

## ***The Novara and its models: a history of stories***

Numerous models of the *Novara* exist, in both sail (frigate) and mixed sail-steam (pirofregata) versions, owned by cultural institutions and museums or by private collectors in Italy and Austria. GSR project was able to identify 9 of them<sup>1</sup> realised between the 19<sup>th</sup> to the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Some of these are the protagonists of interesting stories that reveal the long reputation of the first Austrian circumnavigation of the globe and its role in the historical memory of Trieste and Austria in relation to the history of the Habsburg Empire.

This is the case of the model conserved at the Aldebaran Maritime Association (Associazione Marinara Aldebaran) in Trieste: it is the frigate in the sail version built in 1:100 scale by Gualtiero Serafino (1942-2023), a fine naval modeller and member of the Aldebaran, who completed it in the 1990s, inspired by drawings signed by the Austrian modeller Karl Klaus Körner. The Association's archive records – namely the correspondence between the Aldebaran and Körner – have revealed some interesting aspects of the model's design. It appears that Körner drew up his designs in the 1970s as reproductions of the originals preserved in the Austrian State Archive (Österreichischen Staatarchiv-Kriegsarchiv) in Vienna, which is interesting considering the fact that the literature on the subject states that the original plans of the frigate were lost as a result of the archive documents being moved from Venice, where the frigate was built, and Vienna after the city's handover to Italy.<sup>2</sup>

In Trieste there is also a model of the *pirofregata* – the mixed sail/steam version of the *Novara* –, kept at the Civic Museum of the Sea (Civico Museo del Mare). This is on a scale of 1:500 and dates back to the 1970s. It was built by the modeller Carlo Sanzin, himself a member of the Aldebaran Association. In this case, the research revealed a clear interconnection between local cultural institutions and a shared and strong interest in promoting the history of this ship.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Among the models surveyed is the sail version exhibited at the Gallerion Museum in Novigrad, Croatia. It is a large object (1:50), made in Trieste between 1999 and 2000 by the modeler Claudio Cernive. The model presents some design inconsistencies: in fact, the hull was built according to the measurements of the mixed sail/steam version, and the external decoration lacks some important details such as the gondola – typical Venetian boat, requested by Archduke Maximilian as a representative auxiliary boat.

<sup>2</sup> Reproductions of Körner's drawings are available in: Aichelburg, Wladimir. 1981. *K. u. K. Segelschiffe in alten Photographien*. Wien: Verlac ORAC.

<sup>3</sup> See the exhibition *Fatal Novara: la nave di Massimiliano attorno al mondo (1857-1859)* (*Fatal Novara: Maximilian's ship around the world, 1857-1859*), held at Palazzo Costanzi in Trieste (Trieste, 10 September – 8 October 1998), which was the result of the collaboration between the Civic Museum of History and Art, the Civic Museum of Natural History and the Maritime Museum of Trieste, as well as the Civic Library, the Revoltella Museum, the State Museum of the Castle of Miramare, and the Naval History Museum of Venice, the Military History Museum (Heeresgeschichtliches

Moving on to Austria, one of the most detailed frigate models is the one realised by the Austrian modeller Michael Schildorfer in 2008 and located in Graz. It is in 1:72 scale and it too is the result of a study of Körner's drawings, which Schildorfer cross-referenced with those of the ship *Pallada*.<sup>4</sup> According to him, the hull of this ship, like that of the *Novara*, would have been built in the Venice Arsenal at the same time and according to the same design. Then they sold the *Pallada* to Russia. For the colour scheme, Schildorfer relied on the watercolours realised by Joseph Selleny, the expedition "painter-documentarist".<sup>5</sup>

Four other models of the frigate are located in Austria: a first large model is kept at the Natural History Museum in Vienna; a second is exhibited in room 804 – Seemacht Österreich (Austria as a naval Power) of the Heeresgeschichtliches Museum in Vienna;<sup>6</sup> a third, scale 1:500, belongs to the collection of the Austrian Maritime Association in Vienna (Österreichischer Marineverband), and was built by Prof. Walter Rieck;<sup>7</sup> and the last one, scale 1:25, located at the Minimundus park in Klagenfurt. This model could conceivably have been realised by Friedrich Jerina, one of the modellers active in the park's workshop between the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>8</sup> Here, the *Novara* is placed in the stretch of water in front of the miniature of Miramare Castle, Maximilian's residence, to seal the link between the archduke and the frigate.

