

In the South of the Monarchy Lies our Strength

Istria and Dalmatia in the Habsburg Imperial Propaganda of the Vienna Adria-Ausstellung in 1913

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents an analysis of the rhetorical strategies of the Habsburg imperial propaganda in the *Adria Exposition*, held in Vienna from May to October 1913. In what remained the last major international exhibition in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, plans for a process of modernization and colonial exploitation of Istria and Dalmatia became the cornerstone for a future vision of imperial power along the Adriatic seaboard and its hinterlands.

KEYWORDS

Habsburg Monarchy, Istria, Dalmatia, Adria Exposition, Trieste

IZVLEČEK

Članek predstavlja analizo retoričnih strategij habsburške cesarske propagande na Razstavi Adria (*Adria-Ausstellung*), ki je potekala na Dunaju od maja do oktobra 1913. Na tej zadnji veliki mednarodni razstavi v avstro-ogrski monarhiji so načrti za proces modernizacije in kolonialnega izkoriščanja Istre in Dalmacije postali temeljni kamen vizije prihodnje cesarske moči ob Jadranskem morju in v njegovem zaledju.

KLJUČNE BESEDE

habsburška monarhija, Istra, Dalmacija, Razstava Adria, Trst

The *Österreichische Adria-Ausstellung*, the Austrian Adria Exposition, held in the Vienna Prater from 3 May to 5 October 1913, presented to the general public the histories, cultures, and economic development opportunities of the Habsburg territories located along the Adriatic seaboard and its hinterlands.¹ Organized by the *Österreichischer Flottenverein*, the Austrian Navy League, under the patronage of the heir presumptive, the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the Exposition pursued two related objectives: first, to celebrate, via a series

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of symbolic commemorations, the imperial possessions in Istria, Dalmatia, Trieste, and the recently annexed Bosnia and Herzegovina; and to reaffirm, domestically and on the global stage, the Dual Monarchy's rule over Southern Slavic populations, in an unequivocal assertion of Habsburg power on the geopolitical chessboard of Europe.² For Franz Ferdinand the Adria Exposition, destined to remain the last major international exhibition in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, represented an opportunity to advance his economic and political agenda for the future of the Dual Monarchy, which he envisioned to transform into an assertive and influential maritime power.³ Winning the support for such an ambitious political endeavor among different sectors of the population – including the general public, the aristocracy, and the industrial elite – required a sophisticated propaganda machine that operated on a large scale. To this end, the *Adria-Ausstellung* was promoted via different media that included advertisements, photographs, movies, newspaper articles, postcards, the authorized poster, and the official exhibition catalog.

This paper illustrates the rhetorical strategies of the Habsburg imperial propaganda and its representation of Southern Slavic territories as primitive geographies, still untamed lands that are ultimately in need of Austria's civilizing mission. I argue today that the catalyst for this Austrian process of social and cultural domestication of the Slavic hinterlands was, in the eyes of the imperial state apparatus, the colonial exploitation of local resources and raw materials. In other words, the plans of economic development reinforced the underlying message that the Adria Exposition broadcast to the Austrian and by extension European public: Istria and Dalmatia, shorthand for a rural Slavic world, could only be civilized by the logic of European colonial and capitalist modernity.⁴ The geographic core of the Exposition was the upper Adriatic region, an area known for its multilingual and multicultural composition. So, while the focus remained this hybrid, Italo-Slavic world, an important operational assumption in this intended process of civilization was a cultural-political

² The *Flottenverein* was founded in 1904 in Vienna with the explicit objective to promote both the military navy and commercial shipping. The association published an official magazine, "Die Flagge," and established a number of regional offices throughout the empire. After a timid start, the number of members grew quickly and reached, shortly before the outbreak of the First World War, more than 40,000 associates. With its robust promotional campaign, the Adriatic Exposition represented the most important initiative of the *Flottenverein*.

³ Vego, *Austro-Hungarian Naval Policy*, p. 182.

⁴ It is worth noting here that the Habsburg state was certainly aware of the linguistic, cultural, and ethnic diversity among its Slavic populations. These differences between Slovenes, Croats, and Bosnians – the main groups represented in the Adriatic Exposition – were generally glossed over in favor of a broader Slavic grouping.

hierarchy between Italian (or Romance dialect) speakers, fluent in what was considered a “historical language,” and Slavic dialects, spoken by so-called “non-historic peoples.”⁵ The civilizing mission that governed the Adria Exhibition was thus directed at the Slavic communities of the region, who were considered backwards and living, as it were, outside of history. The colonial driving force behind the Exposition, then, combined projects of systematic economic exploitation and the effort to finally bring “history” to allegedly underdeveloped populations. The 1913 Exposition, then, treated the sizeable Italian-speaking population that inhabited the Adriatic shore differently from its Slavic-speaking counterpart. While Austro-Italians were the poster child of successful policies of the past, Austro-Slavs were the object of a renewed and vigorous consideration that could propel the Habsburg Empire into an even more prosperous future.

