

TELLING TIMES: MEMORIES OF CULTURE, CULTURES OF MEMORY

Lecture Series 2021



Tuesday, 8 June 2021, 16:00-17:30 (CET)

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“Mirrors of Habsburg Memory”

This talk examines both memories and legacies of the Habsburg Empire in coastal areas of the former Austrian Littoral (Österreichisches Küstenland) and the Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia (Königreich Lombardo–Venetien). The focus on coasts follows out of two principal questions: 1) In light of the often asserted cosmopolitan histories of multi-ethnic and multiconfessional maritime cities like Trieste and Venice, do we find memories or other indices of mixture and co-mingling associated with the Habsburg era? If so, in what form and for what purposes? and 2) Given the predominant image of the Habsburg Empire as a continental or terrestrial power indelibly associated with a notion of Mitteleuropa, in what ways do memories of the Austrian era resonate in Adriatic/Mediterranean sites? To what degree do invocations of the Habsburg past map onto its enduring literary, linguistic, and architectonic legacies?

In the talk, I explore the issue of what we might call “indifferent memories” — that is, indifference to the legacies of the Austrian era — and examine their relationship to expressions of national indifference or nationalism/national identity. Not surprisingly, such (Habsburg) imperial indifference emerges most clearly in Venice, despite the incorporation of the Venetian navy into the Austrian one and the building of extensive military fortifications on various islands in the lagoon. By contrast, Trieste — historically the great rival of Venice — represents an unabashedly Mitteleuropean site both in architectonic terms and in terms of self-identification and heritage commodification. Nonetheless, political expressions of nationalist indifference (such as independence parties past and present) have been overshadowed by vocal irredentist/Italian nationalist sentiments for the last century. And, famously, figures associated with Trieste’s late Habsburg Mitteleuropean literary milieu such as Italo Svevo and Umberto Saba identified strongly with Italy,

indicating the often paradoxical nature of identity in this port city. Is it any surprise, then, that one of Trieste’s most famous “Habsburg” literary haunts, the Antico Caffè San Marco, invokes Venice? The talk thus highlights the situational and shifting tides of indifference (nationalist and imperial) in contemporary memoryscapes, locating these within a regional Adriatic frame.

Pamela Ballinger is Professor of History and the Fred Cuny Chair in the History of Human Rights in the Department of History at the University of Michigan. She holds degrees in Anthropology (B.A. Stanford University, M. Phil Cambridge University, M.A. Johns Hopkins University) and a joint Ph.D. in Anthropology and History (Johns Hopkins). She is the author of *History in Exile: Memory and Identity at the Borders of the Balkans* (Princeton University Press, 2003), *La Memoria dell’Esilio* (Veltro Editrice, 2010), and the *World Refugees Made: Decolonization and the Foundation of Postwar Italy* (Cornell University Press, 2020). She has published in a wide range of journals, including *Austrian History Yearbook*, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, *Contemporary European History*, *Current Anthropology*, *Journal of Contemporary History*, *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, *Journal of Refugee Studies*, *Journal of Tourism History*, and *Past and Present*. Her areas of expertise include human rights, forced migration, refugees, fascism, seaspace, and modern Mediterranean and Balkan history.



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