

# “Comincia a prendere il nome”. Growth and Urban Development in Trieste at the Time of Maria Theresa

DANIELE ANDREOZZI

## 1. PRELUDE

At the turn of the seventeenth century into the eighteenth, a redefinition of quantitative and qualitative hierarchies of commercial sea routes took place in the Adriatic and Mediterranean. . Especially in the Adriatic, coasting trade became central to define economic areas. At the time, heavy and cheap goods – such as olive oil, cereal, timber, raw metal, iron and copper manufactures, rough textile fabrics, fruit, vegetables, cheese, salted fish – were the bulk of trade. Venice’s predominance over the sea seemed to be seriously compromised by the actions of many mercantile “marine” fleets from small and medium ports on the Adriatic, Ionian and Aegean Seas. These settlements gave birth to a very thick trade network that could connect coasts and ports on those seas with the subsequent emerging of old lines of smugglers and “minor” routes. Exchanges and relations, favoured by goods, were not restricted to economy, but involved wider social and cultural spheres. Moreover, sea routes were characterized by an extreme mobility of men and women<sup>1</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> On this, for a wider bibliography and more extensive archival indications see Andreozzi 2005, 153-201 e 2005, 113-139.

In such “Adriatic” context, at the start of the eighteenth century, Emperor Charles VI of Habsburg, father of Maria Theresa, was convinced that sea power was fundamental to have an important role among the European superpowers, i.e. «to be properly respected by England, Spain, Holland and Russia»<sup>2</sup>. The Emperor and his court believed that the development of sea trade could support an imperial merchant fleet and that merchant ships could in turn provide the military fleet with everything necessary, especially money, men, knowledge, expertise and tools.

As for Maria Theresa, she was born on May 13th 1717 in Vienna. In June of the same year, her father, the Emperor, declared the freedom of navigation in the Adriatic Sea. In 1718, he signed the Peace of Passarowitz and reached a commercial agreement with the Ottoman Empire. In 1719, the cities of Trieste and Rijeka were declared free ports<sup>3</sup>.

There is a traditional narrative in Trieste, which considers the creation of the free port by Charles VI as the “mythical” starting point of the city’s growth and sees Trieste as the result of the centralistic and modern approach of the Emperor. Without forgetting the role of the Habsburg, however, it is possible to tell the story of Trieste by taking other hypotheses, players, paths and stories into consideration. This interpretation increases the role of Trieste in shaping its history and the importance of local forces, making them protagonists of their fate. Moreover, it places the growth of Trieste in the network of the sea routes crossing the Mediterranean.

At that time, Trieste had approximately 5.000 inhabitants and had almost no manufacturing sector. The local merchants were few and played no relevant role, and the city was ruled by an ‘original’ patriciate focused on making the urban and port spaces available to the foreign merchants counting on profits coming, above all, from the taxes imposed on mercantile traffic and the tenancy of city offices. This patriciate was weak and possessed little wealth, but from the eighteenth century on Trieste expe-

---

<sup>2</sup> State Archives, Venice (SAV), Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia (Savi), II, 7/3, 31 December 1729.

<sup>3</sup> Andreozzi 2015. On the history of Trieste see Finzi, Panjek 2001; Finzi, Panariti, Panjek 2003; Andreozzi, 2011, 13-38.

rienced a rapid growth becoming one of the largest ports on the Adriatic Sea. The city rapidly developed into a large commercial, industrial, financial and multicultural centre. The 5,000-7,000 inhabitants at the beginning of the eighteenth century became almost 10,000 towards the half of the century and then increased up to 30,000 by the beginning of the nineteenth century<sup>4</sup>.

## 2. YOUTH AND BEGINNINGS

Maria Theresa never visited Trieste. As a child, she had the opportunity in 1728 when her father, «eager to [get to] know the coastline», decided to visit the city and the port<sup>5</sup>. However, the Emperor's health was terrible and gout and bloodletting confined him to his bed. Moreover, the high travel costs – 500.000 florins – were discouraging, since Charles did not have enough money. Nonetheless, the Emperor decided to leave because doctors suggested a 'change of air', but he opted, along with his councilors, for a low-cost solution, reducing the number of aristocrats and courtiers who would follow him on his voyage. For reasons of etiquette, his children also had to stay in Vienna. Maria Theresa insisted to accompany her mother on the journey, but it was useless<sup>6</sup>. In any case the years of her youth were those of the city's first stage of growth. One of the first ships built in Trieste – a frigate with twenty cannons suitable «for corsair activity and for trade» – was named Theresa<sup>7</sup>.

At that time, in the Twenties and Thirties, in Trieste, in the context of the free port privileges, there were three hypotheses concerning the construction and control of the urban spaces and economic and social growth of the city. Such hypotheses were not exclusive, but rather predominant.

---

<sup>4</sup> Breschi, Kalc, Navarra 2001, 73 -95. Gatti 2005, 35-72.

<sup>5</sup> SAV, Senato, Dispacci di ambasciatori e Residenti, Germania (Germania) 221, 17th and 31th January 1728.

<sup>6</sup> SAV, Germania, 221, 14th and 28th February 1728, 6th and 20th March 1728.

<sup>7</sup> SAV, Inquisitori di Stato (Inquisitori), Dispacci da Palma, 317, 4th August 1727.

The Emperor, the Court, and the Habsburg aristocracy and bureaucracy developed them fighting and interacting with the local actors' practices. These three hypotheses were:

- 1717-1729: the 'privileged' Oriental Company («Compagnia Orientale»);
- 1729-1733: the free fair;
- 1733-1748: the military role.

