

# "Old Records asserting to the World: Italy stands here". Italian Hegemonic Policies and Dalmatian Archival Heritage (1918-1949)

Stefano Talamini

Università di Trento  
Dipartimento di Lettere e Filosofia  
Via Tommaso Gar, 14  
ITA – 38122 Trento TN  
stefano.talamini@unitn.it

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## Abstract

This paper analyzes the actions taken by the authorities of the Kingdom of Italy concerning the Dalmatian archives between the end of World War I and World War II. It aims to illustrate how Italian hegemonic strategies viewed the Dalmatian historical archives as a useful tool to justify the fascist cultural policy in the Eastern Adriatic.

**Keywords:** history of archives, archival heritage of Dalmatia, Italian hegemony on the Eastern Adriatic, fascist cultural policy, Emilio Re, Giorgio Cencetti, Francesco Salata

## Introduction

On August 23, 1797, in Perast, present-day Montenegro, the flag of the Republic of Venice was lowered for the last time. After receiving honors from those present, the flag was placed in a box and buried beneath the altar of the Church of San Nicolò, marking the end of Venetian presence in Dalmatia. However, from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Venetian legacy in the region became pivotal in supporting the assertion of Dalmatia's Italian character, contrasting with the claims of Slavic peoples over the region.

From the Italian perspective, Dalmatian archival heritage is a significant cultural tool used to advocate for the 'reunification' of Dalmatia with the 'motherland', the Kingdom of Italy.<sup>1</sup> During its peak between the end of World War I (1918) and the fall of fascism (1943), Italian hegemonic policies extensively utilized Dalmatian archives, particularly those dating from the Venetian era, to justify its presence in the Eastern Adriatic.

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1 Luciano Monzali, *Il sogno dell'egemonia: L'Italia, la questione jugoslava e l'Europa centrale (1918-1941)* (Firenze: Le Lettere, 2010).

In this context, we will explore the historical connection between the archives of Dalmatia and Italian cultural policy from the late 1910s to the 1940s. Our goal is to illustrate, using sources from the Central State Archives in Rome, how this archival heritage has been subjected to various instrumental interpretations. Recognizing this enables us to mitigate the impact of such interpretations and to promote a more effective enhancement of Dalmatian cultural heritage.

## The Kingdom of Italy and Dalmatian Archives between the two World Wars

### The first Dalmatian Governorate (1918-1920)

After the end of World War I in November 1918, the Italian army occupied cities in northern Dalmatia. On November 14, General Enrico Millo assumed command of operations. On December 27, he issued a decree establishing the first Dalmatian Governorate (*Governo della Dalmazia e delle Isole Dalmate e Curzolane*). At the head of the administration was placed the Governorate, with Millo himself appointed as governor.<sup>2</sup>

In this context, the Venetian-era Dalmatian archives immediately attracted the attention of Italian authorities. On December 14, 1918, Cesare Augusto Levi, secretary of the Venice *Deputazione di Storia Patria*, informed the Ministry of the Interior about the Archives of Old Records (*Archivio degli atti antichi*) in Zadar (*Zara*<sup>3</sup>), which he had visited in 1911.<sup>4</sup>

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2 Luciano Monzali, *Gli italiani di Dalmazia e le relazioni italo-jugoslave nel Novecento* (Venezia: Marsilio, 2015), 112-123. On the Italian military occupations in the Adriatic see *La vittoria senza pace: le occupazioni militari italiane alla fine della grande guerra*, a cura di R. Pupo (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2022).

3 For each Dalmatian place mentioned in the text, the current name in Croatian is given, with the corresponding Italian name in brackets. The Italian names used in quotations, however, remain unchanged.

4 Archivio Centrale dello Stato (Italy) (henceforth: ACS). Ministero dell'Interno, Direzione generale degli Archivi di Stato, Archivio generale, Affari generali e per provincia (henceforth: MI), 1940-1944, f. 60, file 4B/1, C.A. Levi to the Ministry (1918 Dec. 14); this and other sources are cited and quoted in Laura Fortunato, "L'Archivio di Zara nelle carte dell'amministrazione archivistica italiana", *Atti e memorie della Società dalmata di storia patria* 15 (2004): 157-233. On a previous mission by Levi to Corfù in 1906 see Cesare Augusto Levi, *Venezia, Corfù ed il Levante. Relazione storico-archivistica* (Venezia: Ferrari 1907).

At the start of 1919, the Army's General Secretariat for Civil Affairs<sup>5</sup> instructed the Governorate to assess the optimal measures for safeguarding the archival heritage. The Governorate reached out to local authorities in Dalmatia, requesting *specific reports on the condition of each archive, its respective contents and origin, damages incurred due to the war, and any removals*. These reports were forwarded to Vitaliano Brunelli, a professor at Zadar's Gymnasium and an expert in Dalmatian antiquities, for review on June 23, 1920.

Brunelli's report, dated September 25, 1920, outlines the measures implemented by the Governorate: *it seems to me that, before starting work, it was necessary to establish an action plan and ensure the cooperation of well-intentioned individuals residing in each locality, along with the personal insights of those familiar with the province's history and with some expertise in archival matters. Instead, the Government relied on the heads of civil and ecclesiastical authorities who, on their own initiative, issued a circular letter to their subordinates. Responses varied according to individual discretion, and many were evasive or chose not to respond at all.*

Instead, Brunelli suggests identifying the archives of Dalmatia's historical institutions and recommends to continue concentrating the Venetian-era archives in Zadar. Additionally, he advises sending an expert to inspect the Governorate's occupied area and preparing a dedicated space for historical archives in the Palace of the Lieutenant Governor.<sup>6</sup>

However, Brunelli's recommendations cannot be implemented due to the Treaty of Rapallo (November 12, 1920), which annexed Dalmatia to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. The Treaty stipulated that Zadar and the islands of Palagruža (*Pelagosa*) and Lastovo (*Lagosta*) would become part of the Kingdom of Italy. A Civil Commissioner is appointed to administer them instead of the Governorate.<sup>7</sup>

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5 Maria Elodia Palumbo, "L'archivio del Segretariato per gli Affari Civili del Comando Supremo dell'Esercito italiano", *Officina dello storico* I, 1-2 (1980), 137-152. From July 4, 1919, the Secretariat is replaced by the Central Office for the New Provinces; Decreto Luogotenenziale col quale è istituito presso la presidenza del Consiglio dei ministri un ufficio centrale per le nuove Province del Regno, GU 160/1919.

6 ACS, MI, 1874-1939, f. 296, file 14/3, V. Brunelli to the Dalmatian Governorate (1920 Sept. 25).

7 Regio Decreto che provvede alla soppressione del Governatorato per la Dalmazia con la istituzione di un Commissariato civile in Zara, GU 299/1920. Meanwhile, on October 20, 1920, the High Council for Archives (*Consiglio Superiore per gli Archivi*) of the Kingdom of Italy issued an agenda concerning the Dalmatian archives. The Council, *recalled that Italian influence in the Dalmatian lands has always been that of a superior culture, and that it is not permissible to renounce this in the interest of civilization itself*, asks the Government not to forget the archives of Zadar; ACS, MI, 1874-1939, f. 296, file 14/3, agenda of the High Council for Archives (1921 Oct. 20).

