

Any attempt at collaboration and cooperation must necessarily begin from the achievement of a common linguistic base – the primary resource for any process of communication. From this point of view, the spread and use of Italian in the universities of Serbia and Montenegro is undoubtedly a brilliant example. And the path of the spread of Italian in these areas has progressed successfully side by side in schools and universities

The Italian language as a passepartout

BALKANS 2

by Pasquale Guaragnella



_In the “Paradise” canticle of Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, the poet compares himself and his condition with that of the humble Romario who came “(...) perhaps from Croatia to gaze on our Veronica”

Culture in its various aspects – from language to literature and the multiple forms of art – has long been the protagonist of a process aimed at enlarging its “confines”. The time when culture could be satisfied with its meaning and the value given to it by the national context in which it was rooted is now past; today, more than in the past, culture has gained renewed topicality and continuity with its spread, promotion and enhancement in countries other than its native land. Today, more than in the past: however, the

knowledge and study of art and culture that are different from established ones is certainly not a new practice. Rather, the evolution and training of many thinkers of the past was based precisely on the knowledge and comparative study of the linguistic, cultural and social aspects of countries with the most consolidated tradition. A similar observation is of course valid for Italy: our country represents perhaps the most emblematic seat of a cultural and artistic history whose fame has spread over the centuries beyond all geographical limits. Every aspect of Italian culture – from the language, studied through its texts, to forms of architecture, paintings and all the figurative arts – has now become the subject of attentive and comparative study and, in many cases, also a model to imitate and emulate. The international and intercultural identity



that appears to have pervaded modern society in every form, from the most concrete – in terms of economic and commercial trade – to more knowledge-related aspects (I refer here to the numerous scientific and didactic initiatives that Italy has undertaken in collaboration with a number of foreign countries) seems to have renewed the topicality of this practice of “inter-knowledge”, i.e. crossing geographical confines, and led to the building of a macro-system that, in the wake of the processes of European unification, contains a multi-culture, i.e. an identity made up of different parts but with each part aware of the existence of the others and all united by the basic “European essence”. Our region, Apulia, has always been marked out, at least from the geographical point of view, as being a genuine crossroads, a meeting point for Mediterranean Italian-ness and Eastern Europe. Most of its coastline overlooks a sea, the Adriatic, and beyond this sea, Apulia sees national and cultural worlds that have different origins and traditions but share its own maritime existence, the itinerary “by sea” that forms an ideal link between the two shores. In truth, for a long time now the bond has been more than merely ideal. The spirit of interculturality and cooperation briefly mentioned earlier has concretely drawn these apparently distant sides closer. They have been brought closer together through a commitment towards and beginning of a reciprocal awareness that, starting from contents and contexts aimed directly at places and landscapes, has absorbed the most intense

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and significant forms of expression of the respective cultures to finally reunite the two aspects and depict them as being complementary and indispensable for a correct multicultural approach. In recent years, the academic world of which we form part has taken significant steps in the direction of a culture “astride the Adriatic”, and it is to these very initiatives that the essays contained in this volume bear witness.

If it is true that any attempt at collaboration and cooperation must necessarily begin from the achievement of a common linguistic base – the primary resource for any process of communication, the essay by Julijana Vuco can be considered a useful summary of the results achieved on the linguistic and didactic front by the collaboration set up a few years ago between the two shores of the Adriatic, more precisely between Apulia and the world of South-Eastern Europe. The scholar skilfully summarises the current situation regarding the presence of the Italian language and culture in the republics of Serbia and Montenegro, with attentive and precise references to the linguistic policies of these two countries (the latter recently split from the former). Starting with considerations of a general nature such as the intrinsic methods and modalities foreseen



_The Italian language and culture are currently flourishing in the Republics of Serbia and Montenegro, kept alive not only by trade but also by academic institutions

in the context of language teaching in general, Julijana Vuco describes the path along which the Italian language and culture have progressed over the years in the midst of the consolidated supremacy of languages such as American English, French, German and, understandably, Russian.

This path of the spread of Italian in Serbia and Montenegro has progressed side by side in schools and universities. In schools, the stable use of Italian as the language of teaching started in the 2001-2002 academic year. Italian made its official entry into universities as far back as the 1930s, when an illustrious scholar gave the very first Italian lesson at the University of Belgrade. However, traces of the interest of this city and its region in the Italian language and culture can be found even earlier. Julijana Vuco notes that the situation has now changed considerably: those early studies of the Italian language at the beginning of the past century have acquired a definitively stable character with the establishment of a chair in Italian Language and Literature at the Philology Faculty of the University of Belgrade. It is a genuine institution, which represents a stable and useful reference point for people in the Balkans wishing to undertake Italian language and culture studies as well as

for those who embark on the study of our language and culture with the intention of starting initiatives of cooperation and trade with “our” shore of the Adriatic in the wake of the numerous initiatives already undertaken in this sense. It is no coincidence that, with great sensitivity, Julijana Vuco directs our attention to the importance held today by collaboration agreements with Italy, particularly universities and institutes in Apulia. The scholar explains that these agreements make adult education courses possible in Italy as well as in their home countries for teachers and scholars working in Serbia on the spread of the Italian language and culture. However, numerous other institutes both within and outside the university system also testify to an interest in the Italian language and culture in Serbia, Vuco notes: the Romance language and literature department at the University of Novi Sad, which provides compulsory Italian language and literature courses (and is now planning an extension to set up a four-year chair) at the Belgrade Conservatory as well as the Novi Sad itself, and some private, recently established Serbian universities, which also provide Italian language courses.

