

'Dalmatia': The Forgotten Milestone

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The most important moment in the history of liner navigation on the Dalmatian coast was the establishing of 'Dalmatia' steamship company in 1908. A century later this milestone is completely forgotten. But, the fact is hardly surprising! In all the past decades there were no serious attempts to describe the exciting years of battles pro-et-contra united shipping company; short but fascinating rise of 'Dalmatia' and her end only 14 years after.

Back in 1962 Dr.Oliver Fio, leading researcher of Croatian maritime history, published his capital work 'Parobrodarstvo Dalmacije 1878 – 1918' (Dalmatian Steam Shipping). A part of that excellent study dedicated to 'Dalmatia' is still the most relevant work on this important matter. But, after so many years few copies of Fio's book are available only in libraries.

Boosted by the fact, I prepared a short history of 'Dalmatia', based on Oliver Fio's work and the results of my own researches, especially on ships sailing in the company's fleet. I believe that publishing in ToMS magazine is the best way to make such an interesting story available much further than bookshelves.

Few, just as the copies of Dr. Fio's book, are the photos of the company's steamers. Still, thanks to the great help of Italian maritime historians and researchers Nereo Castelli and Mario Cicogna, history of 'Dalmatia' is illustrated with the photographs taken a century ago.

Officially, the story of 'Dalmatia' begins on the very first day of 1908 when the ships of the four Dalmatian shipping companies for the first time sailed under new flags and livery: great white letter D on traditionally black funnels. Few months earlier owners



Figure 1.

'Dalmatia' steamers at the port of Split.

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Figure 2.
'Brač'.

of companies Braća Rismondo of Makarska, Dalmatinsko-Istarska Paroplovidba Pio Negri i Drugovi of Šibenik, Serafin Topić of Vis and Zaratina Società di Navigazione a vapore of Zadar decided to merge their fleets in a Trieste-based consortium called Consorzio di Navigazione 'Dalmatia'.

These enterprises were the forerunners of coastal liner shipping in Dalmatia. The leading one was the Braća Rismondo. The first traces of Rismondo family's connection with the city of Makarska date back to 1789 and from the early 1850's they were permanent citizens. The family originated from Rovinj in Istria and as merchants often visited Makarska with their own sailing ships. The pioneer in shipping business based in Makarska was Frane Rismondo. His sons Vjekoslav, Petar, Ante and Ivan followed their father's business. Ante was a seafarer, firstly served on sailing ships, then became a master mariner and was later in command of the family vessels. In many registers Capt. Ante Rismondo, instead of Braća Rismondo, was stated as the owner of the ships.

In 1878 the Rismondos purchased two wooden steamers to operate a weekly line between Makarska and Metković. 'Barone di Rodich', later renamed 'Dalmazia', was built in 1858 at Sestri Ponente and 'Erzegovina' was built in 1868 in Trieste. 'Barone di Rodich' was 26.7 meters in length and powered by a steam engine of only 16 HP. 'Erzegovina' was even smaller and weaker with a 10 HP engine. Nevertheless, small 'Barone di Rodich' in November

1880 inaugurated a regular line Trieste – Metković, with calls at Zadar, Trogir, Split and Makarska.

In 1881 the company ordered the steamship 'Eco' of 29.2 meters from the Trieste shipyard Stabilimento Tecnico Triestino. Two years later from the same yard came a much bigger steamer 'Salve' of 43.3 meters. Later she was renamed 'Barone de Pino' and in 1901 became 'Jadro'. At the same time two more Trieste-built ships were purchased. 'Barone Rodich', built in 1878, was purchased in 1881, but only a year later, it was sold to the Turkish owners. Purchased in 1885 was the biggest Rismondo's steamer up to that date: 'Isea' of 42.9 meters. This ship lasted until 1911. On the very Christmas Day she caught fire and was forced to run aground on Sestrice Islet near Rogoznica, finally becoming a total loss.

One more newcomer from Stabilimento Tecnico Triestino entered fleet in 1888. She was 'Dinara' of 36.6 meters. From the same yard in 1896 came the steamer 'Mosor'. Until the establishing of 'Dalmatia' two second-hand steamers were purchased. In 1892 it was the famous 'Dubrovnik', built in 1880 at Dumbarton for Dubrovnik owners. The Rismondos renamed her as 'Biokovo'. The German-owned coastal steamer 'Brunsbüttel II', built by Howaltswerke at Kiel in 1896 was purchased in 1903. She was renamed as 'Brač' and sailed under the same name for 60 years, before being scrapped at Sveti Kajo breakers' yard.