I examine the Adria Exposition as a self-contained cultural artifact operating within several semiotic dimensions. In this analysis, I follow Maria Carolina Foi’s approach to the *Wiener Weltausstellung*, the 1873 World’s Fair organized in Vienna, which served as the blueprint for the 1913 Adria Exposition.⁶ Foi regards world fairs and universal exhibitions as social and political phenomena that functioned as “systems capable of working on multiple, interconnected levels.”⁷ The intersecting levels of signification that traversed the Adria Exposition were indeed manifold. The most immediate function appeared to be the promotion of a newly invigorated Mediterranean mission of the Habsburgs, one in which Slavic regions were framed as strategically crucial holdings in a possible future expansion of Austria as a sea power. In addition, the Adria Exposition overlapped with other important occasions of public interest since 1913 also marked the 65th jubilee of the Emperor’s ascent to the throne while,

⁵ The notion of “non-historical” people was famously discussed by Hegel in the context of the relationship between nationality and statehood. For a discussion of 19th-century power dynamics related to language use and policies in the Habsburg Empire, see Rindler Schjerve, *Diglossia and Power*. For a discussion of how language classifications in the empire were later used to construct ethnolinguistic identity categories, see Stergar and Scheer, *Ethnic Boxes*.

⁶ The Adriatic Exposition was modeled on the popular world fairs of the previous century, such as the ones held in London, Paris, Chicago, and Vienna itself. Attended by visitors eager to be both entertained and educated, these universal exhibitions often displayed the latest scientific and technological advances, while encouraging international trade. The Adriatic Exposition needs to be understood in the context of this popular trend in rapidly industrializing countries of the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries. Although smaller in scale, the 1913 Exposition was intended for a domestic audience (mainly the Habsburg upper and middle classes) but also for international visitors.

⁷ Foi, *Wiener Weltausstellung 1873*, p. 121.

in the meantime, the Balkan Wars were fought not far from Vienna. Against the backdrop of increasingly worrying warfare on the Ottoman frontier, the *Adria-Ausstellung* was conceived as an effort to promote an Austrian peace in the region. In the introduction to the official catalog of the Exposition, the president of the organizing executive committee, the doctor and balneologist from Abbazia/Opatija Julius von Hortenau, spoke of the historical importance of the *Adria-Ausstellung*.⁸ In the context of momentous events that threatened the *status quo* such as the disintegration of “European Turkey” and a general economic recession that thwarted the flow of global capital, the Adria Exposition was conceived as an endeavor to guarantee peace, “ein Friedenswerk,” suggesting a *pax austriaca* imposed with the might of imperial control.⁹

The spring and summer of 1913 were unseasonably cool and rainy, so much that in a reportage about the Adria Exposition published in mid-August, the *Neue Freie Presse* lamented the persistent bad weather during this time of year.¹⁰ The *Adria-Ausstellung* opened at 10 o'clock of an unusually mild and fair-weathered Sunday morning in early May. A sudden drop in temperature and heavy rain the day before had worried the organizing committee of the Adria Exposition, fueling the fear that the opening had to be relocated inside the Rotunda building on short notice. But the capricious weather in the end decided to cooperate. Emperor Franz Joseph presided the pompous inaugural ceremony, officially conducted by the patron of the Exposition Franz Ferdinand. Also present were Minister President Karl von Stürgkh, along with the highest court dignitaries, representatives of the ministerial and diplomatic corps, various other international guests of honor, and imperial government delegations from the Adriatic territories. The event conjoined public education and political propaganda attracting, despite the rainy weather in the summer months of that year, an overall number of over two million visitors.¹¹ On mild Sundays the number of visitors could exceed 80,000 guests.¹² The exhibition was installed around in the park area around the Rotunda building, which had been erected for the 1873 Vienna World Fair.

