

THE ROMAN CITY OF DOCLEA
AS A FOCUS FOR ITALIAN SCIENTISTS
AND ITALIAN STATE AUTHORITIES

Starting in the late 19th century, Italy developed stronger political and commercial interests in the Balkans: Montenegro's location was considered an exceptionally important geopolitical one. In 1896, the marriage of the Prince of Naples, Vittorio Emanuele and the Princess Jelena Petrović Njegoš linked Italy and Montenegro. As a result, in the first decade of the 20th century Italy set about realizing a stronger economic expansion into Montenegro. From the ideological point of view, such policy found part of its justification in the long tradition of the Roman and later Venetian presence within the region.

As an important archaeological site, Doclea became the focus of the European scientific attention from the 1870s. That was due to the activities of two Italians, Lorenzo Perrod and Giovanni Battista de Rossi. The Italian Consul in Shkodra, Mr. Perrod had bought the so-called 'Podgorica Cup' that had been found in Doclea (DUMONT 1873, 71-73; LEVY 1963, 55). Later on, out of Perrod's collection of artefacts, the Cup was purchased by the Russian diplomat and collector A. Basilewsky; subsequently, it became the possession of the Russian Tsar Alexander III who presented it to the Hermitage Museum where it is still preserved (KRYZANOVSKAYA 1990, 143-155). The Old Testament scenes depicted on that artefact provoked the attention of a number of scientists: among them was de Rossi, who described the 'Podgorica Cup', analysed it and emphasised the significance of its discovery for the archaeology of Christianity (DE ROSSI 1874, 153-155; 1877, 77-85; FINNEY 1994, 284-286; NAGEL 2013, 165-198; ŽIVANOVIĆ 2015, 77-108).

The first systematic archaeological explorations of Doclea took place from 1890 to 1892, managed by P.A. Rovinski. This resulted in the discovery of the *basilica*, *thermae*, the temples of Roma and Diana and some housing units (ROVINSKI 1909, 20-69). The news about these explorations attracted the interests of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In March 1891, Minister Antonio Di Rudini requested Felice Barnabei, the director of the National Museum of Rome/Baths of Diocletian to provide information about the characteristics and importance of the discovery. In his report, Barnabei wrote: «E l'impressione generale che ne ho avuta è questa, che il [...] prof. sembra essersi messo all'opera non abbastanza fornito di tutte quelle nozioni storiche, topografiche e archeologiche tecniche, che sarebbero state necessarie per condurla a buon fine, e soprattutto per rendere possibile al medesimo e agli altri di trarre risultati scientifici più o meno accertati dai ritrovamenti fatti» (KOPRIVICA 2017, 61).

In September 1892, the renowned Doclea-researcher from Trieste, Piero Sticotti, together with Luka Jelić, arrived in Montenegro. Their mission was but a part of a more extensive research into Montenegro and Albania under the auspices of the Archaeological and Epigraphic Seminar of the Vienna University. Sticotti also explored Doclea in 1902 and 1907. The results of his efforts produced the most comprehensive study on Doclea managed so far (STICOTTI 1913; Plate 1).

In 1893, the British archaeological mission in Doclea enriched the picture and produced a more complex representation of the site's greatness and significance. In the eastern part of the city, the team led by J.A.R. Munro discovered the late antique and the early medieval Christian churches – known today as Basilica A, Basilica B and the Cruciform church (MUNRO *et al.* 1896, 23-30; KOPRIVICA 2013, 1-15). The results of the British research increased the interest of the general scientific community in Doclea. The option of sending an exploration mission was considered in France as well. As a result, Paul Nicod and Armand Dayot visited Montenegro in 1892 and 1895 respectively (KOPRIVICA 2017, 62).

