In 1919–1920, during Gabriele D'Annunzio's occupation of Fiume, it became the headquarters for the "Comandante". He used to hold his speeches from its terrace. As for theatre and music, the public preferred mainly Italian operas (sometimes patriotic ones), whereas Hungarian companies played mainly prose. Giovanni de Zaytz/Ivan Zajc (1832–1914) was a native of the town of Czech and German descent and after a typical career in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, he became a leading figure of Croatian music.

Balls, sporting events, meetings and readings of the various societies and associations played an important role in social life. The nearby town of Abbazia (today's Opatija) became a popular resort where the imperial family also spent their Easter holidays, and concerts were frequently held there.

Newspapers and journals became widespread in the second half of 19<sup>th</sup> century, especially the Italian-language *La Bilancia*, founded in 1867, which was the longest-lasting paper in the town, first as a weekly, then as a daily. People also had the habit of reading papers in the cafés of Fiume. Newspapers from Hungary, Austria and all over Europe arrived, and they continued to arrive after the town became part of Italy. In those days, they expressed a more open spirit than those of Fascist Italy. Papers from Budapest also figure in a novel by Franco Vegliani, the plot being set in Fascist Italy and focusing on the anti-Slav politics of the regime.<sup>25</sup>

The second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw a growing number of literary productions – we know about works in Italian or even in the Italian dialect of Fiume. Some of them centred on Hungary and Hungarian history. The town and the region appeared in a novel written by the great Hungarian Romantic writer, Mór Jókai, who was a frequent visitor to Fiume, as reflected in his works. The novel *A Player Who Wins* is set there and at scenic Porto Re (Krajlevica in Croatian). Jókai caught the idea of the bridge Fiume represented among different languages and cultures. He also completed a prologue for a theatre performance in Fiume, (1881) in which he emphasized the town's economic importance, and saw the growing economy as a guarantee for the disappearance of the tensions and fighting among ethnic groups; unfortunately the fulfilment of his forecast was shortlived.

Perhaps the main figure of the transmission of cultures between Fiume and Hungary by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was Vittorio de Gauss (1857–1932),<sup>26</sup> a descendant of an old patrician family, a biologist who became a Hungarian writer, journalist, translator, and took up a "Hungarian" name: Viktor Garády. He published a huge number of books, mostly for the dissemination of culture and science. The Hungarian Dr. Géza Kenedi published several volumes on Fiume. There were a number of

<sup>25</sup> Franco Vegliani: Processo a Volosca [The Volosca Process]. Milano, Venezia 1958. New Ed.: Palermo 1989, pp. 114–115. On Hungarian works of literature and correspondences regarding Fiume, see also Ilona Fried: Fiume; and anthologies edited by Csaba Kiss Gy.: Magyar írók az Adrián [Hungarian Writers at the Adriatic]. Budapest 2007 and Adriai képek [Adriatic Pictures]. Budapest 2008. See also Balázs Ablonczy: A kikötő lakói. Fiumei magyarok a két világháború között [The Inhabitants of the Port. Fiumian Hungarians Between the Two World Wars]. In: Rubicon (2018) 3–4, pp. 174–181.

<sup>26</sup> Ilona Fried: Kulturni identitet granice. Vittorio Gauss – Viktor Garády [The Cultural Identity of the Border. Vittorio Gauss – Viktor Garády]. In: Rijeka i mađarska Kultura, pp. 47–56; Ilona Fried: Egy kulturális identitás. Vittorio de Gauss – Garády Viktor [A Cultural Identity. Vittorio de Gauss – Garády Viktor]. In: Fiume és a magyar kultúra, pp. 97–117.

translators of Fiumian origin, most of them functionaries of the towns, among them Ernesto Brelich or the notary and vice-mayor Niccolo Gelleich. Hungarian literature was also translated into Italian, including works by Jókai.

## **After the Fall of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy**

After World War I, Fiume belonged to about six different states. As the London Treaty of 1915 did not mention Fiume, after the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy it was considered to belong to Croatia. In 1919–1920, D'Annunzio headed about two thousand soldiers who occupied Fiume for about 15 months, declaring the Kvarner Republic.<sup>27</sup> In 1921, the town voted for the establishment of a Free State guaranteed by international law, but it was opposed by nationalists and fascists, (more than half a year before the fascists took over in Italy). As for the Hungarians, most of them left the town after 1918; those who remained became Italian citizens. In 1924, the town became part of Italy, but without its hinterland it practically lost its importance in Italian economic life. In 1943, after the German occupation it became part of the Adriatisches Küstenland, and in 1945 Yugoslav troops entered and took vengeance on the "enemy", first on the autonomist leaders of the Free State of Fiume, then leading functionaries during Fascism (a number of people outside Fiume) and finally on the civilian population.

## **Mediators in Culture and Memories of Those Who Left**

During the "ventennio" (as the two decades of Fascism are often referred to in Italian), some of the previous irredentists who spoke good Hungarian and knew about Hungarian culture played a key role in the cultural transfer between Hungarian and Italian culture. Apart from Silvino Gigante mentioned earlier, Enrico Burich and Gino Sirola also translated Hungarian literature in Italy. The latter published two anthologies of Hungarian poems.<sup>28</sup> At that time, especially Hungarian prose fiction and plays were very popular in Italy. In Hungary, Antonio Widmar, (Antal Vidmar) of Fiumian origin, working in D'Annunzio's Foreign Office during the occupation of Fiume, an employee of the Italian Embassy in Budapest from 1924 to 1943, became the most important mediator between the two literatures in Hungary, translating Pirandello into Hungarian and Hungarian authors into Italian.

