



Martin Trancik. *Abgrund–BrÄ¼ckenschlag: Oberschicht und Bauernvolk in der Region Dubrovnik im 19. Jahrhundert.* Zurich: Pano-Verlag, 2002. 464 pp. EUR 39.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-907576-48-9.



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Published on HABSBURG (September, 2003)

Dubrovnik: 1840-1914

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The title of this book (based on the author's dissertation from the University of Basel), *Abgrund–BrÄ¼ckenschlag*, refers to the problematic field of nations and nationalism. Trancik suggests that a national-political bridge (*der BrÄ¼ckenschlag*) was constructed over what he determines to be a social and industrial abyss (*der Abgrund*) between the upper class and the peasantry in Dubrovnik (Ragusa) during the period from shortly before the *VormÄ¼rz*, until World War I. In a region with more than 50,000 people in 1841, only 10% of the population was urbanized; the majority was Catholic, and even the upper classes had begun to speak Croatian.

Although Dubrovnik was an independent republic until the nineteenth century, it was commercially linked to the Venetian Republic and had been an important center for Mediterranean trade. Under the Habsburgs, traditional power structures persisted until the middle of the nineteenth century, when the Austrian government began to become involved on a daily basis in this region. The urban elite "held the hinterland's nearly landless peasantry in thrall under a colonate system of con-

tractual sharecropping,"[1] writes Trancik.

Trancik divides his book into four sections (Biographie, Ethnographie, Abgrund/BrÄ¼ckenschlag, Schlussinterpretation). The first presents biographies of "a handful of patriots and champions of revolution" from the upper strata (p. 366). He focuses primarily on four families (Pozza, Cingrija, Bogisic, and Vojnovic), analyzing the role of the patriarch within the family, as well as regional politics in Dubrovnik. The author concludes that the father of each was, paradoxically, a "perfect egotist" to outsiders, but at home a "poor old man." He could, and had to be both things, "concurrently" (p. 57). The father had an absolute power that functioned without checks and balances, a power which closely resembled that of the "ancient regimes" of pre-Revolutionary Europe. Men like Pero Cingrija were also leaders in their political communities, where their domestic tyranny seemed to give way to civil and social democracy.

These men supported and contributed to the political and economic infrastructure of modernization in Dubrovnik, from local steamers and railroads which opened up the monopoly that the Austrians maintained

for fifty years, to voting boycotts and multi-party alliances in the name of South Slavic nationalism. They, for the most part, were in control of the nation-building process. But according to Trancik, they also needed to establish some sort of connection with the peasantry in order to accomplish these national goals.

In the second section of the book, Trancik focuses on the world of the peasant, using ethnographic rather than biographic references as a *Kontrapunkt* (counterpoint) to his description of the seeming total power of the upper classes (p. 367). Reflecting on similar themes of family and patriarchy, he depicts the lower classes of Dubrovnik as the raw material that would have to be mobilized for the process of nation-building. He focuses on one area in the hinterland of Dubrovnik, called Konavli, and describes rural life through religion, contemporary novels, folk songs, fables, and fairytales. This world was strange and threatening to the upper classes, who perceived the *zadruga* (Slavic extended household) as a communist collective, and the social bandits as enemies of the state.

Trancik's third section describes the connections made between the upper classes and the peasants during the process of modernization in Dubrovnik. He begins this section, however, with an analysis of the class systems and revolutions in France and England. He is particularly interested in the *Frontverlauf* (battle line) where the collaborations and clashes between upper class and peasant interests took place. Through this, he questions the basic assumptions made by historians about the relations between the *patrizisch-städtbürgerlichen Patrioten* (the patriarchal-urban Patriots) and the peasantry. While the national parties were under the leadership of men like Pozza and Cingrija, their support came from the peasants. As many left to work for more pay in places like America, the political leaders of Dubrovnik fought to keep the nation together and meet the needs of the people. The system which developed from this eliminated the domination of *Honoratiorenpolitik* (upper class politics) in Dubrovnik, and instead centered on Croatian national parties which offered concrete reforms that even mobilized aristocrats and merchants for national causes.

In his final section, Trancik draws from the theoretical frameworks of Miroslav Hroch, Max Weber, Ernest Gellner, Jacques le Goff, and Jürgen Habermas, among others, to pave his own path for describing the historical changes of the nineteenth century. He combats dominant historical methodologies, such as those who would

propport the dominance of *Äberindividuen* (superior individuals), or which interpret class struggle as a driving force of change, and depicts nation-building, instead, as the efforts of both the upper classes and the peasantry to find values and ideals that made their lives meaningful.[2] He argues that small groups already existing in Dubrovnik, or patriarchic families, could be easily incorporated into larger groups, such as the nation. The Habsburg Empire's reorganization during the 1860s/70s coincided nicely with the 1860s Croatian nationalist movement, as both worked towards modernization. The *Patrioten* of Dubrovnik were well aware that their success lay in their ability to mobilize the peasantry. The erosion of sub-groupings, and the sharing of a literary culture, had made the nation important to both groups.

Trancik's writing is clear, concise and well-organized, but the reader is sometimes overwhelmed by the vast amount of facts presented. The organization of his fourth section, in which he offers an analysis and interpretation of primary research, relies heavily upon the reader's ability to retain the information presented in the first three sections. Still, Trancik's use of traditional and less traditional historical sources provides a clearer understanding of nineteenth-century Dubrovnik's path towards nation-building and modernization. His methodology could be particularly useful in comparing Dubrovnik's experiences with other ethnically Slavic areas in the Habsburg Empire, like the region of Kotor, which seemed to share similar imperial experiences and similar problems with peasants in the hinterland, but differed slightly in its ethnic makeup.

Notes:

[1]. John Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History: Twice there was a Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996) pp. 41-42.

[2]. Anthony Giddens, "Jürgen Habermas". *The Return of Grand Theory in the Human Sciences*, ed. by Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) p. 134.

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Citation: Natasha Margulis. Review of Trancik, Martin, *Abgrund–BrÖ¼ckenschlag: Oberschicht und Bauernvolk in der Region Dubrovnik im 19. Jahrhundert*. HABSBURG, H-Net Reviews. September, 2003.

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