

Montenegro in Travel Accounts of Italian Authors in the Period of the Balkan Wars

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This paper explores the little-known travel accounts of various Italian authors who visited Montenegro before, during and after the Balkan Wars (1912–1913). These wars were important for Montenegro because of the decision of the state to act in concert with the other Balkan countries in order to expel the Ottoman Empire from Europe and to achieve greater territorial expansion. In addition to this, during the Balkan Wars, political and other relations between Montenegro and Italy were significantly redefined, after Italy had established rather narrow connections with the small Balkan state, especially following the marriage of the Italian Crown Prince Vittorio Emanuele III of Savoy to the Montenegrin Princess Elena Petrović-Njegoš (1896). We analyze the historical and socio-political context in which the image of Montenegro and of Montenegrins was created and define the characteristics of this discourse through the comparison of travel accounts of these authors with those published in previous epochs. We base our analysis on models of interpretation of the scholars who dealt with travel literature about Balkan countries in general, in order to make reference to the source of the discourse that the Italian authors embraced.

Key words: Balkan Wars, Imagology, Montenegro, Travel accounts



The Balkan Wars (1912–1913) represented the conclusion of a process aimed at expelling the Ottoman Empire from Europe, during which Montenegro, Serbia, Greece and Bulgaria joined forces in an attempt to circumscribe both their territory and their national state (Hall 2000, 21; Andrijašević and Rastoder 2006, 273; Ivetić 2006, 10–11). Despite the attempts of the Great Powers to prevent an armed confrontation, the First Balkan War began on 8 October 1912, with the declaration of war by Montenegro against Turkey. Ten days later, the other allied countries also entered the conflict, and in a few months Turkey, partly due to internal political issues, lost almost all of its territory on European soil, which led to the signing of the Treaty of London, dated 30 May 1913 (Andrijašević and Rastoder 2006, 277). In the Second Balkan War, which lasted from June to August 1913 and which this time broke out between the former Balkan allies because of arguments over the division of the territories conquered in the First Balkan War, Montenegro sided with Serbia and Greece, against Bulgaria (Andrijašević and Rastoder 2006, 277). The allies, joined by the Romanian army, defeated Bulgaria, which was forced to renounce the territories in question by signing the Treaty of Bucharest (Andrijašević and Rastoder 2006, 277).

The war in the Balkans forced Italian diplomacy into a defensive position. Italian public opinion generally supported the liberation struggles of the Balkan peoples. The Italian Government, on the other hand, had to be more cautious in order not to damage its relationship with Vienna (Biagini 2012, 80). In an attempt to maintain a balanced position in the Balkans, between a desire to affirm its presence and the intention to contain Austrian expansionism, Italy supported the idea of forming the independent state of Albania (Biagini 2012, 174). The Montenegrin government felt betrayed by this decision, because it expected the greatest support for its aspirations to come in particular from Italy, because of the dynastic and economic relationships that linked the two countries.¹⁶

16 Closer relations between the two countries had been enshrined in 1896 by the marriage of the heir to the Italian throne, Prince Vittorio



Italian public opinion was extremely well informed as to the participation of Montenegro in the First Balkan War. Both at the beginning of the crisis and during the military operations, various Italian newspapers sent their reporters to get first-hand news about the events. Some of them, such as Alessandro Dudan (1883–1957),¹⁷ Gualtiero Castellini (1890–1918),¹⁸ Eugenio Guarino (1875–1938)¹⁹ and Giulio Barella (1888–1942),²⁰ pub-

