

The Fiume Crisis: Life in the Wake of the Habsburg Empire.

By Dominique Kirchner Reill. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2020. 312 pp.

Dominique Reill, professor at the University of Miami, has done something that Hungarian, Croatian, and Italian historians have failed to do so far: in a coherent monograph, she has broken with a chronological, somewhat nationalist discussion of the political and diplomatic issues of the events in Fiume that followed World War I. This comes as no surprise, since Reill's thinking has been greatly influenced by the ideas and arguments of István Deák, Pieter M. Judson, and Hannah Arendt, who tended to emphasize the diversity and plurality of the Habsburg Monarchy and reconsidered nationalism, as well as the studies by William Klinger, Ivan Jeličić, and Vanni d'Alessio on Fiume, in which the authors adopted a more modern approach and dispensed with stereotypes. Although Reill does not distance herself from theoretical postmodern theories and models, instead of oversimplifying theoretical discussions and relying on convenient absolutes, she builds her Fiume-narrative on empirical, source-centered research. This means that Reill summarizes the arguments laid out in previous individual studies explicitly and shapes them into a consistent narrative, while also verifying or refuting them by adding her own examples.

The subject matter of the volume is thus neither Gabriele d'Annunzio's extravagant rule nor the career of some prominent figures or the endless disputes about where Fiume belonged. Reill is most interested in the community's and people's attitudes in various situations, as well as the continuation, gradual shift, and waning of structures of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. In other words, instead of examining "what happened when," she searches for answers concerning the reasons for the social and mental processes behind the historical events, such as why the ruling elite, which trumpeted nationalist slogans, so firmly insisted on the annexation of the Italian town when at least half of the inhabitants did not claim Italian as their mother tongue. Why did a multilingual and multiethnic small town want to insert itself into the Italian nation-state? In what ways, with what slogans, and under what conditions did it hope to do so? How compatible could nationalist and localist interests be? And finally, what was the experience of the inhabitants, living in existential uncertainty; in what forms did they experience this transitional phase?

Reill's first thesis is that the basic situation of Fiume after the war was determined by its extensive autonomy under the Dual Monarchy, its state of

being a *corpus separatum*, a “semiautonomous city-state.” As part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and, within that, the Kingdom of Hungary, the port could count on generous support by Hungarian governments, as well as the hinterland function of the entire empire: it had a large market and was part of a protective network. Without these favorable circumstances, the elites of Fiume were forced to take steps. The town councilors knew that Fiume was incapable of functioning on its own, so they looked for a new strong “protective shield,” a hinterland to replace the monarchy. Under the new circumstances, the most suitable alternative for a hinterland was Italy, regarded as the “Madrepatria” (mother country).

This leads to two other major arguments by Reill. First, the nationalization of Fiume or its transformation into “Italianissima,” as expressed at least by symbols and through statistical ratios, were justified by the abovementioned concerns. Second, although the people of Fiume did all they could to make their town part of the Kingdom of Italy, they remained localists with local interests, including the safeguarding of their privileges, even in their most nationalist moments. For them “Patria” meant their birthplace and place of residence, not Italy. This “theory of continuity” is closely linked to Reill’s fourth thesis, which queries the view that the end of World War I and Gabriele d’Annunzio’s endeavor of Fiume, ending with the Bloody Christmas of 1920, were simple and clear watersheds which divided political systems. Reill foregrounds continuities instead of breaking points, and she emphasizes the political elite’s opportunities and competencies to preserve their positions, as well as their adaptation strategies.

This firm emphasis on interests and the focus on aims could easily lead to a simplified, instrumental concept of nationalism, but that is not the case here. It enables Reill to avoid denying the residents’ zeal for and sentimental attachment to the Italian nation and to examine the local interpretations of “nationalism,” “localism,” and “autonomy” in a period which included the era of the Dual Monarchy as well. Furthermore, Reill offers a more nuanced picture and avoids banalities in part because she analyzes the transformation of structures and changes in people’s life circumstances in five large units, alongside the introductory and concluding chapter, through the dimensions of economic and financial difficulties (money), the relationship between power and autonomy (laws and independence), belonging (pertinency and citizenship), as well as internal and external manifestations of identity (symbols and propaganda), with a list of representative micro-historical examples from everyday life.