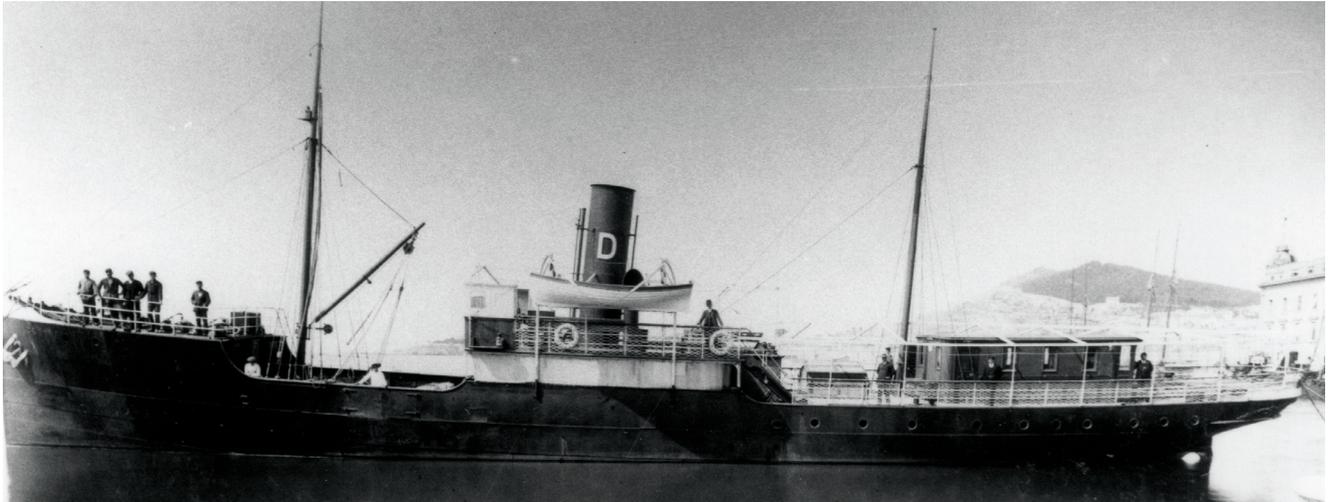


Figure 3.
'Cetina'.

The second Dalmatian steamship company was established on the Island of Vis in 1890 by the wine merchant and shipowner Serafin Topić. Serafin's father Ante came to the island from the village of Topići in the Dalmatian hinterland and in 1848 was

registered as a wine wholesaler. Serafin, with several partners from Vis, owned sailing ships 'Višanin' and 'Serafino', engaged mainly in wine trade.

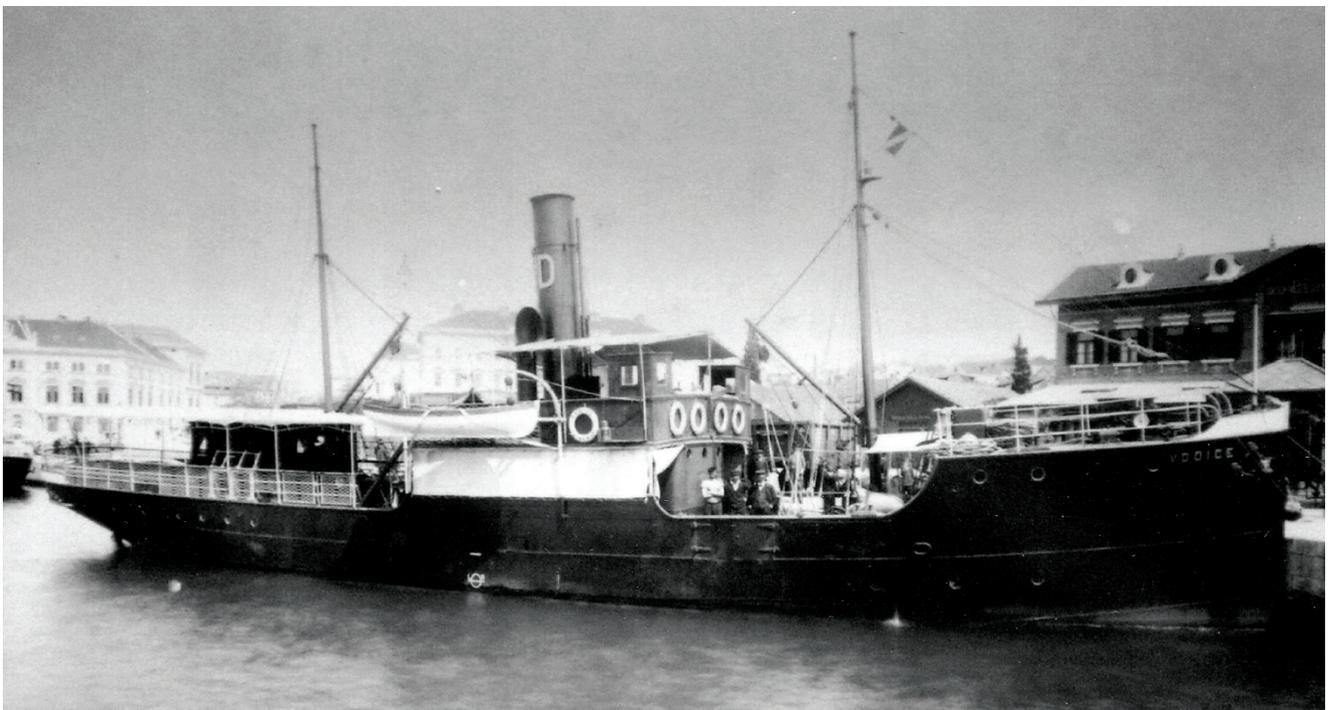


Figure 4.
'Vodice'.



Figure 5.
'Makarska'.

Topić made a grand entrance in the steam shipping world with a brand new cargo/passenger ship 'Vila' built in 1890 by Howaldtswerke at Kiel. It was a big and very modern ship of 46.4 meters and steam engine of 450 HP. She was engaged on Split-Trieste route, mainly carrying wine to the northern Adriatic and returning with general merchandise.