In 1719, Charles VI gave the task of developing Trieste to a privileged company, the Oriental Company, of which the Emperor himself was among the main stockholders, along with many aristocrats. The Company had the task of developing trade between the Habsburg Empire and the Ottoman Empire by exploiting the sea routes between Trieste and the Levant, as well as the fluvial routes – particularly the Danube – linking Vienna to the Black Sea. The Company soon became the pivot of the Habsburg strategies and enjoying large monopolies in the commercial and manufacturing sectors. Moreover, during the Twenties, the Company represented the Emperor in Trieste, thus assuming a 'public' role. It was responsible for the economic and social growth of the city and for its government, along with some new extraordinary magistrates who were direct emanations from Vienna. The Company, active in Trieste for about ten years, was closely interwoven with these and their staffs were not clearly separated. However, its strategies were characterized by constant inefficiencies and by ongoing conflicts between the official goals of the Habsburg bureaucracy and the interests of its local agents and of its investors. Basically, the Company was unable to perform the tasks it was assigned. Starting in 1728, it was weighed down by the insufficient development of its mercantile activities, which should have instead favoured growth. First its headquarters moved to Rijeka and then the Company slowly went bankrupt<sup>8</sup>.

From the urban point of view, the most important aspect of the Company's business was the start of the draining of salt basins. In 1720, the

---

<sup>8</sup> On the "Oriental Company" see Bussolin 1882, 29-164; Babudieri 1978; Andreozzi, 2017, 65-87; Andreozzi 2009, 119 – 130; Andreozzi, Panariti 2011, 220-223. On the urban growth of Trieste see also Andreozzi, Marin, Panariti 2013

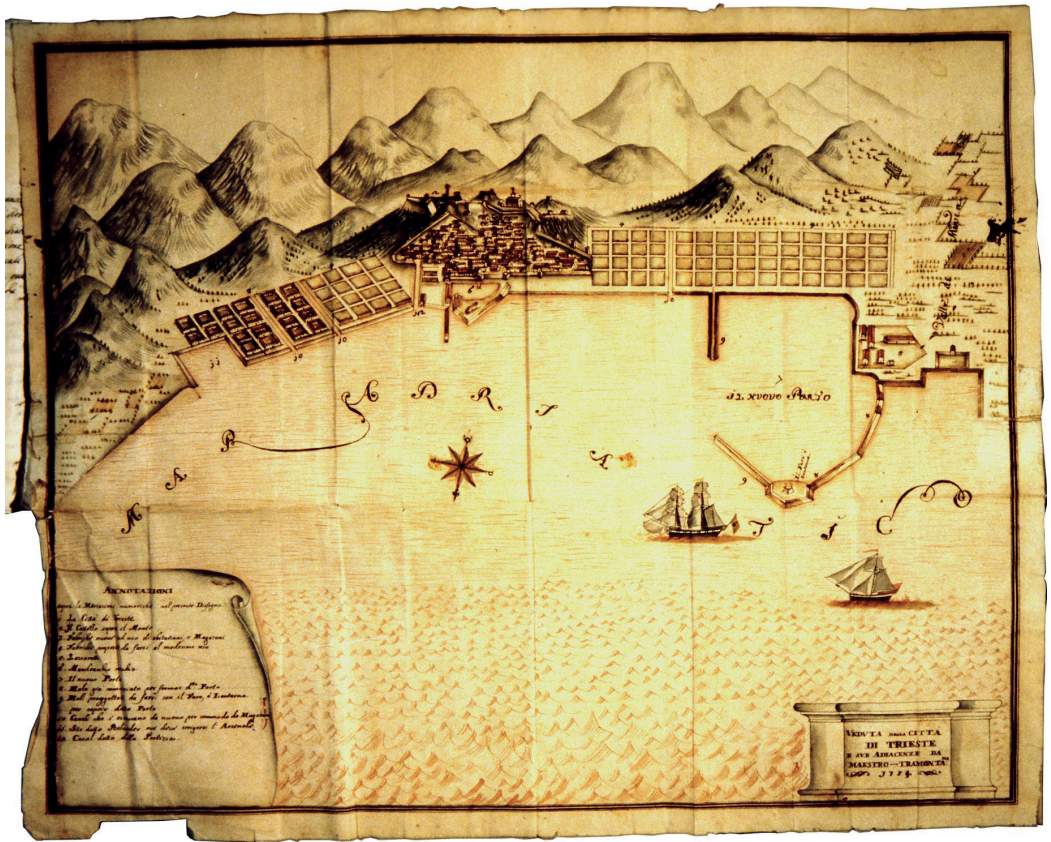


Figura 1  
 "Veduta della città di Trieste da Maestro a Tramontana", 1754  
 (source P. Di Biagi, V. Fasoli, A. Marin, *Dalla città moderna alla città contemporanea. Piani e progetti per Trieste*, Udine, 2002)

Company was discussing with the city, the «Public», the conditions of its settling in Trieste. It had, in fact, to establish the conditions of its stay and to obtain a space in order to locate a dockyard to start the construction of its fleet. The city allowed the Company to use the land outside «the door of Riborgo», along the city walls and all the way to the port. This was the site where the «Snel» saltpans were once located, which had been abandoned twenty years previously. Here the company started building ships. Harmony, however, was only apparent and soon a fierce conflict broke out. The imperial bureaucracy, fearing that the quarrel could become an obstacle to the «increase of commerce», found itself mediating between the two parties. However, the agreement was impossible to reach. The decision made in Graz in 1723 by the Habsburg bureaucracy to impose the company's point of view did not put an end to the dispute, which ceased only after the failure of the Company towards the end of the 1720s<sup>9</sup>.