The Expo was open daily from 10 o'clock in the morning to 2 o'clock at night. The price of a daily admission ticket was 60 Heller, while a general pass for the entire length of the Expo (*Permanenz-Karte*) could be purchased

⁸ A brief note about toponyms in this paper: I use the English place names for major cities such as Vienna and Trieste. For all other towns, I employ a double toponym formed by the town's name at the time, followed by its present-day counterpart in Slovene or Croatian.

⁹ *Österreichische Adria-Ausstellung* [...], *Catalog*, p. x. See also Ursula Storch, *Der Süden*.

¹⁰ The article is dated 15 August 1913.

¹¹ *Neue Freie Presse*, 6 October 1913, p. 6.

¹² Beranek, *Die Adria-Ausstellung und ihr 'Meer'*, p. 583.

for 30 crowns. Visitors entered the Exposition near the western access of the Rotunda through an entrance that was a replica of the city gate in Dalmatian Zara/Zadar. The guests immediately reached a large artificial lake, excavated specifically for the Exposition, imitating a harbor in the Adriatic Sea. The waterfront extended into what the organizers named the *Canale grande*, an eleven meter wide artificial channel that in turn lead to a large *Café-Insel* and a full-size reproduction of the Trieste-built Austrian Lloyd steamship “Wien,” which housed a sizable restaurant. The floor of the canal had been painted blue to imitate the chromatic hues of the Adriatic Sea. The entire surface area of the water amounted to almost 12,000 square meters. The *Canale* could be crossed by three Venice-inspired bridges offering access to exhibition halls on both sides of the banks. The exhibition halls were replicas of famous buildings in the Austrian Adriatic surrounded by a built scenery of towns and villages, churches, and a small mosque. Among the artistic and architectural reproductions, one could count the Praetorian Palace in Capodistria/Koper, the Rector’s Palace of Ragusa/Dubrovnik, the Municipal Building of Spalato/Split, the colonnades and narrow passageways of Abbazia/Opatija, the St. George Church in Lovrano/Lovran, and the splendid mosaics of the Euphrasian Basilica in Parenzo/Poreč. Curiously enough, a replica of the Venetian House in Pirano/Piran, built in fifteenth-century Gothic style in what today is Slovenian Istria, was chosen as headquarters of the Bosnia and Herzegovina pavilion, conflating geographic and cultural areas into a generic and stereotypical Slavic grouping. This conflation notwithstanding, male and female actors, dressed in traditional folk costumes, walked through the streets and alleys to enhance the appearance of ethnic and cultural authenticity. The argument here was rhetorically subtle but visually powerful. With this ethnographic spectacle the organizers did not intend to suggest that these areas were inhabited by Slavic speakers.¹³ Evident from the display of the traditional *Volkstracht*, however, is an ethnically-inflected strategy of representation in which specific local costumes are subsumed in a larger Slavic world, constructed in opposition to Italian-speaking cultures. Crucial was that all installations had to be as genuine and realistic as possible: for the aquaria of the Natural Museum on display, the organizers shipped to Vienna the equivalent of sixty cubic meters of seawater from the Bay of Trieste.

On proud display was an entire section devoted to Trieste, the shiny crown jewel of the Habsburg Adriatic. The port city told a remarkable success story. Steadfast in resolve and true to her dynastic commitment, Trieste was commercially irreplaceable and politically invaluable. The growth of its urban

¹³ The Austrian census indicates that in 1910 over 90% of inhabitants of Pirano/Piran and Capodistria/Koper indicated Italian as their main language.

center was the tangible demonstration of Austrian administrative achievements and the metaphorical springboard from which to dive into future endeavors in the Adriatic and beyond. The Trieste exhibit showed panoramic views of the city and the port area, as well as pompously boasting the latest work of civil engineering such as the San Vito road tunnel, opened to the public in 1911. On display were also the geological attractions of the region with a reconstruction of a Karst grotto that led to a panorama of the Miramare Castle. Creating the powerful illusion of an adventurous and culturally edifying maritime journey, the exhibit offered the spectacle of an exotic yet domesticated Mediterranean atmosphere. A red and white lighthouse, visible from afar, clearly indicated that the goal of the *Adria-Ausstellung* was a celebration of an already well-established Austrian imperial power in the Adriatic. But the exhibition was also much more than a simple glorification of past annexations and territorial gains. The vividly painted dioramas and the movie theater showing cinematographic renderings of pleasant sea voyages offered visitors the unmistakable notion that the whole project was in large part the affirmation of a renewed and modernized colonial fantasy that made visible the many new economic opportunities and chances of exploitation that the Habsburg Mediterranean offered.

