
My Father; from Slovene, to Italian then Australian!

A BRIEF HISTORY OF TRIESTE

Trieste, the birthplace of my father, has a colourful and diverse background.

Historical records show that the region where Trieste currently lies, was occupied by settlers during the Neolithic period, some 12,000 years ago. The first Indo-European groups that appeared there were known as Histri (living in Istria) around the 10th century BCE. This area would become known by its German name of Tergeste, a Roman municipality following the Roman conquest of Istria in 177 BC (or BCE).



Source—[Wikipedia](#)

Ancient Roman settlement remains can still be seen at the city's historic centre of San Giusto Hill. The Roman temples dedicated to Jupiter and Athena are also visible in some of the architecture of the Basilica di San Giusto.



Basilica di San Giusto, Roman ruins

Another ancient monument that is still visible today is the Arco di Riccardo; a city gate that was purportedly traversed by Richard the Lionheart on his journey from the crusades. But it could also have come from the Latin name 'Cardo', given to the main streets in the north-south direction in olden Roman times.



Arco di Riccardo

After the fall of the Western Roman Empire, the region became part of the Kingdom of Italy around 476–493 AD. During the mid-500s, it was turned into a military colony under the Byzantine Empire (also known as the Eastern Roman Empire centred around Constantinople), before being destroyed by the Lombard's (of Germanic origin) a few years later. It was rebuilt by the Franks (northern Germanic) some years later in 788 AD.

Over the ensuing years, the area and city went through various 'owners', from the Kingdom of Italy to the clergy, namely Bishop John III, before finally, being given to the local community by the Government of Trieste, establishing Trieste as a free municipality in 1295 AD.

Over many years since, Trieste has had to overcome several insurgencies, both from within Italy (Venice for one!) and externally by Austria, France and Italy. Some of these were instrumental in the development of Trieste; it became a major port due a major railway built from Vienna, in Austria, which also built and expanded the shipping port.

During the years leading up to the end of WWI in 1918, both the Italian-speaking population and the Viennese bureaucracy were concerned about the spread of the Slavic population. This period was also marked by a series of wars of independence by the Italians against the Viennese policies of centralisation and Germanisation (along with Slovenians). This was in part due to a general anti-Italian sentiment within the Habsburg dynasty ruled by Franz Josef of Austria!

There was also a concern in other areas such as education and the labour market. With a diverse ethnicity in the region and city, it gave rise to a need for retaining the Italian but, supporting its neighbours whilst appeasing the then, Austrian authority.

Fear grew among the Italian community, that with Slavic immigration, the Italian way of life would be eroded, much as had happened in Dalmatia years before. This led to a period of conflict and persecution of the Slovene ethnic community by the rising Italian Fascism movement, with rioting destroying many Slovene owned shops and buildings.

During the latter part of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a movement grew for the annexure of Trieste to Italy. This movement of irredentism¹ grew from its foundations in the late 1800s to where Trieste was annexed to Italy in November 1918.

Contrary to this movement, following WWI, a growing group of anti-Fascists and anti-Italians was formed, mainly of disorganised Slavic radicals. In 1927 a group called TIGR (an abbreviation of Trieste-Istria-Gorizia-Fiume or Trst-Istra-Gorica-Reka), was formed and began a wave of bombings and assassinations with the goal of annexing Trieste (and other Italian lands) to Yugoslavia!

Interestingly, this group was aligned with communism and supported by Yugoslav and British secret services in the 1930s—the group began smuggling weapons from Yugoslavia in the hope of a rebellion against Italy. They had also planned an assassination attempt on Benito Mussolini in 1938. By the end of 1941, the group had begun to disappear as most of their leaders were arrested and imprisoned. Many of the remaining TIGR members later joined the Yugoslav Partisans.

Towards the end of WWII, Trieste was once again at the mercy of various occupying groups, firstly the Germans (Italy had changed allegiances in 1943 to the allies), then by Yugoslavia and NZ troops (as part of the allied forces). Germany eventually fled in early May of 1945, then Yugoslavia formed its own military rule in the city and began arresting members of the Italian democratic resistance forces. Yugoslavia eventually withdrew its forces under pressure from the allies.

Trieste was declared an independent state, protected by the UN in 1947. The Free Territory of Trieste was governed by an allied military government for several years. Parts of Trieste were under the control of the allies and part under Yugoslav rule until 1954, where the allied zone was annexed to Italy and the eastern areas to Yugoslavia. In 1975, the extent of the borders and status of the ethnic groups (Slovenes in Italy and Italians in Yugoslavia) was settled under the treaty of Osimo.

Each year on October 26 the Italians celebrate the anniversary of the return of Trieste to Italy. Trieste is known as the most Italian city and remains one of the most proud and patriotic cities in all of Italy. But, even as recent as 2014, there have been demonstrations by the Slovene minority, backed by communist ideologies. And so, the political scene is still to be watched.



Trieste

¹ See <http://istria-fiume-dalmatia.blogspot.com/2016/10/making-trieste-slavic-ethnic-cleansing.html>