Nor should we overlook the situation, as solid and stable as that of Belgrade, of the University of Montenegro, which has offered a degree course in Italian language and literature for several years now: the course has already produced a number of degree holders. In this small republic, which only recently officially seceded from neighbouring Serbia, the bond with and interest in Italian culture can actually be retraced to a historical event, the marriage of Princess Elena of Montenegro and Victor Emmanuel III of Savoy. Hence, emphasises Julijana Vuco, for Montenegro the bond with Italy, i.e. with the language and culture that inhabit the opposite shore of the Adriatic, also has an “emotional” origin, which has made the people of this country particularly sensitive to the contents of “Italian-ness” over the years. In Montenegro too, the bond with the Italian language and culture is “fed” in the context of scholastic education: Italian is in fact taught in Ginnasio schools (lower cycle, first two years, of the Liceo Classico), secondary schools and music schools.

The bond between the East and West of the Adriatic is also proved, observes Julijana Vuco at the end of her essay, by institutes outside the school and university systems: the

Montenegro branch of the Dante Alighieri Society, the Italian Cultural Institute in Belgrade and some private Italian language schools in these countries work on projects and activities aimed at consolidating interest in the Italian language and culture over time, and consequently an interest in trade and cooperation relations, whether established, recent or future.

Going from the interior to the “exterior”, i.e. towards the part of the Balkans that most directly faces “that other” shore of the Adriatic Sea, one notes unceasing cooperation and cultural synergies. The essay by Sanja Roic, a Croatian scholar of Italian language and literature, shows the extent of the historically deeply rooted interest and the feeling of affinity with Italy that the inhabitants of this part of Eastern Europe have often demonstrated. The past and present of “Italian-ness” to the east of the Adriatic Sea: a theme on which Sanja Roic reflects starting from the geographical and historical-cultural preambles codified by an illustrious Italian scholar, Carlo Dionisotti, a sensitive observer of the relations among culture, population and territory. The scholar has great regard for an area particularly close to the South-Eastern European world, not only for territorial reasons but also in terms of past twinships and sharing: I refer here to Trieste, Friuli Venezia Giulia and the Carso, which ceded Fiume (today Rijeka) to Croatia, but have preserved a deep awareness of this territorial and, finally, cultural community. An awareness of common bonds and points of contact can even be found in Dante Alighieri’s *Divine Comedy*, more precisely in the Paradise canticle, in which the Florentine poet compares himself and his condition in Paradise with that of the humble Romario who came “(...) perhaps from Croatia to gaze on our Veronica (Paradise, XXXI, 103-111)”. In fact, Roic also discovers traces of reflections on the Adriatic Sea and its role as a link between the cultural and social worlds rooted in the Adriatic area in the work of other authors, from Ariosto to Machiavelli, from Ugo Foscolo – who remembers being “educated in Dalmatia” – to Niccolò Tommaseo, whose febrile literary activity was nearly always carried out in the recognition of a “double Adriatic vision”, i.e. a vision that took into account and actually tended to enhance the analogies and

differences detectable between the east and west of the Adriatic Sea, which could have, each in their own way, contributed to forming a common bridge.

Sanja Roic’s wide ranging reflection mixes, in its course, elements of history and geography, culture and civilisation, tracing an ideal line that joins the writings and intentions of numerous authors, Italian and “Adriatic”, through the years and centuries: authors who are perhaps not as well known as Tommaseo, but whose testimony nevertheless remains essential so as to recover, in the current projects and spirit of collaboration, the traces left in a distant yet significant past. From Sergio da Pola to Pietro Paolo Vergerio il Giovane in the 15th century; from Francesco Patrizi to Matteo Flacio Illirico and Marco Marulic in the 16th century; from Orazio Mazibradic to the Spalato native Giulio Bajamonti in the 18th century, numerous authors are called upon, in the essay by Sanja Roic, to testify to the cultural and historic-civil interlacing between the eastern and western shores of the Adriatic Sea. And if Italian literature can count on more centres of reference to the east – from Dubrovnik to Cattaro, from Spalato to Sebenico, from Zara to Fiume a Pola – it is equally true that in Italy, Slavic languages and literature can count on the crucial support and activities of equally important centres, Ancona and Trieste being the most frequently cited.

An equally important moment is the one that the author reserves for reflection on the way in which more recent historical events – the Balkan wars in particular – have in some way changed, altered, the forms of the presence of Italian literature and culture in the eastern Adriatic and, equally, of Balkan literature and culture in Italy. The rapid and ungovernable succession of these historical events has created a genuine literature of emigration of modern times: a phenomenon within which, Sanja Roic observes, it is however still possible to discover traces of the cultural crossing that the eastern and western shores of the Adriatic have often “boasted”. All of which creates, in the final encounter among past, present and future, a diversity that, as Pier Paolo Pasolini once remarked, “coincides deep down with something familiar”, in such a strong way as to occasionally be upsetting, as in sad dreams – writes Pasolini – “with wonderful landscapes”.