The structural configuration of the Adria Exposition was organized in large units and departments that in turn grouped together smaller, thematically related, pavilions and exhibits. The large theme park contained exhibitions that featured the *k. u. k. Kriegsmarine*, the Imperial-Royal Austrian War Navy, including the reproduction of the navigation bridge of a battleship, the mercantile navy, as well as the most recent developments in naval engineering and architecture. The section dedicated to the art, history, and ethnology of the Adriatic region and the Balkan peninsula included presentations of local folklore. A sizable area covered the natural sciences and the speleology of the Karst Plateau and the Dinaric Alps. Various other exhibitions educated the public about forestry, agronomy, and fishery, as well as marine botany and zoology. Here, the presentations included the maritime fauna of the Adriatic Sea, comprising among other animals, dolphins and seals; and the diverse wildlife in the region that included wild goats, deer, bears, wolves, as well as pelicans and vultures. While geared towards the general public, part of the intent of these exhibits was also to promote hunting expeditions for the Habsburg aristocracy.¹⁴ These efforts were connected to the larger promotion of Austrian tourism to seaside resorts and spa towns in Istria, Dalmatia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Other exhibits boasted the development of agriculture, hydraulic engineering, and the recent completion of sizeable public works.

¹⁴ See also Morgan, *Das Jagdwild*.

Next to the sections devoted to the imperial capital Vienna and Trieste was the exhibit that showcased the *Südbahn*, the Southern Railway, that connected the imperial capital to the Adriatic city. As the most important commercial port and Habsburg outlet to the Adriatic Sea, Trieste played a particularly prominent role in the Exposition.

One of the main rhetorical objectives of the imperial propaganda underlying the Adria Exposition was the crafting of a persuasive argument through which the Habsburgs could vigorously stake a renewed claim over the Slavic territories. To that end, the visual vocabulary of the Exposition deployed a collection of colonial tropes and Orientalist iconographies that built upon a longstanding imperial tradition of representation of the cultural landscapes located southeast of Vienna. Tasked with this political strategy of legitimization was the historical exhibition, a museum-like display curated by a committee that included, among others, the directors of the Imperial-Royal Archeological Institute, the Court Museum of Art History, and the Central Committee for the Preservation of the Imperial Cultural Heritage.¹⁵ Chronologically arranged, the exhibition halls included replicas of artifacts and monuments that spanned the period from the second century C.E. to the beginning of the sixteenth-century. The emphasis of the exhibit was placed upon the civilizing Roman influence on the material cultures of local Illyrian and Celtic tribes at the expense of a larger contextualization that discussed pre-Roman populations and Greek colonies of the upper Adriatic region. In particular, the narrative in the official catalog of the Adria Exposition highlights how the Roman military occupation imposed upon a motley crew of warring barbarian tribes “state order” and a unifying “spiritual culture” upon the area.¹⁶ The results of recent archeological excavations are enlisted to demonstrate how the arrival of a superior state infrastructure shaped the identity of the region. In this vein, artifacts from early centuries to late antiquity are presented as incontrovertible evidence of the steady and relatively homogeneous Romanization, a process that intensified in the imperial period. Photographs, models, and dioramas of the Roman amphitheater and Augustan temple in Pola/Pula, mural paintings and floor mosaics of Roman villas, and the early Christian architecture of Aquileia are displayed as further testimony of the Western origin of Istria and Dalmatia.

In the historical exhibit, the large diorama that presented a replica of Diocletian’s Palace in Dalmatia offered a locus towards which several threads of

¹⁵ Respectively, the K. k. Hofrat Prof. Dr. Emil Reisch, Prof. Dr. Wilhelm Kubitschek, and Prof. Dr. Max Dvořák.

¹⁶ *Österreichische Adria-Ausstellung [...] Catalog*, p. 211: “staatliche Ordnung” and “geistige Kultur.”