The part about the economy, for instance, begins with the example of a young legionary in Italy, who, with naïve enthusiasm, tells his fiancée about the beauty of the town and (an alleged) Italian localism, as well as the pretty, easy girls of Fiume (no doubt his purse was full of Italian lire and Hungarian/Austrian crowns). Reill, on the other hand, points out that the local inhabitants were acquainted with more currencies than these two. Borislavo Gjurić, for example, was arrested because in addition to Italian lire, he also had French francs, Serbian dinars, and Croatian-Slovenian and Fiume crowns on him. With the help of these examples, Reill illustrates how the monetary union of the empire collapsed, and by the spring of 1919, at least four different currencies and fake banknotes were circulating in Fiume. The uncontrolled circulation of money made the economic situation of both individuals and the town unstable.

Although restoring financial conditions was paramount, the elites of Fiume believed that settling currency issues was the duty of the state, so they expected the Italian government to do something about it. This gave a new impetus to the annexation program, indicated by converging Fiume crown to Italian lire, that is, gradually coordinating the economy of Fiume and Italy. Rome, however, believed that the Italian state had the exclusive right to annexation and was appalled by the town's demand to be annexed in accordance with predetermined conditions (keeping its autonomy). There were further aspects to this questioning of the relationship between power and autonomy, in no small part simply because the issue of where the port belonged was debated for long time to come, so Fiume practically had to function as an independent state for a time. This position was difficult to manage, however, mainly as a result of an economic and financial crisis, growing unemployment, and permanent coal and food shortages due to consecutive blockades and military occupations.

Reill presents one way of dealing with procurement difficulties through the failed deal between Slavko Ivančić, a “trader in comestibles” from Fiume, and Ivan Rošić, an inn owner and agricultural supplier from a Croatian village. The story may also help demonstrate the continuity of the legal system and jurisdiction of Fiume, since it clearly shows that until the fall of 1920, the denizens of the city operated in accordance with the former laws and orders. Furthermore, by offering a comparison of financial and legal conditions, Reill also points out one relevant difference: while the multi-currency system was the result of the decline of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the challenges and opportunities of multi-system jurisdiction had shaped the lives of the inhabitants of Fiume for generations.

In her discussion of the everyday conflicts of the tobacco factory and the post office, Reill identifies similar elements of continuity in terms of the issue of language use. She comes to the conclusion that although the elites of Fiume strove for the establishment of monolingual (Italian) administration, this was mainly a façade to show to the rest of the world, as internal communication continued to be multilingual. The same is true of the implementation of the regulation concerning the Italianization of names, in connection with which Reill notes that while the measure served the purpose of emphasizing the Italian character and dedication of the inhabitants, there were huge differences between theory and practice. All this indicates that these laws were either not implemented at all or only to some degree and that there were individual preferences and choices. To underlie this claim, Reill mentions two concrete examples from among the many: despite their Italian nationalist convictions, Antonio Grossich, the widely respected elderly president of the Italian National Council in Fiume, kept the name Grossich, and his ambitious secretary, Salvatore Bellasich, continued to be called Bellasich.

One of Reill's greatest merits is that she does not shy away from treating legal categories in a nuanced way. She dedicates a whole chapter to content-related and qualitative differences between concepts of citizenship and residence. This is justified by her emphasis on the continued validity of the municipal statute of 1872 regulating civic entitlement, which provided the elite of Fiume with an effective tool to enforce their rights under the shifting (and financially limited) conditions. In fact, by regulating the conditions of "Fiume pertinency" and concomitant active political participation (electoral reform), the elite of Fiume could both strengthen the support they received and their legitimacy and protect the (in a classical sense) "lawful" members of the community from competition in the form of a flood of "strangers" coming to the town. In this respect, even Gabriele d'Annunzio's soldiers could not have been exempt from the rule: like the civilian "newcomers," they could only receive the "citizenship to the Free City of Fiume," reserved for "others."

In addition to the redistribution of social, economic, and political privileges, education also served the purpose of preserving the positions and transmitting localist values. Reill proves this by pointing out that even in the fall of 1919, elementary schools in the city used traditional didactic teaching methods and Fiume-centered maps. Although the town seemed to become an "Italianissima" dressed in the Italian tricolored flag, for the locals it remained, for a long time, what it was before: the "true Patria," which everyone had to know. Thus, mapping

the district, the country, and the world could only start after one had acquired a rich knowledge of Fiume itself.

Overall, Reill offers a new interpretation of Fiume, using modern approaches and methodologies. Her volume will surely be one of the most, if not the most influential monograph on Fiume in years to come for two reasons. First, her monograph is impressive in its thoroughness, the precise use of terms, its clever methodological solutions, its welcoming style, and its use of convincing examples based on a rich and diverse collection of sources. Second, thanks to the distance Reill keeps when using theories and examining sources, she is able to see and show different phenomena in all their complexity.

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