## Archival Agreements (1920-1929)

Following the Treaty of Rapallo, Italian and Yugoslav authorities addressed the 'Adriatic Question', which had remained unresolved by the Treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye (September 10, 1919). These treaties differed significantly in their application, especially in the archival sector, where specific implementing conventions led to the creation of two commissions. One was the Italo-Yugoslav Commission for the Implementation of the Treaty of Saint-Germain, while the other was the Commission for the Partition of Dalmatian Archives under the Treaty of Rapallo.<sup>8</sup>

Between June and November 1924, the first session of the Commission for the Partition of Dalmatian Archives took place in Zadar, focusing primarily on archival records related to current affairs.<sup>9</sup>

On August 5<sup>th</sup>, Emilio Re, archivist and one of the two Italian delegates, drafted a report on the conducted operations, providing further insights. Re noted that the Yugoslav delegation intended to propose partitions for historical records as well, particularly those dating prior to the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Additionally, concerning the '*archivi veneti*' of municipalities relocated to Zadar since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Yugoslav delegation aimed to apply the principle of provenance, advocating for their return to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. However, Re understood that the negotiations were not solely technical in nature: *it is evident that, while not ignoring and indeed duly considering each of the mentioned elements, a true course of action — namely [...] the degree of greater or lesser compromise or intransigence to maintain in negotiations — can only be provided by a higher consideration, of a national character. Furthermore, by anticipating the solution to the following problem, which it is beneficial to state clearly: what value does the Italian State attribute to these Zara Archives, and what role does it intend to assign it in connection with the internal life of the city, its policies regarding the Kingdom of S.H.S., and considering future possibilities?*<sup>10</sup>

However, at the end of the first session, it was the Yugoslav delegation itself that asserted its incompetence to handle the partition of Dalmatian archival heritage.

8 The Italo-Yugoslav Commission originated from the Convention among the successor States of the Austro-Hungarian Empire concerning archives matters (Rome Convention, April 6, 1922). The Commission for the partition of the Dalmatian archives is the outcome of the Santa Margherita Agreements (October 23, 1922), which outline the procedures for the partition in art. 25-31. Šime Peričić, „Podjela zadarskih 'arhiva' između Italije i Kraljevine SHS (1924.-1926.)“, *Arhivski vjesnik* 21-22 (1979.): 357-374; Dubravka Kolić, „Gradivo Državnog arhiva u Zadru u mirovnim ugovorima s Italijom nakon dva svjetska rata“, in *Arhivi i politika. Zbornik radova sa 4. kongresa hrvatskih arhivista u Opatiji*, ur. Silvija Babić (Zagreb: Hrvatsko arhivističko društvo, 2013.), 89-94.

9 Elio Lodolini, „Gli archivi della Dalmazia durante la Seconda Guerra Mondiale e l'opera di Giorgio Cencetti“, *Rivista dalmatica* LVIII, 4 (1987), 248-250.

10 ACS, MI, 1940-1944, f. 62, file 4C, E. Re to the State Archives in Rome (1924 Aug. 5).

The Italian Legation in Belgrade clarified the reasons for this alleged incompetence: *the main concern of this Government and the subsequent actions taken regarding the pairing of 'current records' and 'historical documents' arise from the fear that Dalmatians and their press will protest against Belgrade. The Dalmatians cherish the 'historical' documents that concern them specifically and have expressed the preference that only a Dalmatian should manage their partition.*<sup>11</sup>

The deadlock persisted until the first half of 1926.<sup>12</sup>

At this point, the Italo-Yugoslav Commission for the Implementation of the Rome Convention comes into play, convening in July 1926 in Trieste. Belgrade intends to redirect the discussion on Dalmatian archives to this Commission, aiming to leverage the less binding nature of the Rome Convention. Despite Re finding the shift to Trieste inappropriate, he urges the Ministry to participate in the Commission's sessions, emphasizing that the issue of the Dalmatian archives should be addressed in accordance with the Santa Margherita Agreements.<sup>13</sup>

On July 21, 1926, the inaugural meeting of the Trieste Commission was held. The Italian delegation included Francesco Salata<sup>14</sup>, Eugenio Casanova, and Mariano Pierro, while the Yugoslav delegation comprised Gustav Gregorin, Fran Vodopivec, and Josip Nagy. Vodopivec indicated he was authorized by the Belgrade government to discuss *the general issue of Dalmatian historical archives* in Trieste. In response, Salata decides to seek a similar authorization from the Italian government. On July 31, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs agreed to Salata's request, stipulating that Emilio Re must also be present in Trieste and that the discussion should adhere strictly to the Santa Margherita Agreements.<sup>15</sup>

In the second session of the Commission, held in Venice in September 1929, the issue of Dalmatia's archival heritage was thoroughly discussed. On September 20, Salata underscores the necessity of drafting a plan for the partition. Following this, Nagy proposes a text consisting of 13 articles. The first seven, addressing archival records related to current affairs, had already been covered in the Santa

11 ACS, MI, 1940-1944, f. 62, file 4C, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Ministry (1924 Nov. 7).

12 On July 29, 1925, Belgrade transmits to Rome its requests regarding Dalmatian archives. The Yugoslav government suggests to keep the Venetian-era (1409-1797) and the French period (1806-1814) records in Zadar. The Austrian-era archives (1797-1806, 1814-1918), along with those from the monasteries of Zadar and Biograd na Moru (*Zaravecchia*) and the 'archivi veneti' of Kotor (*Cattaro*), Split (*Spalato*), Makarska (*Macarsca*), Korčula (*Curzola*), Nin (*Nona*), Omiš (*Almissa*), Knin (*Tenin*) and Brač (*Brazza*). ACS, Archivi di famiglie, di persone e di studi professionali (henceforth: AF), Emilio Re, f. 1, file 1/5, note from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of S.H.S. (1925 Jul. 29, copy).

13 ACS, MI, 1940-1944, f. 60, file 4C, E. Re to the Ministry (1926 Jul. 9).

14 About Salata see Luca Riccardi, *Francesco Salata tra storia, politica e diplomazia* (Udine: Forum, 2001).

15 The proceedings of the first session are in ACS, MI, 1940-1944, f. 60, file 4A/3.

Margherita Agreements. The remaining six focused on the *equitable partition of all archaeological, artistic, scientific, and bibliographic material located in the territory of Zara*. These articles were not addressed in the Agreements. Instead, Article 31 exempted from partition *the segment of Zara's Archives containing acts, records, or items representing remnants or memories of the Venetian Republic's rule in Dalmatia*. However, Nagy argued that Article 31 did not apply to the '*archivi veneti*' of Dalmatian municipalities relocated to Zadar, nor to family and monastery archives.

On September 23<sup>rd</sup>, Salata presents Re's responses to Nagy's text. Exploiting the ambiguity of Article 31, the archivist argued that records dating prior to the 15<sup>th</sup> century could not be partitioned due to Venetian influence in Dalmatia predating that century. Regarding the '*archivi veneti*', the Italians believed it was crucial to delve into their content and the reasons behind their transfer, in order to ascertain whether they were excluded under the terms of Article 31.

