

# THE VAGARIES OF IDENTIFICATION IN THE SOCIETÀ DI MINERVA OF TRIESTE (1810–1916)

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*This article looks into the past of the illustrious Triestine voluntary association Minerva. The author suggests that its 19<sup>th</sup> century path went from being monarchically loyal to rather nationalistic, but not in a linear and uncomplicated manner as it might seem on the first sight.*

Keywords: Trieste, Minerva, 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Voluntary Associations, Habsburg Empire, Irredentism, Nationalism.

*V članku avtorica raziskuje tržaško zgodovinsko društvo Minerva in pri tem ugotavlja, da se je v devetnajstem stoletju spreminjalo od monarhiji vdanega do nacionalističnega; na prvi pogled razviden proces pa ni bil niti linearen niti enostaven.*

Ključne besede: Trst, Minerva, 19. stoletje, prostovoljna društva, habsburški imperij, iredentizem, nacionalizem.

In May 1919, three years after the Austrian government had disbanded the Minerva Society (*Società di Minerva*) and after Trieste/Trst/Triest<sup>1</sup> “finally” became part of the Italian state, the Italian newspaper *La Nazione* published a thought-provoking article on the society’s rebirth. Since its first establishment in 1810, under the Illyrian Provinces, this cultural association named after the Roman goddess of wisdom strove to contribute to modern society’s progress through study, discussion, providing reading materials, and holding lectures. Its assortment of intellectual activities only expanded after 1814, when Trieste once more became part of the Habsburg Monarchy. However, the article in *La Nazione* accuses the Austrian authorities of deliberately impeding and preventing the general progress of scholarship in Trieste throughout their century-long rule. What is more, the author celebrated the years of French sovereignty over Trieste in the early nineteenth century. According to the article, the Minerva Society never would have been founded were it not for the brief but cordial Napoleonic era, when a plethora of liberal ideas was allowed to spread. In the decades of the forbidding Austrian rule that followed, the society was supposedly forced to conceal its true spirit of pure Italian character (*italianità purissima*), which nonetheless managed to dominate it.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Trieste was and remains known by its many different names. The use of one or the other inevitably reinforces a certain nationalist frame, that is why I on the following pages refer use its common English name: Trieste.

<sup>2</sup> *La Nazione*, May 19th, 1919.

In spite of this, a brief glance at sources from the early nineteenth century shows a rather different, divergent picture. When Habsburg rule was restored in 1814, the Minerva Society quite literally sang praises to the returning regime. In one of the society’s booklets (*Ritorno della patria al felice dominio* ‘Return of the Homeland to the Happy Domain’) devoted to the emperor or the “father,” the members put pen to paper and composed poems in various languages, all applauding the emperor as their savior. A poem written by Lorenz (or Lorenzo) Miniussi, for instance, depicted the four years of French rule as an agonizing eternity.

<i>In vier Jahren</i>	In four years
<i>(O sie waren</i>	(Oh, they were
<i>Ewigkeit für unser Herz!)</i>	An eternity for our Heart!)
<i>War nur Beben unser Leben</i>	Our life was only an earthquake,
<i>Kummer nur, und herber Schmerz<sup>3</sup></i>	Only sorrow and bitter pain.

The narrative that the nationalist print disseminated after the dissolution of the Dual Monarchy is in many regards radically different from the agenda that the Minerva Society was actually pursuing in the nineteenth century. On the following pages, I shed light on the society’s first century and, above all, illustrate the transformation of individual identifications within it. Through particular empirical cases, I explain the shift that the society as a more or less coherent whole underwent during the long nineteenth century, and also say something more general about the transformation of identifications in Trieste in the period studied—or, as Jurij Fikfak (2008) put it, I use the parts to illustrate a whole. In other words, I am interested in what happened “below” or at the micro level of the society’s everyday life between 1814, when the emperor’s “virtuous flame lit up every heart,”<sup>4</sup> and the end of the First World War, when “the Habsburg eagles were demolished, the monument to Empress Elisabeth and the one celebrating the city’s belonging to Austria were removed, while the Miramar Castle, constructed in the mid-nineteenth century by Maximilian of Habsburg, became a residence of the Italian royal family” (Klabjan 2017: 4–5).

Since 1810, when it was established in the Habsburg port city of Trieste, the Minerva Society was devoted to science and the arts, especially history. Particularly in the beginning, it was a venue where the cream of the crop of the Triestine literati gathered. Because the society was principally an elite platform, studying it illuminates the growth of nationalism from a particular and limited perspective. However, the society also played a solid public

<sup>3</sup> Gabinetto di Minerva. 1814. *Ritorno della patria al felice dominio di sua mestà l'imperatore dell'Austria, re di Boemia ed Ungheria ecc. ecc. ecc. Francesco I.* Trieste: Tipografia Governiale, p. 21. Odes recited in January 1814 in front of the emperor’s bust at the society’s office.

<sup>4</sup> Gabinetto di Minerva. 1814. *Ritorno della patria al felice dominio di sua mestà l'imperatore dell'Austria, re di Boemia ed Ungheria ecc. ecc. ecc. Francesco I.* Trieste: Tipografia Governiale, p. 6. Signed by Joel (Joël or Giambattista) Kohen.

role. In this sense, it should also be understood as an opinion-making organization with broader importance on the urban scene of Trieste. The language of communication in the society was usually Italian, and one could safely say that this association was from its very beginnings oriented toward the Apennine Peninsula. However, labeling the society in the first century of its existence as simply Italian is questionable. This is not merely because nationalism, along with many other processes of that era, transformed Trieste's social life only in the second half of the nineteenth century (Cattaruzza 1992: 191; Millo 2007: 74), as was also the case in other imperial regions (Judson 2016: 9–10), but also because the adjective *Italian* can refer to a number of things: language, culture, political nationalism, economic ties, and so on.