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- Emanuele III of Savoy, to the Montenegrin Princess Jelena Petrović-Njegoš – an event that had aroused enormous interest among Italians about Montenegro, and a large number of scientific and informative publications (Cronia 1958, 502; Kilibarda 1993).
- 17 Alessandro Dudan, born in Split, started writing about politics at a young age. He graduated in Law from Vienna, then devoted himself to a journalistic career by starting to collaborate with the newspaper *Dalmata*. He wrote for important Italian newspapers such as *La Tribuna*, *La Stampa*, *L'Adriatico*, *Il Messaggero*, *La Rassegna contemporanea*. Dudan arrived in Montenegro in 1911 and described this visit in the article “Travel notes in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in Montenegro and in Albania during the Malissori insurrection” (Dudan 1912). See Vittoria 1992.
 - 18 Gualtiero Castellini was born in Milan. He followed the Italian military operations in Libya, and later also the Balkan Wars as a war correspondent collaborating with *Il Carroccio*, *La Grande Italia*, *L'Idea nazionale* and *L'Illustrazione italiana*. He wrote various political works and travel reports. He visited Montenegro in 1912 and published his observations first in the *Illustrazione italiana* and then, with a few changes, in the monograph entitled *The Balkan Peoples in the Year of War, observed by an Italian* (Castellini 1913). See Merolla 1978.
 - 19 Eugenio Guarino was born in Naples. At a young age he joined the organization *Gioventù operosa*, and then the Neapolitan section of the Italian Socialist Party called *Il Fascio dei lavoratori*. He wrote for many newspapers connected with Socialism. Towards the end of 1901, he became a member of the municipal council of Naples, and in 1906 he was Vice-President of the Italian Socialist Party. From 1909 he lived in Rome, and later in Milan. He arrived in Montenegro in October 1912 as editor of the daily newspaper *Avanti!*, whose director at the time was Benito Mussolini. Guarino published his correspondence on the situation in the Balkans in a volume entitled *In the Balkans during the War: Letters from Montenegro, Serbia, Bulgaria, Rumania, Turkey*, (Guarino 1913). See Sircana 2003.
 - 20 Giulio Barella was born in Rovigo and, after studying Law, he collaborated with various Italian newspapers, including *Il Resto del Carlino*, *L'Adriatico*, *La Perseveranza* and *La Tribuna*. He visited Montenegro in October 1912, as editor of the Milanese newspaper *Il Secolo*. Barella

lished the impressions of their stay in the country in the form of travelogues.²¹ By offering a great deal of information and describing the specificities of the Montenegrin geographic and cultural space, they influenced Italian public opinion; not only are their writings therefore precious as primary sources for research, but they are also particularly useful for the analysis of the tradition of the representation of Montenegro and for the identification of the stereotypes and connotations related to this Balkan country that existed at this time.

From November to May 1912, two teams of Italian doctors also worked in Montenegro, sent to help the Montenegrins by the Italian Red Cross. One was stationed in Podgorica, under the supervision of Prof. Bartolo Nigrisoli (1858–1948) and the other at Lake Skadar, directed by Prof. Torquato Scocciati (Cipolla and Vanni 2013, 844). Both these doctors published their impressions on the permanence in those places, but odeporic elements are more present in the report of Scocciati (Scocciati 1914; Nigrisoli 1915). After the conclusion of the Balkan Wars, in 1914 the military doctor Stefano Santucci also went to Montenegro. As a member of the International Commission charged with delimiting the borders of northern Albania, he visited the border regions between Montenegro and Albania and published a travelogue about his stay in these countries (Santucci 1916).

Among the Italian visitors who offered a printed testimony about their stay in Montenegro in the turbulent period of preparation for the war, it is also important to mention the geographer Guido Cora (1851–1917).²² The Balkan Wars offered

published his correspondence in a book entitled *The Balkan Turkish War seen and experienced by Montenegrin outposts* (Barella 1913). See *Dizionario degli italiani d'oggi* 1928, 62–63; Rovito 1922, 30.

- 21 The selection of the material to be analyzed is based on the definition of those critics who believe that the travelogue is a literary genre modelled, from a thematic point of view, on a reliable journey made by the author who, in narrative form and in the first person, describes the places visited and the people met (Duda 1998, 48; Chirico 2008, 39–41).
- 22 Guido Cora, born in Turin, showed, from his high school days, a great interest in geography, publishing his first scientific article at the age of



an opportunity to authors to recall their previous journeys to Montenegro, and the Trieste writer Umberto Saba (1883–1957) published a memoir story of odeporic content in 1913, in which he narrated his visit to the country in 1904 (Saba 1913).²³

The travel accounts of Montenegro published during the Balkan Wars do not have many artistic pretensions and belong to the genre of scientific-journalistic writing. The reason for such a choice is attributable to the prevailing necessity of their publication, most notably the need to gather information on Montenegro and on Montenegrins at that precise moment in history. Most of these works are characterized by clear political propaganda tendencies, hence they deserve special attention because they highlight the change in Italian discourse concerning Montenegro, compared with the previous period.