Meanwhile, the idea of buying the saltpans next to the city and converting them to a different use had been gaining popularity in Vienna since at least 1729. The idea was to drain them both for sanitary reasons, since they caused fever and unpleasant smells and some merchants who had come for the first fair had even complained about the risk of malaria, and economic reasons. They were not highly productive. The idea of using them to build warehouses «and make profit through merchants» was entertained by many, especially in order to allow in «merchants and foreigners» that would have come to the city looking for adequate spaces to locate activities and living quarters. In fact, in January 1730, «deeming necessary for the public benefit the acquisition of the saltpans next to Riborgo», Charles VI gave the order to purchase the saltpans via a «regulated contract». The negotiation turned out to be neither brief nor easy. However, when evaluated according to the Ancient Regime's criteria, the transaction was not particularly complex or time-consuming and,

---

<sup>9</sup> On the agreements and the disputes relating to the saltpans of Snel see Archives of the Republic of Slovenia, Ljubljana, As 730, Gospostvo Dol, book 158, pp. 728-740 (1720-1723). Bussolin 1882, pp. 29-164. For a wider bibliography and more extensive archival indications, see Andreozzi 2012, 137-157.

in between September 14th and 15th, the contracts of purchase were drawn up<sup>10</sup>.

Moreover, because of the failure of the Company, at the end of the Twenties the Court of Vienna changed strategy, choosing a development plan based on projects internal to the circuits of the Adriatic trade. This fair system was designed by the 'fixer' Fortunato Cervelli, a merchant and entrepreneur from Ferrara. The strategy devised by Cervelli was based on the creation of a system of fairs able to connect Europe, the Padan Plain, Trieste and the Levant. If these plans seemed in line with the imperial goals, they also hid other interests rooted in the Adriatic commercial networks. The fair of Trieste was located on the same site where for the dockyards had been for a few years, on the old salt basins. It was a short-term attempt. The only fair that actually opened was in Trieste and lasted for four years (each August, from 1730 until 1733)<sup>11</sup>.

After this attempt, the outbreak of the Polish Succession War (1733-1738) and the Austrian Succession War (1740-1748) caught the attention of Vienna, who lost interest in what was happening in Trieste. In the eyes of the Habsburg government, the city became a strategic hub in the context of the European wars, to be used for mobility and the quartering of troops and supplies for the armies. As a member of the Venetian government, Alvise Forcarini, wrote: «officers and soldiers, with their families, settled in Trieste; the war was in Italy; so Aleman troops were constantly passing and they made a stop at Trieste, where large quantities of supplies flowed»<sup>12</sup>. However, the food and supply streams were a great opportunity for the merchants living in Trieste. They sent provisions to the battlefields mainly by connecting Trieste to the mouth of the Po river. In such context, the most important urban and infrastructural outcomes of

---

<sup>10</sup> On the events concerning the saltpans of Riborgo see State Archives, Trieste (SAT), Intendenza commerciale (Intendenza), 183, Saline, cc. 1r-47r (1730-1733) and 43, «Contrati seguiti con li fondali e consorti delle saline appresso Riborgo e in Valle de Rivo comprate in esecutioni delle clementissime cesaree resolutioni di sua sacra cesarea cattolica real Maestà», cc. 1r-49r (1731).

<sup>11</sup> Caracciolo 1962; Andreozzi 2009, 113-139.

<sup>12</sup> SAV, Inquisitori 843, 2 April 1754. Gatti 2005, 55-58.

the period 1719-1748) in Trieste were: the construction of the lazaretto in 1730, the draining of the salt basins, the excavation of the seabed in the port, and the construction of some warehouses, shops, taverns, and small craft workshops and manufacturing factories<sup>13</sup>.

### 3. «THE FREE PORT OF TRIESTE STARTS TO TAKE THE NAME»

Between 1719 and 1748, following the partial failure of the Habsburg policies, small business initiatives thrived in Trieste for a while, fluid and discontinuous, sometimes failing and when successful controlled by the commercial capital. In fact, this network created by medium and small ports was characterized by an extreme mobility of men and women. Being the result of individual economic strategies and of the influence of family, kinship, community and clientelistic relationships, such a mobility lead to the gathering of men and women at the 'junctions' of the Adriatic routes. These men and women – with their own share of knowledge, relations, skills and capitals – were very important for the economical, demographical and social development of the Adriatic ports. In Trieste, all that had peculiar repercussions because of the scarce economic and social weight of the local patriciate and the small demographic consistency of the city<sup>14</sup>. 'Local' inhabitants were joined by a «crowd» of foreigners, of 'floaters', «somewhat smaller, equal or bigger, depending on cases, but always in a comparable quantity»<sup>15</sup>. Those people became protagonists of Trieste's growth and of the development of its economy and a group of merchants with a sufficient level of stability began to emerge in the city. It was made up of people coming from different places (Italian Peninsula, Habsburg Empire, Balkans, Levant, Western Europe) and with different beliefs (Catholic, Protestant, Jewish and Orthodox). They arrived in town

---

<sup>13</sup> Ruaro Loseri 1980, 112-127; Andreozzi 2003a 541-547 e 2011, 13-16.

<sup>14</sup> Andreozzi 2005a and 2009.

<sup>15</sup> Gatti 2005, 37-38. As an example, two estimates of Venetian informers: in 1752-4,000 locals and 6,000 'foreigners', in 1754 – 5,000 locals, 5,000 foreigners and 2,000 'not [...] stable'.



Figura 2  
"Plans de la ville de Trieste et de ses environs", 1765,  
(source P. Di Biagi, V. Fasoli, A. Marin, *Dalla città moderna alla città contemporanea. Piani e progetti per Trieste*, Udine, 2002)

for various reasons (working for the oriental Company, on the sea routes and so on) and won the fight against the local patriciate, positioning themselves as a leading group representing the city. It was a cosmopolitan type of social class held together by common interests and a shared heritage of early rudimentary myths, ideals and behaviours. They were able to assimilate external contributions as long as they stayed within the established context without competing with it. Between the Twenties and the Forties, these people sustained the commerce of Trieste and were the protagonists of the development of the secondary sector too. In this context, the mechanisms of interchange between Adriatic, Levant, Central and Continental Europe and the Po Valley were the central element of the mercantile circuits revolving around Trieste, which sustained the commerce in Trieste between the 1720s and the 1750s<sup>16</sup>.