Despite the recent explosion of work on ethnicity and nationalism, not many texts on nineteenth-century Trieste managed to exit the national master narrative, today's profane religion. Drawing from several well-elaborated theories on nationalism emerging in the 1980s (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983; Gellner 1983; Anderson 1983; Hroch 1985), I invite readers to think of nationalism as constructed—that is, to be very wary of national identities in the first half of the nineteenth century, and utterly skeptical of fixed, static, or eternal identities on the whole (Barth 1969; Verdery 1983; Eriksen 1993). The situational and contextual character of identities (or rather identifications and along these lines ethnicity too) is thus one I emphasize. My goal is to present not who the members of the Minerva Society were, but how they acted in various political, social, and historical contexts.

In this article, the Minerva Society functions as a case study illuminating the intellectual interests of the local intelligentsia in the decades of the gradual spread of Italian political nationalism. By examining the society's own archives, the State Archives in Trieste, the contemporary press, and secondary materials, I offer a more nuanced picture of the society. I avoid simplifying the society as a mere agent of Italian nationalism from its very beginning onward and do not place its history on the straight line of national teleology. Instead, I carefully observe it in different periods, through different sources, and, all in all, show that the nationalization of Minerva was neither linear nor fast. Instead, it was unhurried and filled with contradictions.<sup>5</sup>

## MINERVA AS AN IMPERIAL SOCIETY

The busy port city of Trieste reached its heyday in the nineteenth century, when it became the fourth-largest city in the monarchy. For the Habsburg Empire, the city was a vital outlet to the sea for at least two centuries. It was a part of the Mittel-European unity that sustained

<sup>5</sup> In this sense, the society's nineteenth-century journey is very similar to that of the Schiller Society (*Schillerverein*). This was another Triestine association established more than five decades later, but which experienced a similar “in-betweenness” (Holfelder, Katschnig, Schemmer & Schönberger 2017).

Trieste's economic existence and attracted individuals and families from all over Europe and other parts of the world to enjoy its cultural and financial wealth. Precisely this urban milieu enabled the Minerva Society to form. In the first half of the nineteenth century, associations or clubs, modern manifestations of public collective life where members could debate and amuse themselves as equals, appeared not only in London or Paris, but also on the Austrian imperial urban scene, including in Trieste. The noble and bourgeois men of Trieste were similar in many ways to those in other urban communities across Europe (Millo 1990: 57). The civic associations that they formed—although limited by cautious inhibiting and strict laws—aimed to improve the cultural, moral, and educational status of fellow citizens (Judson 2017: 30–31). To the civic-minded noble and bourgeois founders, the associations offered a public space where they could discuss matters, cultivate themselves, and study regional histories (Judson 2017: 139–140).

According to well-established popular and scholarly narratives, the Minerva Society was established in 1810 by Domenico Rossetti (1774–1842), a local Triestine polymath and jurist of noble descent. “Minerva was him and he was Minerva,” is what Attilio Gentile (later Gentile), one of the most dedicated Minervians in the early twentieth century, wrote about Rossetti on the occasion of the society's first centenary in 1910. In fact, the society was indeed officially established in 1810, during the third French takeover, but formally registered by a Triestine named Paul Schubart and not by the celebrated Rossetti. It is also not entirely true that the society's story first began in 1810. In reality, it sprouted out of the eighteenth-century *Accademia Arcadia*,<sup>6</sup> and thus grew from a strong enlightenment tradition.

The most eminent Triestines socialized in the Minerva Society's assembly rooms. They included recent emigrants from Greek islands, evangelical pastors sojourning in Trieste for short periods of time, and Italian-speaking lawyers born and raised in the city. The association also functioned as an instrument expanding and fortifying the members' social networks. For instance, on one scandalous occasion in 1839, when Antonio Madonizza, the editor of the local newspaper *La Favilla*, had to resign from office, the society played a key role in determining the next editor (Kirchner Reill 2012: 89).

From its very beginnings, the Minerva Society rather regularly held lectures on various topics. According to its yearly programs, the nineteenth-century topics ranged from the moral crisis in France, earthquakes, feminism, Buddha, vaccinations, Satanism, and Umberto Saba's poetry to preschools. The society also collected valuable historical artefacts and works of art, and especially books and journals. In 1815, the society's library consisted

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<sup>6</sup> Archivio di Stato di Trieste, I.R. Luogotenenza del Litorale, Atti Presidiali Riservati (1854–1916), Fasc. 81, Gabinetto di Minerva: relazioni di Pietro Kandler, commissario imperiale alla società (1864–1866). In his letter to the local governorship in 1864, Pietro Kandler stated that the society originated from the earlier *Accademia Arcadia*, which relocated from Gorizia to Trieste around 1780. More on Arcadia Triestina can be found in Franca Donà's (1990) contribution to the volume *Neoclassico: arte, architettura e cultura a Trieste 1790–1840*.



Figure 1: Domenico Rossetti. Trieste/Trst. 2018. Photo by Peter Rustja.

of at least 1,772 volumes (Messina 2011: 238), and four decades later about 5,000.<sup>7</sup> In 1829, the Minervians started to publish a journal (*Archeografo Triestino*, The Trieste Archaeograph), one of the first historiographic journals written in Italian and still issued today.

After Rossetti's death in 1842, the torch was handed over to his "spiritual descendant" Pietro Kandler (1804–1872), a historian and jurist, who described the initiative for the association's establishment as one seeking the niceties of intellectual life, encompassing conversations, music, declarations, poetry, and art, as well as science.<sup>8</sup> Although, at least in the first half of the century, the Minerva Society was somehow isolated from the everyday political events of the city, it valued Trieste's status as a free port city, as well as its rationalism and secularism (Simčič 1988).