The need for further investigation led to the suspension of the Commission's meetings. In the subsequent years, the Yugoslav delegation ceased to request discussion on the partition issue through the Commission. As a result, the Dalmatian archival heritage preserved in Zadar remains under the management of the Italian archival administration.<sup>16</sup>

### **From the *Archivio degli atti antichi* to the *Archivio di Stato di Zara* (1920-1943)**

As previously noted, following the Treaty of Rapallo, Zadar came under the control of the Kingdom of Italy, effectively becoming a new province. In January 1921, Salata, who was then the head of the Central Office for the New Provinces (*Ufficio Centrale per le Nuove Province*), contacted the Civil Commissioner of Zadar to inquire about the possibility of sending an official to inspect the city's archives. Upon receiving a positive response, Salata dispatched Re on this mission.<sup>17</sup>

On March 1<sup>st</sup>, Re submitted his report to Rome. The primary need identified was the establishment of State Archives (*Archivio di Stato*), as at that time only the Archives of Old Records (*Archivio degli atti antichi*) in the former Lieutenant Governor's Palace were active – a location Re deemed most suitable for the future Archive. Additionally, Re expressed his intention to publish a pamphlet upon the establishment of the State Archives, *as a tangible sign of how the Italian State intends its duties towards Dalmatia and its historical culture*.<sup>18</sup>

16 The proceedings of the second session are in ACS, MI, 1940-1944, f. 60, file 4B.

17 Fortunato, "L'Archivio di Zara": 171 ff.

18 ACS, MI, 1874-1939, f. 296, file 14/4bis, E. Re to the Central Office for the New Provinces (1921 Mar. 1, copy).

Re's proposals remain unimplemented. The only significant development occurred on October 17, 1922, with the formal establishment of the province of Zadar and its Prefecture.<sup>19</sup> In the following years, the Prefecture appointed employees to manage the Archives of Old Records. Alberto degli Alberti oversaw the Archives until 1924, followed by Antonio Crehici from 1924 to 1936.

In 1924, the Prefecture informed the Ministry about the necessity to establish the State Archives, due to the poor condition of the Archives of Old Records: *the Historical Archives [...] currently function as an office associated with the Prefecture, with limited functions, as it simply preserves government records up to 1815, along with a few later documents. With its functions remaining unchanged, the Historical Archives would never be susceptible to further development, while perpetuating the inconvenience of scattered materials among numerous small archives of individual state, provincial, municipal, and corporate offices. This results in the implicit impracticability of the ideal of forming a cohesive unity of the historical heritage of this Province.*<sup>20</sup>

Despite these requests, the State Archives were only founded on December 6, 1928.<sup>21</sup>

From then on, a notable division becomes clear in writings concerning the Archives: official publications highlight the cultural policy of the fascist government, while internal Ministry reports reveal a precarious situation.

Among the former is a paper from 1933 authored by Crehici, the director of the State Archives, wherein he expresses himself in the following terms: *this exquisite sensitivity of the Fascist Government to the cultural issues of Dalmatia had, regarding our Institute, results of magnificent fertility. We do not exaggerate in asserting that in these last ten years, the Archives have achieved greater enhancement than in all of its previous 300-year history. The number of facilities was doubled, the staff assigned there tripled, the archival equipment enriched with numerous and very important materials, and in general, a comfortable study environment was created for scholars, so necessary for calm and fruitful work.*<sup>22</sup>

19 Regio Decreto-Legge concernente la sistemazione politica ed amministrativa delle nuove Province, GU 254/1922.

20 ACS, MI, 1874-1939, f. 296, file 14/4bis, the Prefecture of Zadar to the Ministry (1924 Apr. 30). Also Re (November 1926) recalls that *once the delicate question of the distribution of historical records is resolved, there will remain the immediate task of establishing State Archives in Zara, fulfilling towards Dalmatia a duty that the Royal Government feels is no less than those recently fulfilled towards Tridentine Venice and Julian Venetia with the establishment of the Archives of Trento and Trieste*; ACS, AF, Emilio Re, f. 1/1.5, note from E. Re (1926 Nov.).

21 Istituzione dell'Archivio di Stato in Zara e di una sezione distaccata di Archivio in Fiume, GU 8/1929.

22 The conclusion of the paper is particularly significant: *the Fascist government established, organized, and strengthened it. It is now up to historians to know it, to frequent it, and to carry out that scientific work within it that the honor of our Nation demands*; Antonio Crehici, "L'Archivio di

Noteworthy are also several resolutions from the High Council for Archives (*Consiglio Superiore per gli Archivi*) in support of fascist cultural policy. In 1938, the Council requested that the archival administration collaborate in the restoration of notarial records in Zadar. In 1942, there was a call for the establishment of State Archives in Kotor (*Cattaro*) and Split (*Spalato*).<sup>23</sup>

Conversely, internal reports reaching the Ministry convey a markedly different tone. On October 18, 1942, Giuseppe Praga, who had been acting as director since 1936, describes the conditions of the Archives: *the State Archives in Zara, after being for several centuries the most important, and almost the only archival institution in Dalmatia, were reduced, after the Treaty of Rapallo in 1920, to a mere repository of records for the Province of Zara [...]. Following the Santa Margherita Agreements between Italy and the former Kingdom of S.H.S., the broader and administratively more significant series of records were dismantled and largely handed over to Yugoslavia. Consequently, the Archives declined. This limitation led the Ministry in 1936 to entrust its direction not to an official from the Ministry of the Interior, but to myself, an official of the Ministry of National Education, who, in addition to fulfilling my primary duties as director of the Library of Zara and bibliographic inspector of the Province, dedicates two or three hours a day to the direction of the Archive, without any remuneration.*

Therefore, Praga finds it necessary to commit *to the restoration of the archives of the Dalmatian capital*.<sup>24</sup>

Also, in the mission carried out in Dalmatia by Giorgio Cencetti<sup>25</sup> in February 1943, which we will discuss later, the comments regarding the State Archives are not flattering: *the issue to be addressed [...] is that of the facilities [...]. It is not that they are, for now, absolutely insufficient in Zara [...]: however, they are extremely unsuitable and – let's say it plainly – altogether indecorous. They clearly show the series of compromises that had to be made to accommodate the continuously growing volume of records: the documentary series are scattered in different groups of rooms in the Palazzo Generalizio, without direct communication between them. Some of them, located in the*

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Stato in Zara”, in *Ad Alessandro Luzio, gli Archivi di Stato italiani. Miscellanea di studi storici* (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1933), 285-286.

23 Lodolini, “Gli archivi della Dalmazia”, 268-269. About High Council see Elio Lodolini, “Il personale dell’Amministrazione archivistica entrato in servizio dalla prima alla seconda guerra mondiale (1919-1945) e collocato a riposo sino al 1986/1988. Letà dell’«Ordinamento gerarchico delle Amministrazioni dello Stato»”, in *Repertorio del personale degli Archivi di Stato, II, 1919-1946*, a cura di M. Cassetti, U. Falcone e M.T. Piano Mortari (Roma: Direzione generale per gli Archivi, 2012), 117-124.

