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.

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