While at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, thanks to the establishment of kinship relations between the ruling dynasties of Italy and Montenegro, the authors of travel books were interested in the history, geography, ethnography, literature, architecture, education and journalism of Montenegro, the travel accounts published during the Balkan Wars reveal the lack of this kind of interest, leaving considerable

eighteen. Inspired by the most important German geography magazine *Petermanns geographische Mitteilungen*, he founded the journal *Cosmos*. Later he became a correspondent member of the Royal Geographical Society of London, from which, in 1886, he received a gold medal. For the publisher Paravia of Turin he created a series of globes and physical and political maps, the best in Italy at that time. In 1881, he became an Associate Professor at the Faculty of Philosophy of Turin, and three years later he promoted the Society of Geography and Ethnography. From 1898 he held for many years, as a free lecturer, his own course of lessons. Cora visited Montenegro for the first time in 1899, describing his stay in the travelogue "In Montenegro. Travel Impressions" (Cora 1900/1901). At the time of the Balkan Wars he wrote an article entitled "The Balkan Peninsula at the present time. Travel Impressions" (Cora 1912), in which he describes his fifth journey to the Balkans in 1911. Cf. Surdich 1983.

- 23 On his return from Montenegro, Saba immediately published his impressions of this experience in a short report entitled "Montenegro" (Poli 1904).



space for political considerations, as indeed, considering the circumstances, was to be expected. These considerations reveal an evident subalternity to the majority political positions in the Italian public debate. Reporters of nationalist orientation or those who supported Mussolini's socialists, such as Dudan, Castellini and Guarino, give a representation of Montenegro full of irony, harsh criticism and polemical tones. On the other hand, Barella, the correspondent of the *Secolo*, which at the beginning of the twentieth century promoted the interests of Giolitti's government, and from 1912 also the ideas of the Italian Socialist Reformist Party (De Nicola 2012, 85–87), tries to represent Montenegro and Montenegrins in the best possible light. The attitude of Barella is shared by the geographer Guido Cora, while the writings of the Italian doctors contain very little in the way of political analysis.

Regarding the need to declare war on Turkey, and the general causes of the conflict, the opinions of these authors were quite divergent. During the Turkish–Montenegrin War between 1876 and 1878, when Italy had also waged wars fighting for the definition of its national territory, the Montenegrins had received great support from the Italian public, whereas during the Balkan War this support began to waver.²⁴ The nationalist Gualtiero Castellini saw in this war a fight for the economic emancipation of Montenegro, while Dudan and Guarino, supporters of Mussolini, who at the time was firm in his anti-imperialist position, criticized Montenegrin foreign policy, considering it adventurist. In contrast, Cora attributes the responsibility for the outbreak of the First Balkan War to the European powers, who had missed the opportunity to solve the problem of the Turkish–Montenegrin border by forming a mixed commission,

24 The Turkish–Montenegrin war from 1876 to 1878 brought to Montenegro the double benefits of territorial expansion and the international recognition of its independence at the Congress of Berlin in 1878. Among the Italians reporting from the battlefields of these events were the journalist Eugenio Popovic, who published his articles under the pseudonym Emilio Tergesti (Tergesti 1876) and the member of the Italian parliament Alfredo Serristori (Serristori 1877).



but also to the violence of the Turks, who had not allowed the Montenegrin authorities to find a peaceful solution to the question of setting boundaries.

These authors also dealt with broader political issues, analyzing the already very tense relations between Montenegro and Austria-Hungary, the Austro-Hungarian administration in the Balkans in general, and the position of Italy in the Mediterranean area. Since the Dual Monarchy was the main rival to Italy in the Adriatic, the correspondents holding nationalist views directed criticism towards its administration, expressing the hope that Italy would be able to restore its power to the territories once ruled by the Republic of Venice (Dudan 1912, 48–49; Castellini 1913, 15–16).

Furthermore, Gualtiero Castellini refers to the problems that Italy had to face in its attempt to maintain good relations both with Austria and with Montenegro (Castellini 1913, 7), while Guido Cora blames his government for a lack of support for the Balkan peoples, whereas Balkan inhabitants had followed with sympathy and affection the Italian conquests in Libya (Cora 1912, 289–290). Italy's final decision to support Albanian independence was justified by the fear that the creation of a strong Southern Slavic state could damage Italian interests in Dalmatia (Castellini 1913, 8).