## THE MINERVA SOCIETY'S THORNY PATH THROUGH THE LONG NINETEENTH CENTURY

### UNTIL 1848

Already in 1809, a year before the Minerva Society's official inauguration, the future Minervians discussed the journals they could subscribe to.<sup>9</sup> The list from 1810 demonstrates that the members' interests ranged from journals printed in Paris, Geneva, and Monaco to ones from Berlin, Leipzig, Vienna, and Milan. There were many other localities, but the index suggests that the society's scope was rather northern oriented, prevailingly toward the German-speaking world.<sup>10</sup> The society's academic compass kept pointing in this direction in the first half of the nineteenth century, while it increasingly started to point toward the Apennine Peninsula in the second half of the nineteenth century. Despite the importance of several factors (conditionality of language competence, the strength of particular academic traditions, and strict Austrian censorship), the society's institutional network changed mainly due to the winds of nationalism(s) that began to blow across Trieste, the Austrian Empire, and beyond. On the following pages, I more or less chronologically demonstrate how during the long nineteenth century the society first consented to, occasionally turned against, and later even embraced the rise of Italian nationalism.

<sup>7</sup> Österreichischer Lloyd in Triest. 1857. *Lloyd's Illustrierte Reisebibliothek*. Trieste: Literarisch-Artistische Abtheilung des Österr. Lloyd.

<sup>8</sup> Archivio di Stato di Trieste, I.R. Luogotenenza del Litorale, Atti Presidiali Riservati (1854–1916), Fasc. 81, Gabinetto di Minerva: relazioni di Pietro Kandler, commissario imperiale alla società (1864–1866).

<sup>9</sup> Archivio della Società di Minerva, 1.7 Corrispondenza relativa a periodici e pubblicazioni; elenchi di periodici (1809/1810).

<sup>10</sup> Archivio della Società di Minerva, 1.7 and 5.7 Elenchi di riviste e suggerimenti sul loro acquisto (1814).





Figure 2: The cover of Minerva's 1814 booklet *Ritorno della patria al felice dominio* (Return of the Homeland to the Happy Domain). Source: Gabinetto di Minerva. 1814.

In the *Vormärz* era, the imperial regime, on the one hand, tolerated independent civic associations, but on the other hand it considered them potential subversive hazards to the public order (Judson 2016: 105). Nonetheless, in the first decades of the Minerva Society's existence, the members had no dissident views, but the opposite. Similar to the 1814 brochure mentioned in the introduction, two years later, after the Illyrian Provinces ceased to exist, the Minervians published another booklet with various arty texts admiring the emperor and the “golden age” he had brought back.<sup>11</sup> The members wrote their idolizing verses in Latin, Italian, German, Greek, and other languages, which demonstrates linguistic abilities of the educated bourgeoisie that were not out of the ordinary. Nonetheless, the vast archival sources testify that the association's language was primarily Italian. It would, however, be wrong to identify the members at that point simply as Italians. As the historian Dominique Kirchner Reill put it, “denoting an ethnic or national identity in the eastern Adriatic based on language use is an impossible and historically incorrect exercise” (2012: xvii). Italian was the city's *lingua franca*, but was not linked to any specific national sentiments, and as such was a sign of cultural and not national dominance (Cattaruzza 1992: 191; Millo 2007: 64). I would add that in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century the predominance of Italian is perhaps also merely a sign of practicality, connected to Trieste's commercial successes.

Similar to the local commercial elite, from its very early phase onward the Minerva Society had established ties connecting it to the world beyond the city's borders. Like other associations of its era, it set up a scholarly and scientific network, which also included a kindred Carniolan association from Ljubljana. For instance, in 1824 during his excursion to Trieste, Henrik Costa (1796–1871), a member of the Carniola Historical Association,<sup>12</sup> was hosted by none other than Domenico Rossetti. Costa admired Rossetti and was glad to be able to visit the Minerva Society (Janša Zorn 1994: 88). Apropos, the bonds between the two associations were enhanced in the 1850s, when Pietro Kandler became one of the Carniolan association's honorary members (Janša Zorn 1996: 51), and also continued through the 1860s, when Kandler sent his book to fellow Carniolan sages (Janša Zorn 1996: 60).

In the first half of the nineteenth century in Trieste, ethnic sentiments were thus of slender presence. On September 28th, 1828, the Minervians, for instance, joyfully celebrated the first centenary of Trieste as a free port.<sup>13</sup> That is to say, they commemorated Trieste's belonging to the Habsburg Empire and the advantages that this state of affairs yielded. Nonetheless, nationalism became an increasingly present feature on the Apennine Peninsula. The Folliero De Luna family was one of the educated Neapolitan families visiting the

<sup>11</sup> Gabinetto di Minerva. 1816. *Per la presenza di Francesco primo in Trieste*. Venice: Tipografia Picotti, p. 55. Also according to the historian Tullia Catalan (2000: 28), Triestines were in general prevailingly content that the French rule had come to an end.

<sup>12</sup> Slovenian: *Historično društvo za Kranjsko*, German: *Historischer Verein für Krain*.

<sup>13</sup> Archivio della Società di Minerva, 19.8 Giubileo del porto franco di Trieste: annotazioni, appunti, minute relazioni per la celebrazione (1828).



salons of Italian revolutionaries and embracing Giuseppe Mazzini's ideas,<sup>14</sup> including the idea of freeing the emerging Italy from Austria. It is therefore quite reasonable that in 1841, when hosted by the Minerva Society, the young Giuseppe Folliero De Luna (1822–1871) delivered the lecture “The Progress of Civilization in Current Austrian Countries.”<sup>15</sup> As a member of a family that played a prominent role in Italy's fight for independence and a later Garibaldian, by emphasizing Austria's merely current (*attualmente*) political dominance, Folliero de Luna was probably underlining its potential disappearance, at least from what the Italian national activists considered to be Italian lands.