When Maria Theresa of Habsburg consolidated her power and the European situation calmed down, the Court of Vienna again picked up interest in Trieste's economic development. In the early '50s, Venetian observers and spies wrote that «the free port of Trieste starts to take the name» and that the growth of Trieste was an «unquestionable reality»<sup>17</sup>. The Habsburg authorities took note of this partially spontaneous growth and chose the mercantile class as their main interlocutor for the governance of the entire city, assigning part of the tasks to the 'nations' (cultural, ethnic and religious communities). The prominent members of the 'nations' were an integral part of the mercantile class. The foundation of the stock exchange deputation (the 'Borsa'), in 1755, symbolized that choice<sup>18</sup>.

Moreover, the mercantile class was capable of using all forms of resources coming from the centre to achieve its own goals and its connections with certain branches of the imperial bureaucracy helped it along; connections strengthened by the common interest in the development of the city and the many ways opportunities for personal enrichment they insured. In this way, the peripheral branches of the Imperial bureaucracy

---

<sup>16</sup> Andreozzi 2005a, 153-168 and 2009, 113-139.

<sup>17</sup> SAV, Savi, 843, 20 April 1754.

<sup>18</sup> Gatti 2001; Andreozzi 2003b 191-199.

became important allies of the protagonists of the informal economies, in the circumvention and transgression of the rules, too. In fact, on the one hand they pledged themselves to hide, defend and camouflage these practices, and on the other they became guarantors of the continuity of the flow of investments from the centre of the Empire. Imperial magistrates residing in Trieste were hiding, for instance, the real condition of the city and were sending Vienna false information. They were writing false reports about profits and costs of various investments, they were coming up with schemes, sometimes very ambitious, aiming at the economic development of the city, so to keep the imperial goals in play; they were hiding and protecting the actual policies adopted by the mercantile class, like smuggling, for example; they were supporting certain activities instead of others, justifying the granting of monopolies, patents, financial aids or, vice versa, their denial with wide-ranging strategies, when the actual motivation was tied to the interest of local merchants<sup>19</sup>. With regard to such practices, in the 1750's Marco Monti, Venetian consul in Trieste, wrote that half of the state investments in Trieste had already been «eaten». However, the situation was not perceived as a problem because «enriching the Emperor treasury was a private thought, but enriching the State was an object fit for a Prince»<sup>20</sup>.

#### 4. IMAGINE AND BUILD

In the early '50s, Trieste's "Old Town" was surrounded by walls and counted 535 houses<sup>21</sup>. Due to the growing population, rents and housing density were very high<sup>22</sup>. So, the issues to be dealt with were infrastruc-

---

<sup>19</sup> Andreozzi 2005b and 2012.

<sup>20</sup> SAV, Savi, 753, 28th October and 5th November 1769.

<sup>21</sup> SAV, Savi, 843, 28th March 1754.

<sup>22</sup> SAV, Inquisitori 618, 1<sup>st</sup> June 1754. In Trieste, Part of the population lived «in small warehouses and shacks» (SAV, Savi 843, 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1754). On the demographic growth of Trieste Gatti 2005 and Breschi, Kalc, Navarra 2001.

tures, especially trade and port infrastructures, and the lack of housing supply. The Vienna Court decided to create a 'technical organ' charged with the oversight of the planning and execution of the public works, the «Imperial royal factories Committee». Such organ was subordinated to the Commercial Intendence (*Intendenza Commerciale*), the office which the city government had been entrusted with during the Thirties<sup>23</sup>.

However, after five years, only a new pier and a custom had been built. The pier was actually built taking advantage of the Roman harbor ruins, of a rock that was there, the so called 'Zucco', and the custom, which was also home to the Intendence, had been built in the 'Large Square' (*Piazza grande*) along with a fountain to supply the port and the new town area with water. The shore was little more than a beach and was exposed to winds from the Levant, Bora and Tramontana. There was only a small '*mandracchio*' in the middle<sup>24</sup>. The new pier had cost a lot, but had been built without considering the dominant wind directions. So, when the winds blew impetuously, the waves threatened the ships<sup>25</sup>. Accidents and shipwrecks were frequent. For example, in February 1754, because of the Bora, many ships were heavily damaged and four of them sank in the harbor including a large Dutch sailing ship. Five sailors died. The captains demanded compensation for damage, arguing that the Empress was responsible because of the insecure pier, and threatened to avoid the port of Trieste<sup>26</sup>.

In attempting to resolve the issue, the count Rodolfo Chotek came to the city. He was a «knight of great birth», Minister of Finance and President of the Trade Directory, the office that was responsible for the development of Trieste. Moreover, he had personal economic interests in the growth of the port and its trade<sup>27</sup>. On April 1754, the Count arrived in Trieste. He immediately ordered to pull down the walls dividing the Old

---

<sup>23</sup> On the Commercial Intendence see Faber 2003, 25-26 and 28-33.

<sup>24</sup> On the port see Comune di Trieste 1980; Andreozzi 2011.

<sup>25</sup> SAV, Inquisitori 618, 1st June 1754.

<sup>26</sup> SAV, Inquisitori 618, 9th February 1754.

<sup>27</sup> SAV, Inquisitori, 1265, 14th March 1750.

Town from the New Town, to fill in the Canal collecting drainage water from the Karst and the Old Town, to build two new warehouses and demolish two houses to enlarge the square. Then, along with the captains, he decided to build a new pier where the wreck of the San Carlo ship was. The new pier would be added to the project of a canal designed to shelter ships, which had been approved a few months before. To demonstrate the seriousness of the Empress's intentions, he brought to Trieste a hundred bags with 1000 'Ungari' gold coins each. The imminent arrival of the Empress required to carry out works quickly and for this reason Chotek wanted all the houses in the city to be whitewashed<sup>28</sup>.