Still, ships that followed were far from being big and new. In 1892 Topić purchased from Franjo Olivieri of Senj the steamship 'Vitez'. She was a veteran, built at Blackwall near London in 1868 as a side-wheeled paddle tug. But shortly prior to purchase by Topić she was rebuilt and re-engined. In the same year fleet was boosted with its biggest ship named 'Vis'. Originally being 'Trieste' in the fleet of Österreichischer Lloyd, she was of 440 gross register tones and 62.4 meters in length. A big ship indeed, but she was built back in 1870 in Trieste, also as a side-wheeled paddle steamer. Shortly after purchase 'Vis' was sent to Trieste to be rebuilt into a twin-screw ship and re-engined with a 450 HP steam engine.

The third ship purchased in 1892 was a small steamer 'Zara', but she was sold only three years later. In 1893 another newbuilding from Howaldtswerke entered Topić's fleet, the relatively small 'Lussin' of 39 meters. The following year saw another newcomer, but again a veteran. She was 'Jason' of 51.4 meters, built by Glasgow shipyard of Blackwood & Gordon as 'Belle of Dunkerque' in 1876. One more veteran was purchased in 1899 and it was the last Topić's acquisition prior to the establishing of 'Dalmatia'. Originally built by Neptun shipyard at Rostock for German owners, but purchased from Italians, she was named 'Medea T'.

For many years after the creation of 'Dalmatia' it seemed that the Topić family left shipping business forever. But in 1926 Serafin's son Ante founded a company named Slobodna Plovidba Topić and, in a short time, became one of the leading Yugoslav shipowners. It is interesting to know that the family's flag and funnel markings are still on the blue lanes. The Topić company

Marfin Management, based in Monte Carlo, is today among the highly respected in the shipping world.

The third founding company of 'Dalmatia' association was Dalmatinsko-Istarska Paroplovidba Pio Negri i Drugovi of Šibenik, represented with a fleet of small and antique steamers. The first liner to sail in Šibenik area was 'Šibenik', built in 1875 in Gloucester as 'Augusta'. In 1878 she was registered in Split, being purchased by forwarding company Prini and Tartaglia. But that company lasted for only three years. 'Augusta' was bought in 1881 by Ante Šupuk, a businessman and the Mayor of Šibenik. In 1890 'Šibenik' became the first ship owned by Pio Negri.

Negri, one of the leading merchants in Šibenik, renamed the ship properly: the 'Primo'. A year later 'Nada' was purchased. But she was just a steam boat, only 11 meters in length, built in 1888 at Korčula for brothers Gustav, Josip and Jerolim Bonačić from Milna, Brač Island. 'Nada' was purchased by the company called Paroplovidba Pio Negri i Drugovi (often referred to as Pio Negri & Co.) as Negri's partners became Capt. Andrija Zafranović and the shipbuilders Krsto and Šimun Ježina. Only two years later 'Nada' was sold.

The third ship was purchased in 1892 and was renamed improperly: the 'Secondo'. It was also a small ship of 18 meters, built in 1868 in Trieste as 'Elvira P.'. In the same year the fleet entered second steamer named 'Primo'. The first one was sold and the brand new one was purchased from the shipbuilders in Mali Lošinj. In 1894 another newbuilding from Mali Lošinj, named 'Tommaseo', entered the fleet.

Paroplovidba Pio Negri i Drugovi became a strange mixture of new ships and obsolete steamers. In 1896 'Sibyl', a ship with a very interesting history was purchased. She was built in 1872 by Day, Summers & Co. in Southampton as a yacht 'Sibyl' for William Lon. In 1884 she was sold to Prince Nikola of Montenegro, but kept her original name. The Prince, later to become the King, was known for his passion for yachts and during his reign he owned ten royal pieces. Obviously, 'Sibyl' didn't meet his expectations, so in 1886 he sold her to Mate Švrljuga from Rijeka. Rebuilt into a passenger ship she kept the name 'Sibyl' and sailed in the northern Adriatic until 1896, when she arrived at Šibenik to be renamed 'Krka'.



Figure 6.
'Mosor'.