Only a year later, in 1842, the Minerva Society received an invitation to participate in the congress of Italian scholars in Padua.<sup>16</sup> This event probably cannot be characterized as political, but as cultural, because these two aspects did not necessarily go hand in hand. Pietro Kandler himself, for instance, distinguished between the cultural and political nation (Baskar 2008: 68). In other words, although he considered Trieste to be Italian, he still reckoned it more advantageous for Trieste to remain part of the Habsburg Monarchy. For this reason it is not surprising that in 1842 Giuseppe De Lugnani (1793–1857), the long-term director of the civic library and one of the most active Minervians of this period, delivered a lecture in which he claimed that a monument dedicated to Emperor Francis I should be erected in Trieste to honor his virtuousness. Lugnani also stated that Trieste had been blossoming precisely because of its inclusion in the Austrian state.<sup>17</sup> What is more, by 1842 some royal and other stately names enriched the society's guestbook: from Francis IV, the Duke of Modena, his brother Maximilian, and Archduke John of Austria to Count Franz von Stadion.<sup>18</sup> If the society's loyalty to the emperor in the process of nationalization was diminishing, it was most definitely a slow and a knotty process that heavily depended on particular circumstances. Thus in the mid-nineteenth century Trieste's attraction to nationalism was not of an irresistible kind.

The events taking place in subsequent years further prove the contested nature of the established teleological linear narratives by and large disseminated in the nineteenth century as well as contemporary nationalists. For example, in 1844 the Minervians were delighted

<sup>14</sup> Giuseppe Mazzini (1805–1872) was a crucial nineteenth-century proponent of Italian nationhood, especially famous for modeling the influential political movement Young Italy (*Giovine Italia*) and its international twin Young Europe (*Giovine Europa*). Mazzini has since been recognized as one of the founders of the Italian nation.

<sup>15</sup> Archivio della Società di Minerva, 32.3 Distinta delle letture sociali (1841).

<sup>16</sup> Archivio della Società di Minerva, 33.6 Distinta delle letture serali per l'anno sociale 1841–1842 (1842).

<sup>17</sup> Giuseppe de Lugnani. 1842. *Serate di Minerva, discorsi sette dell'imp. regio professore e civico bibliotecario Giuseppe de Lugnani letti all'adunanza del Gabinetto di Minerva in Trieste*. Trieste: Tipografia Weis, p. 52.

<sup>18</sup> Giuseppe de Lugnani. 1842. *Serate di Minerva, discorsi sette dell'imp. regio professore e civico bibliotecario Giuseppe de Lugnani letti all'adunanza del Gabinetto di Minerva in Trieste*. Trieste: Tipografia Weis, pp. 13, 32.

when Emperor Ferdinand I and his spouse Maria Anna visited Trieste. On that occasion, the emperor and the monarchy were once more praised for protecting and encouraging the sciences in the city of Trieste, which the Minervians referred to as the *città fedelissima* ‘most faithful city’.<sup>19</sup> Even so, in 1846, when the maturing Italian national activist Carlo De Combi (1827–1884) requested membership in the Minerva Society, he received a positive response.<sup>20</sup> Carlo De Combi and his father Francesco were among the earliest Italian nationalists from neighboring Istria. It is difficult to be certain what Combi’s feelings were at that point, but they were most probably far from loyal because in that period Combi became close to Vincenzo De Castro, a fellow Italian activist, and in 1848 they even left the imperial territories for Genoa, where they continued their nationalist mission (Cella 1982).

#### FROM 1848 TO 1861

The upcoming revolutionary years of 1848 and 1849 did not really gain momentum in Trieste (Millo 2007: 69–70; Kirchner Reill 2012: 178). The Minerva Society’s archival records also confirm this, but it is probably true that these events brought many Triestines a bit closer to their new patria, the rising Italy, and a step away from the previous patriae, be they Trieste, the monarchy as a whole, or some other collective entity. This is because before 1848 not all nationalisms strove to create a monist nation, at least not in the northern Adriatic. Some were not antagonistic to religious, ethnic, linguistic, or other kinds of pluralisms (Kirchner Reill 2012). What surfaces from these contradictive occurrences, and from what follows too, is that “participation within a nation-state was never a predetermined or natural phenomenon but rather the result of constant negotiation of shifting interests and contingencies” (Kirchner Reill 2012: 4).

After the liberal-democratic wave of 1848/49 flooded the monarchy, many new associations mushroomed in Trieste too, including the Slavic Club (*Slavjansko društvo* or *Casino Slavo*). The ethnic boundaries that arose were, however, at that time still very permeable, in comparison to the state of affairs in the ensuing century. In 1848, Janez Vesel (a.k.a. Jovan Koseski), one of the Slavic Club’s leaders, visited the Minerva Society without any impediments (Simčič 1988: 202). In the years after 1848, the society was slowly becoming less of a noble and upper bourgeois association, and increasingly a cluster of bourgeois intellectuals, lawyers, architects, doctors, publishers, and so on (Simčič 1988: 202). Moreover, after the revolution was suppressed the society was again under the cautious eye of the censors, like other associations and the print of that era. Unsurprisingly, the 1850s were thus a period in which the society’s activities were sparse. In passing, such rather dormant periods were in fact quite common in the first century of the society’s existence.

<sup>19</sup> Gabinetto di Minerva. 1844. Nell occasione faustissima in cui Ferdinando Primo Imperatore e re e Maria-Anna-Carolina imperatrice e regine, rendono beata Tergeste di lor presenza augustissima la Societa di Minerva porge omaggio di suddita devozione. Trieste: Tip. M. Weis.

<sup>20</sup> Archivio della Società di Minerva, 37.8. Lettere di Carlo de Combi (1846).

## FROM 1861 UNTIL THE GREAT WAR

Several factors point to the 1860s as pivotal years in establishing national identities separated by progressively more rigid boundaries. The crisis in the port's economy and the unification of Italy in 1861 encouraged the local bourgeoisie to look across the state borders for alternatives. The more liberal laws that were introduced in 1861, and also in 1867, were decisive for this as well. In 1861, constitutionalism was revived and followed by the restoration of municipal autonomy, which made possible a local platform for expressing national particularities. Some now began to articulate their Italian identity in overtly political ways. One of Trieste's crucial public figures and a member of the Minerva Society, Francesco Hermet (1811–1883),<sup>21</sup> established the Progress Society (*Società del Progresso*) in 1868; this was a political association that represented the epicenter of Italian liberalists, the main pro-Italian alliance until the war.