the imperial propaganda rhetoric converged. Part military fortification, part residence of leisure in close proximity to the Adriatic Sea, the architectural complex was built in the fourth century C.E. at the behest of the Roman emperor. The growing interest in Diocletian's Palace, in addition to other Roman archaeological sites in Salona/Solin and Spalato/Split, had increased in the course of the nineteenth century and was motivated by a strategy of legitimization of power. Through the excavation and preservation of this cultural and artistic heritage, the Habsburgs could represent themselves as heirs to Roman imperial rule in Dalmatia.¹⁷ The catalog of the exhibit draws attention to the massive and iconic granite Sphinx statue located at the end of the easternmost arcade of the Palace, reminding the audience that the monument was built in Egypt and then transported to Dalmatia.¹⁸ The emphasis on this architectural detail reveals a strategic argument that establishes a historical analogy between the Roman colonization of Egypt and the Austrian colonization of Dalmatia. The maritime location of the Palace also provided further historical justification as it encapsulated the ambitious dreams of an Austrian thalassocracy, a military sea power dominating the Adriatic Sea. In this network of mutually reinforcing political statements, a circumstance that did not pass unnoticed to the organizers and the public alike was the close physical proximity of the Palace with the geographic site of the Austrian naval victory in the 1866 Battle of Lissa/Vis, a nearby island off the Illyrian coast. Outnumbered against the Italian navy, the Austrians here won a strategically insignificant but symbolically important success against their Prussian-backed enemy.

Parallel to this assertion of imperial continuity that established an ideal genealogy from Rome to Vienna is the representation of Dalmatian locals as Slavic noble savages, unsophisticated peasants who were less likely to be contaminated by the rhetoric of nationalism and thus faithful to the House of Habsburg. Actors dressed in Dalmatian traditional folk costumes, including the characteristically black Morlach attire, walked in the streets of the theme park to convey a sense of genuineness. The iconography of the Morlachs, a rural community from the Dalmatian hinterland, hailed from late eighteenth-century travel accounts in the region, in particular from the famous *Journey to Dalmatia* (*Viaggio in Dalmazia*), published in 1774 by the Venetian abbot Alberto Fortis. Although Fortis's understanding of the population focused on their maritime homeland (from the Slavic root *more*, meaning "sea"), inherent in the ethno-anthropological classification of the Morlach community as Black Vlachs (from the Italian term *morlacchi*) was a process of exotic racialization

¹⁷ Baskar, *The Habsburg Empire in the Adriatic*, p. 17.

¹⁸ *Österreichische Adria-Ausstellung* [...] *Catalog*, p. 215.

according to which they were often described as intemperate and debauched mountain brigands. When represented as racially white, black was traditionally the color of their clothes. In the traditional iconography, Morlachs were portrayed donning an elaborate folk costume that featured embroidered velvet robes and the famed Dalmatian lace.

Dalmatian lacemaking figured prominently at the Adriatic Exposition in Vienna. Once again, the organizers resorted to a well-established tradition that connected the aristocratic patronage of local arts and craftsmanship to projects of colonial expansion. A nascent, politically motivated tourism in Dalmatia promoted a sense of imperial pride and ownership. Bojan Baskar has shown that in the Eastern Adriatic, Habsburg aristocratic initiatives played a crucial role in the promotion of different forms of travel, from cultural tourism to the development of seaside resorts.¹⁹ Dalmatian lacemaking exhibitions in Vienna were then advertised in newspapers specifically printed for guests on Austrian steamships carrying visitors to the Adriatic resorts. Newspapers such as *Adria*, read by the imperial court in Vienna, or the *Illustrierte Österreichische Riviera-Zeitung*, a newspaper distributed on board of steamships, promoted events such as the 1905 Exhibition of Dalmatian Lacemaking in Vienna. Now, laced fabrics featured prominently in the representation of ethnographic exhibits and local folklore.

An often-employed colonial trope revolved around the representation of these Orientalized territories as fabled places. An article of the *Zeitschrift des österreichischen Ingenieur- und Architektenvereins* extolling the virtues of the Adriatic Exhibition made the ambitions of new colonial explorations more explicit. Addressing an audience of engineers and architects, the editorial described the Dalmatian and Istrian coasts and inland territories as eagerly awaiting development.²⁰ The Adria Exposition showed that Austria was ready to awake these territories from the long slumber of Sleeping Beauty. This storybook imagery was not new. The description of Dalmatia as Cinderella of the imperial crown lands had been a widespread trope in Austrian travel accounts. In Hermann Bahr's *Dalmatinische Reise*, the author cites a review of the previous edition of his travelogue in the *Österreichische Rundschau*

¹⁹ See Baskar, *Southbound*; idem, *The Habsburg Empire in the Adriatic*.