In 1754, the Old Town and New Town were united under one jurisdiction. The New Town, where building rights were granted free of charge for ten years, was just sketched. There, the building hosting the customs and the seat of Intendence had the «appearance of a palace» and it was located where a square had been made for the parking of trade carts. The public weigh station for goods was at entrance of the square. There were some low-cost houses built in a botched way and without a precise plan. Some houses were tall, others short, the ground was not even and the water stagnated and formed puddles. Moreover, there were three taverns, a soap and a rosin factory belonging to the entrepreneur and merchant Giacomo Balletti, the houses and workshops of two blacksmiths, a merchant and a rope maker. Another house and office destined to the port captain were under construction<sup>29</sup>. In 1754, the Imperial royal factories

---

<sup>28</sup> SAV, Inquisitori 618, 11th May 1754 and 616, 12th July 1754. Beyond the two main piers, there were other wooden piers (Sat, Intendenza, 21, 23 July 1757). A feast was scheduled for Maria Teresa's arrival with «Illuminated machines, virtuous music of instruments, opera in music and a wonderful shipracing» (SAV, Inquisitori 903, 9th November 1754). In December 1754 the project of Maria Teresa's visit was suspended (SAV, Inquisitori, 619, 14th December 1745).

<sup>29</sup> SAV, Inquisitori, 903, *Descrizione di Trieste*, 1754 and 618, 1<sup>st</sup> June 1754. This time, between 1754 and 1755, in the New City about 50 houses, stores and shops were under construction. By order of the Commercial Intendence, 17 of these houses formed a «*contrada*» (SAV, Inquisitori 619, 8th August 1755 and SAT, Intendenza, 14, 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1755). In May 1755 the Commercial Intendence ordered all the house owners to bleach the facades (SAT, Intendenza, 14, 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1755). On 'building practice' in New Town see also Caputo 1982.

Committee actually started to work. The Intendence member Count Philip Zinzendorf was the president, Lieutenant Francis Bonomo was the director and Captain Joseph Conti and Lieutenant John Conrad Gerhard were among the other members. The latter had just come from Vienna and soon assumed the leadership of the Office<sup>30</sup>.

Mattio Pirona was another protagonist of public works during those years. He was about 35, short, black-haired and recognized as a «great speaker»<sup>31</sup>. He arrived in July 1754 coming from Venice, where he had worked as «*cavafango*» for the 'Magistrate of the Waters', the Venetian office responsible for the lagoon. An expert in channel digging, he fled from Venice because of debts and conflicts at work and hoped for a new career in Trieste. His technical knowledge was unique in Trieste. So, Pirona became the main referent of the Vienna court, Commercial Intendence and Imperial royal factories Committee<sup>32</sup> in the field of public works.

Initially, on the basis of negotiations which began when Mattio was still in Venice, the Habsburg authorities entrusted Pirona with the digging of a Canal according to «the use and manner of Venice», to provide a safe port for the ships. The agreement provided that the State would have paid 13,300 ducats and the Venetian would have taken care of all the costs<sup>33</sup>. During the works, Pirona supervised and directed hundreds of workers<sup>34</sup>, while, fearing for his safety or not trusting him, the Habsburg authorities guarded and protected him with armed guards. Venice, for its part, feared that Pirona's knowledge could be a strategic resource for the growth of the rival Trieste and spied Mattio carefully, even going so far as to plan his assassination<sup>35</sup>. However, while the construction of the new dock proceeded slowly, by spring 1755 the canal was ready to be opened despite the Venetian threats. So, after the construction of the Lazaretto, the Grand

---

<sup>30</sup> Dorsi 1985, 75-76. On the public works in Trieste see also Visintini 2001, 239-260.

<sup>31</sup> SAV, Inquisitori 618, 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1754.

<sup>32</sup> SAV, Inquisitori 255, 28th August 1754.

<sup>33</sup> SAT, Intendenza, 12, 19th July 1754 and SAV, Inquisitori, 616, 18th August 1754.

<sup>34</sup> Most diggers at his service were «Friulians» (SAV, Inquisitori, 618, 20th July 1754).

<sup>35</sup> SAV, Inquisitori 616, 19th February 1755.

Canal was the first port infrastructure work in Trieste that the Hapsburg authorities managed to complete quickly, with reasonable costs and good results<sup>36</sup>.

This success gave great prestige to Pirona, who had the favour of Maria There. She promised Mattio «bread for all his life»<sup>37</sup>. The court of Vienna, Commercial Intendence and Imperial royal factories Committee virtually entrusted him with every public work to be done in Trieste: the dredging of the port seabed, the construction of walls on the port banks after the example of Venice, the construction of fortified cannon batteries, a draw-bridge on the Grand Canal, the so called «red bridge», and the paving of the streets of the New Town<sup>38</sup>.

In such context, on September 18th, 1756, a thunderstorm arrived in Trieste. A violent outburst of rain, lightning and thunder fell on the city for five hours. The water «coming down from the mountains» formed a «river» that swept away everything it encountered in the New Town. Many people lost their lives and their corpses were never found. Even animals, carts and goods were overwhelmed by water and washed into the sea. The area was submerged by nearly two meters of water. Houses, craft workshops, manufactures, and warehouses sustained damages estimated at approximately 300.000 florins. Moreover, the wall built along the shore between the Grand Canal and the new dock fell down and mud and debris poured into the canal, raising its level and compromising its functionality. The inhabitants of New Town were frightened, «shocked by the fatal accident», and regretted the decision of moving from Old Town. They accused

---

<sup>36</sup> Just opened to the ships, the canal suffered serious damages. The main causes of these damages were: the excessive number of boats damaging the canal shores, the custom to throw «human excrements and other garbage» in the canal, the carelessness of the boats carrying the stones for the construction. When the rocks were unloaded, the sailors dropped a lot of them on the bottom of the canal (SAT, Intendence, 14, 8th March 1755). The problem of waste was particularly felt in New Town. In 1756 The Commercial Intendence forbade house owners from building underground culverts for the drainage of the dirt. The culverts obstructed the channels for rainwater drainage (SAT, Intendenza, 20, 2 January 1757).