However, not all Minervians adhered to Italian nationalism, nor were they politically pro-Italian in every single setting. In January 1868, for instance, Pietro Kandler wrote a letter to Cavalier Edoardo Radonetz, the caretaker of Miramare Castle. In his letter he maintained that Triestines were old querulants, but “in their hearts affectionate and good Austrians—even speaking Italian and Slovenian, and Serbian and Greek.”<sup>22</sup> The Minerva Society's essential linguistic, cultural, and intellectual openness indeed endured. In the 1860s, another Slovenian writer and national activist, Fran Levstik, paid a visit to the society (Simčič 1988: 202). However, Anna Millo (2007: 74) suggested that the increasingly exclusivist understandings of ethnic belonging in 1860s Trieste excluded Slovenians, whereas Greeks and Jews could still be amalgamated into Trieste *italianissima* (‘pure Italian character’).

The celebration of the six hundredth anniversary of Dante's birth that the Minervians held in 1865 can hardly be avoided in this text. Attilio Tamaro (1884–1956), one of the most influential irredentist historians, acknowledged this celebration of Dante, the “great man” from the pantheon of Italian national history, as a pro-irredentist event, thus praising Italy and patriotism. He also criticized Kandler for supposedly opposing the festivity because of his treasonous allegiance to Austria (Simčič 1988: 198). Still, according to Simčič (1988: 198), “Festa di Dante” was in no manner a manifestation of irredentism. Dante was praised more as a symbol of progress than an apostle of the national idea. The Minerva Society, again, was neither head nor tail, but a knotty and conflicting accumulation of views that, on the one hand, supported “international” contacts with, for instance, the American Smithsonian institute,<sup>23</sup> but on the other hand in the 1860 and 1870s also

<sup>21</sup> Archivio della Società di Minerva, 47.5 Elenchi dei soci (1861) and 56.2 Elenchi dei soci (1871). Francesco Hermet can be found on both lists of members.

<sup>22</sup> Archivio di Stato di Trieste, Amministrazione del Castello di Miramare, b. 67, no. 55/1868.

<sup>23</sup> Archivio della Società di Minerva, 48.15 Minute relative all'invio di opere e pubblicazioni allo Smithsonian Istituto di Washington (1862) and 60.6 Invio di libri da parte dello Smithsonian Institution di Washington (1874).

increasingly became a center where Italian teachers, mainly from Veneto, were able to disseminate nationalist ideas through their lectures (Simčič 1988: 197).

The following article from *La Provincia dell'Istria* further underscores the Minerva Society's incongruity regarding identifications: loyalist on the one hand, yet adhering to a nationalist political agenda on the other. In 1869, according to the pro-Italian journal *La Provincia*, the society was increasingly central to patriotic work, mainly by encouraging all scholarly and literary disciplines that could illustrate the past and improve the future.<sup>24</sup> The article's author was clearly hinting at Minerva's usefulness for the Italian national movement, while putting such a stance on paper meticulously and ambiguously. Also, according to Tomaž Simčič's (1988: 202) article on Minerva, the 1860s and 1870s were the years when it evidently became integrated into "Italian national culture" but did not carry any political function. Not only the society's, but also Trieste's, Italoophone culture, which until then overlapped with those of other fuzzy "ethnicities," slowly changed into a more nationally "pure" one. In other words, the linguistic and cultural heterogeneity of central Europe that Trieste had been very familiar with was on its last legs.

Although the Minerva Society's activities in the 1870s were far from being radically nationalistic and still allowed very diverse individuals to socialize, in 1868 the previously mentioned liberal Progress Society was happily welcomed into the society's meeting rooms (Simčič 1988: 202). In addition, the honorary section of the society's 1871 list of members attests to a shift of the society's horizon: it consisted of nine distinguished intellectuals, all residing in cities on the Apennine Peninsula.<sup>25</sup> Despite the fact that Minerva's enlightened primary objective seemed to strive for progress and not the unification of Italy, it was clearly becoming increasingly connected with Italian intellectual and national currents. Another episode further proves this point. In 1872, the Minervians established a philological section, with the central goal of providing language courses. Before its actual inauguration, one of the members, Alberto Tanzi, invigorated the desire for it by stressing how this could boost Trieste's Italian roots and love for all things Italian, and how such groups were already sprouting in many Italian cities.<sup>26</sup>

The Minerva Society remained open and not strictly national, but its initiators were nonetheless retrospectively nationalized and placed on the pedestal of national heroes.<sup>27</sup> Since his death in 1842, Domenico Rossetti has been commonly identified as an early irredentist, and in 1876 he was described by some Triestines as a hater of barbarian Ljubljana,<sup>28</sup> and

<sup>24</sup> *La Provincia*, August 16th, 1869.

<sup>25</sup> Archivio della Società di Minerva, 56.2 Elenchi soci (1871).

<sup>26</sup> Archivio della Società di Minerva, 58.4 Circolo filologico triestino: fondazione ed attività (1872–1873).

<sup>27</sup> More on heroes and celebrities in Fikfak (2014), Podjed (2015). About their role in establishing national identity see Jezernik (2016).

