

I have been always fascinated by history and archaeology, disciplines that study human interconnections at specific periods and through time. The reader can therefore imagine how honoured I was when offered the opportunity to write a foreword for this collection of papers under the title 'Interconnections in the Mediterranean through Time: Montenegro and Italy'. I am also particularly glad to see how fruitful the collaboration between the Italian CNR - Institute of Heritage Sciences and the Historical Institute of the University of Montenegro continues to be.

Reading through the various contributions, we can better discover the deep and noteworthy past shared by the two shores of the Adriatic Sea. These interconnections have taken various forms: at times violent conquest, on other occasions peaceful trade and cultural exchanges. 'Hybridization processes', to quote from Lucia Alberti, seem to have always been shaping the Balkans, by nature a 'bridge' between the rest of Europe and Asia.

We are reminded of the myth of Kadmos, the Phoenician prince who supposedly brought the alphabet to the Greeks and then, together with his son Illyrios, shaped the birth of Illyrian peoples. Our time-travelling continues with a succinct but fascinating description of those Municipia, some still thriving (like modern Risan, former Risinium, with its beautiful mosaics), once part of the Roman province of Praevalitana, more or less corresponding to present-day Montenegro. In some cases, we do not even know the precise name of the urban centre: a timely reminder that so much is still to be researched and studied in this country.

We are then offered an interesting glimpse to the process of 'Romanization' that transformed the inhabitants of the Balkans, especially their elites, into citizens of the Empire. Thanks mainly to epigraphy, it is possible to reconstruct, at least to some extent, the specific 'civic identity' of those Romanized elites. An identity, as Olga Pelcer-Vujačić tells us in her essay, 'shaped by their mostly Italic origins, as well involving indigenous features': a process that apparently ended up stimulating, so to say, a peculiar sort of 'Romanness'.

One cannot talk of any human culture, even more so an ancient one, without referring to its 'religious side'. In this respect, the religious tradition emerges most strongly from the archaeological evidence in Doclea, the administrative capital of Roman Praevalitana. Romans never left matters to chance: after conquest through arms, they normally undertook a winning

over of ‘hearts and souls’ of the conquered, by integrating them as fast as possible. Among the ways of achieving this end, one employed was religion, in particular the spreading of the Imperial Cult: Doclea, from the Flavian age on, is a case in point. Various other cults, reflecting the polytheistic society of the age, were also practiced in this large and important town. Some were of Illyrian origin, reshaped in a Romanized form (probably, we are told in the paper, the Mercury cult, which seems well established in Doclea); others came from abroad, as the finding of a Jewish grave suggests, testifying of the cosmopolitan dimension of this ancient capital.

Other contributions touch upon different dimensions of these ‘interconnections’: the intertextuality of a museum collection; the use of ICT in archaeological projects in the Adriatic area; the Italian-Montenegrin cooperation in the digitalization of a damaged archival fond, related to the records of Governors for Kotor and Albania of the Venetian Republic, at the Kotor Historical Archives.

The ‘interconnections’ between Italy and Montenegro have endured through the centuries. Professor Burzanović, catapulting us into early 20th century, offers an intriguing picture of a group of ‘Italian capitalists’ investing in the development of the city of Bar, designing its port with the idea of linking it, mainly via railways, to the Danube River (a sort of reverse ‘road and belt initiative’ ante litteram?). In any case, this paper ‘bridges’ the past to the present. Nor can I forget that Italy and Montenegro have recently renewed their ‘interconnections’ through a colossal physical link: on November 15th 2019 the submarine power cable (423 km in length) joining the two countries (and therefore the EU with the Western Balkans) was inaugurated. The infrastructure, built by an Italian company (Terna, which is also supporting the publication of this volume), is in a way the latest in a long, near unbroken, chain of exchanges and interactions shared between the two shores of the Adriatic Sea, part of the Roman Mare Nostrum already in antiquity.

Interconnections produce prosperity, in terms of shared values, culture, new ideas, economic development; in the Ionian-Adriatic region, they really can be seen as the result of long-lasting habits and affinities.

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