

Katrina O’Loughlin, Ana Šverko, and Elke Katarina Wittich (eds.)

Discovering Dalmatia: Dalmatia in Travelogues, Images and Photographs

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In our work as researchers, the topics that we study, and the manner in which we discuss them, reveal not only new information about the subject of our research, but also about our own era – about the questions that intrigue us, and the problems that are familiar and relevant to us. Studying them can perhaps help us to better understand our contemporary world. The breadth with which it is possible to cover various aspects of the political and economic development of society, and which art history (in its broadest sense) offers us through the use of critical and comparative research and the adoption of the principles of intercultural and transdisciplinary dialogue, demonstrates once again a potential for deconstructing some common, and long-seated, assumptions. This is important not only for our profession, but for examining our understanding of individual and collective identities, and relationships between cultures and peoples. Travelogues, which we can consider the results of encounters with the new and unfamiliar, confrontations with the preconceived and newly perceived, are increasingly being regarded as a good starting-point in this.

In late 2019, the Institute of Art History published *Discovering Dalmatia: Dalmatia in Travelogues, Images and Photographs*. This book brings together twelve papers that originated at the conferences that have been held in Split since 2015 as part of the *Grand Tour Dalmatia* project (<http://grandtourdalmatia.org>), and is the second publication to emerge from this project. By focusing on the study of the (historical) Croatian region of Dalmatia, as a Grand Tour destination from the 17th to the mid-20th century in travel writings (manuscripts, printed books, letters), images and photographs, a framework has been developed for considering the wider socio-political context on the European level – the dichotomy between the center and the periphery, the history and development of monument preservation, the politics of presentation and representation and the exoticizing of the Balkan Peninsula, which shaped generations of European intellectuals (and others from further afield as well). It is therefore logical that the editorial team, which comprises the literary historian Katrina O’Loughlin, the architecture historian Ana Šverko, and the art historian and archaeologist Elke Katarina Wittich, chose to begin this book with a paper by Wittich herself, entitled “On Towns and People: Traditions of Describing and Depicting Dalmatia and South-Eastern Europe from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century.” In this paper, Wittich places historical maps at the heart of a reading of travelogues and their political influence from the 18th to the 20th century, with a particular emphasis on those that originated in German-speaking lands. This text introduces an incredibly important theme, which begins with the question of who created these maps and how, in which language and with what purpose. Maps, which are frequently read uncritically, are revealed to be anything but apolitical and objective. What makes the maps of Dalmatia produced in this era particularly interesting is that the main information that they convey is not related to the geological and geographic characteristics of the region, but rather “historical and political events of confrontation and struggles over spheres

of political influence.” (p. 31) Dalmatia, as well as the Balkan Peninsula, were traditionally the point of confrontation between Christian Europe and the Ottoman Empire. A careful reading of this position reveals the context of both the travels through Dalmatia, as well as the political and economic interests of the era, which clashed here, and which undoubtedly also shaped the contemporary perception and (self-)perception of this space in the European context.

Having thus established the socio-political context of Europe in the early modern period, Wittich's text is succeeded by four papers that consider the written works of author-travelers. Jean-Pierre Caillet offers an overview of a travel account published in 1678 in French by Jacob Spon, a physician and archaeologist from Lyon, who travelled together with the British clergyman Sir George Wheler through Istria and Dalmatia in 1675-1676. In his book, Spon devotes the majority of his attention to valorizing the ancient art and Renaissance monuments of these regions, along with observations on the people and nature, which makes this book interesting in the context of the early development of art history and archaeology. The paper that follows is by Colin Thom, who focuses on a book published almost one hundred years later, Robert Adam's *Ruins of the Palace of Emperor Diocletian at Spalato in Dalmatia* (1764), which is considered to be one of the most significant publications in the history of 18th century architecture. Thom draws connections between the book and the private letters that Robert sent to his brother James, relating to the creation of the book's illustrations and the creation of this kind of book generally. It is particularly interesting to consider Caillet and Thom's texts together with the text that follows, which is by Cvijeta Pavlović. It offers what we might call a kind of local perspective. In 1776, a text was published in Venice in Italian, by a writer and polemicist from a wealthy Sinj family, Ivan Lovrić. This book was a critical and polemical answer to a text that had been published two years earlier by Alberto Fortis, entitled *Viaggio in Dalmatia*. In addition to interpreting it as a textual representation of space, this text is considered through the prism of its genre, and read on the narrative level, which later served as inspiration for Lovrić's literary work in the field of fiction. The final text in this section is by Magdalena Polczynska, who through an analysis of narrative techniques studies the image of space in the travelogue of Duke Aleksander Antoni Sapieha. In the early 19th century Sapieha, a Polish naturalist and enlightenment thinker, published the book *Podróż w krajach słowiańskich obdywane* [*Travels to the Slavic Lands*], part of which focuses on his travels in Dalmatia, during which he visited both the coast and the hinterlands. Polczynska reads Sapieha's text through the prism of the author's specific worldview, that of an enlightenment thinker and Slavophile, emphasizing the significance of his descriptions of the people and their customs.