24 ACS, MI, 1945-1948, f. 83, file 48/2, G. Praga to the Ministry (1942 Oct. 18).

25 A biographical profile of Cencetti (noting his early adherence to fascism and his self-identification as a ‘*squadrista*’, positions he minimized after the conflict) can be found in Lodolini, “Il personale dell’Amministrazione archivistica”, 165-169.



*basement now used as an air-raid shelter, are almost inaccessible to the archival employees and in any case removed from their supervision, exposing them to dangers perhaps more concrete than the ones they are protected from: certainly to that of humidity, because the openings that provided air to the underground have been walled up due to its purpose.*<sup>26</sup>

The contrast between official publications and internal reports highlights the discrepancy in the political and propagandistic role assigned by the fascist government to Dalmatian records and their actual state of conservation.

## The Dalmatian Archives during World War II

In April 1941, the Italian army occupied Dalmatia for the second time, establishing another Governorate.<sup>27</sup> By the end of the month, the Ministry of the Interior informed the Army about which Dalmatian archives held Venetian-era records, emphasizing the need to protect them during the occupation.<sup>28</sup> This marked the start of a new phase in the interaction between the Dalmatian archives and the Italian authorities, intertwining archival considerations with fascist cultural policy. The aim of this policy, ultimately, was to assert cultural hegemony over the Eastern Adriatic.<sup>29</sup>

### The Attempt to Organize the Archival Service (1941-1943)

On June 4<sup>th</sup>, 1941, the Ministry of the Interior sent a circular letter to the prefectures of Kotor, Rijeka (*Fiume*), Split, and Zadar, requesting information about the Venetian-era archives, *given their primary importance*.<sup>30</sup>

The first response came from Rijeka on August 12<sup>th</sup>, where the local State Archives proposed an inspection of Krk (*Veglia*) and Rab (*Arbe*). General Inspector Emanuele Librino was dispatched by the Ministry, but his report on September 18<sup>th</sup> mainly highlighted the difficulties in gathering information about the archives of the two islands.<sup>31</sup>

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26 See note 38.

27 Monzali, *Gli italiani di Dalmazia*, 347-426.

28 ACS, MI, 1945-1948, f. 83, file 48/2, the Ministry to the Supreme Command of the Army (1941 Apr. 28).

29 Part of the sources used are cited in Lodolini, "Gli archivi della Dalmazia", also referenced in Kolić, "Gradivo Državnog arhiva u Zadru", 95-97.

30 ACS, MI, 1945-1948, f. 83, file 48/2, the Ministry to the prefectures of Rijeka, Split, Zadar and Kotor (1941 Jun. 4).

31 ACS, MI, 1945-1948, f. 83, file 48/2, the Prefecture of Rijeka and E. Librino to the Ministry (1941 Aug. 12 and Sept. 18).

On September 2<sup>nd</sup>, after completing his inspection in Rijeka, the Ministry instructed Librino to proceed to Kotor. His task was to verify the existence of the Venetian-era archives of the Extraordinary Commissioner of Albania (*Provveditore straordinario dell'Albania*), which had actually been located in Zadar since 1885. However, invited by the local prefect, it was Emilio Re who went to Kotor. He presented his report to the Ministry on September 27<sup>th</sup>.<sup>32</sup>

Re, besides providing the data on Kotor's archives (*sanctuaries of Venetian Italianness and of our civilization*), offers some reflections that highlight the relationship between archives and cultural policy: *what are the duties of an Italian Administration that returns today to the Bocche di Cattaro [i.e. Bay of Kotor] to resume the civilizing mission inherited from Venice, simply interrupted a century and a half ago? It is evident that for Italy, the Archives of the Bocche di Cattaro, as well as those of the entire Dalmatia, besides their cultural value, have an exquisitely political significance, as they collectively demonstrate an enduring influence that knows no sunset.*

Re underscores the need to establish State Archives. The archives he described earlier should become part of the Institute's collection, beginning with those of the *Provveditore straordinario* (known as the 'archivio antico'): *I note, as a matter of fact, that the return of the 'archivio antico' kept in Zara has long been an aspiration of local scholars. As a member of the Italian Delegation in the Italo-Yugoslav Commission [...] I personally recall how many times that issue was raised by the Yugoslav Delegation, and needless to say, at that time I did everything possible not only to reject it but also to prevent it from being considered. However, twenty years later, the situation has fundamentally changed. Back then, it was a matter of handing over to a foreign state, Yugoslavia, an archive that was in our possession for whatever reason; now, it would instead involve returning to a city, once again ours, what it claims as its own. This is why, at that time, being absolutely opposed, I can now allow myself [...] to be in favor, without fearing to be accused of inconsistency.*<sup>33</sup>

The archivist, however, believes that certain political conditions must be met before the return of the records to Kotor: *the first condition, and the most obvious one, is above all that the most absolute peace has returned to the Adriatic; a Roman peace, naturally. [...] The other condition is to be clear about the future mission intended for Cattaro and its Bocche [...]. But if Cattaro returns to being what geography destines it*

32 Regarding Zadar, the Prefecture communicated the existence in Šibenik of the Pretorial and Notarial Archives (*Archivio pretorile e notarile*) in the Court and the Municipal Archives; v. ACS, MI, 1945-1948, f. 83, file 48/2, the Prefecture of Zadar to the Ministry (1941 Nov. 25 and Dec. 21). No response had been received from Split.

33 On the requests of the Municipality of Kotor see also Jelena Antovic, *50. godina Istorijaskog arhiva Kotor 1949.-1999. Bio-bibliografije arhivskih sluzbenika sa pregledom arhivskih fondova i zbirki* (Cetinje: Državni arhiv Crne gore, Istorijaski arhiv Kotor, 1999.), 27.

to be, namely a point of landing of Western civilization in the most eastern of the Mediterranean peninsulas, if it regains all its political and military value and Italy makes it a bridgehead for its penetration into the Montenegrin and Albanian hinterlands, in that case Italy must be present not only with the force of its arms, but also with the support of its civilian institutions, with the light of its culture, with the prestige of its great past, as equally proclaimed by documents and monuments.<sup>34</sup>

On November 4<sup>th</sup>, the Ministry offered to provide the Governorate with an official for *the survey and reconstitution of ancient and recent archival collections* in Dalmatia.<sup>35</sup> Despite the offer, between 1941 and 1942, the Governorate showed little concern for the fate of the archival heritage. This is evident from the aforementioned letter from Praga dated October 18<sup>th</sup>, 1942, where the acting director highlights the ongoing need to organize the Dalmatian archival system: *there is an urgent need to proceed with the survey and protection of the archives in Split and Kotor provinces, in order to establish State Archives in these cities, and subsequently create an Archival Superintendency for Dalmatia. [...] These circumstances lead me to represent the necessity to your Ministry of sending to the position of director of the State Archives in Zadar and Superintendent of Dalmatian Archives an official who can exclusively dedicate himself to archival organization.*

Therefore, on October 26<sup>th</sup>, the Ministry writes again to the Governorate. Finally, on November 3<sup>rd</sup>, Governor Giuseppe Bastianini approves sending an archivist to Dalmatia.<sup>36</sup>

Following the refusal of Felice Perroni, former director of the State Archives in Trieste, the mission is assigned to Giorgio Cencetti.<sup>37</sup> Cencetti arrives in Zadar in mid-December and on Christmas Eve writes to Rodolfo Biancorosso, head of the Ministry's Central Office for State Archives (*Ufficio Centrale per gli Archivi di Stato*), with the first news about the Dalmatian archives: *I spoke with the Governor's personal secretary, who granted me full autonomy both in organizing my work and in allocating the funds designated for initial measures aimed at archives reorganization [...] Here in Zara, I began to realize the seriousness and complexity of the issue, which involves not only historical aspects but also crucial administrative ones.*<sup>38</sup>

The later report by Cencetti is dated February 13<sup>th</sup>, 1943. It begins with reflections on the relationship between institutions and archives, which, howev-

34 ACS, MI, 1945-1948, f. 83, file 48/2, E. Re to the Ministry (1941 Sept. 27) and "Archivi della provincia di Cattaro", *Notizie degli Archivi di Stato* I, n. 3 (1941), 113-114.

