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A HISTORY OF ODESSA, THE LAST ITALIAN BLACK SEA COLONY

by *Anna Makolkin*

"Dr. Anna Makolkin's monograph is a carefully researched and accurate account of the foundation of the port city of Odessa(1794) , and tells of the part, played by the Italian immigrants in this historical event which lead to the successful exploration of the Black Sea frontier - Novorossia/New Russia. The materials about this obscure migration have been scattered in archives of Italy and Ukraine, and most 19th and 20th century historians, intimidated by radical nationalism, politics and geopolitics of Europe, and post-colonial trends did not have sufficient courage to address the topic. Italians were not just another wave of Odessa immigrants, not just another part of her multicultural mosaic, they were her founders and colonizers of the region. None of the so far available historiographical materials have ever suggested this, and it is the main accomplishment of Dr. Anna Makolkin and her timely, elaborate, well-researched and erudite monograph. Unlike some recent historical essays about Odessa, her book goes beyond the account of the single city and temporary contributions of a single group. Her book fills the gap in the European historiography about the unknown, atypical and underestimated Italian migration which was instrumental in Europeanizing rural and backward Russia, at the time of mass migration from Europe to North America. Reconstructing the early history of the port and reclaiming Odessa's Italianness, the author not simply restores the misrepresented past, but it places this little known 18th century Italian migration into the wide context of the general cultural role of Italians in Europe. The Odessa Italian colony adds to the other Italian European cultural contributions. Telling the Italian Odessa story, the author deals with the phenomenon of European urbanism as a universal cultural sign, problems of transfer of Italian cultural traditions, their art, music, sculpture, painting, architecture and civic governance, next to banking, supervision of customs and foreign trade. The urban and cultural history of Europe, both Western and Eastern, is inseparable from Italy and Italians, and this is the context into which Dr. Makolkin places her research. ... This remarkable book has the most balanced thematic range, dealing not only with Imperial foreign and domestic politics, urban, military affairs and diplomacy, professional performance of different Italians but having substantial well-researched chapters on Italian language, opera, music, religious life and architecture." – (from the Commendatory Preface) Michael Ukas, Professor Emeritus, University of Toronto

"[This work] is the first wonderful adventure into the exotic cultural and commercial traffic between the Italian States and Southern Russians. Semiotician Anna Makolkin launches into the *terra incognita* of European historiography by exposing the unique Italian 18th century colonization in the founding of the Black Sea port of Odessa. She explores the many colored threads, identifying the northern Italian adventurers who transported themselves and their culture to establish a rich and beautiful city, a replica of their home land. Pursuing the primary and often the first time discovered sources in Russian and Italian archives, Dr.Makolkin weaves them into a rich pattern of exciting European cultural history. She is the first author to have explored these valuable rare archives, and with the support of the well-researched secondary sources, to have stitched together this complex story of the Italian migration and their last colony by the Black Sea ... The author has provided the reader with a carefully researched and well-written volume which should be the basis for a delightful Rossini opera on the Odessa Italians. This polyphonic, multilayered monograph is an important contribution to Italian, Russian, Ukrainian and European historiography. Dr.Makolkin catalogues the establishment in Odessa of the Italian urban planning, architecture, music and the arts.The growth of the city stimulated trade and commerce, provided taxation and capital for the Russian economy, and made Art essential. The author has dramatically enhanced this little known story of the nineteenth century Italian colonization in Russia." – Dr. Terence J.Fay, SJ, University of Toronto

0-7734-6272-4 US\$119.95 / £74.95 320pp. 2004

About the author: Dr. Anna Makolkin, a student of Jacques Derrida and Northrop Frye, Phyllis Grosskurth and Thomas Sebeok, holds Ph.D. in Comparative Literature from the University of Toronto, where she is currently a Research Fellow and Adjunct Professor. A Northrop Frye Fellow 1989-90 and a member of twelve Canadian and International Learned Societies, Dr. A.Makolkin is the author numerous interdisciplinary publications, ranging from works on the myth of Dionysus, Byron's, Gladstone's and Pushkin's biographies, history of law, and urban semiosis to the analysis of Aristotle, Epictetus, Freud, Kierkegaard, Plotinus, and Giambattista Vico. Her most recent books include *The Genealogy of Our Present Moral Disarray* (The Edwin Mellen Press, 2000), featured on the Canadian Broadcasting Millennium Program on January 1, 2000, and *Anatomy of Heroism* (Ottawa:Legas,2000).



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