Almost all of these authors devoted their attention to the relationship between Montenegro and Italy. However, this theme, which was always present in the Italian travelogues about Montenegro at the end of the nineteenth century, showed an approach that was very different to that found in earlier travel writers. The dominant feature of the travel accounts published on the eve of and immediately following the royal wedding in 1896, was the constant reference to the ties between Italy and Montenegro, to the proven friendship between the two peoples, to the same national objectives that united them, to the extensive knowledge of the Italian language and literature in Montenegro, as well as to the strong interest of the Montenegrins in the situation in Italy and its colonial conquests (Mantegazza 1896; Rossi 1896; Borsa 1896; Baldacci 1897; Corrodi 1899; Cagni 1899). This tendency remained in Barella's book and in



Cora's article, while the other authors who dealt with this topic gave a completely different picture of Italian–Montenegrin relations. Castellini believed that a dynastic policy between Montenegro and Italy did not exist and that the Italian influence in Montenegro, despite the collaboration in the economic field of the two countries, was irrelevant, whereas Guarino announced the worsening of diplomatic relations between the two countries due to the signing of the peace treaty between Italy and Turkey. The authors also insist on great differences in the mentality of the two peoples, representing the Italians as diligent and industrious, rational in their political decisions and committed to economic progress, while the Montenegrins are depicted as a fighting people who started conflicts for the simple enjoyment of fighting (Guarino 1913, 59–62). Even when they observe similarities between the two countries in relation to various negative activities, such as the disinformation of public opinion on the course and the result of military operations, the correspondents conclude that the Montenegrins do not do it “with the refined elegance of Italians but with rough barbarity and even with childish naivety” (Guarino 1913, 22).

The most significant changes in the forms of representation of Montenegro and Montenegrins with respect to previous travel accounts can be perceived in the descriptions of the Montenegrin King, Nikola I Petrović (1841–1921). Therefore, while the travel writers who had visited the country only a few years earlier described the ruler with admiration while resolving the controversies and complaints of his subjects, praising him in particular for his astuteness, his enlightened government and his open and cordial relationship with the people, while also representing him as a generous benefactor and the main driver of progress, later visitors criticize his absolutist government and his hostility towards the application of the Constitution, citing examples of political persecution and tyranny (Dudan 1912, 40; Guarino 1913, 18). During the Balkan Wars, for the first time we find evidence of deep political divisions within Montenegrin society and of the totalitarian government of the Montenegrin monarch. Authors such as Dudan, Castellini and Guarino point out that the modernization of Montenegro, achieved with the



adoption of the Constitution and with the institution of the parliamentary system in 1905, was only apparent and superficial, recognizing in it the emulation of a type of civil behaviour devoid of the true values of contemporary Europe.²⁵ The judgments on the intelligence and ability of Nikola I remain unchanged, but now these traits are qualified as exceptional craftiness combined with a great ruthlessness (Dudan 1912, 40; Guarino 1913, 17–18). His literary work, which was translated and praised in earlier travel books, is almost completely ignored in these later accounts. The attempt to dissolve the image of the rulers of the dynasty of Petrović as artists with a remarkable talent is also reflected in the loss of interest on the part of the travel writers in the literary opus of the famous ancestor of the Montenegrin King, the Prince-Bishop and poet Petar II Petrović Njegoš (1813–1851). Just a few years before, fragments of his works translated into Italian could even be found in the books of naturalists (Baldacci 1897, 18, 82). Even the sons of Nikola I, once portrayed as aristocrats of refined culture, who when needed would have been ready to demonstrate their patriotism and their warlike virtues, are now being harshly criticized, especially the heir to the throne, Danilo.

The homogeneity of the image of Montenegro as a backward and neglected country is also evident, in contrast to the dominant image in the travel accounts published at the time of the Savoy–Petrović marriage, in which the reader could easily distinguish the different characteristics of Cetinje as a political and cultural centre, of the mercantile cities such as Podgorica and Nikšić and of the rural villages on the outskirts of Montenegro. While the Italian authors who came to the country during and after 1896 highlighted its economic, social and cultural progress, those who wrote about Montenegro at the time of the Balkan Wars underline the defects of its development, despite