According to some figures, about 25,000 of the Italian inhabitants (but not only the Italians) fled in the late 1940s and early 1950s; some speak of even higher numbers. For most people leaving behind properties and belongings, the "esodo" (exodus in English), as it is called in Italy, meant the end of their past culture. Many of them never returned; the town took on special features in their memories.

In many of these memories, there was a rich, tolerant, well-to-do town which offered a good standard of living; they conserved it as a symbol of Mediterranean liveliness.

<sup>27</sup> From the recent studies on D'Annunzio's occupation of Fiume see Giordano Bruno Guerri: *Disobbedisco. Cinquecento giorni di rivoluzione. Fiume 1919–1920 [I Disobey. Five hundred Days of Revolution. Fiume 1919–1920]*. Milano 2019.

<sup>28</sup> Gino Sirola: *Accordi magiari* [Magyar Chords]. Trieste 1928; Gino Sirola: *Amore e dolore di terra magiara. Antologia di poeti ungheresi. Introduzione di Babits Michele* [Love and Pain of the Magyar Land. An Anthology of Hungarian Poets. Introduction by Mihály Babits]. Firenze 1932.

People I interviewed, including Antoniazzo Bocchina, an art historian, emphasized that the two “most fascist” people, Riccardo and Silvino Gigante both had Hungarian wives (Riccardo actually a Jewish wife). Sergio Katunarich, a Jesuit friar wrote and spoke about Fiume as a town with endless possibilities for making one’s fortune. Rosemarie Wildi Benedikt, a teacher, spoke about how she, the daughter of a director, played with all the other children where they lived, some of them from much lower social backgrounds and of different ethnic origin. The politician Miklós Vásárhelyi, secretary to Imre Nagy during the Hungarian revolution of 1956, replied when I asked if he was sorry that his family had moved back to Hungary in 1928, “Well, we ought to live in a Mediterranean town”. In an article, he wrote about the “Town of Dreams”. Over the years, in many memories it became the ideal town to live in.<sup>29</sup>

One of the most important writers, Enrico Morovich, recalls the period of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy as the happiest time in Fiume. After World War I, “the new border divided Fiume from Sussak and from all the surrounding places and took it away from the islands and from Dalmatia, not to mention Zagreb or Ljubljana, which we originally also considered to be the hinterland of our town.”<sup>30</sup>

The memories of the great Italian Germanist Ladislao Mittner describe old Fiume in the light of all future events. He wrote his article in 1975, conscious of what had happened so far. He considered his hometown full of contrasts and therefore of stimulus in the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His father – of German origin – was a Hungarian who arrived in Fiume, was fascinated by the town, and married his mother, herself of Italian origin but with many Croat relations too:

One of my uncles, the extraordinary and erudite scholar of German studies, Enrico Burich was one of the key figures of Fiumian irredentism. Another uncle of mine, Adolf Hromatka, a very open-minded and lovable man, was the owner of the only German bookshop in Fiume, but as he had a Czech name, the “true Austrians” did not consider him a true Austrian. So the newly converted irredentist teacher, [...] the “kaisertreu” bookseller [...] and the family doctor, a stubborn panslavist, kept on having heavy discussions in order to assume the impossibility for mutual understanding and for this purpose they used the good old Fiumian dialect, or even worse, they took a terribly funny mixed language, the mixture of all the existing languages, the dialect used in the old town or even more on the outskirts. It was not pleasant at all to live at the crossing of four nationalities ready to lacerate one another. But contrasts sometimes favour, or in some rare cases even deserve attempts at pacification. In my family, on my father’s and on my mother’s side all together we could count at least eight teachers. My grandfather, Enrico Burich senior, wrote a Croatian grammar for Italians, my father an Italian one for Hungarians, I followed them on this road with a German grammar for Italians.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Fried: Emlékek városa, pp. 261–265; Fried: Fiume. Città della memoria, pp. 328–332.

<sup>30</sup> Enrico Morovich: Il mio ungherese [My Hungarian]. In: Un italiano di Fiume [An Italian from Fiume]. Milano 1993, p. 73.

<sup>31</sup> Ladislao Mittner: Appunti autobiografici [Autobiographical Notes]. In: Belfagor 30 (1975) 4, pp. 389–394, here: p. 390: “Uno dei miei zii, il valente e dotto germanista Enrico Burich [...] fu uno dei promotori

This year, Rijeka, a cultural capital of Europe will fulfil its century-long role as a mediator among nationalities and cultures.

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dell’irredentismo fiumano. Aveva studiato a Budapest, Monaco e Firenze, dove collaborò a *La Voce* con i primi articoli sull’italianità a Fiume. Un altro mio zio, Adolf Hromatka, molto affabile ed estroso, era il proprietario della sola libreria tedesca di Fiume; ma aveva un nome boemo e dai ‘veri austriaci’ non era considerato vero austriaco. Continue ed accanite discussioni si accendevano fra il neoprofessore irredentista, che nel 1912 dovette o piuttosto preferì lasciare Fiume, il libraio ‘kaisertreu’, che aveva però una spiccata predilezione per inusitati e pomposi nomi antico-germanici, ed il medico di famiglia, panslavista ostinato; per comprendere che non potevano comprendersi essi si servivano del buon vecchio dialetto fiumano, a meno che non si servissero di un orrido e spassoso miscuglio di tutte le parlate che risuonavano nella città vecchia e più ancora, nei sobborghi. Non era piacevole vivere al crocevia di quattro nazionalità che già si preparavano a sbranarsi fra loro; i dissidi favoriscono però, e talora impongono, tentativi di conciliazione. Erano, nella mia famiglia, che fra il ramo paterno e materno annoverava almeno otto insegnanti, tentativi di chiarificazione linguistica. Mio nonno, Enrico senior, scrisse una grammatica croata per italiani, mio padre un’italiana per ungheresi; io li seguii su questa via con una grammatica tedesca per italiani.”