<sup>28</sup> Ugo Soliani. 1876. *Il cuore di Domenico Rossetti*. Reprinted in Archeografo Triestino 2011, 4(71): 211–234, p. 15.

hence was transformed or reduced to being simply Italian.<sup>29</sup> In 1910, the journal *L'Operaio*, for example, described Rossetti as a zealous patriot promoting the awakening and progress of national consciousness.<sup>30</sup> From the late nineteenth century onward, many retrospective interpretations emerged regarding Rossetti and Kandler in particular. National narratives were constructed in a way that prevented anyone from belonging to anything more or less than one nation, which required drastic (re)constructions of lives of local dignities. A similar fate also awaited the Triestine writer and poet Francesco Dall'Ongaro (1808–1873), whose bust Minervians erected in 1877, alongside two other national dignitaries: Antonio Gazzoletti (1813–1866), a poet and a jurist, and Antonio Somma, a playwright (1809–1864).<sup>31</sup> Dall'Ongaro's past was re-evaluated for that occasion, as the surviving brochure makes clear.<sup>32</sup> He was described as an archetype of mono-nationalism, which based on Kirchner Reill's volume is far from being the truth (2012: 11). Such historicism was a means of pushing aside different feelings of belonging and the ambiguities they generated. It was one of the attempts to mythologize national history supposedly stretching all the way back to the beginnings of time.

The Austrian regime carefully observed and recorded events that added fuel to the nationalist fire; however, whereas many associations were shut down, the Minervians received only a warning. In May 1887, the Minervians hosted a certain Alessandro Lanzi's lecture on Abbot Luigi Lanzi. The commissary sent to the event by the authorities wrote an exhaustive report, in which he noted that the speaker talked of "Italy, the dominant queen of sciences in all centuries" and "much love of country" (*tanto amor di patria*), and expressed national sentiments in other similar ways, which were naturally suspicious for the imperial administrators.<sup>33</sup> A similar report followed in 1889 after a lecture by Domenico Giuriati (1829–1904), a zealous Italian patriot already before 1848 and 1849, who according to the chronicle pleaded with the listeners to fight for the national idea with pens, words, and blood.<sup>34</sup>

The Minerva Society's chambers—where explicitly nationalist associations were later established or held their events—became a territory conquered by the Italian nationally oriented segment of the population, along with many cafés, banks, welfare institutions, insurance offices, shops, and other places. Strongly nationalist associations such as the Gymnastics Union (*Unione Ginnastica*, 1883), For the Fatherland (*Pro Patria*, 1885), and the National League (*Lega Nazionale*, 1891) were even established in the society's chambers,

<sup>29</sup> For more on the Rossetti myths (*miti rossettiani*), see Trampus (1992).

<sup>30</sup> *L'Operaio*, January 29th, 1910.

<sup>31</sup> Gabinetto di Minerva. 1877. *Ricordo della solenne inaugurazione dei busti di Dall'Ongaro, Gazzoletti e Somma*. Trieste: Star. Tip.-Calc. di G. Balestra&C.

<sup>32</sup> Gabinetto di Minerva. 1877. *Ricordo della solenne inaugurazione dei busti di Dall'Ongaro, Gazzoletti e Somma*. Trieste: Star. Tip.-Calc. di G. Balestra&C.

<sup>33</sup> Archivio di Stato di Trieste, Polizia atti riservati, b. 275.

<sup>34</sup> Archivio di Stato di Trieste, Polizia atti riservati, b. 275.

and the Mandolin Club (*Circolo Mandolinistico*), Youth Club (*Circolo dei Giovani*), and many others used the society's rooms.<sup>35</sup> In the division of the urban milieu along ethnic boundaries, whatever they were, the Minervians stood on the Italian side, at least culturally. As Gerald Stourzh described these processes that were taking place across the entire empire, “choose you could; ethnic ascription did not come from above, but compelled to choose you were” (2011: 294). This, however, does not imply that nationalism encompassed each and every Triestine, as national architects try to convince people (Verginella 1998: 70–74). Many also remained “nationally indifferent” at the level of the empire (Judson 2006; Zahra 2008).

Still, the Minerva Society was certainly seen by contemporary sources as belonging to the “awakening” Italian nation. In May 1900, the Slovenian newspaper *Edinost* pronounced the society to be the association “where the most awful Italians gather.”<sup>36</sup> Because of the many aforementioned “ultra-Italian” associations that were gathering in the society's assembly rooms, many classified the society as an utterly irredentist hub. However, its activities never really overgrew cultural sympathies and turned into proper political activism. In the late nineteenth century, the society was still in essence an association where science, history, and the arts had a central role, but these fields now reached for the opportunity to support a potent ideology—namely, irredentism. History in particular was to be adjusted to fit the idea of purely Italian Trieste (*Trieste italianissima*). From the last decades of the nineteenth century onward, Minerva's objective was to invite renowned Italian writers and scientists such as Gabrielle D'Annunzio, Giosuè Carducci, Edmondo De Amicis, and Giacomo Barzellotti to Trieste. The aim was to introduce them to the city, the city to them, and stitch together a sense of belonging.

On the Minerva Society's 1903/1904 program of lectures as many as seven lectures on various Italian regions or cities can be found;<sup>37</sup> that is, almost half of all that were held. Yet, apparently none of the lectures were politically rowdy. An account of a very problematic lecture that the authorities initially forbade can be found only in 1911. The subject of the lecture was the oasis and trenches of Tripoli;<sup>38</sup> that is, territories that the Kingdom of Italy had conquered that year, and so it was no wonder the authorities found it objectionable. What however implies a certain distance that the Minervians had from more radical irredentist associations is that they charged their guests for using their rooms, even though

<sup>35</sup> Archivio della Società di Minerva, 54.4. Richieste di uso della sala da parte della Società del Progresso (1868), 55.4 Uso della sala (1870), 56.4 Uso della sala (1870–1871), 57.6 Uso della sala (1871), 59.2 Uso della sala (1874), 60.3 Uso della sala (1874–1875), 61.2 Uso della sala (1875–1876), 62.2. Uso della sala (1876–1877), 63.3. Uso della sala (1878), 64.4. Uso della sala (1878), 68.7 Uso della sala (1882), 78.5 Uso della sala 1892, 80.4 Uso della sala (1894–1895), 82.4 Uso della sala (1896–1897), 83.3. Uso della sala (1898), 84.4 Uso della sala (1898–1899).

<sup>36</sup> *Edinost*, May 2nd, 1900: “Minerva je dvorana v Trstu, kjer se shajajo najhujši Lahi.”