35 ACS, MI, 1945-1948, f. 83, file 48/2, the Ministry to the Dalmatian Governorate (1941 Nov. 4).

36 ACS, MI, 1945-1948, f. 83, file 48/2, G. Praga to the Ministry (1942 Oct. 18); the Ministry to the Dalmatian Governorate and response (1942 Oct. 26 and Nov. 3).

37 ACS, MI, 1945-1948, f. 83, file 48/2, the Ministry to the Dalmatian Governorate (1942 Dec. 11).

38 ACS, MI, 1945-1948, f. 83, file 48/2, G. Cencetti to R. Biancorosso (1942 Dec. 24).

er, are clearly instrumental in demonstrating the nature of the so-called '*archivi veneti*'.<sup>39</sup>

Cencetti believes that the preservation standards are mostly *satisfactory at the judicial authorities and at some administrative ones, but poor or very poor at the municipalities*. Issues arise in Trogir (*Traù*), where the *Pretura's* archives are at risk due to a nearby military kitchen, and where the Municipality's old records *are mixed with modern ones and scattered*. Similarly, in Šibenik (*Sebenico*), the Municipal archives are *housed in a very humid and insecure attic*. Furthermore, there are no shortage of considerations about the political role of archives and the Italian character of Dalmatia: *immediate expression of an original civilization, [...] this collection of documents [...] constitutes one of the most tangible and concrete justifications for our return to the eastern shore of the Adriatic, almost serving as our inalienable title of ownership over Dalmatia. Its systematic and comprehensive organization thus transforms into an issue no longer merely technical or scientific, but political, and [...] implies the prestige of Italy, or at the very least, of the Italian administrations responsible for the preservation of the most glorious monuments of the Nation's history, art, and politics*.

In terms of practical needs, Cencetti deems it necessary to establish the Archival Superintendency, while considering it inappropriate to place Dalmatia under the jurisdiction of the Venetian one. Specifically, the role of the Dalmatian superintendent *is imbued with special political values, which are not difficult to grasp even in Venice, but whose demands can only be met by residing permanently in a Dalmatian city*. Cencetti also acknowledges the usefulness of creating State Archives in Kotor and Split. Regarding Šibenik, he suggests creating a branch office of the State Archives in Zadar, rather than relocating Šibenik's old records to Zadar (*which would provoke strong discontent among the people of Šibenik*), thereby creating *a kind of sanctuary for its memories*.<sup>40</sup>

Cencetti returned to Dalmatia in the spring of 1943 on multiple occasions, assisted from late April onward by the archivist Giovanni Cabizza. In early May, Cencetti wrote detailed instructions for Cabizza regarding the tasks to be carried

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39 Cencetti asserts that *only rarely do municipalities retain records dating before the early years of the last century because, during Venetian rule, the municipality had no autonomy and thus did not produce its own archive*. This interpretation suggests that the archival heritage of Dalmatia from the Venetian era is almost exclusively composed of records produced by the chancelleries of the Venetian rectors. The documentation is 'venetian' and thus, according to fascist cultural policy, an expression of Italian civilization in the Eastern Adriatic. It is partly based on these reflections that, in the following months, the Italian authorities transferred the Dalmatian archives to Italy. Lodolini, however, shares Cencetti's position; Lodolini, "Gli archivi della Dalmazia", 276-277.

40 ACS, MI, 1945-1948, f. 83, file 48/2, G. Cencetti to the Ministry (1943 Feb. 13). On the practical measures taken between March and May see Lodolini, "Gli archivi della Dalmazia", 322-333.

out.<sup>41</sup> At that time, Cencetti was still unaware that on the night between April 24th and 25th, the Town Hall of Trogir, where the Community's records and the Venetian counts' penal records were stored, had caught fire. Cencetti only received news of this on May 5th from Mihovil Abramić, the director of the Archaeological Museum in Split. Upon returning to Dalmatia in mid-May, he immediately traveled to Trogir with Cabizza, where the two could examine the considerable damage caused by the fire.<sup>42</sup>

The Italian interest in Dalmatian archival heritage during these years extends beyond mere technical and organizational issues. Various figures connected to Italian hegemonic policies in the Eastern Adriatic are deeply involved in these archival matters. One such figure is Annibale Alberti, vice-president of the *Deputazione di storia patria delle Venezie* (with Salata serving as president) and a prominent figure within the Ministry, serving as Commissioner for the execution of the Archival Law of 1939.

In 1942, an article authored by Alberti titled "*Cenni sugli Archivi di Stato della Dalmazia e di Lubiana*" was published in *Archivio Veneto*, the journal of the *Deputazione*, where the qualities of Dalmatian archives are praised in the typical tones of fascist propaganda, portraying them as monuments of Italian civilization on the eastern shore of the Adriatic. The following year (1943), a second article titled "*La riforma della legge sugli Archivi di Stato. Gli archivi delle terre del Levante veneziano*" was published, once again emphasizing the importance of Dalmatian archives within Italian cultural policy in the Eastern Adriatic: *the spoken language that has persevered through the centuries, the grace and architectural imagination that have triumphed over every barbaric attempt at violent suppression, the clear geographical situation – these are the enduring signs of our rightful claim. Moreover, profound and unequivocal proofs are enshrined in the old records stored in the Dalmatian archives, asserting to the world: Italy stands here.*

But it is too late now. In the summer of 1943, the situation worsened for the Italian army, leaving no time to demonstrate to the world that *Italy stands here*. The imminent collapse of the fascist dictatorship, and with it Italian hegemonic policies, ushered in a completely new phase in the relationship between Italian archival administration and Dalmatian archival heritage.<sup>43</sup>

41 *Id.*, 314-318.

42 ACS, MI, 1940-1944, f. 88, file 6, G. Cencetti to R. Biancorosso and to the Ministry (1943 May 12 and 17). Later, only Cabizza handles the arrangement of the surviving documents, which are integrated with the records kept in the *Pretura*, mainly civil deeds of the Venetian counts; ACS, MI, 1945-1948, f. 83, file 48/2, "Stato di consistenza delle carte della città di Traù" (1945 Nov. 8).

43 Annibale Alberti, "Cenni sugli archivi di Stato della Dalmazia e di Lubiana", *Archivio Veneto* s. V, 59-62 (1943), 1-6; Annibale Alberti, "La riforma della legge sugli Archivi di Stato. Gli archivi nelle terre del Levante veneziano", *Archivio Veneto* s. V, 63-66 (1943), 168-174.