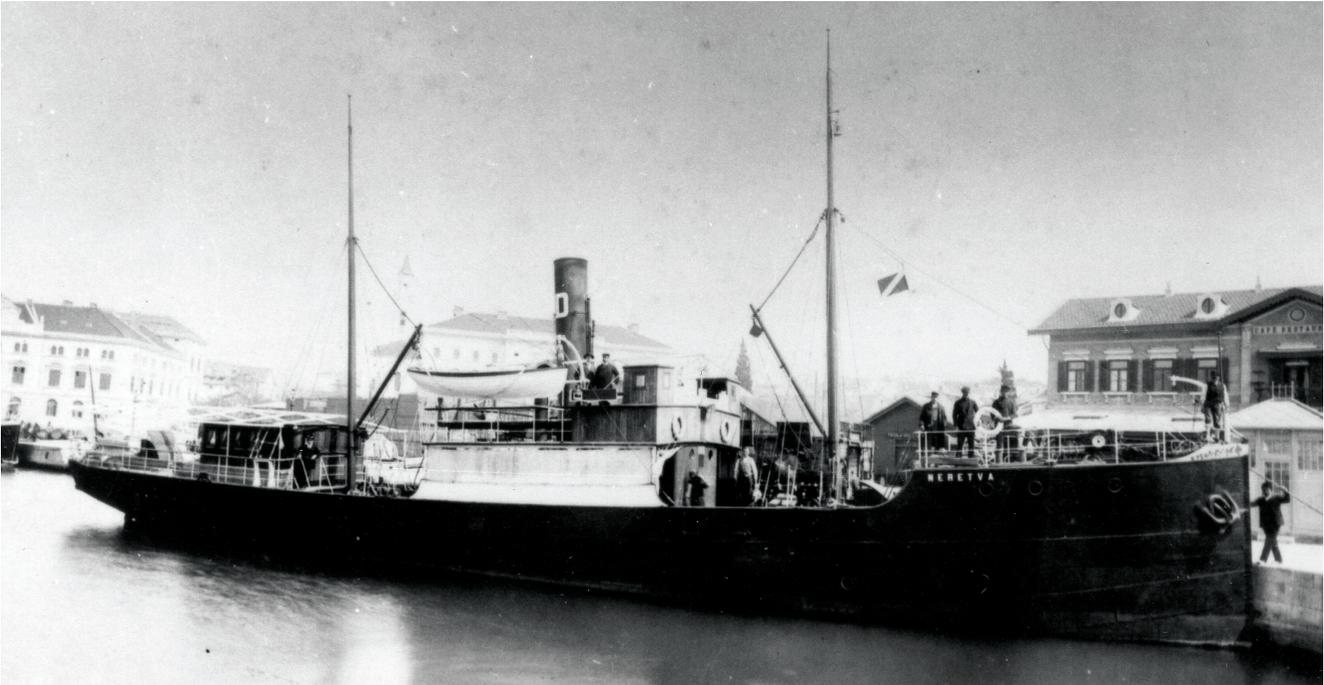


Figure 7.
'Neretva'.

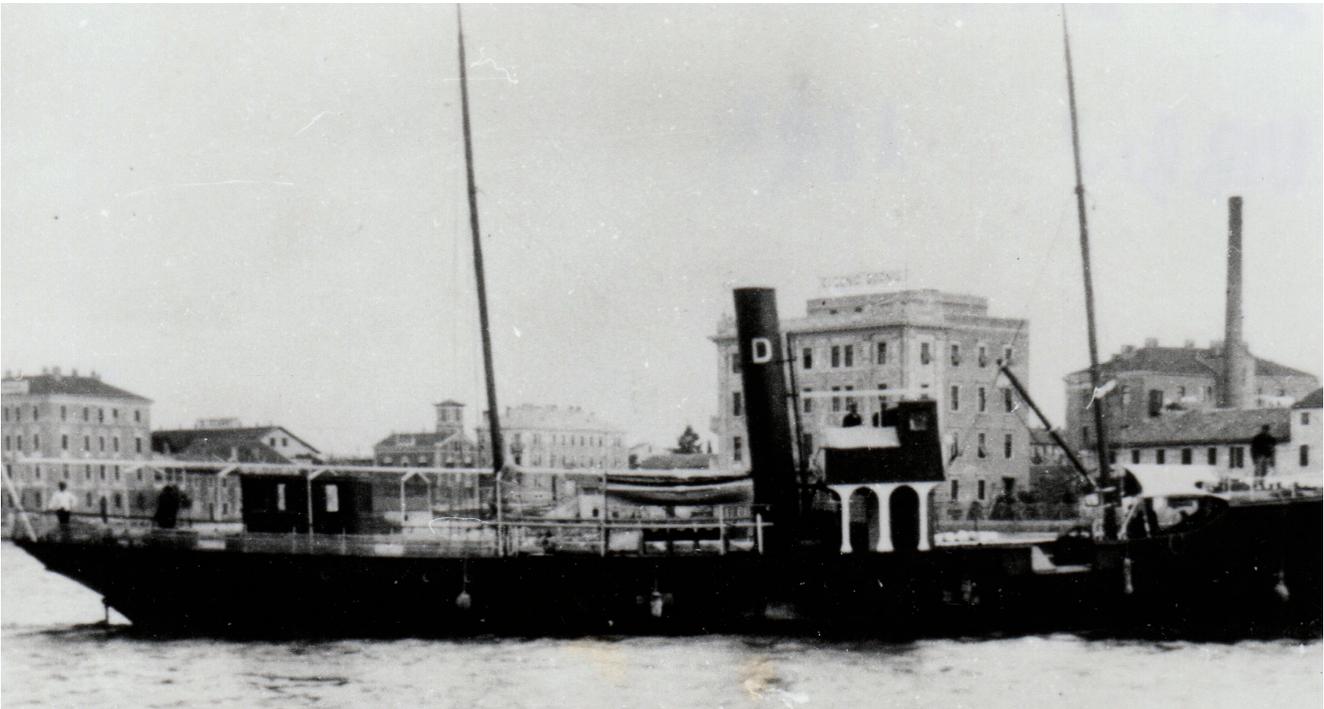


Figure 8.
'Nibbio'.

A year later 'Zlarin', built in Kiel in 1866 as 'Worwärts' was purchased. Then, in 1898 from Mali Lošinj came the pride of the fleet, a brand new steamship 'Sebenico' of 41.2 meters. Only a year later the ancient 'Iniziatore' was bought. She was built at Marseilles in a year unknown and in 1883 was rebuilt by Stabilimento Tecnico Triestino. Very often 1883 and Trieste are quoted as a year and place of her construction. Not so ancient was the 'Risorto', purchased in 1900. As 'Flink', she was built at Mali Lošinj in 1886.