The second section expands the perception of Austrian interest in, and influence on, this region. It likewise considers methods for visually “conquering” and representing this space, primarily through images. In 1815, following the Napoleonic Wars, Dalmatia was joined to the Austrian Empire, later becoming a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. This position resulted in increased interest in a region considered to be the threshold of the Orient, and certain changes to the perception of the space and people, the valorization and protection of monuments and cities, and the beginning of their systematic classification and description (above all through the work of the Central Commission for the Investigation and Conservation of Artistic and Historic Monuments). In “Framed Views of Dalmatia,” Nataša Ivanović discusses fifteen watercolor views of Dalmatia created in the 1840s by Rudolf and Jacob von Alt for Emperor Ferdinand I's peep-box. These watercolors depict the Mediterranean setting, city squares and monuments, people, their clothing and customs with topographic precision. Ivanović considers them through their role at the time of their creation (taking into account the artistic and political aspects) but equally, she considers them as historical documents and discusses their significance today. At the end of the century, in 1892, as part of a series of books published under the patronage of Prince Rudolf of Habsburg, *Die österreichisch-ungarische Monarchie in Wort und Bild* [*The Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in Words and Pictures*], the volume *Dalmatia* was published. The contributions of this volume's five authors, the illustrations of which depict key Dalmatian cities and their monuments, are at the center of Irena Kraševac's text. In addition to being a source of visual depictions, the publications from this series are also significant models for later publications,



which adopted their form and manner of presentation, and which created visual codes and topoi and actively contributed to the development of national awareness and a feeling of belonging to the Empire, and to a knowledge of its various parts. Sanja Žaja Vrbica's text offers a specific perspective and description of Dubrovnik that is in fact exceptional. She focuses on three books published in the late 19th century, which were written by Archduke Ludwig Salvator. As a member of the royal family, Salvator possessed an education and fortune that allowed him to lead an unconventional life, and, through his unique, free, and autonomous view, to create far from standard representations of the region around Dubrovnik during this period, in which it is worth highlighting, in particular, his descriptions of natural features, flora and fauna, and the lack of a description of the city itself, in which he doubtless stayed.

The following three texts likewise discuss the topic of visual representation. However, the focus is on the medium of photography, which appeared in the second half of the 19th century. A faith in the truthfulness and objectivity of photographs, its cheapness and time-effectiveness, as well as the possibility of producing (almost) unlimited copies of photographs quickly transformed photography into a key representational medium. Early preserved photographs are today as important for the study of monuments and historical places as the history of the medium itself. Hrvoje Gržina's text focuses on the work of Franz Laforest, a photographer active on the eastern coast of the Adriatic in the second half of the 19th century. Laforest was known for his 1878 book of photographs *Spalato un Seine Alterhümer* [*Split and its Ancient Monuments*], and the partially preserved *Album von Dalmatien* [*Album of Dalmatia*] from 1898. In addition, Laforest also left behind his less well-known glass negatives, as well as a certain number of smaller copy negatives made for various purposes. In a study of these negatives, Gržina discusses both the creative techniques that Laforest used to create his images, as well as the development of the medium itself. Dragan Damjanović, meanwhile, considers photography as a record of the political context of the time. His paper focuses on the study trip organized by the University of Vienna, and the photo album that emerged from it. The goal of this trip was to travel along the entirety of the Austrian coast (with a focus on Dalmatia), and 300 people took part in this trip. The album contains around 350 photographs that provide excellent evidence of the state of Dalmatian monuments in 1910, revealing the interventions and restorations that had taken place, and the trip itself directly influenced the creation of a book of essays by Max Dvořák and Josef Strzygowski, which are a key point for the development of thinking about monument protection. The photographs in general depict sites and cultural artefacts, as well as people and customs. In addition to the album, some of the photographs were used in newspaper articles and travel guides. This trip can therefore be considered in the context of the politics of the day, which recognized tourism as an opportunity for economic development of an impoverished part of the Empire, Dalmatia. The final text focusing on photography is by Katrina O'Loughlin and Ana Šverko. They study the photographs and letters of the British archaeologist Gertrude Bell, a woman doing "men's work," with an unconventional and progressive position, who stayed in Dalmatia in 1910. She travelled to Dalmatia in order to undertake a comparative study of Western and non-Western cultures; in doing so, she considered the entire space as a part of a unique, dynamic system. Methodologically speaking, her work represents a significant move away from the ruling Orientalising tendencies of the era due to her support for the notion of transculturalism, and even today she is considered to have made a significant contribution to the development of the profession. These proceedings conclude with a paper by Joško Belamarić and Ljerka Dulibić, in which the authors trace the travels of the American art historian Bernard Berenson through the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (including the Dalmatian coast) in 1936 and the letters that he wrote. This travel diary, created on the brink of the Second World War, was edited and prepared for publication as a monograph, but was never published. It represents an important view of life in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia during this period, as well as reflecting Berenson's encyclopedic range of interests, his unorthodoxy, and his belief in the superiority of Hellenic art.

Finally, it is important to note the fact that these conference proceedings are richly illustrated with images: from maps and graphics to paintings and photographs. Particular attention has been paid to its design: the visual identity of the project as a whole, and of this publication in particular,

was developed by Damir Gamulin Gamba. In addition, the translator Sarah Rengel served as manuscript editor, ensuring the consistency of the language.

These proceedings unquestionably represent a contribution to the study of Dalmatia in the context of European culture, the relationship between powers and specific historical and geographic positions as the threshold of the Orient. Methodologically speaking, it demonstrates clearly that the profession's future lies precisely in critically approaching the imperialist and colonialist tendencies that shaped our shared European past and which wrote our histories, the consequences of which can undoubtedly be felt even today. Despite the lapse of many decades and centuries, studying the history of the 18th and 19th centuries today is of particular importance, because this period is a key one that saw the shaping of national identities and prejudices. It is therefore extremely important to give a voice to individuals that have thus far been neglected, particularly those that speak from the perspective of the "other." In this sense, the contributions of local researchers and projects are particularly significant, emphasizing our shared cultural heritage, "whose currents and threads touch and intertwine," as Ana Šverko writes, reminding us of that which is shared, which connects us.

Translated by Sarah Rengel