## The Prelude to Relocation (1943)

Cencetti's report on Dalmatian archives was read by Salata in early March. Writing to the aforementioned Biancorosso on March 12<sup>th</sup>, Salata seems to be weighing the possibility of relocating the Dalmatian archives to the Italian peninsula: *the situation imposes constraints on goodwill. However, in light of some regrettable possibilities, it may be advisable to consider implementing security measures, which I intend to discuss further at our next meeting.*

We do not know the details of Salata and Biancorosso's personal conversation, but other sources confirm that it is indeed the senator from Osor (*Ossero*) who advocates for relocating the Venetian-era archives away from Zadar.<sup>44</sup>

On July 20<sup>th</sup>, just a few days before the fall of fascism (July 24<sup>th</sup>-25<sup>th</sup>), the Ministry of the Interior urgently telegraphed the director of the State Archives in Zadar to prepare the packing of *valuable material and of historical-political importance* for its transfer to the Italian mainland.<sup>45</sup>

This marks the beginning of the concentration of valuable archival holdings from Šibenik, Trogir, and Kotor in Zadar, handled by Cabizza in the first case and by Cencetti in the other two. Packing operations for the transfer were underway throughout the month of August. At the same time, additional collections are selected at the State Archives for relocation to Venice. Thus, among the 148 wooden crates departing from Zadar are sections of the '*archivi veneti*' from Split and Korčula (*Curzola*), Venetian rectors' records of Zadar, the old archives of Lastovo, parchment records from Zadar monasteries, confidential correspondence from the Austrian-era Government and Lieutenancy, and the archives of the first Dalmatian Governorate.<sup>46</sup>

By August 25<sup>th</sup>, the crates were ready to depart, but bureaucratic issues delayed the necessary authorization from Rome.<sup>47</sup> Meanwhile, on September 6<sup>th</sup>, Cencetti

44 ACS, MI, 1945-1948, f. 83, file 48/2, F. Salata to R. Biancorosso (1943 Mar. 12); Lodolini does not quote the excerpt reported; Lodolini, "Gli archivi della Dalmazia", 333.

45 ACS, MI, 1945-1948, f. 83, file 48/2, the Ministry to the Dalmatian Governorate (1943 Jul. 20). A few days later, the order is also extended to Šibenik, Split, and Kotor.

46 Lodolini, "Gli archivi della Dalmazia", 335-342; Fortunato, "L'Archivio di Zara", 211-229. Regarding the events of August 1943, there are different accounts. Lodolini describes them as measures to protect from war damage, while Vidaković speaks of the Archives being *looted*. On February 2, 1945, Ante Dujela, keeper of the Archives, reported to the People's Liberation Committee of Zadar (*Narodno oslobodilački odbor Zadra*) that Cencetti and Cabizza enlisted three peasants from Preko for the task, without involving the Archives' employees. Josip Vidaković, *Državni arhiv u Zadru 1624. – 1970. (Prikupljanje i zaštita arhivalija)* (Zadar: Hrvatsko komunikološko društvo; Nonacom, 2002.), 76-80.

47 ACS, MI, 1945-1948, f. 83, file 48/2, G. Cencetti to the Ministry (1943 Aug. 27); the Ministry to the prefectures of Rijeka and Zadar (1943 Sept. 7).

managed to secure space for the 148 crates on a vessel – the *Laura* – set to sail for Venice two days later, on September 8<sup>th</sup>. In a letter to the Ministry dated September 11<sup>th</sup>, Cencetti recounted those chaotic days: *I had not [...] neglected to continue researching a direct transport solution that, by eliminating the highly problematic and unsafe overland route, would ensure the arrival of the precious material in Venice. On Monday the 6<sup>th</sup>, I received news of a vessel scheduled to depart on Wednesday at noon for Venice: by contacting the captain and the shipowner, I secured the loading of all 148 crates aboard. Loading took place on Tuesday the 7<sup>th</sup>, and the following day at noon, the "Laura" set sail. Arrival was expected on Sunday the 12<sup>th</sup>, as navigation during the night was prohibited for that boat, as well as for all those engaged in coastal shipping along the Dalmatian shore.*<sup>48</sup>

In Rome, the departure of the *Laura* was already known, as telegraphed by the regent of the Prefecture, Alberto degli Alberti, at 9:30 PM on September 8<sup>th</sup>.<sup>49</sup> Less than two hours earlier, at 7:42 PM, the voice of General Pietro Badoglio announcing Italy's armistice with the Allies was heard on the radio by millions of Italians. The overlap between the "major events" of the World War II and the "minor events" of Dalmatian archival heritage history had wholly unforeseen consequences on the journey of the crates towards Venice.

### The Journey towards Venice (1943-1944)

When Cencetti and Cabizza managed to reach Venice, around mid-September, they did not find the *Laura*: *The vessel "Laura", on which the crates containing the Dalmatian records are loaded, has not entered the harbor [...]. According to information obtained from the Duodo Maritime Agency [...], it appears almost certain that it must be docked in Cherso's harbor [...]. The journey could proceed to its destination if the right authorization comes from the competent German command [...]. If the Ministry considers requesting it, it should be noted that the "Laura", commanded by Captain Giovanni Baici, belongs to the shipowner Buchetti (or Bachetti) of Pola. Its cargo, in addition to the 148 crates of archives records (referred to simply as "books" [...]), includes fish meal and barrels of iron and manganese.*<sup>50</sup>

48 ACS, MI, 1945-1948, f. 83, file 48/2, G. Cencetti to the Central Office for State Archives (1943 Sept. 11).

49 ACS, MI, 1945-1948, f. 83, file 48/2, the Prefecture of Zadar to the Ministry (1943 Sept. 8).

50 ACS, MI, 1945-1948, f. 83, file 48/2, G. Cencetti to the Central Office for State Archives and to the Ministry (1943 Sept. 11 and 19). The surname of the Captain is Bajčić; Kolić, „Gradivo Državnog arhiva u Zadru“, 96.

However, in the following months, silence surrounds the fate of the Dalmatian archival heritage, fish meal, and barrels of iron and manganese.