25 It is interesting that some Italian authors believed that the adoption of the Constitution and the establishment of parliamentarianism in Montenegro were in fact overly progressive events that could even lead to the ruin of the country (Mantegazza 1896, 204, 270; Mantegazza 1910, 157–158; Frenzi 1910).



the fact that the country was, at that time, much more modern and urbanized than it had been at the end of the nineteenth century. The authors also note that the merit of the Montenegrin economic progress achieved in the previous period was to be attributed to foreign capital, and they underline the key role of Italian investment, urging their government to take advantage of the opportunity to realize their own interests, to prevent a situation in which Italians would only be the pioneers in giving life to many projects whose fruits would have been collected by third parties.²⁶

Montenegro is also represented as a backward country because of the lack of social stratification characteristic of modern countries and due to the absence of class struggle. Unlike the travel writers who visited the country between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, who were for the most part lovers of traditional Montenegro, of its heroic society that developed naturally and independently, and that in their visions lived in the bliss of ingenuity, purity, naturalness, simplicity and frankness, as opposed to the artificiality and superficiality of the urban environment, the later visitors take as a point of reference the situation in their own country, interpreting the differences as defects in the environment they are confronted with.²⁷

One topic that aroused great interest in the Italian authors was the relationship between the members of various religious confessions. At the time of the Savoy–Petrović marriage the degree of civilization that Montenegro had achieved by promoting a multi-ethnic and multi-confessional state was glorified by emphasizing the mutual consideration and peaceful coexistence of Orthodox Christians and Muslims. Those inhabitants who followed Islam were represented as opponents of the heroic society

26 A group of Venetian capitalists opened some enterprises in Montenegro that led to the economic transformation of the small Balkan country (Vernassa 1976, 338–364; Burzanović 2009).

27 The romantic idealization of Montenegro as an ancient and healthy heroic community is also present in the travel accounts of other foreign travellers (Jezernik 2008, 113, 161; Šistek 2009, 257–260; Čagorović and Carmichael 2006, 62, 66; McArthur 2010, 82; Bracewell 2008, 181).



and its chivalrous-moral code, since they were mainly concerned with trade, or were portrayed as a community of backward traditions exposed to the beneficial effect of the modernization impulses and reforms of Prince Nikola I. By contrast, in the period of the Balkan Wars we are presented for the first time with an inverse image. Turkey, in Eugenio Guarino's book, is depicted as an advanced civilization against which the Montenegrins fought, guided by their innate barbarism, while the Muslim inhabitants are described as capable and enlightened citizens, oriented towards progress (Guarino 1913, 50–51). Stefano Santucci wrote on the continuation of the conflict between the members of different nationalities and religions in Montenegro after the end of the Balkan Wars, noting that the Muslim population in the territories just conquered by Montenegro hated the Montenegrins, who treated them violently, so that many were forced to emigrate as a result of fear of reprisals (Santucci 1916, 23–25). Although he records a case of the desecration of Muslim religious buildings, this author points out that the Montenegrin government was attempting to mitigate the effects of other national influences mostly through the school system (Santucci 1916, 23–25).

Men from Montenegro, both in times of war and in times of peace, were represented simply as warriors, but the view of the travel writers in relation to this image changed during the war in very specific ways. Although the Montenegrins were blamed for their monolithic warrior tradition and their lack of interest in economic development, many authors who wrote about the country in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were aware of the problem of the relative lack of fertile land, and also believed that the Montenegrins were not even able to deal with other activities, especially commercial ones, due to their alleged indifference to material wealth, something that in the eyes of some authors made them noble in comparison with other peoples. Moreover, the defects of the heroic society were rarely the subject of harsh criticism, representing, instead, picturesque details that contributed to the country's exoticism. In the period of the Balkan Wars, in Italian travelogues, for the first time, there is a tendency to dismantle the myth concerning the ability and skills of the Montenegrin warriors. Therefore, while