<sup>37</sup> SAV, Inquisitori 616, 19th February 1754.

<sup>38</sup> SAV, Inquisitori 619, 12th April and 8th August 1755 and 255, 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1755.

the «engineers» of not having listened to anyone and having done a bad job. Above all, they had not thought about an urban drainage system and had built New Town at too low a level. For these reasons, merchants and entrepreneurs turned to the court asking for funds and immediate measures<sup>39</sup>.

Pirona immediately carried out emergency works and in October the Habsburg authorities planned to start a new phase of infrastructural works to secure New Town from rainwater and from the sea. So, without taking the costs into account, Pirona's plan was accepted. Such project envisaged the restoration of the Grand Canal, the digging of a new smaller canal for the drainage of rainwater, the reconstruction of the fallen walls, and the placement of a double row of poles in front of the waterfront to break the force of the sea, taking as a model the bank near the Venetian Arsenal<sup>40</sup>. 12.500 florins were allocated for the two canals only. Moreover, fearing an English or French attack on the port, John Conrad Gerhard planned the construction of three cannon batteries – another work entrusted to Mattio<sup>41</sup>.

By that time, Pirona's career had indeed reached its apogee. He was the protagonist of public works, he had close links both with merchants from Trieste and Habsburg officials, he expanded his business to the most profitable trade branches, he had the monopoly of cooking and selling bread in Trieste: in short, he was one of the wealthiest men in town and had close relations with the court of Vienna and the Empress. However, just by the same time, his star began to decline. The first difficulties appeared when the construction of the cannon battery became a complex affair fraught with accusations of malpractice and inefficiency<sup>42</sup>. In Trieste, there were many rumors about Pirona<sup>43</sup>.

---

<sup>39</sup> SAV, Inquisitori 903, 25th September 1756.

<sup>40</sup> SAV, Inquisitori, 616, 17th October 1756, 1<sup>st</sup> January and 4th June 1757.

<sup>41</sup> SAV, Inquisitori, 619, 6th August 1757.

<sup>42</sup> SAV, Inquisitori, 619, 10th September 1757.

<sup>43</sup> SAV, Inquisitori, 255, 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1755 and 619, 21<sup>st</sup> July 1759 and 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1760; SAT, Intendenza, 209, 4th February 1758.

In this context, two clientelistic and entrepreneurial groups linked to the courts of Vienna and Trieste started to fight for the control of the main sources of income: trade, the urban and infrastructural growth of Trieste and, above all, the construction of the port and waterfront. The protagonists of this conflict were both members of the court and of the Habsburg bureaucracy, such as the Earl Chotek, the Earl Ramon Frederic of Vilana-Perlas, the Marquis of Rialp and the Earl Gian Gottofredo of Heister, State Councilor and Councilor of the Royal Chamber in Carinthia, but also the 'peripheral' imperial bureaucracy, the Community town and merchants. In Trieste, the leaders of the two groups were, on one side, Pasquale Ricci, born in Leghorn, member of the Commercial Intendance and President of the Commission for Police and Public Safety; Francesco Antonio de Raab, member of the Commercial-Intendance; Giulio Cesare Porta, vicar and judge of 'malefici' (criminal court); Francesco Giuseppe Gabbiatti, born in Koper, lawyer and actuary at the stock exchange; and the merchants Giacomo Balletti and Ernesto Bonomo. On the other side, we find Pirona; the Baron Francesco de Fin, member of the Commercial-Intendance, vice-captain and vice military commander of Trieste; the Earl Nicolò Hamilton, president of the Commercial-Intendance, captain and military commander of the city and castle of Trieste, intimate Councilor of State and Golden Key Cavalier; the Flemish architect Johan Conrad de Gerhard; the Admiral of the Lazaretto Giacomo Dini; the merchant and financier from Vienna Fortunato Heller; the captain of the militias in Temswar Teodoro Scheley; the director of the commercial and financial company "Brentani Cimaroli and Venino" Giosuè Bianchi; and the Swiss merchant Marco Blanchenai<sup>44</sup>.

Therefore, most of Trieste ruling class was involved in the dispute when in April 1760 Chotek financed with 20,000 florins the digging of a new larger canal, after the example of the Grand Canal. The new canal was part of a larger project which de Gerhard had designed. The project included: drainage of the salt basins, ground preparation to make the area suitable for building new houses and trade infrastructures, digging

---

<sup>44</sup> Archivio Diplomatico, Trieste, 21 c 57. On Pirona's story and the growth of Trieste in the Fifties and Sixties see Andreozzi forthcoming.

a canal all around the New Town which would collect drainage and rain waters, digging two larger canals to give shelter to ships, dredging the port seabed and repairing the banks. The contract provided that the contractors would have to bear all the costs. In return, they would receive a compensation of 145,000 florins, that the imperial government would pay in copper and mercury. The trade in such goods was reserved to the Empres who had the monopoly<sup>45</sup>.

The two groups competed for the contract presenting two different projects and fought with no holds barred<sup>46</sup>. In 1762, Pirona died under mysterious circumstances while he was imprisoned in the castle jails. Many of his allies were tried and condemned for fraud against the Empress. For example, the Baron de Fin was exiled to Bohemia and Gerhard escaped from prison avoiding being exposed to public opinion «on a pole»<sup>47</sup>.