In 1904 the company name was changed to Dalmatinsko-Istarska Paroplovidba Pio Negri i Drugovi (Dalmatian-Istrian Steam Shipping), primarily to point out that Pio Negri was born in the Istrian city of Labin. The only acquisitions of the newly named company were 'Istriano' and a second ship named 'Krka'. The brand new 'Istriano' was built in 1904 by Stabilimento Tecnico Triestino, but a year later she was sold to Ungaro-Croata. In 1905 the steamer 'Cherso', built in 1898 at Mali Lošinj as 'Barone de Chlumecky' was purchased. She became 'Krka' after the existing ship under that name was christened 'Obrovac'. The last ship to enter the fleet was the old steamer 'Nada', purchased in the late 1907 from the Italian owners. She was built in 1885 at Wallsend-on-Tyne as the yacht 'Salamander'.

A tiny shipping company 'Zaratina' was the fourth founding father of 'Dalmatia'. In 1888 Giuseppe (Josip) Perlini, a prominent merchant and property owner of Zadar, purchased at Senj the wooden steamship 'Vinodolac' of 24.7 meters and renamed her 'Falco'. Thirteen years earlier she had been built by Stabilimento

Tecnico Triestino as 'Capodistria'. In 1892 Perlini with his partners ordered two somewhat larger wooden steamers in Mali Lošinj: 'Airone' and 'Rondine'. These wooden coasters became the cornerstone of 'Zaratina', Societa di Navigazione a Vapore, founded in Zadar in 1895 by a group of local entrepreneurs.

Until 1908 and the creation of 'Dalmatia' only two ships entered the fleet. In 1899 from Mali Lošinj arrived a brand new steamer 'Nibbio' of 33.8 meters and in 1903 the company's flagship 'Zara'. Built by Rotterdamsche Droogdok Maatschappij, she was a sturdy passenger/cargo ship of 43 meters, with steam engine of 420 HP. She lasted for 62 years. Under the name of 'Hvar' she arrived at Sveti Kajo breaking yard in April 1965.

On the fleet list of 'Dalmatia' from January 1908 by far the biggest are the steamships 'Bosnia' and 'Danubio' of the mighty Österreichischer Lloyd. During the painstaking negotiations about united Dalmatian company, Lloyd acted on behalf of the Government in Vienna and eventually became one of the partners with these two ships. 'Bosnia' was a ship of 49.6 meters with powerful steam engine of 600 HP and she was delivered to Lloyd in the summer of 1899 by Lloyd's own Arsenal in Trieste. On the contrary, the much bigger 'Danubio' of 62.7 meters was a worn-out veteran, being built by 'Vulkan' shipyard at Stettin back in 1866. While 'Bosnia' was estimated at 330.000 Austrian Krone, 'Danubio' was worth only 50 thousand.

So, it seemed that on the New Year's Day of 1908 ended the war that lasted from the late 19th century: the pro-et-contra war of words about the united steamship company on the Dalmatian

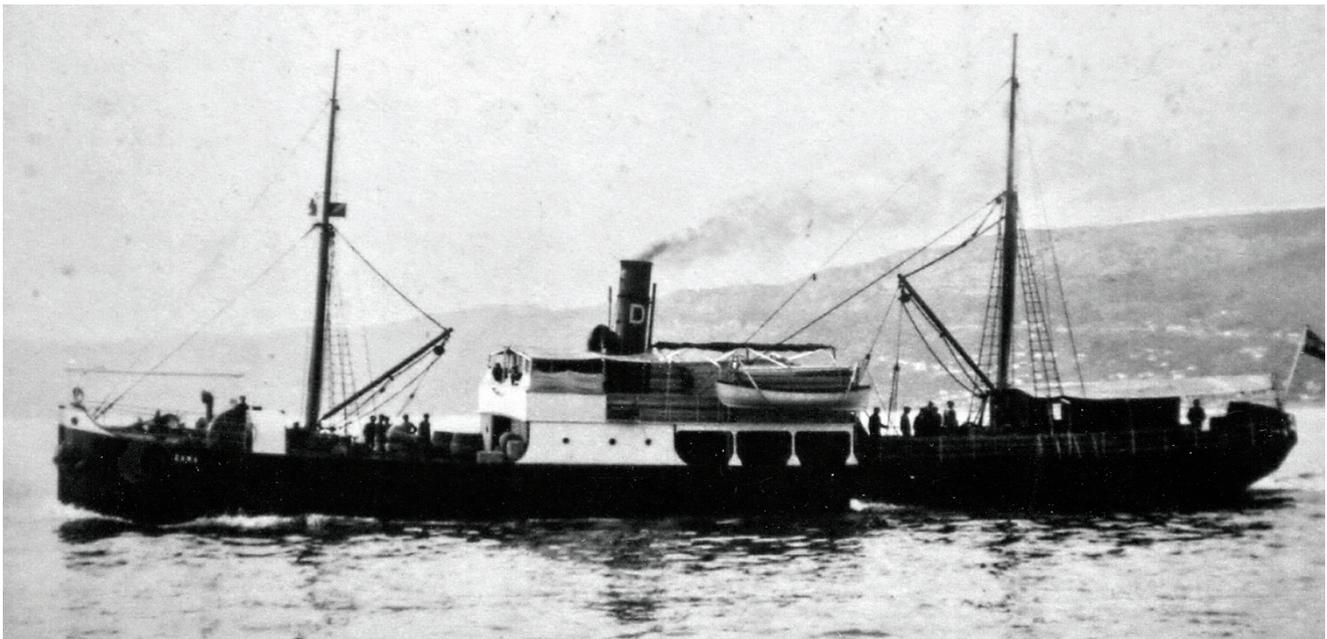


Figure 9.
'Zara'.