²⁰ "Das Innere Dalmatiens und wohl auch Istriens harret noch der Erschließung, des Erweckens aus einem langen Dornröschenschlafe. Hier ist noch das weite Feld für ergiebige Entdeckungen, die vielleicht künftige Bahnbauten dem Ingenieur gewähren. Beispiele locken ja kräftig, so jenes von Abbazia, das binnen drei Jahrzehnten aus einem armseligen Fischerdorf zum weitbekannten Kurort sich verwandelte; von Brioni, das unser Vereinsmitglied Ing. Kuppelwieser zum Erblühen brachte." Beranek, *Die Adria-Ausstellung und ihr 'Meer'*, p. 583.

that describes Dalmatia as “das Aschenbrödel Österreichs.”²¹ In the article, however, the rousing of Sleeping Beauty is associated with potential investment opportunities. The Brionian (Brioni/Brijuni) archipelago, purchased by the industrialist and magnate Paul Kupelwieser and transformed into a luxury seaside resort, is used as an example. The complete makeover of Abbazia/Opatija, a small town turned from a “squalid fishing village into a renowned health resort” is another illustration of the Austrian industrial elite’s ability to secure fruitful capitalist investments in the region. Other areas of abundant discoveries are alluringly wide open, such as the initiation of construction projects that could expand the imperial railway network.

The characterization of the unexplored or underdeveloped territories along the Adriatic shores as fairytale-like realms is echoed in a contemporary article in the *Neue Freie Presse* that reported on the opening ceremony of the Adria Exposition. Here the littoral region is once again described as dwelling in the slumber of Sleeping Beauty, in German *Dornröschenschlummer*. Contrary to the publication of the Club of Austrian Engineers and Architects, however, the daily newspaper argued that the Adriatic region has finally woken up from its slumber, ready to welcome its Austrian prince charming. The Adria Exposition, then, is the “logical next step in our realization that in the south of the Monarchy lies a piece of our main strength.”²² The ultimate conquest of the Adria is the cornerstone of a new geopolitical strategy.

The civilizing mission and military might of Austria needed a clear visual representation for its Viennese audience. The official poster for the Adria Exhibition was conceived by the painter and graphic designer Kurt Libesny (1892–1938). Unaffiliated with the *Wiener Werkstätte*, his extensive work included propaganda billboards during the First World War and commercial

²¹ Bahr, *Dalmatinische Reise*, p. 146. The newspaper reference is from the *Österreichische Rundschau*, 2 March 1908. On his journey, Bahr admires the landscape of the upper Adriatic region, in particular Dalmatia, as the fairy-like land, nestled between what he describes as the majesty of the Alps and the splendor of the sea. The travelogue becomes an opportunity to criticize the imperial administration’s neglect of Dalmatia. His sharp critique extends to other hotly debated questions of the time, such as the administration’s unwillingness to open an Italian university in Trieste. According to Bahr, the Austrian crown unwittingly fostered the city’s Irredentists, who were denied the possibility of developing their Italian cultural institutions within the confines of the Habsburg state.

²² “Denn mit dieser Ausstellung soll ein weiterer Schritt vorwärts in der Erschließung unseres großen Adriagebietes geschehen, das längst nicht mehr in seinen Dornröschenschlummer versunken ist, sondern von vielseitigen Interessen geweckt wurde. Die Adriaausstellung ist keine willkürliche Veranstaltung, sondern die logische Folge unserer Erkenntnis, daß im Süden unserer Monarchie ein Teil unserer Hauptkraft liegt.” *Neue Freie Presse*, 3 May 1913, p. 4.

Art Deco advertising placards in the 1920s. His 1913 Art Nouveau poster for the exhibition captures the rhetorical strategies of the Habsburg colonial propaganda (see Illustration 1 below). Framed by two captions of descriptive labels about the Exposition, the central image of the poster features an armor-clad knight on horseback who holds in his right hand the reigns of a battle-ready stallion in full barding. On the knight's right forearm hangs a shield with the insignia of the Austrian double-headed eagle. His helmet, held by its strap, drops behind on his shoulders. A caparison-like blanket casually drapes his upper leg above the knee, arranged to be employed in a rescue mission. The horse is clad with a criniere to guard its neck, while a decorated chanfron equipped with a sharp spike on the forehead protects the animal's face, and signals the cavalier's readiness to charge. A peytral to safeguard the chest of the horse completes the sophisticated and detailed equestrian paraphernalia. With his left arm, the knight holds a mermaid whose fishtail lies over the horse's back. While the Austrian knight maintains a stern look forward, the body language of the mermaid is more relaxed and unmistakably sexualized. She smiles lasciviously, her head hanging back, while her breasts are exposed. Both the knight and the mermaid wear head decorations in the form of a flower headband, which might suggest a ritualistic union between the two such as an imminent wedding ceremony. The two figures and the horse are colored in shades of black, white, and grey with the exception of some flowers in their headbands, several dots on her fishtail, and a long necklace on her chest that are in deep red. The couple is riding against the background of a large sunset of a reddish orange color that gradually fades into a light yellow hue closer to the horizon and eventually fades into an ochre-colored sea. The viewer can see in the background a jagged shoreline with coastal settlements, suggestive of either small villages or a larger city, and numerous sailboats faring to and fro. The iconography of the medieval knight saving the damsel in distress is juxtaposed to Austria's imagined and promulgated role in the Adriatic, a saving and civilizing force. The knight signals the *pax austriaca* in the coastal territories of the Adriatic Sea, a hard-fought peace that will be defended, once again, with arms if necessary. The peaceful but battle-ready knight seems to embody the Latin adage *Si vis pacem, para bellum*, "if you want peace, prepare for war," so dear to Robert Musil's character, General Stumm von Bordwehr, in *The Man without Qualities*. The mermaid here personifies the Adria. The Austrian knight-errant comes to the rescue of the water nymph but her relocation on the horse leaves her without any agency whatsoever. Her mobility is restricted: her piscatorial extremity is an unsurmountable handicap outside her native aquatic environment. Libesny presents the colonial relationship underlying the Austrian possession of Adria in obvious sexualized overtones.