The model at the Heeresgeschichtliches Museum hides a quite fascinating and interesting history. It seems to have been realised by an unknown sailor from the *Novara* during the circumnavigation; it is in a non-compliant scale (98 x 74 x 44 cm), resulting in the reduction and compression of the hull, precisely because of the reduced space available to the sailors on board.<sup>9</sup>

---

Museum) and the Österreichischen Staatarchiv-Kriegsarchiv in Vienna, the Aldebaran Maritime Association and the best naval modeller and collectors: Gualtiero Serafino, Mario Marzari and Sergio Zerial. See the catalogue of the exhibition: *Fatal Novara. La nave di Massimiliano attorno al mondo (1857-1859)*. 1998. Trieste: Hammerle Editori in Trieste.

<sup>4</sup> *Modelist Konstruktor*. 1980 (8), pp. 16-19.

<sup>5</sup> This model is owned by Renate Basch-Ritter, a scholar and expert on the history of the *Novara* and its circumnavigation of the globe. See: Basch-Ritter, Renate. 2008. *Die Weltumsegelung der Novara 1857-1859 Österreich auf allen Meeren*. Graz: Adeva.

<sup>6</sup> See: <https://www.hgm.at/en/exhibitions/permanent-exhibitions-until-1955/austria-as-a-naval-power> [last consultation date: 10 October 2023].

<sup>7</sup> For further information: <http://www.marineverband.at/> [last consultation date: 10 October 2023].

<sup>8</sup> For further information: <https://www.minimundus.at/en/minimundus-history/> [last consultation date: 10 October 2023].

<sup>9</sup> N. Inv. 1955/39/MI 3213, in Kraus, Carl & Romen, Valentina & Rosani, Tiziano (eds.). 2004, p.72. *L'orizzonte libero e sconfinato: la circumnavigazione della Novara e il sogno messicano di Massimiliano. Una mostra del Museo storico di Castel Tirolo 10.07-14.11.2004*. (Catalogue of the exhibition). Bolzano: Museo storico di Castel Tirolo. The model was exhibited on loan at Tyrol Castle Museum in Bolzano in 2004.

Another model that has added interesting perspectives to the research is the one on display at MUST – Museo Nazionale della Scienza e della Tecnologia “Leonardo Da Vinci” (National Museum of Science and Technology) in Milan.

It is a large object (460 x 130 x 280 cm), scale 1:14. The panel describing it bears the following caption:

Model of sailing ship *Nocchieri d'Italia*. War sailing ship. Built as an Austrian sailing frigate, it was launched in 1850 under the name *Minerva* and transformed into a sail/steam ship in 1861-1862. It was scrapped in 1898. The model of this ship was discovered in the arsenal of Venice and later fitted out as a mixed sail/steam ship with the name *Nocchieri d'Italia*, in the military arsenal of La Spezia.<sup>10</sup>

Leaving aside a few inaccuracies – in particular the fact that the *Novara* was never launched under its original name *Minerva* – the caption directly relates the history of the *Nocchieri d'Italia* model to that of the Austrian frigate, because of their common origin at the Venice Arsenal and the sharing of the same construction plans.

However, the history of the Milan model follows a different though no less complex path than that of the *Novara*. It becomes part of a collection commissioned by the *Marinai in congedo* (Sailors on leave) o *Società Militari congedati dalla Regia Marina* (or Society of Sailors Discharged from the Royal Navy) of Milan, which merged in 1911 into the *Unione Marinara Italiana (UMI)*<sup>11</sup> (Italian Maritime Union), whose work to promote naval culture. Admiral Filippo Camperio (1873-1945) was one of the founders of the Society and the collector of the first *corpus* of objects of the *Museo Navale Didattico* (Naval Didactic Museum) originally on display at the *Villa Reale* in Milan. Later, the Society donated the collection to the Municipality of Milan, which moved it to the *Corte Ducale* (Ducal Court) of *Palazzo Sforzesco* (Sforza's Castel) where the official *Civico Museo Navale Didattico* (Municipal Naval Didactic Museum) was inaugurated on 16 April 1932.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Code: CMND-649 – Date/Chronological reference c. 1932-1981 [translation by the author].