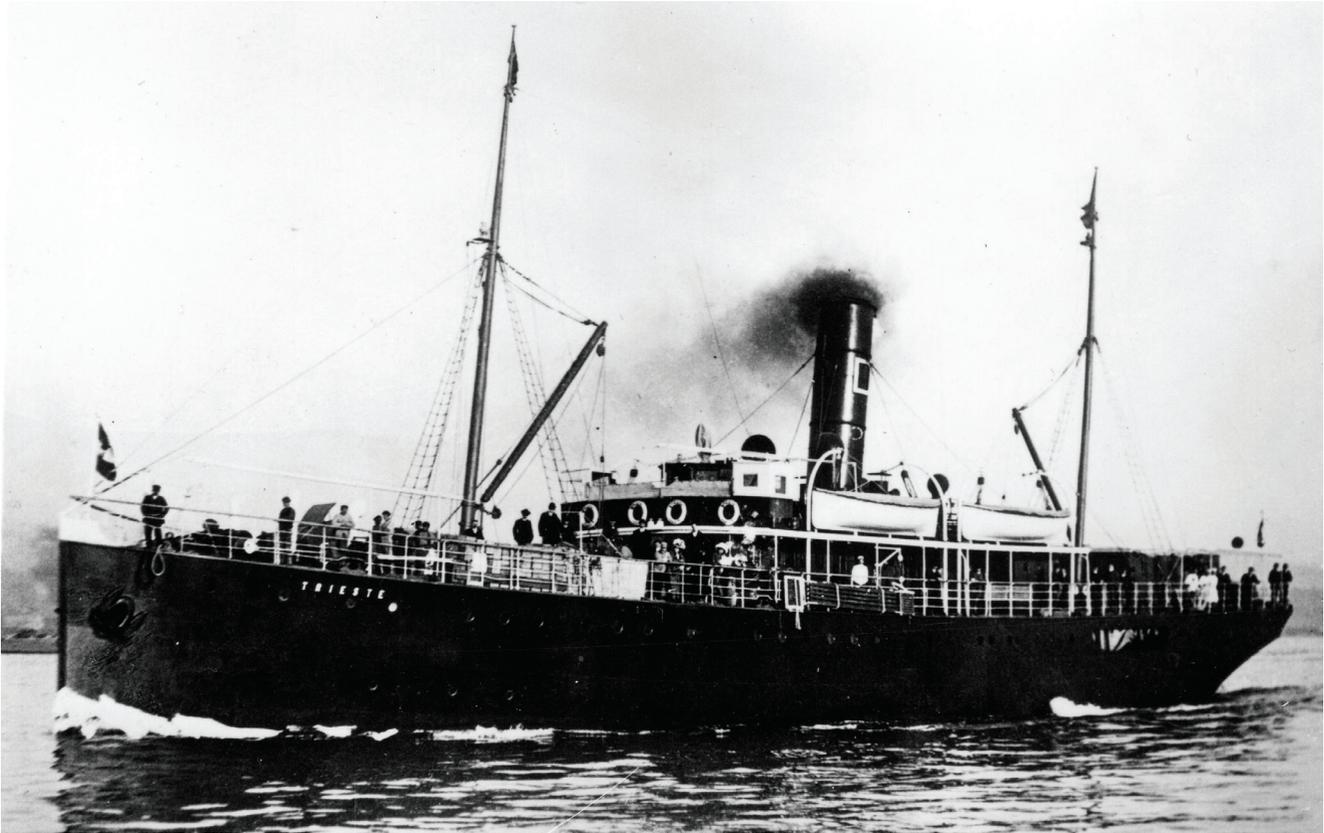


Figure 10.
Pride of the fleet: 'Trieste D.'

coast. It is impossible to describe in short all that was happening, as it was quite a complex mixture of political and economical interests, huge distrusting and fears, national sentiments, petty local interests and alike.

The steam navigation in Dalmatia was lagging behind the northern Adriatic where *Österreichischer Lloyd* and *Ugarsko-Hrvatsko Dioničko Pomorsko Parobrodarsko Društvo*, better known under the Italian short name *Ungaro-Croata*, ruled the sea lanes. There were many initiatives to establish a Dalmatian company strong enough to deal with the Austrian and Hungarian competitors. The leading entrepreneurs required a single company having in mind the possibility for significant cutting of transport costs and, thus, attracting the cargoes into Dalmatian ports.

At the end of the 19th century the Croatian national sentiment was very strong in Dalmatia. In the early 1880's the supporters of the Croatian national revival won the elections in the Dalmatian cities and in 1883 Croatian had been declared the official language. A Croatian shipping company was a matter of national pride. But there were strong oppositions of all kinds. Especially expressed was a fear that the authorities in Vienna and

Budapest would, sooner or later, find the way to control such a company.

The most serious initiative for the merger of Dalmatian shipping companies came in 1904, not from the Dalmatian cities but from Ljubljana in Slovenia. Dr. Ivan Hribar, director of *Ljubljanska Kreditna Banka* and the Mayor of Ljubljana, met on the 24th of February with numerous prominent Dalmatians, including shipowners *Serafin Topić*, *Ante Rismondo* and *Pio Negri*. He presented a very detailed plan on the merger of the Dalmatian companies, supported by the Croatian and Slovenian banks. Hribar insisted that his only aim was a strong company able to compete with *Lloyd* and *Ungaro-Croata*.