the authors describing the situation in Montenegro during the Turkish–Montenegrin war between 1876 and 1878 invited their government to study the way of fighting of the Montenegrins and praised the mastery of their leaders, the new reporters highlight the defects of their military education, despite the modernization of the Montenegrin army that had been carried out a few years earlier, and despite the experience that young Montenegrins had acquired in military schools abroad.²⁸ The image of fearless, skilled and experienced warriors, who had struggle in their blood, is now replaced by the appearance of clumsy and confused young men under the guidance of inexperienced officers (Castellini 1913, 36; Guarino 1913, 40, 49). In addition, the news related to Montenegrin victories is questioned, while information on those successes that could not be denied was accompanied by explanations according to which Turkey, by military tactics, had decided to withdraw from certain positions, or even that the Turkish soldiers in post on the outskirts of the Ottoman Empire were not even aware of the beginning of the war (Guarino 1913, 39). Unlike the travel writers who at the time of the previous Montenegrin conflict had emphasized the crucial role of priests and their desire to share the fate of the people in everything, we now find emphasis on the war-mongering activities of the Orthodox clergy (Dudan 1912, 43) or the comfortable life of the Metropolitan Bishop as compared to the hardships endured by the people (Guarino 1913, 24). These remarks mainly characterize the book of Eugenio Guarino, who described Montenegro with particular animosity. A completely different image is offered by Giulio Barella and Guido Cora, in whose writings the Montenegrins are described as virtuous and courageous warriors, who are contrasted with the treacherous, arrogant and cruel Turks.

The only thing that in fact ensured the glorification of Montenegro even in the travelogues of the early twentieth century was the patriotism and the extreme sacrifice of the people.

28 The Montenegrin army and its modernization were the main subject of the writings of the Italian sub-lieutenant Eugenio Barbarich, who had visited Montenegro in 1896 (Barbarich 1897).



Almost all the authors recognize, as fundamental characteristics of Montenegrin society, the complete dedication to the common goal, resistance and the desire for glory, and those who show sympathy towards the Montenegrins were impressed by the exemplary behaviour of its inhabitants (Scoccianti 1914, 15–16). Therefore, Barella provides an idealized representation of the Montenegrins who, driven by high aspirations of freedom and inviolable moral principles, drive away the Turkish tyrants, sacrificing, without hesitation, not only themselves but also their offspring, believing that no sacrifice is too great for the motherland. Offering such an image, he continues the tradition of *heroic discourse* on Montenegro, adhered to also by Torquato Scoccianti.²⁹

Another theme that caught the particular attention of the Italian correspondents in this period was the fate of the wounded. Guarino talks about the disorganization of the Montenegrin authorities concerning medical assistance, highlighting the fact that warriors remained for days on the battlefield or died along the difficult route to the hospital, and that even in hospitals they were not adequately assisted because of the absence of medical supplies and medicines, as well as of medical personnel. Doctor Scoccianti summarily confirms the claims of Guarino, emphasizing the problem of the slow transport of the wounded from the battlefield to the hospitals. Negligence is attributed mainly to the war customs of the Montenegrin people. In fact, he reports that the members of the health service, in contravention of the orders given, refused to leave the battlefield, taking care of the wounded only at the end of the fight. Among the problems he had to face during his service in Montenegro, Scoccianti indicated the same ones found by the correspondents of the

29 The *heroic discourse* appears in the first half of the nineteenth century, at the time of the decline of Ottoman power and popular uprisings that led to the establishment of various national states in the Balkans. The core of this discourse was the right to struggle for freedom and independence, and the Balkan warrior in that perception was not seen as a barbarian executioner but as a respectable and valiant hero (Šistek 2009, 265). With reference to Italian travel books, this type of discourse was dominant in the travel reports published during the Turkish–Montenegrin War of 1876–1878.

Turkish–Montenegrin war of 1876–1878 (Tergesti 1876, 210–211), most especially the firm refusal of amputation as medical treatment.

As in the case of authors who had published travel accounts on Montenegro in the second half of the nineteenth century, the later travel writers also showed interest in the attitude of men towards women, albeit to a much lesser degree. In all these travelogues the position of women represented a sort of cultural barometer in the evaluation of the progress that a civil state had achieved. Although the authors who noted the name of a Montenegrin woman with whom they had talked or her considerations about any subject were rare, in many travel books we find phrases of disapproval concerning the despotic attitude of men towards women. The Montenegrins are usually criticized for the physical exploitation of the fair sex, for their lack of interest in helping women in agricultural activities and for the little consideration they paid to women in social relations. However, towards the end of the nineteenth century, the Italian authors recorded some changes in Montenegrin society and praised the King's attempts to improve the condition of women. They also noted the advantages of their life by comparing it with the condition of their neighbours in the territories governed by the Turks, referring above all to their personal security and freedom of movement at all times of the day and night, even during wartime. The representation of Montenegrin men as the defenders of the right of women's mobility is also present at the end of the 1870s in the travel accounts of the authors who showed sympathy towards the Montenegrins. In the travelogues published at the beginning of the twentieth century, however, this tendency fades and the descriptions are of women carrying heavy loads and doing all the rural activities, while their husbands devoted themselves exclusively to the arts of war.