However, Pirona's technical knowledge was not easily replaceable and, in the following years, Public works slowed down in Trieste. The construction of the port infrastructure, which started in the 50's and of which the main elements were the Grand Canal and the new docks, ended in 1764 in conjunction with the construction of the new Lazaretto<sup>48</sup>.

The urban design planning phase ended as well and the subsequent development of the city continued in the context of the guidelines laid during that time span. In the following years, Trieste's landscape mostly changed because of the increase in the number of houses, warehouses and manufactures located in the New Town. Houses slowly occupied the area previously occupied by the salt basins, a process that became more and more massive after the 80's<sup>49</sup>.

---

<sup>45</sup> SAV, Inquisitori 616, 30th April 1760. SAT, Intendenza, 24, 15th May and 12th June 1761.

<sup>46</sup> SAV, Inquisitori 255, 16th January 1762 and 619, 20th December 1760.

<sup>47</sup> SAV, Savi 752, 21<sup>st</sup> June 1761, 9th January 1762 and 25th June 1763.

<sup>48</sup> The idea of a new lazaretto was born between the 1759 and 1760 and the Commercial Intendence had thought to entrust the construction to Pirona (SAV, Inquisitori, 5th January 1760). The lazaretto was located on the opposite side of the existing one, out of the New City, closing it to the west.

<sup>49</sup> Panjek 2003, 671-676.

Maria Theresa died on 29th November 1780, but the growth of the New Town continued and accompanied the economic and social development of the city, its port and trades.

During the second half of the eighteenth century, merchants from Trieste designed new routes and trades, integrating flows and demands coming from the West, the Levant and from across the Alps and supplying merchandise now considered «more interesting» (sugar, Eastern and Western coffee, tea, cocoa, cinnamon, nutmeg and mace, cloves, pepper, saffron, tobacco and cotton) along with traditional goods, like oil, rosolio, raisins, almonds, walnuts, citrus fruits, candied sweets, manna, soap, liquors, vintage wines and silk<sup>50</sup>. In such circuits, a wide range of products was traded, from cereals (wheat and coarse wheat) to metals, from timber to ordinary textiles.

In this way, Trieste assumed its emporium-like role. By the middle of the 1790s, the city was actually described as the «most essential hub between the East and the West, between Italy, Germany and the other Northern European kingdoms». Switzerland and Hungary, for instance, were supplied with merchandise and products coming from «the Levant, Italy, America and the Indies» only «through Trieste» and, in turn, shipped «their own natural and handmade products via the same route»<sup>51</sup>. In 1782, Trieste was receiving merchandise from the Ottoman Empire, Venetian ports, the Kingdoms of Naples and Sicily, other Habsburg ports, China, France, Lombardy via the Po river, ports of the Papal State, Genoa, Hamburg, Leghorn, Dubrovnik, Holland, Denmark, Malta and North Africa. Along that same route, more merchandise was shipped to England, the Flanders, the Venetian and the Papal State, the Po Valley, the Kingdoms of Naples and Sicily, the Levant, Genoa, Leghorn, Austria, Hamburg, Holland, Spain, Portugal, Malta, North Africa and Dubrovnik. As for the value of products shipped to Trieste, the Ottoman Empire came in first with almost 2 million florins per year, China was number five, sending tea and silk for a total of 850.000 florins per year. England and the Flanders

---

<sup>50</sup> SAV, Inquisitori, 903, 1754 e 1758.

<sup>51</sup> Il mentore 1797.

were the largest exporters for a total of over 2.700.000 florins per year, with top items such as oil, spices from the Levant, silk, tea, porcelain and raisins; exports to the Venetian ports approached 2.500.000 florins, with goods like coffee, cinnamon, oil, silk, tea and tobacco.<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>52</sup> SAV, Inquisitori, 183, Stato di commercio di Trieste, 1782.

## Bibliography

- D. Andreozzi, "Gli 'urti necessari'. Dalla manifattura all'industria (1718-1914)", in: R. Finzi, L. Panariti, I. Panjek (eds.), *Storia economica e sociale di Trieste*, vol. II, *La città dei traffici, 1719-1918*, Lint, Trieste, 2003, pp. 541-547.
- D. Andreozzi, "L'organizzazione degli interessi a Trieste (1719-1914)", in: R. Finzi, L. Panariti, I. Panjek (eds.), *Storia economica e sociale di Trieste*, vol. 2, *La città dei traffici 1719-1918*, Lint, Trieste, 2003, pp. 191-231.
- D. Andreozzi, "Tra Trieste, Ancona, Venezia e Bologna. La canapa e il commercio nell'Adriatico del '700", in: D. Andreozzi, C. Gatti (eds.), *Trieste e l'Adriatico. Uomini, merci, conflitti*, Edizioni Università di Trieste, Trieste, 2005a, pp. 153-201.
- D. Andreozzi, "Tra centro e periferia. Pasquale Ricci e la Commissione sulle manifatture e fabbriche del Litorale (1763-1776)", in: D. Andreozzi, C. Gatti (eds.), *Trieste e l'Adriatico. Uomini, merci, conflitti*, Edizioni Università di Trieste, Trieste, 2005b, pp. 123-151.
- D. Andreozzi, "«Qual generazione di fiera si pensi introdurre». Spazi dei commerci e pratiche dei mercanti a Trieste e nel Litorale austriaco nei primi decenni del Settecento", in: D. Andreozzi, L. Panariti, C. Zaccaria (eds.), *Acque, terre e spazi dei mercanti. Istituzioni, gerarchie, conflitti e pratiche dello scambio dall'età antica alla modernità*, Editreg, Trieste, 2009, pp. 113-139.
- D. Andreozzi, "Centro e confine. Porto, spazi e strategie portuali a Trieste tra XVIII e XXI secolo", in: G. Garzella et alii (eds.), *I porti della penisola italiana. Due mari a confronto tra storia e sviluppo futuro*, Pacini, Pisa, 2011, pp. 13-24.