In 1900, the organization of an Italian mission was put before the Italian Government by Guido Cora, who had spent several days the previous year in exploring the Doclea remains (CORA 1901, 45-46; BURZANOVIĆ, KOPRIVICA 2011, 221-222). In his attempts to make the Montenegrin authorities interested in the project, he contacted their representative in Rome, Evgenije Popović and the Foreign Affairs Ministry's Secretary Slavo Ramadanović. He also talked to the Italian Prince Vittorio Emanuele and the Princess Elena. The Italian Prince, who was a passionate numismatist, visited the site for the first time in 1896 (KOPRIVICA 2017, 66). Despite his efforts, Cora was not successful in his plans. In 1901, the Education Minister Nunzio Nasi allocated insufficient funds for the exploration work in Doclea; as a result, the competent financial authorities refused to disburse them (BURZANOVIĆ, KOPRIVICA 2011, 221-222)¹. In early October 1901, the Italian archaeologist Roberto Paribeni stayed in Montenegro (SALMIERI 1986, 201; MUNZI 2008, 561). The Montenegrin Government permitted him to undertake explorations and they provided for him the support of local authorities (BURZANOVIĆ, KOPRIVICA 2011, 222-223). In addition to Doclea, Paribeni was reconnoitring the sites in Martinići, Spuž, Tuzi and Nikšić (PARIBENI 1903, 374-379; BALDACCINI 1991a, 827-833). But on the matter of possible Italian systematic explorations in Doclea, he demonstrated serious reservations (KOPRIVICA 2017, 63).

In 1902, from their funds allocated for archaeological explorations abroad (in Egypt, Tunisia and Crete) the Italian Government allocated a

¹ *Per gli scavi archeologici nel Montenegro*, «La Stampa» 17.8.1901, n. 227, 1.

modest amount of money for Montenegro as well². This act can be put down to the Italian Government's expectations, after the great success achieved by Federico Halbherr in exploring Crete, that archaeological work could be a positive help in their attempt to achieve Italian expansion within the Mediterranean region. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs started endorsing projects in areas where the Italian political and scientific interests overlapped (PETRICIOLI 1990). In 1902, the long-awaited announcement of an archaeological mission to Montenegro became fact, a part of the multidisciplinary scientific expedition arranged and led by the botanist and geographer Antonio Baldacci. The expedition was preceded by Baldacci's application dated June 1902, giving the brief agenda not only of the aforesaid mission, but also of Italian expansion within the region of the Eastern Adriatic shore. Among the mission's goals, local anthropological, folkloric and sociological research was listed, particularly related to the population in the border regions of Montenegro and Albania (BALDACCİ 1991b, 798; BURZANOVIĆ 2008, 73-74). Baldacci expected abundant archaeological findings from the period of Greek and Roman colonization and particularly discoveries concerning Roman trade, military stations and the remains of a road system. In the background of this «nostalgia for the antique», there was a transparent desire to renew the economic and military presence of Rome within the Balkans, as well as converting the Adriatic Sea into another *Mare Nostrum* (BALDACCİ 1991b, 797-805; BURZANOVIĆ 1997, 74). The mission was partly led by an archaeologist, professor Dante Vaglieri who was researching the Doclea ruins and the remains of a Roman aqueduct (Fig. 1). Vaglieri's inquiry did not, however, produce significant scientific results. The Italian scientific mission was present again in Montenegro in 1903 as well; however, due to the illness of professor Vaglieri, the archaeological explorations were not resumed (BURZANOVIĆ, KOPRIVICA 2011, 225-226).

With the exception of Sticotti's short visits (in 1902 and 1907), no new Italian archaeological excavation took place for one hundred years. At the eve of World War I, Doclea was in danger of devastation and being cut through by the Podgorica-Nikšić railway route that the Montenegrin Government planned to construct according to the French engineers' design. Concession for the construction project had been granted to the Italian company, the Bar Company (*Compagnia d'Antivari*) that, supported by its Government, had constructed a complex transport system which included the port of Bar, the Virpazar-Bar railroad, navigation on Skadar Lake, and the Marconi radio station (BURZANOVIĆ 2009, 26-40). The Italian engineer, Vincenzo Pasi put together, though, a different route so that the devastation of Doclea could be

² Atti parlamentari, Camera dei Deputati, Legislatura XXI-2ª sessione-discussioni-1ª tornata del 16 giugno 1902, 2965-2966 (<https://storia.camera.it/regno/lavori/leg21/sed271.pdf>).

