

Fiume hosszú árnyéka – A városi modernizáció kritikája a 19. század második felében [The long shadow of Fiume: Criticisms of urban modernization in the second half of the nineteenth century].

By Veronika Eszik. Budapest: HUN-REN Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont, 2024. pp. 196.

This book, which focuses on critical assessments of urban modernization in Fiume during the second half of the nineteenth century, is based on Veronika Eszik's doctoral thesis in history, completed at the Atelier Department of Interdisciplinary History at Eötvös Loránd University, which is already an indication of the rigor of the methodology and the quality of the academic supervision. Eszik, furthermore, is fluent in the three languages necessary for work on Fiume (Italian, Croatian, and Hungarian), which is not always the case in studies on this city. She has based her work on several conceptual and methodological decisions for which she offers ample explanation in the introduction. Starting from the notion of development as a Promethean phenomenon (Chapter 2 is dedicated to urban space and planning), Eszik proposes a study on the various narratives of the city (Chapter 3) to address anti-urban reactions on several levels: the surrounding rural populations, which was gradually integrated into the city but felt excluded, both because of the acceleration of "progress" and for political reasons, since the Slavic hinterland found itself facing the Italian-Hungarian urban elites. These contradictory aspects generated conflicts centered on the appropriation of the urban space and the challenges of modernization (Chapters 4 and 6). Fiume is therefore well situated, in its imperial, Hungarian, Italian, and Croatian context, as case study of the tensions of urban modernization.

The book offers a deliberately partial picture of society, urban spaces, and discourses (and one hopes that Eszik's discussion will prompt more in-depth research). Eszik offers a rich look at the laboratory character that Fiume took on for the Hungarian state from the perspectives of infrastructure (the recurring dispute over the railway line that only served Hungary), industry, and urban planning. The city assumed this place as a kind of textbook study in part because of the arrival of numerous experts who formed a group of agents promoting discourses of modernization. In this regard, Eszik has a tendency, common in studies on various parts of Austria-Hungary, to seek models and points of comparison in Western historiography, in this case largely French, when works on the empire would have been more relevant. This is particularly true of the

colonial dimension, where insights from Czernowitz or Sarajevo would have been useful. Similarly, when it comes to urban planning and the destruction of the old urban fabric, the examples of Prague (*asanace*, or the major project undertaken in Josefov, the Jewish Quarter, from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth, allegedly to modernize and sanitize the area) or even Vienna are essential, not to speak of Hungarian examples, such as the city of Temesvár (today Timișoara, Romania). Not surprisingly, some reactions noted here were found elsewhere, when the urge to modernize was seen as a negation of urban heritage.¹

The comparison with Zengg (Senj), which is presented in Chapter 5 and which may seem surprising at first glance, proves convincing. It is understandable why another coastal city in Croatian territory was chosen, given that, in purely quantitative terms, one would expect a comparison with Pola (Pula) or Zara (Zadar), which were under Austrian administration. This would be a useful avenue to explore in further research. The discussion of Zengg allows Eszik to illustrate the anti-modern narrative that is one of the central themes of her study. More surprising, however, is the absence of the theme of mirror rivalry between Fiume and Trieste, which is constantly evoked in contemporary sources. This is an important element that dominates the discourse in Fiume, and some consideration of this rivalry would have added nuance to the description of the Hungarians' ambitions, which were also directed against Austria. One of the objectives of the development of the port and the shipping companies was to divert part of the freight traffic from Trieste to Fiume, regardless of how illusory this undertaking was.

One of the book's great strengths is its focus on the discourses of various actors, from the central government to Hungarian intellectuals and local Italian and Croatian protagonists. However, it would have been useful to see a more detailed picture of Fiume's society, particularly from the perspectives of its community life and school system, on which there are abundant sources, as this would have helped clarify certain elements of these discourses. Among the aspects of the narrative put forward by the central government, that of Fiume as a "second capital" is very well demonstrated, and Eszik draws on an extensive array of sources, including literary ones. The analogy between Budapest, which was gradually conquered by the nation, and Fiume serves to turn difficulties

1 Cf. Wolfgang Kos, Christian Rapp, eds, *Alt-Wien: Die Stadt, die niemals war* (Vienna: Czernin Verlag, 2005).

(distance, non-Magyar populations) into assets. Eszik also highlights the paradox of exalting a regional center that was not conceived as such due to its status as the kingdom's only port. This proactive policy was supported by a propaganda campaign at both the local and national levels. Never did the since paraphrased words "Tengerre magyar!" (To the sea, Hungarians!), attributed to Lajos Kossuth in 1848, seem more apt.

The flip side of this discourse, characterized by anti-modernism and Croatian nationalism, is explored through the 1883 bilingual sign affair. Croatian nationalism began to focus more and more on the city of Fiume, and Croatian nationalist discourses (of which the sign affair was a motif) began to fuel resentment among members of the rural populations and in the hinterland in general, as also became increasingly true in Zengg, which emerged as a stronghold of the Party of Rights (Stranka Prava). The arguments subsequently developed by the Croatian Peasant Party (Hrvatska seljačka stranka) echoed this observation of a growing divide between urban and rural areas. Eszik provides clear discussion of the Catholic religious dimension of the movement, but she would have done well to have offered more details concerning its anti-Hungarian (no doubt linked to the Calvinist beliefs of certain members of the Magyar elite) and anti-Semitic aspects. Less attention is devoted to the third actor, the Italian municipality, though its attitude towards irredentism on the one hand and autonomism on the other is very revealing of the unease felt towards the central state, Croatia-Slavonia, and the desire to preserve the Italian character of the city. These issues were raised not only in debates concerning architecture. The figure of Riccardo Zanella, briefly mentioned, reflects these ambiguities. Eszik would have done well to have noted that the state initially attempted to exploit the autonomist movement in order to prevent the development of irredentism, which was poisoning political life in Trieste. The tacit alliance between the local elites and Budapest only reinforced the anti-urban Croatian discourse, which portrayed the city as a true *corpus separatum*.

This informative and engaging study opens up many avenues for discussion and further research, which hopefully will address the lacunae that remain and enable Eszik to engage in dialogues with specialists in the urban history of Austria-Hungary.

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