- D. Andreozzi, "Il peso delle parole. Linguaggi di esclusione e linguaggi di inclusione nella storia di Trieste", in: R. Scarciglia (ed.), *Trieste multicultural. Comunità e linguaggi di integrazione*, Bologna, 2011, pp. 13-38.
- D. Andreozzi, "Croissance et économie licite, illicite et informelle à Trieste au XVIIIe siècle", in: *Territoires de l'illicite: ports et îles. De la fraude au contrôle (XVIe-XXe s.)*, M. Figeac-Monthus et C. Lastécouères (eds.), Armand Colin, Paris, 2012, pp. 173-187.
- D. Andreozzi, "For the service of the most August and of the Public. Expropriations and the building of the mercantile spaces in Trieste in the XVIII century", in: L. Lorenzetti, M. Barbot, L. Mocarelli (eds.), *Property rights and their violations. Expropriations and confiscations 16th-20th century*, Peter Lang, Bern, 2012, pp. 137-157.
- D. Andreozzi, "«La gloria di un dilatato commercio». L'intrico delle politiche e lo sviluppo di Trieste nell'Adriatico centro-settentrionale (1700-1730)", in: *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome – Italie et Méditerranée modernes et contemporaines*, 2015, pp. 127-1.
- D. Andreozzi, "From the Black Sea to the Americas. The trading companies of Trieste and the global commercial network (18th century)", in: D. Andreozzi (ed.), *Mediterranean doubts. Trading Companies, Conflicts and Strategies in the Global Spaces. XIV-XIX Centuries*, New Digital Press, Palermo, 2017, pp. 65-87.
- D. Andreozzi, «Cosa è?». *Intrecci di vite e razionalità economiche nella Trieste del Settecento*, forthcoming.
- D. Andreozzi, L. Panariti, «Trieste and the Ottoman Empire in the Eighteenth Century», in: B. Schmidt-Haberkamp (ed.), *Europe and Turkey in the 18th Century*, Bonn, V&R- Bonn University Press, 2011, pp. 220-223.
- D. Andreozzi, A. Marin, L. Panariti, *Trieste tra spazio e mito*, in: "Citta e storia", anno VIII, n. 2, 2013, pp. 275 – 302.
- F. Babudieri, *L'espansione mercantile austriaca nei territori d'oltremare nel XVIII secolo e i suoi riflessi politici ed economici*, Giuffrè, Milano, 1978.
- M. Breschi, A. Kalc, E. Navarra, "La nascita di una città. Storia minima della popolazione di Trieste, secc. XVIII-XIX", in: R. Finzi, I. Panjek (eds.), *Storia economica e sociale di Trieste*, vol. I, *La città dei gruppi, 1719-1918*, Trieste, 2001, pp. 69-237.
- G. Bussolin, *Della imperiale privilegiata compagnia orientale nel secolo scorso e del Lloyd austro-ungarico nel secolo presente. Studio storico*, Trieste, 1882.

- F. Caputo, «Posto» e casa. *Il controllo sulla pratica edilizia nel Borgo Teresiano e nella cittadella durante il XVIII secolo*, in: "Quaderni Giuliani di Storia", 2, 1982, pp. 49-72.
- A. Caracciolo, *Fortunato Cervelli ferrarese "neofita" e la politica commerciale dell'Impero*, Milano, Giuffrè, 1962.
- Comune di Trieste (ed.) *Maria Teresa, Trieste e il porto*, Fagagna, 1980.
- P. Dorsi, *Archivi cartografici e storia regionale. L'«Archivio piani» della direzione delle fabbriche del Litorale (1754 -18639)*, in: "Quaderni giuliani di storia", 1, 1985, pp. 71-101.
- E. Faber, "Territorio e amministrazione", in: R. Finzi, L. Panariti, I. Panjek (eds.), *Storia economica e sociale di Trieste*, vol. 2, *La città dei traffici 1719-1918*, Lint, Trieste, 2003, pp. 21-53.
- R. Finzi, L. Panariti, I. Panjek (eds.), *Storia economica e sociale di Trieste*, vol. II, *La città dei traffici*, LINT, Trieste, 2003.
- R. Finzi, I. Panjek (eds.), *Storia economica e sociale di Trieste*, vol. I, *La città dei gruppi, 1719-1918*, Lint, Trieste, 2001.
- C. Gatti, "Uomini e politiche nella Trieste del Settecento", in: R. Finzi, I. Panjek (eds.), in: *Storia economica e sociali di Trieste*, vol. 1, *La città dei Gruppi 1719-1918*, Lint, 2001, pp. 359-380.
- C. Gatti, "Numeri, forse uomini. Riflessioni quantitative sulla Trieste di metà Settecento", in: D. Andreozzi, C. Gatti (eds.), *Trieste e l'Adriatico. Uomini, merci, conflitti*, Edizioni Università di Trieste, Trieste, 2005, pp. 35-72.
- Il mentore perfetto de' negozianti ovvero guida sicura de medesimi*, t. V, Trieste, 1797.
- A. Panjek, "Chi costruì Trieste. Edilizia, infrastrutture, mercato immobiliare e servizi tra pubblico e privato (1719-1918)", in: R. Finzi, L. Panariti, I. Panjek (eds.), *Storia economica e sociale di Trieste*, vol. II, *La città dei traffici*, LINT, Trieste, 2003, pp. 643-758.
- L. Ruaro Loseri, *Il porto prima di Maria Teresa*, in *Maria Teresa, Trieste e il porto*, Comune di Trieste (ed.), Fagagna, 1980, pp. 112-127.
- Visintini, C., (2001), "La crescita urbana", in Finzi, R., Panjek, G. (eds.), *Storia economica e sociale di Trieste*, vol. I, *La città dei gruppi, 1719-1918*, I, Trieste, pp. 239-269.