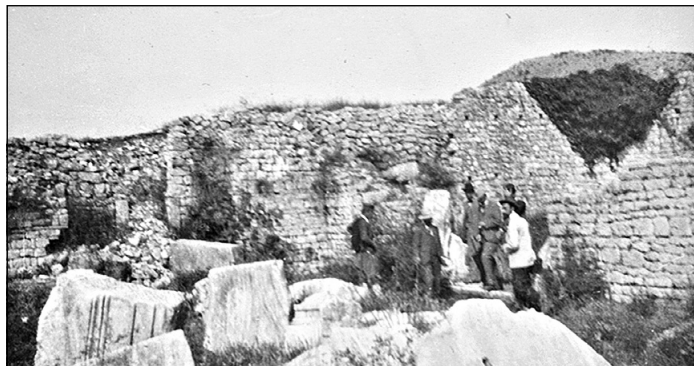


Fig. 1 – Italian mission to Doclea, 1902 (Fondo Antonio Baldacci, Biblioteca dell'Archiginnasio, Bologna).

avoided. However, his design was not motivated so much by the site's cultural and historical values, but rather by the Bar Company's economic interests³. Due to the outbreak of World War I, Pasi's design was never realized. In the end, the railroad leading from Podgorica to Nikšić was constructed in 1947 and 1948 and part of its route, stretching over 900 m, was cut through Doclea, dividing it into two parts and causing permanent devastation (KOVAČEVIĆ 2009, 80).

Italy had also expressed certain interests in Doclea during the Italian occupation of Montenegro, from 1941 to 1943. Roman symbolism played a significant role in the public life of fascist Italy, where the regime propaganda presented itself as a contemporary Roman Empire and Benito Mussolini as the new Augustus (BEGG 2006, 20-21). In the autumn of 1942, in Rome, within the *Direzione dell'Educazione e della Cultura Popolare*, a separate department, specifically the *Archeologia, Monumenti e Belle Arti* was established and entrusted with taking care of the Montenegrin historical and cultural heritage, with particular emphasis on Doclea (BURZANOVIĆ, KOPRIVICA 2011, 229-230). As a consultant in charge of those matters, professor Luigi Crema was engaged as a general conservator for Dalmatia.

Reading the Italian documents concerning these measures, it appears that the collateral benefit of the Italian occupation was the chance to explore Montenegrin heritage, and to see that it was preserved and valued – all as a result of the knowledge, experience and professional human resources donated from Italy. However, in the subtext of the occupying authorities' rhetoric

³ Archivio Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Roma, Primo Levi, *Imprese Italiane nel Montenegro*, Settembre-Ottobre 1912, Relazione a S.E. il Ministro, Roma, Tipografia del Ministro degli Affari Esteri, 1912.



Fig. 2 – The Diana goddess from Doclea (Archives of Yugoslavia, Belgrade).

on its care for the Roman heritage, a different reality was hidden. Exactly at this time, by order of the Italian Governor to Montenegro, Pirzio Biroli, the museums and private collections were stripped of valuable cultural assets (sculptures, architectural fragments, numismatic collections) which were transported to Italy⁴. In 1942, the relief representing the goddess Diana from Doclea was taken to Rome⁵ (Fig. 2). In 1943, the Italian captain Francesco Pitoli removed from the National Museum of Cetinje the “marble head from the Roma time”⁶. A staff member in the Museum, V. Kirsanov wrote out the address, namely *Al Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Ufficio Collegamento con*

⁴ Arhiv Jugoslavije, Beograd, Fond br. 54, Reparaciona komisija pri Vladi FNRJ, Kulturno umetnički predmeti, Zahtevi (prijave) NR Crna Gora, *Zabtjev za restituciju kulturno umjetničkog dobra iz Italije*, N° 64, 65, 74, 131, 154.