CONCLUSION

We can conclude that the Italian authors were aware of the role they would play in creating the image of Montenegro, carefully choosing a visual representation functional to didactic



literary production. In this regard, it is difficult not to pursue the general consideration that many authors, at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, published travel books on Montenegro to show that the small Balkan country deserved to be listed among the civilized countries dedicated to cultural, social and economic development, while many of those who described it in the turbulent period of 1912–1913 assumed the task of disputing such an image.³⁰ Therefore the discourse of Italian travel writers about Montenegro from the period of the Savoy–Petrović marriage to the proclamation of the Kingdom of Montenegro in 1910 was particularly assertive, despite the numerous political and economic problems that the country faced during this period, while the first extremely negative representations appear only at the time of the Balkan Wars. Although in these accounts there are examples of the exaltation of the humanity and the heroism of the Montenegrins, an ironic tone in the description of their characteristics or the socio-political order of the country is much more frequent.

Several factors might have contributed to the existence of this duality of discourse. The tradition of the glorification of Montenegro continues in the accounts of those authors who believed that Italy and Montenegro should cultivate friendly relations, to the political and economic advantage of both countries, an attitude that was in line with the official Italian policy towards Montenegro during the first decade of the twentieth century. On the other hand, a *Balkanist discourse*³¹ marked the travelogues of the authors who supported the ideas of the Italian opposition parties, whether they were nationalists, who

30 Negative representations of Montenegro and criticism of Montenegrin sovereign policies are also present in the works of other foreign travel writers in the early twentieth century, but the Balkan Wars led to their suppression and the reproduction of the traditional images of the Montenegrins as fearless heroes (Šistek 2009, 141–167).

31 The *Balkanist discourse* represents a system of stereotypes that leads to labelling the Balkans as a semi-developed, semi-colonial, semi-civilized and semi-Eastern region. This category is used to indicate the opposition to Europe, which symbolizes hygiene, order, self-control, respect for laws, justice, and effective administration (Todorova 2006, 68–69, 241).



believed that Italy should impose itself as a power that would assert its supremacy in the Adriatic, to the detriment of the political aspirations of the Southern Slavs, or, as was the case with Mussolini's socialists, great adversaries of military campaigns at that particular time.

Beyond the issues concerning the sphere of foreign policy, the appearance of negative representations was also conditioned by the fact that these authors encountered Montenegro in a context quite different from those who had visited it between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The circumstances of war affected the spheres of interest of the authors, directing them towards data relevant to military preparation and tactics, issues where Montenegro was disadvantaged compared with neighbouring countries (Hall 2000, 15, 18). An important role in the formation of the attitude towards Montenegro may also have been played by the correspondence from journalists from Scutari, which aroused the empathy of the Italian public for the inhabitants of the city under siege. Gino Berri, for example, wrote about the hunger, the cold, the terror and the other sufferings of the Albanians who suffered the siege and the bombardment of the Montenegrins (Berri 1913).

The authors' personal opinions about the way a society should function, created under the influence of the environment from which they came, also affected the representation of Montenegro to the Italians. Many of the defects and shortcomings of Montenegrin society were found in the modernization process carried out from the era of the Prince-Bishops to the time of the secular Princes. Although this process brought progress, it also made the country less exotic in the eyes of foreign travellers, showing instead its contradictions and limits (Caccamo 2011, 107). This confirms the thesis that in the *Balkanist discourse* the disdain for the Balkans was due not to its underdeveloped and primitive nature, but to the image of the evolution of a rural society into a bourgeois one – that is, the transformation to which the most economically developed countries had been subjected some decades before (Todorova 2006, 111). Therefore, in the travelogues of Italian authors who visited Montenegro during the Balkan Wars harsh criticism,



irony and sarcasm on account of the insufficient development of the country dominate; all this is written only a few years after the glorifications of its progress. Furthermore, the myth of the egalitarian society without conflict, regulated by the virtues of chivalry, has been dismantled.

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