

CHAPTER EIGHT

INFRASTRUCTURES

Littoral Balkans: Venice and the Adriatic

The header 'littoral Balkans' begs some questions. It reminds us that 'Balkans', like 'Orient', is a culturally contested term. For Jovan Cvijić, as for Fernand Braudel, the Adriatic littoral was part of the Balkans. It existed in a symbiotic relation to its mountainous hinterland so that they formed contrasted parts of a cultural, as well as a geographical, whole.¹ Yet, as Bojan Baskar points out, this has not been a widely-held local view.² For cultural geographers such as Guido Miglia, the narrow strip of the eastern Adriatic coastline, which was never secured by the Ottomans, belongs not to the Balkans but to the Mediterranean.³ But that too is a culturally contested term. Defined by Braudel and others as a 'culture area' characterised by a topos of diversity within unity, 'the Mediterranean' has come to be understood more in symbolic or cultural than in strictly geographical terms; indeed the quality of *mediterraneità* has been subject to appropriations of various kinds, not least by Italian fascism. 'Mediterranean', then, might join 'Balkans' and '*Mittleuropa*' as a term with resonance.⁴

Where Dalmatia is concerned, it connotes the Italianate culture of the towns, open to the sea and cosmopolitan in character, together with an everyday culture (cuisine, architecture, interior design, lifestyle, music) that is removed from the colder, darker Dinaric interior (the contrast is spelt out by Andrić in *Days of the Consuls*). Within Dalmatia, the Istrian peninsula is sometimes singled out as distinctive: more culturally and ethnically mixed, a kind of Mediterranean in microcosm, with a tendency for (urban, maritime) Italians to cluster along the coast, and (rural) Croats or Slovenians to favour the inland territories.⁵ These are stereotypes,

¹ Cvijić 1918; Braudel 1990.

² Baskar 1999.

³ Miglia 1994.

⁴ See Driessen 1999, and other papers in this issue of *Narodna Umjetnost*. For a recent history of the Mediterranean, see Norwich 2006.

⁵ The historical differences, and their relevance to music, are discussed in Stipčević 1992.

of course. But the key point is that a Mediterranean culture has been a reality for many inhabitants of Dalmatia and Istria. One might indeed go further, and suggest that the Croatian lands extend the notion of 'in-betweenness' that will be developed in this book, in that they mediate culturally between the Mediterranean and *Mitteleuropa*.

For much of its history this coastal region was subject to the Venetian Republic, and for several centuries there was an extended war of attrition fought along the whole of the littoral, as the Ottomans pushed forward and harassed the Venetians in all their Adriatic and Aegean territories.⁶ It was a relationship of mutual dependency (mercantile and cultural exchanges between them began at an early stage), but on the coastal strip it was Venice that held the upper hand in cultural terms, and the legacy proved to be a lasting one.

It was not, however, without challenge. In later years, as both the Ottoman and the Venetian empires declined, the Habsburgs exerted a more pronounced cultural influence. They had long been a ruling presence in the Slovenian parts of Istria, and they controlled much of northern Croatia. But following 1815, in the wake of Napoleon's Illyrian adventures, the Habsburgs acquired the bulk of the Adriatic coastal provinces, and much of their hinterland too. It is unnecessary to spell out the constantly shifting political fortunes. The bigger picture is one of conflicting Venetian, Turkish and Austrian (or Hungarian) interests until the late nineteenth century, at which point developing nationalist aspirations in both Croatia and Slovenia came into conflict with the Habsburgs, and – in northern Dalmatia and Istria at least – with the irredentism of a newly unified Italy.

There is no neutrality in scholarship. Today this region is Croatian, and prior to that it was Yugoslav. But the national perspective can function as a distorting lens through which we look back at events, practices and materials. And it has functioned in this way in Croatian music historiography, with national labels assigned to composers and repertoires as though present-day political borders had a permanent meaning. It is instructive to set Croatian accounts of renaissance-baroque music in Dalmatia alongside Italian-based accounts. The Croatian scholar Josip Andreis wrote a detailed history of Croatian music, and one that has benefited from

⁶ For a period in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries the Venetian empire embraced much of the Peloponnese peninsula (Byzantine Morea).