In early March 1944, Guido Buffarini Guidi, Minister of the Interior of the Italian Social Republic, receives a letter from Francesco Salata, conveyed by Serafino Mazzolini, Secretary General of Foreign Affairs. The Osor-born Senator confirms that the crates are in Cres (*Cherso*), adding that upon arriving on the island, Captain Bajčić *would be appointed leader of the local rebels*, referring to the Yugoslav partisans.<sup>51</sup>

At the end of April, finally, the first reassuring news about the crates arrives. It is Praga, in exile in Padua, who informs the director of the State Archives in Bologna, where Cencetti is employed, of the information received from Antonio Colombis, director of the Istrian Provincial Library in Pula (*Pola*)<sup>52</sup>: *all the crates containing the Archives of Zara have been stored since last September in a warehouse of Cherso's Fishing Consortium. Moreover, as communicated to me by the current podestà of Cherso [i.e. the mayor appointed by the fascist regime], thought should be given to removing them from Cherso, as the facility is needed and they have been paying rent only for those crates since September.*

On April 30<sup>th</sup>, Cencetti reports the news to Leopoldo Sandri, employed at the Central Office for State Archives of the Italian Social Republic, adding that it is necessary to involve Fritz Weigle: *it is possible that Weigle may have access to German vehicles for the journey. Naturally, if he wishes to come to Cherso with me, I will have to put up with him. In any case, for now, the important thing is that the records reach Venice; we will then consider whether it will be more appropriate to keep them there or make them disappear.*<sup>53</sup>

Weigle is a prominent figure in this issue. Formerly employed at the German Historical Institute (*Istituto Storico Germanico*) in Rome, he was assigned in the autumn of 1943 to the Central Office of the Commander of the Security Police and the Security Service (*Befehlshaber der Sicherheitspolizei und des Sicherheitsdienstes*), located in Verona and subordinate to the Reich Security Main Office (*Reichssicherheitshauptamt*), one of the departments of the SS. At that time, he was mainly engaged in organizing the transport of Italian archives significant to German history to the Reich, which was approved by Himmler on February 22, 1944.<sup>54</sup> Weigle's

51 ACS, MI, 1945-1948, f. 83, file 48/2, S. Mazzolini to G. Buffarini Guidi (1944 Feb. 25).

52 Praga writes on March 1st to Colombis; Susy Marcon, "Le carte e i volumi di Giuseppe Praga", *Atti e memorie della Società Dalmata di Storia Patria* s. III, 2 (2013), 73.

53 ACS, MI, 1945-1948, f. 83, file 48/2, G. Cencetti to L. Sandri (1944 Apr. 30); Lodolini leaves out the last sentence; Lodolini, "Gli archivi della Dalmazia", 347-348.

54 The plan is not carried out afterward, see Jürgen Klöckler, „Verhinderter Archivalienraub in Italien: Theodor Mayer und die Abteilung 'Archivschutz' bei der Militärverwaltung in Verona 1943-1945“, *Quellen und Forschungen aus italienischen Archiven und Bibliotheken* 86 (2006), 491-



prominence is also noted in a 1946 report: *Dr. Weigle, a member of the German Historical Institute in Rome, had been assigned [...] to the Central Office of the SS [...], where he, dealing with all archival matters, could lend crucial support from its highly important office, particularly regarding the transport of Dalmatian archives to Venice, and other secondary issues.*<sup>55</sup>

We do not know exactly Weigle's role in facilitating the recovery of the crates, but in May, he and Sandri decided to send Cencetti to Cres. Meanwhile, German military authorities assured that they would facilitate the transport of the crates to Venice.<sup>56</sup>

On June 1<sup>st</sup>, Cencetti departs for Cres. Upon his return, he writes on June 15<sup>th</sup> to Guido Manganeli, director of the State Archives in Milan and intermediary with Sandri: *at dawn on the 11<sup>th</sup>, I arrived at Cherso. Here I could immediately confirm the substantial accuracy of the information I had gathered. The vessel "Laura", commanded by Captain Giovanni Baici, departed from Zara on September 8<sup>th</sup> and arrived at Cherso on the evening of the 9<sup>th</sup>. Baici, a native and resident on the island, awaited events here. With the arrival of the partisans on September 12<sup>th</sup>, he took command of the harbor, and the "Laura" remained docked at the pier until, about a month later, it was unloaded to be used by the partisans. The crates, which had suffered considerably from moisture due to water seepage in the hold, were placed in the Customs warehouse and later, after the German occupation on November 13<sup>th</sup>, transferred to the Fishing Consortium warehouse, perhaps a little safer from air raids but less dry [...]. All these unloading and relocation activities were carried out in a haphazard and somewhat brutish manner, and many crates, unfortunately not sturdy enough [...], were shaken apart; indeed, one of the smaller and sturdier ones broke completely.*

The archivist continues describing the operations carried out to remove the crates: *through my contacts in Trieste, I learned that direct transport by sea to Venice was difficult and not recommended; in Fiume, I was informed that the Pola-Trieste railway was interrupted. Thus, the only option left was transport by sea to Fiume and then by railway to Venice [...]. However, in Cherso, I encountered an unpleasant surprise: none of the boat owners were willing to set sail under any conditions [...]. There was, therefore, the daunting prospect of being stranded in Cherso – the records and I – until the end of*

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537; Lutz Klinkhammer, „Die Abteilung 'Kunstschutz' der deutschen Militärverwaltung in Italien (1943-1945)“, *Quellen und Forschungen aus italienischen Bibliotheken und Archiven* 72 (1992), 521-527. „Therefore, Weigle is not part of the *Kunstschutz*, established in October 1943, to which Theodor Mayer was added in April 1944 for the protection of archives and libraries; *Kunsthistoriker im Krieg: Deutscher militärischer Kunstschutz in Italien 1943 – 1945*, hrsg. C. Fuhrmeister (Köln: Böhlau, 2012); Elvira Gencarelli, *Gli archivi italiani durante la Seconda Guerra Mondiale* (Roma: 1979).

55 Gencarelli, *Gli archivi italiani*, 138.

56 ACS, MI, 1945-1948, f. 83, file 48/2, O. Uccelli to G. Buffarini Guidi (1944 May 31).

*the war and beyond. What would happen after, that was difficult to predict. Therefore, to my regret, [...] I had to resort to force: at my insistence, the German harbor commander grabbed the captain of the 'S. Maria' by the collar and forced him to refit the ship that day and depart in the evening. I focused on transporting the crates from the warehouse to the quay and loading them, which, for easily understandable reasons, had to be done as quickly as possible during twilight hours. Thus, at 11:30 PM on the 12<sup>th</sup>, the 'S. Maria' departed from Cherso and arrived safely in Fiume at 6:30 AM.*

On the morning of June 13<sup>th</sup>, the crates are in Rijeka, where they are being placed in the harbor warehouses and taken over by Gondrand, the company handling their transport to Venice.<sup>57</sup> At this point, Cencetti leaves the crates in Rijeka and goes to Verona to meet with Weigle: *I thought it appropriate to proceed immediately to Verona to personally urge Dr. Weigle's intervention for the allocation of railway wagons. For the sake of accuracy, I must say that Dr. Weigle showed keen interest and promptly sent two radiograms to the offices in Trieste and Fiume under his jurisdiction, urging them to intervene urgently with the relevant authorities.*<sup>58</sup>

Since June 13<sup>th</sup>, it takes another full month before the crates depart by train from Rijeka to Venice on July 14<sup>th</sup>.<sup>59</sup> They arrive in the Lagoon on July 21<sup>th</sup>, where they are placed in the State Archives, *specifically in the facility known as the Public Works Hall [Salone delle Pubbliche Costruzioni].*<sup>60</sup>

## **The Return of the Records to Zadar (1949)**

On February 10, 1947, Italy and the Allies signed the Paris Peace Treaty. Article 12, clause 2, mandates Italy to return cultural heritage and administrative archives removed from November 4, 1918 onward, from the territories ceded to Yugoslavia. Similar provisions are found in paragraph 1 of Annex XIV, requiring Yugoslavia to receive *all administrative archives and records of administrative or historical value related to the ceded territories*, and paragraph 4, which demands the return of cultural heritage *removed without payment and currently held by the Italian Government or Italian public institutions.*

Meanwhile, Yugoslav authorities are actively pursuing the return of the Dalmatian archival heritage. In October 1947, an excerpt from the book "Human and Material Sacrifices of Yugoslavia in Her War Efforts (1941-1945)" appeared in *The American Archivist*, describing the relocation of the Dalmatian archives to Italy:

57 ACS, MI, 1945-1948, f. 83, file 48/2, G. Cencetti to G. Manganelli (1944 Jun. 15).

58 ACS, MI, 1945-1948, f. 83, file 48/2, G. Cencetti to G. Manganelli (1944 Jun. 18).

59 In that month, it proves particularly challenging to find an available railway wagon in Rijeka; ACS, MI, 1945-1948, f. 83, file 48/2, G. Cencetti to the Ministry (1944 Jul. 7).