<sup>37</sup> Archivio della Società di Minerva, 89.4 Programma delle letture per l'anno accademico 1903/1904 (1903).

<sup>38</sup> Archivio di Stato di Trieste, I.R. Direzione di Polizia: Società (1850–1918), b. 39.



Minervians were themselves often members of the visiting associations. On top of this, from the perspective of the authorities, the society only became seriously problematic in 1916, when it received a decisive order from the imperial Statthaltereit: the society had to cease all of its activities and dissolve. Minerva was no exception in this regard; in fact, numerous associations had already been brought to an end decades earlier. The ultimate decree was the very same by which the Serbian Reading Club (*Srpska čitaonica*) was also urged to close its doors: both were accused of contradicting the objectives of the monarchy.<sup>39</sup>

## CONCLUSION

When the young Slovenian communist Pino Tomažič was sentenced to death in 1941, the cries of zealous fascists were echoing through the streets of Trieste. According to the writer Fulvio Tomizza, one of the mantras resonating through the streets was *ne la patria de Rossetti no se parla che Italian!* ‘in Rossetti’s homeland we speak nothing but Italian!’ With that, the local fascists claimed that only Italian was rightly spoken in Rossetti’s homeland,<sup>40</sup> whatever that homeland might be. Pino Tomažič was subsequently declared a Slovenian “people’s hero.” Similarly, soon after his death in 1842 Domenico Rossetti, the Minerva Society’s spiritual leader, was integrated into the Italian national fabric. In contrast to that, in 1901 the Slovenian journal *Edinost* questioned Rossetti’s origins and suspected he could “in truth” be Slovenian.<sup>41</sup> Then again, according to a third opinion, Rossetti was supporting a loyal attitude toward the monarchy (Klabjan 2015: 115). There are on the whole many more readings of Rossetti, but how exactly could Rossetti become for some a powerful symbol of Italian identity, for others of imperial loyalty, and for yet others even of Slovenian identity? The discussion above provides evidence that diametrically opposed interpretations of Rossetti, or the Minerva Society for that manner, should not come as a surprise. To explain, the nineteenth-century situations were not black and white, and so they are difficult to grasp properly for an observer rigidly limited to artificial national categories and on the lookout to label an individual or a group of people as belonging to a single, allegedly transhistorical, ethnic group.

As the discussion above demonstrates, in the long nineteenth century, the grand century of nationalist ideologies, the way society as a whole was organized profoundly changed. This was especially so in the late nineteenth century, when national conflicts were increasingly becoming part of individuals’ daily lives. Civic associations also adapted to the emerging changes, either spontaneously or deliberately. The outlook provided here is how the nineteenth-century nationalization of the Minerva Society was not as straightforward

<sup>39</sup> Archivio di Stato di Trieste, I.R. Direzione di Polizia: Società (1850–1918), b. 39.

<sup>40</sup> Fulvio Tomizza. 1987. *Mladoporočnica z ulice Rossetti [Gli sposi di via Rossetti]*, p. 65.

<sup>41</sup> *Edinost*, July 30th, 1901.

and simple as might seem at first glance and as it was later interpreted from various national perspectives. Although commemorations of individuals such as Dante Alighieri or the “great Ligurian” (*grande ligure*) Christopher Columbus first emerged out of motives that one could refer to as cultural, over the decades such devotions also began to symbolize a political shift. From the mid-nineteenth century onward, and especially starting in the 1860s, the Minerva Society began to turn increasingly toward the Apennine Peninsula, from 1861 known as the Kingdom of Italy. After 1900, even the Habsburg state embraced a cluster of nationalities (King 2005: 5). Along these lines, the Italian national project slowly but firmly permeated the life of several Triestine associations, including Minerva. Nonetheless, the growth of ethnic sentiments did not mean they necessarily changed their opinions on the monarchy. “Nation and empire, two polar opposites in the early twentieth-century imagination, repeatedly constituted each other in terms created by and for each other” (Judson 2016: 275). The imperial framework was therefore not something opposing nationalism, which was an assumption criticized as erroneous not only by Bojan Baskar (2008: 67), but also already by the Slovenian historian Fran Zwitter (1967) decades earlier. A coexistence of loyalist and nationalist tendencies existed, at times even within a single individual, or in a single association, for that matter. The empire and nation were not simply binary opposites, even in Trieste, where at least from 1861 onward the newly established Kingdom of Italy was clearly offering itself as a national antagonist alternative to the empire. In this sense, the Minervians were clearly juggling several different identifications.

The changes from what I can refer to as the enlightened tradition to a certain sympathy for Italianness, and later quite an open support of the Italian national state, were slow and indirect. This process, however, offers a good opportunity for analyzing a coexistence of various, perhaps rival, tendencies within the same association. Its nationalization was, as I tried to illustrate, rather complicated, unpredictable, not the only possible outcome, and obviously an unfinished process, at least in the nineteenth century. Of course, in one way or another the Minerva Society took the well-known nineteenth-century path and transformed from a predominantly monarchically loyal association into a rather nationalistic one, but I believe that neatly following historical sources and their original contexts brings to light striking ambiguities that challenge the customary national narrative. In other words, nationalism truly was a process that took place in nineteenth-century Trieste. It somehow changed the lives of most locals as well. Yet, it was a process that constructed new categories of identification, which, although imagined as natural, were learned and caused many inconsistencies, or at least a lengthy acclimatization. Moreover, even though the society was all in all a small part of Triestine urban life, it can serve as an individual tree that in some measure offers insight into the complex forest.

Before concluding, when Eric Hobsbawm (1990: 182–183) hoped in 1990 for the future to be postethnic or postnational, he used Hegel’s metaphor of Minerva’s owl, which spreads its wings only at dusk. What Hobsbawm somehow naively meant was that nationalism can be properly understood only in hindsight. Yet, contrary to what he thought, the strength

of nationalism did not wear off. The sentiment of national belonging still seems to remain one of the most potent social forces and as such is worthy of academic discussion, be it at dusk, night, dawn, or day. National identities are constantly reproduced, depending on the ever-changing conditions, and as such persist as crucial social structures around which people organize their lives, and so they must also be understood in a historical perspective, especially their birth.