<sup>11</sup> In 1954, the UMI becomes ANMI – *Associazione Nazionale Marinai d'Italia* (National Association of Italian Sailors).

<sup>12</sup> *Istromento 16 Aprile 1932 – A. X. Donazione al Comune di Milano del Museo Navale Didattico. N° 978 S.G. d.1932. Delegato Munic.<sup>le</sup> al Registro. Repertorio N° 10262* – (Donation of the Naval Educational Museum to the Milan Municipality) Archives of the Civic Collections of Milan [Unsorted fund in: *Raccolte Storiche, Atti – Museo Navale – 915/3*]. The *Istromento* stipulates «in irrevocable form the donation to the Municipality of Milan of the Naval Didactic Museum formerly housed by the Municipality itself at the *Villa Reale* in the Public Gardens and now in some basements of the *Castello Sforzesco*. This Museum [which] will be called “Educational Naval Museum of the Municipality of Milan” [...]. Object number 649 in the inventory attached to the deed, is the «Pirofregata “*Nocchieri d'Italia*” and iron case» coming from La Spezia with sender of the donation Adm. F. Camperio and destined for room number 1 [p.46] [translation by the author].

In Room VI, at the entrance «from the right» in the «first order of display cases» there is the:

mixed sail/steam ship NOCCHIERI D'ITALIA (type VITTORIO EMANUELE, 1856, 66 - 15 – tonn. 3126 – mg. 9 - 10 x 160, 2 x 20, 4 mitr.) all sails set, i.e. with the “coltellacci” (trapezoidal sails added), the “portelleria” wide open (gunwales) and the sailors’ bunks (hammocks) rolled and arranged along the broadside in the bulwarks [...].<sup>13</sup>

During the Second World War, the exhibitions was dismantled and hidden in wooden boxes in the basement of the Palazzo Sforzesco.<sup>14</sup> In November 1946, the Museum was reopened in the same location, but already in 1952 the entire collection was transferred to the National Museum of Science and Technology – today MUST –, including of course the *Nocchieri d'Italia* «(ex Minerva 2° – ex Italia)». <sup>15</sup>

The research carried out at Milan’s museum and archival institutions has not completely resolved the questions raised by the identification of the model of the *Nocchieri d'Italia*, especially with regard to its transformation from frigate to sail/steam ship at the La Spezia shipyards.<sup>16</sup> What is certain, however, is that like many of its Italian and Austrian analogues surveyed so far, this object seems to materialise the long and troubled history of the *Novara* whose intricate construction, military, political and cultural events involve not only the vessel and its crew that were the protagonists of the scientific circumnavigation around the globe between 1857 and 1859, but also the Italian and Austrian naval tradition, which contend for its documentary heritage and historical memory.

---

<sup>13</sup> *Catalogo del Museo Navale – Comune di Milano – Castello Sforzesco*, Milano 1937, p. 46. According to the *Guida sommaria del Castello Sforzesco e delle civiche raccolte d'archeologia e d'arte* (Milan 1932, p. 21), the model was actually in Room I [translation by the author].

<sup>14</sup> *L'Avanti*, July 1947.

<sup>15</sup> 1. Archivio del Museo della Scienza e della Tecnica | 1890-2004 / 1.4. Corrispondenza | 1927-1980 / 1.4.2. Corrispondenza II serie | 1946-1980 / Navimodel | 1945-1971. The Navimodel association is the direct heir of the activities of the UMI and Adm. Camperio with regard to the MUST’s naval-historical heritage since after World War II.

<sup>16</sup> In this sense, additional research is planned at the Navimodel archives and the unsorted papers of the MUST archives.