Not only is she carried: she is also carried away from her home. Precisely this staged ambiguity between her evident helplessness and projected willingness to be rescued, a common colonial trope, is highly reminiscent of the iconography of the rape of Europa, the maiden carried away by the supposedly saving grace of the divine bull. In Libesny's poster, the aesthetics of sexual violence conveys a politics of colonial domination. Like in other colonial narratives, the story must project an implicit positive response onto the victim in order to be complete with a socially constructive and morally edifying message. It is not enough to assert Austria's imperial presence in the Adria: the Adria must willingly accept the civilizing mission of her culturally and technologically superior rescuer. In this modern transmutation of a classical trope, the Habsburg Adria is the new Europa.

Let me briefly return to the status of Habsburg Trieste in the Exposition. The social and political tensions that at the same time were brewing in the Adriatic city once again show how these events in Vienna intersected with local affairs. While Trieste's commercial emporium and its picturesque backgrounds of the littoral Karst were all favorite topics of discussion in Vienna, the talk of the town in Trieste during the month of August in 1913 was of a different nature. The Austrian *Statthalter* of the city, Fürst Konrad von Hohenlohe, was a special guest at the inauguration of the Adria Exposition at the beginning of May. Already in that occasion, he had angered Italian Irredentists by declaring in his opening remarks that Trieste should be considered a *Nationalitätenstadt* that did not belong to any nationality, given its role as commercial port of the empire. On 21 August 1913, von Hohenlohe decided to relieve all Italian-born municipal clerks of duty. His decrees immediately stirred up much controversy. Street demonstrations, public protests, and incendiary newspaper articles gave voice to a general discontent. In the past, the Austrian monarchy had allowed the employment of *Reichsitaliener* within the ranks of the Habsburg municipal bureaucracy. This concession, made when neither the Habsburg administration nor the Italians in Trieste were concerned about nationalism in the Adriatic city, was part of an effort to grant Trieste ample local autonomy. Now, the official rationale of the new legislation was to limit foreign interference in state affairs, but behind the decrees stood a growing fear that the questionable allegiances of these Italian clerks fueled the Irredentist movement in the city. The decision stirred up much protest among Italian nationalists, who saw Hohenlohe's decrees as a maneuver to undermine their power in the city. What angered Italian Irredentists even more was the enthusiastic reception of the Hohenlohe decrees by the Slovene community in Trieste, who welcomed the announcement as a new opportunity to enhance their presence in the public administration. Hohenlohe's intention was not necessarily to favor a



Illustration 1: Kurt Libesny, *Poster for the Adriatic Exposition*, 1913. (Source: Wikimedia Commons.) Intended for an international audience, the poster was printed in different languages, including German, Italian, English, French, and the above Russian.

pro-Slovene agenda, but the circumstances were such that the Irredentists interpreted the ordinance in such a way.²³ The Slovene community in the city was grappling with the end of the Second Balkan War, which had ended two weeks earlier, pondering the immediate consequences of the Bulgarian aggression of its former ally Serbia. Many Slovene intellectuals in Trieste considered the city an essential center of their cultural and political life, continuing to envision a gradual Slovene nation-building process within the framework of the Austrian state, often preferring this Austro-Slav solution to any projects of a future Yugo-Slav confederation.²⁴