But the proceedings of that meeting were sent only to the Maritime Government in Trieste and the Ministry of Commerce in Vienna, being unavailable to the Split Chamber of Commerce and other interested parties. As expected, that caused anger and immense distrust on Hribar's initiative. The battles lasted for months and years. Finally, under the official Vienna auspices, on August 27, 1907 a framework for agreement on 'Dalmatia' consortium with the head office at Trieste was adopted. The opponents of 'Dalmatia' acted promptly by establishing a



Figure11.
Delivery of 'Trieste D.' at Monfalcone.

company called Dalmatinska Plovidba. But, to make the story shorter: the Final agreement on 'Dalmatia' was signed in Vienna on November 27, 1907 and the company was brought to light on January 1, 1908.

Only two weeks later, on the 15th of January, the new company was hit by a general strike of crews. Contrary to the earlier strikes on the coastal steamers, this one was led by the captains and not the ordinary seamen. The management of 'Dalmatia' abandoned the usual communication with the captains on the issues of wages, food allowances and pension conditions, thus making a way for rumours and fear. Captains, already doubtful about the company intentions, believed in the rumours that the former Austrian naval officers would be preferred as masters on 'Dalmatia' ships. Above all expectations, the dramatic strike lasted for two weeks and was finally ended on January 29.

So, the fleet renewal became again the main issue of 'Dalmatia'. The number of 30 ships sounds mighty, but in reality it was a rag-tag fleet of steamers of all shapes and sizes, with only one ship built in the 20th century! Many ships were wooden, far more were built of iron and not steel, generally powered by weak steam engines and being very slow. The real strength and importance of 'Dalmatia' was the ambitious newbuildings programme.

The results were visible in the first year of the company's existence. Stabilimento Tecnico Triestino built four most modern coastal liners: sisterships 'Cetina' and 'Makarska' of 42.4 meters

and a smaller pair of 'Adria' and 'Vodice' of 34 meters. On the trials, 'Cetina' and 'Makarska', powered by steam engines of 520 HP, achieved the speed of 14 knots. All of these steamers proved reliable and durable and, except for 'Vodice', which was lost in the Second World War, sailed for nearly 60 years.

In the history of 'Dalmatia' 1909 was the most important year. From the shipyard of Marco U. Martinolich at Mali Lošinj came another pair of modern coastal liners – 'Liburnia' and 'Neretva' of 37 meters. But, the prides of fleet came from Cantiere Navale Triestino at Monfalcone, the brand new shipyard of the Cosulich brothers. They were the sisterships 'Trieste D' and 'Split D', newbuilding numbers 1 and 2. The ships of 60 meters, powered by 1,000 HP steam engines and with the speed of 13 knots, were near copies of the successful Lloyd's liners 'Metcovich' and 'Almissa' built in 1893.

Together with the fine new ships came the new organisation of the company boosted mainly by the Government in Vienna. On June 21, 1909 'Dalmatia' became joint stock company named Austrijsko Parobrodarsko Društvo na Dionice in Croatian, Österreichische Dampfschiffahrts-Aktiengesellschaft in German and Società Anonima Austriaca di Navigazione a vapore in Italian. The old companions became shareholders in the company worth 3 million Krone. Serafin Topić was the biggest one with the shares worth 806,000 Krone, than followed Rismondo (794,800), Pio Negri i Drugovi (570,400), 'Zaratina'(478,800) and Österreichischer Lloyd with the shares of 380,000 Krone.

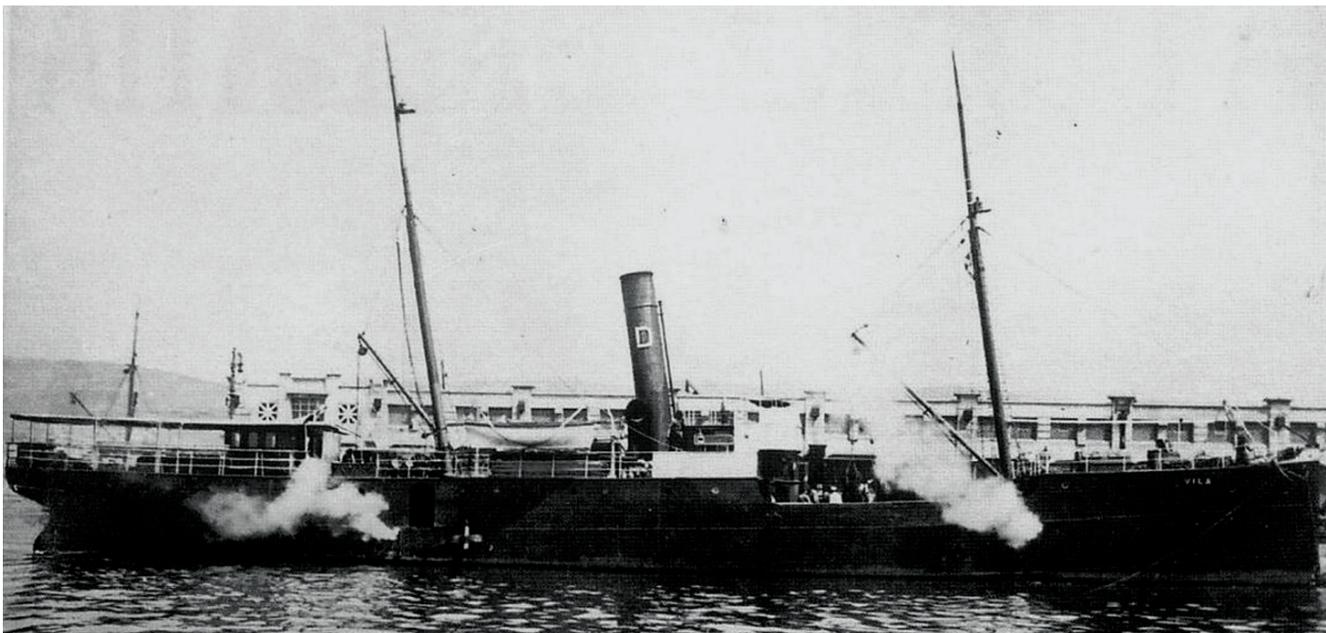


Figure12.