60 ACS, MI, 1945-1948, f. 83, file 48/2, the State Archives in Venice to the Ministry (1944 Jul. 22).

*During the occupation period Italian representatives came over and instigated searches in various archives. [...] Dr. Giovanni Gabizza, the representative of Rome Government, caused all the more important papers in the Trogir Archives [...] to disappear. [...] Professor Cencetti, the Italian scientist and inspector of the Rome Archives, relieved the Nona, Split and Kotor Archives of 74 cases of documents and manuscripts written partly by Venetian and partly by local historians over the period from 13<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> century. These were taken away by the above professor. Further 157 cases of Archives and other material were shipped by the Italians on the s/s "Loara" [sic]. destined to Venice on 8<sup>th</sup> September 1943.*

The reconstruction of events is inaccurate and tends to portray a negative image of the two Italian archivists. Nevertheless, it remains a fact that the crates of records are still in Venice, and the Italian authorities are compelled to return them. Emilio Re is also aware of this, as reflected in his response regarding the Yugoslav claims (published in *The American Archivist* in 1949), where he merely provides a justification for the transport in 1943: *it is quite true that during the war and the temporary military occupation of the western shore of the Adriatic the Italian Archives Administration made provisions to remove the precious material of all of the archives located there [...]. However, this was done in conformity with a single plan, which had been applied already in the whole peninsula, for removing archives from the more exposed places [...]. It was done without mystery, openly, issuing each time regular receipts, which today, because of this, Yugoslavia has been able to enclose with requests for restitution presented to Italy [...]. Nothing therefore extraordinary or irregular, but simple, ordinary administration for protecting, in the interest of each of those noble little cities, documentary material [...] which otherwise could have been lost, and which instead in this manner has been saved.*

By the time Re's response is published, an agreement for the return of the Dalmatian archives has already been reached.<sup>61</sup>

Early meetings to determine which restitutions to undertake took place in Venice in the summer of 1948. As early as January 13<sup>th</sup>, 1949, the Dalmatian archival heritage, excluding that of the capital city, was ready to depart for Zadar. The crates reached Zadar on January 29<sup>th</sup> and were reinstated in the Archives. The archives of the city of Zadar, on the other hand, were delivered on July 31<sup>st</sup>, 1949. Thus, even in the realm of historical archives, a final chapter was written on Italian hegemonic aspirations in the Eastern Adriatic.<sup>62</sup>

61 *The American Archivist* X, 4 (1947), 400-401; *The American Archivist* XII, 1 (1949), 93.

62 Kolić, „Gradivo Državnog arhiva u Zadru“, 97-101; Elena Franchi, “La restituzione dei beni culturali alla Jugoslavia in base al Trattato di pace del 10 febbraio 1947”, in *La protezione dei monumenti e delle opere d'arte in Friuli Venezia Giulia nella Seconda Guerra Mondiale*, a cura di R. Cassanelli, R. Fabiani and R. Scopas Sommer (Roma: Ministero della Cultura, 2021), 169-170.

## Conclusions

The history of Dalmatian archives in the 20<sup>th</sup> century combines the actual challenges of preserving archival heritage with the underlying cultural policy shaping preservation efforts. In Dalmatia, the cultural policy adopted by Italian authorities since 1918 is clear: archival heritage is viewed as a tool to support hegemonic aspirations in the Eastern Adriatic. Both figures closely associated with the fascist regime, such as Francesco Salata and Annibale Alberti, and archivists from the Ministry of the Interior, like Giorgio Cencetti and Emilio Re, convey this perspective in their writings, where Italy also assumes the role of the civilizing nation in the Balkans.

After World War II, Italian interest in Dalmatian archival heritage significantly waned. It is only in recent decades that collaborations between Italian and Croatian specialists and archivists have revitalized historical studies. The hope is to continue on this path, acknowledging the importance of fostering connections between the two shores of the Adriatic.

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## **”Stari zapisi tvrde svijetu: Italija stoji ovdje”. Talijanske hegemonističke politike i dalmatinska arhivska baština (1918. – 1949.)**

### **Sažetak**

Ovaj znanstveni rad analizira postupke vlada Kraljevine Italije u vezi s dalmatinskim arhivima između Prvog i Drugog svjetskog rata. Cilj je pokazati kako su talijanske hegemonijske strategije doživljavale dalmatinske povijesne arhive kao korisni alat kojim će opravdati fašističku kulturnu politiku na istočnom Jadranu.

Rad je podijeljen u dva poglavlja. Prvo poglavlje obrađuje međuratno razdoblje i organizirano je u tri dijela. Prvi dio opisuje interes za dalmatinsko arhivsko naslijeđe za vrijeme prvog Namjesništva za Dalmaciju (1918. – 1920.). Drugi dio analizira pregovore između talijanskih i jugoslavenskih vlasti u Povjerenstvu za podjelu dalmatinskih arhiva, osnovanom nakon Santamargeritskih konvencija od 23. listopada

1922. godine. Posljednji dio opisuje povijesne događaje koji su pretvorili Arhiv starih spisa (*Archivio degli atti antichi*) u Državni arhiv u Zadru (*Archivio di Stato di Zara*), kao i uvjete u arhivu tijekom godina talijanske uprave. Drugo poglavlje, podijeljeno u četiri dijela, istražuje razdoblje koje počinje s talijanskom invazijom Jugoslavije (u travnju 1941.) i osnivanjem drugog Namjesništva za Dalmaciju. Prvi dio opisuje pokušaj organizacije dalmatinske arhivske uprave, uključujući i ličnosti poput Emilija Rea i Giorgia Cencettija. Drugi i treći dio rekonstruiraju preseljenje u Italiju najvrednijeg dijela dalmatinskog arhivskog naslijeđa, u čemu su ključne uloge imali senator Francesco Salata, predsjednik društva *Deputazione di Storia Patria per le Venezie*, kao i Annibale Alberti, potpredsjednik društva i povjerenik Ministarstva unutarnjih poslova za primjenu Zakona o arhivima od 1939. godine. Posljednji dio je zaključak znanstvenog rada s kratkim bilješkama o povratu dalmatinskih povijesnih arhiva u razdoblju između siječnja i srpnja 1949. godine.

**Ključne riječi:** povijest arhiva, arhivsko naslijeđe Dalmacije, talijanska hegemonija na istočnom Jadranu, fašistička kulturna politika, Emilio Re, Giorgio Cencetti, Francesco Salata