The Austrian loyalty of the Slovenes also angered the separatist Italians, who suspected some sort of conspiratorial coalition between Slovenes and the imperial administration aimed at weakening Italian influence in the city.²⁵ Against this background of competing interests, the Hohenlohe decrees looked like a major imperial interference in local matters, adding fuel to the mounting tension between Italian-speaking and Slovenian-speaking Triestines. The whole affair caused an awkward diplomatic crisis between the Kingdom of Italy and the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, now members of the Triple Alliance.²⁶ The Italian government in Rome sent an official grievance to the Austrian authorities, who chose to ignore the complaint. Between August and September, Italian newspapers ran indignant articles accusing the Austrians, despite their official alliance in foreign policy matters, of an ill-concealed Italophobia in the context of domestic affairs. The Adria Exposition in Vienna cast a long shadow that intersected with debates in international diplomatic circles and that also resonated loudly with local Triestine politics, where the strained relationship between Italian-speaking and Slovenian-speaking Triestines was growing more acrimonious.

Let me conclude with some final remarks about the role that Trieste played in the marketing strategy of the Adria Exposition. As we have seen, the main objective of the *Adria-Ausstellung* was the projection of a domesticated image

²³ According to Elio Apih, Hohenlohe did not necessarily intend to strengthen the position of Slovenes in Trieste, but to reduce the number of Italian Irredentists in key positions of the public administration, not disdaining an alliance with members of the socialist internationalism in the city. Apih, *Trieste*, pp. 80–81.

²⁴ Bulgaria would now be excluded from such a state project. The political body that would host the Southern Slavs saw the light after World War I as the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes.

²⁵ Apih, *ibid.*

²⁶ As Sabine Rutar has put it, “Prime Minister Giolitti had systematically punished any public anti-Austrian manifestation for an entire decade, but here, for the first time, he failed to do so. A rather marginal event thus acquired a disproportionate impact and marked a turning point in Austrian-Italian relations.” Rutar, *Fear of War*, p. 290.

of Southern Slavic territories and the promotion of colonial economies in Istria, Dalmatia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina. In the imperial propaganda, the history of Habsburg Trieste told the success story of territorial expansion, effective local administration, and commercial achievements on a global scale. The example of Trieste, then, represented a case study that could function as a blueprint for future developments in the upper Adriatic region. In other words, the long-term vision encapsulated in the *Adria-Ausstellung*, from projects of colonial exploitation to plans of infrastructural development and innovation, was to turn Istria and Dalmatia into a new Trieste. This strategy conceived of this state-sponsored wave of modernization as a social, cultural, and political mechanism that could propel the Habsburg Empire, perhaps with a revised constitution, into a bright and prosperous future. It is a matter of speculation, here, to what extent these projects would have supported Franz Ferdinand's alleged Trialism, a transformation from the Dual to a Triune Monarchy that would have divided the state into Austrian, Hungarian, and Slavic areas of administration, with a privileged role for the South Slavs in the latter territories of the empire.²⁷ The *Adria-Ausstellung* was the last major exhibit in the history of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the final socio-cultural and politico-economic articulation of this future strategy. With the precipitating incidents in the summer of 1914, events took a decidedly different turn.

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²⁷ The Archduke's straightforward embrace of constitutional Trialism has been reevaluated recently. For a history of the reception of this figure, see Miller, *Forgetting Franz Ferdinand*, p. 236.

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V jugu monarhije je naša moč

Istra in Dalmacija v habsburški cesarski propagandi na dunajski razstavi Adria-Ausstellung leta 1913

Povzetek

Österreichische Adria-Ausstellung oz. Avstrijska razstava Adria, ki je potekala od 3. maja do 5. oktobra 1913 v dunajskem Pratru, je širši javnosti predstavila zgodovine, kulture in možnosti gospodarskega razvoja habsburških ozemelj ob jadranski obali in v njenem zaledju. Prispevek prikazuje retorične strategije habsburške cesarske propagande, v luči katere so bila južnoslovanska ozemlja predstavljena kot primitivna in potrebna avstrijskega civilizacijskega poslanstva in modernizacije. Dolgoročna vizija razstave *Adria-Ausstellung* je bila ponovitev zgodovinskega uspeha habsburškega razvoja Trsta na ozemljih Istre in Dalmacije. Na ta način bi lahko Habsburžani svojo cesarsko moč postavili v širok mednarodni okvir in upravičili svoje težnje po tem, da postanejo močna in vplivna pomorska sila.