⁵ Arhiv Jugoslavije, Beograd, Fond br. 54, Reparaciona komisija pri Vladi FNRJ, Kulturno umetnički predmeti, Zahtevi (prijave) NR Crna Gora, *Zabtjev za restituciju kulturno umjetničkog dobra iz Italije*, Beograd, 4. mart 1948, N° 37.

⁶ Arhivsko-bibliotečko odjeljenje muzeja kralja Nikole, Cetinje, Fond Muzej, *Revers*, Cetinje, 8. jun 1943; Arhiv Jugoslavije, Beograd, Fond br. 54, Reparaciona komisija pri Vladi FNRJ, Kulturno umetnički predmeti, Zahtevi (prijave) NR Crna Gora, *Zabtjev za restituciju kulturno umjetničkog dobra iz Italije*, Beograd, 4. mart 1948, N° 60.

il Governatorato del Montenegro (Colonello Tancredi), Palazzo del Drago, Via Quattro Fontane 20, Roma, where the artefact was sent to (ROGANOVIĆ 2012, 128-129). The Italian Foreign Affairs Ministry's documents state that the marble head should have been given as a present to the Italian Queen Elena; however it disappeared, most likely, during the transportation⁷. Although we lack a more precise description, the fact that it was considered a worthy present for the Queen implies that it was a significant piece of art. In 1946, within the framework of the restitution of cultural assets, the Yugoslav Government requested that the artefacts which the Italian occupation authorities had taken from Doclea be returned, but without success⁸.

During the time of socialist rule, the Montenegrin authorities relied only on Yugoslav scholars for explorations undertaken in Doclea, when several archaeological campaigns were undertaken from 1954 through 1964, supported by limited funds and inadequate policies for the conservation, preservation and presentation of the site. Italian researchers were again engaged in explorations of Doclea in 2007, where they introduced new technologies (RINALDI TUFİ *et al.* 2008, 71-77; PETT 2010, 7-44; BARATIN 2010, 59-65; RINALDI TUFİ 2010, 45-47; RINALDI TUFİ 2012, 477-489). The research was resumed once more in 2011 (GELICHI *et al.* 2012, 10-40). A further engagement of an Italian research-team is scheduled to take place again in 2018-2020, as a result of cooperation between the National Research Council of Italy (CNR) and the Historical Institute of Montenegro, University of Montenegro (ALBERTI, KOPRIVICA 2017).

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⁷ Archivio Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Roma, Serie Affari Politici 1946-1950, Jugoslavia, 1946, *Richieste di restituzione di beni, Richiesta della Commissione Jugoslava n. 771/45 (4. giugno 1946-Scultura classica del Museo di Cettigne)*.

⁸ Archivio Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Roma, Serie Affari Politici 1946-1950, Jugoslavia, 1946, *Richieste di restituzione di beni, Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Memorandum per la Commissione Alleata*, Roma, 13 dicembre 1946, N° 41272.

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ABSTRACT

The Authors consider the interest that Italian government institutions have demonstrated since the late 19th century to the present, in the archaeological exploration of Doclea, the most significant Roman city in Montenegro. It points out the link existing between those interests and the Italian foreign policy towards the Balkans, as well as to the discontinuities in Italy's interest in Doclea and clarification of the reasons for such happenings. The activities of the Italian scientists are set forth, as they individually or as participants of archaeological missions contributed to the research into Doclea and its presentation (Giovanni Battista de Rossi, Guido Cora, Roberto Paribeni, Dante Vaglieri, Piero Sticotti). Attention is also drawn to the negative aspect of the Italian interests in Doclea, specifically the removal of artefacts from the site during the time of the Italian occupation of Montenegro (1941 to 1943).