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## VARIACIJE IDENTIFIKACIJ V TRŽAŠKEM DRUŠTVU MINERVA (1810–1916)

*Autorica analizira prvo stoletje Società di Minerva, ki velja za eno najbolj znanih in častitljivih tržaških društev. Korenine Minerve segajo v leto 1810, ko je bilo društvo formalno ustanovljeno, to je v času delovanja Ilirskih provinc. Resnično pa je zaživelo šele po ponovni vzpostavitvi habsburške oblasti od leta 1813 naprej, ko se je Minerva uveljavila kot zbirališče številnih pripadnikov tržaške družbene elite. Minerva je na isti način kot druga podobna društva širom imperija od samega začetka delovanja pomenila prostor, kjer so lahko mestni oziroma meščanski intelektualci, sprva sicer nadvse oprezno, soočali lastne preudarke in ideje, prebirali časopisje z vseh koncev in krajev evropske celine, se poglobljali v strokovno literaturo s področij, ki so segala od medicine in arhitekture pa vse do pedagogike, teologije ali zgodovine, in pisali lastne prispevke, ki so jih potem predstavljali na društvenih konferencah ali publicirali v društveni reviji Archeografo Triestino. Tako Società di Minerva, kakor tudi Archeografo Triestino ohranjata kontinuiteto delovanja vse do današnjih dni, v tem času pa sta odigrala pomembno vlogo v tržaškem javnem življenju. V dveh stoletjih od ustanovitve je Minerva v svojih prostorih gostila nepregledno število pomembnih raziskovalcev in umetnikov. Najgloblji pečat pa sta v delovanju društva zapustila njegov »oče« Domenico Rossetti (1774–1842) in Rossettijev "duhovni potomec" Pietro Kandler (1804–1872).*

*Analiza prvih sto let Minervinega delovanja temelji na širokem naboru arhivskega gradiva, zbranega v Državnem arhivu v Trstu, v Arhivu društva Minerva, v časopisih iz obravnavanega obdobja, in na podlagi raziskav drugih avtorjev. Razsvetljenska idejna izhodišča, ki so bila temelj njeni ustanovitvi, je Minerva v dolgem 19. stoletju zamenjala s precej ožje usmerjenim italijanskim nacionalizmom. O temeljni preobrazbi priča že razlika v vsebinah v Minervinem glasilu: na začetku 19. stoletja lahko npr. naletimo na številne hvalnice cesarju in drugim članom habsburške družine, ki so jih pisali člani društva; devetdeset, sto let pozneje lahko ugotovimo, da so v Minervinih društvenih prostorih gostili nekatere ključne glasnike iredentizma, ki jim je društvo očitno služilo kot oder za nagovarjanje lokalnega tržaškega občinstva. Prav temu idejnemu in vsebinskemu preobratu se avtorica približa na neustaljen način. V besedilu si namreč prizadeva pokazati na počasnost in kompleksnost tega procesa, ki vsekakor ni bil linearen, kot bi nemara lahko sklepali iz današnjega dominantnega vidika, tj. vidika nacionalnih držav. Pot Minerve iz cesarju oziroma cesarstvu naklonjenega srečevališča v društvo, ki je konec 19. in na začetku 20. stoletja že precej odkrito podpiralo italijansko državo, je bila veliko bolj zapletena. In prav tovrstna zapletenost in kompleksnost sta tista vidika, ki ju avtorica v svojem članku postavlja v ospredje. Na osnovi analiziranega gradiva je namreč mogoče zaključiti, da procesi nacionalizacije oziroma prevzemanja take ali drugačne nacionalne identitete nikdar niso preprosti, hitri ali enoznačni. Zato analiza prvega stoletja društva Minerva ponuja dobro izhodišče za analizo sobivanja različnih, med seboj marsikdaj celo konfliktnih tendenc, znotraj enega organizacijskega, tj. društvenega okvira.*

*Iz številnih majhnih društvenih epizod, ki jih avtorica niza in analizira v kronološkem vrstnem redu, je tako mogoče razbrati, da so iredentistične simpatije, ki so jih člani društva*

*izražali v predvojnih letih, vse prej kot jasen ali pričakovan rezultat poprejšnjih dogodkov. Avtorica na ta način prevprašuje sicer precej zakoreninjeno stališče, ki Minervo že od samih začetkov opredeljuje kot nacionalistično in italijansko kulturno društvo; Minervine preteklosti ne obravnava teleološko, torej pri interpretaciji njenega delovanja ne izhaja iz razmer na začetku 20. stoletja, temveč jo skuša karseda neobremenjeno razgrniti na način, ki temelji na natančni analizi dosegljivega historičnega gradiva. Pri tem pa ponuja v premislek sklep, da lahko analiza idejnih kontinuitet, diskontinuitet in prepletanja, značilnega za Minervino društvenem delovanje v prvih sto letih, problematizira zakoreninjeno predstavo o linearnem procesu nacionalizacije celotne tržaške skupnosti. Zdi se, da prvih sto let obstoja Minerve potrjuje tezo, da razmah nacionalnih gibanj ni bil nujni rezultat poprejšnjega družbenega in političnega razvoja, temveč s protislovji in mimobežnimi silnicami nasičen fenomen postopne preobrazbe in prilagajanja na novo politično, kulturno in socialno realnost.*

*Ne nazadnje lahko kot droben, a pomemben primer analiza Minerve postavi pod vprašaj linearnost nacionalizacije celotne tržaške družbe. Razmah nacionalnih gibanj namreč ni bil logičen rezultat zgodovine kot se retrospektivno to morda zdi, temveč poln protislovij.*

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