'Vila' – the only victim of WWI.

The following year Lloyd entered the company with a big, but antiquated liner 'Sultan' of 61.4 meters. She was built back in 1863 by Vulkan yard at Stettin with the traditional clipper bow of the sailing ships. Only three years later 'Sultan' became a casualty. On June 25, 1910 she hit a rock near Vis, but managed to reach the port of Vis where she sank. Raised and towed to Trieste, she was abandoned to the underwriters. She was purchased by Austro-Americana of Trieste, repaired and returned to service as 'Josephine'. Still, she was ill-fated. In September 1914 she struck a mine and sank off the Istrian coast.

The total of 11 newbuildings entered the fleet in only six years, making 'Dalmatia' success story so impressive. The last three were built in 1913. The sisterships 'Velebit' and 'Zrmanja' of 28 meters were built at Mali Lošinj and 'Hercegovina' came from Akers yard of Norway. She was a sturdy ship of 58 meters and with the cargo capacity of 960 tons. In December 1914 came 'Val', the very last entry in the fleet. She was also a cargo ship, but a very old one, built in 1888 at Sunderland as 'Portslade' for the renowned Stephenson Clarke company.

During the First World War the majority of 'Dalmatia' steamers were requisitioned for various military duties and the only 'Vila' was lost by the enemy action. On June 30, 1918 she was torpedoed and sunk by the Italian submarine 'F 7' near Šibenik. After the armistice all the company's vessels passed under the control of the Inter-Allied Reparations Commission (IARC). In September 1920 Italy and the newly formed Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (later renamed Yugoslavia) concluded the Trumbić - Bertolini Agreement and divided the fleets of the Austro-Hungarian shipping companies. By the Agreement, confirmed by IARC in August 1921, the fleet of 'Dalmatia' was divided at the ratio of 65:35 in favour of Yugoslavia.

In 1921 the offices were moved from Trieste to Split and the company title was changed to 'Dalmatia' Parobrodarsko d.d. Previously, in 1919, the word Austrian was deleted from the name. The final chapter of 'Dalmatia' history was written in the late 1922, when it merged with five other coastal shipping companies to form Jadranska Plovidba d.d. On January 1, 1923 the black funnels with the large white D disappeared from the Adriatic...

Table 1.
‘Dalmatia’ fleet list.

entry	steamship	GRT	YOB	place of built	owner
1/ 1/ 1908	AIRONE	64	1892	Mali Lošinj	Zaratina
	BIOKOVO	229	1880	Dumbarton	Rismondo
	BOSNIA	540	1899	Trieste	Lloyd
	BRAČ	135	1896	Kiel	Rismondo
	DALMAZIA	57	1858	Sestri Ponente	Rismondo
	DANUBIO	817	1866	Stettin	Lloyd
	DINARA	118	1888	Trieste	Rismondo
	ECO	85	1881	Trieste	Rismondo
	FALCO	49	1875	Trieste	Zaratina
	INIZIATORE	37	n/a	Marseille	Pio Negri
	ISEA	225	1881	Trieste	Rismondo
	JADRO	237	1883	Trieste	Rismondo
	JASON	407	1876	Glasgow	Topić
	KRKA	110	1896	Mali Lošinj	Pio Negri
	LUSSIN	253	1893	Kiel	Topić
	MEDEA T.	217	1872	Rostock	Topić
	MOSOR	132	1896	Trieste	Rismondo
	NADA	161	1885	Wallsend-on-Tyne	Pio Negri
	NIBBIO	112	1899	Mali Lošinj	Zaratina
	OBROVAC	55	1872	Southampton	Pio Negri
	PRIMO	42	1891	Mali Lošinj	Pio Negri
	RISORTO	110	1886	Mali Lošinj	Pio Negri
	RONDINE	85	1892	Mali Lošinj	Zaratina
	SEBENICO	297	1898	Mali Lošinj	Pio Negri
	TOMMASEO	67	1894	Mali Lošinj	Pio Negri
	VILA	405	1890	Kiel	Topić
	VIS	440	1870	Trieste	Topić
	VITEZ	186	1868	London	Topić
	ZARA	338	1903	Rotterdam	Zaratina
	ZLARIN	94	1866	Kiel	Pio Negri
1908	ADRIA	164	1908	Trieste	
	CETINA	226	1908	Trieste	
	MAKARSKA	226	1908	Trieste	
	VODICE	154	1908	Trieste	
1909	LIBURNIA	160	1909	Mali Lošinj	
	NERETVA	160	1909	Mali Lošinj	
	SPLIT D.	896	1909	Trieste	
	TRIESTE D.	896	1909	Trieste	
1910	SULTAN	752	1864	Stettin	
1913	HERCEGOVINA	748	1913	Kristiania	
	VELEBIT	100	1913	Mali Lošinj	
	ZRMANJA	100	1913	Mali Lošinj	
1914	VAL	594	1888	Sunderland	