

Annalisa Rellie (1941-2014)

An Appreciation

Annalisa Rellie was a woman of many parts. In a full and eventful life, she was an author, wife, and mother, and a warm and faithful friend and colleague, but will always be remembered for her contribution to Slavonic Studies as the founder-author of the Bradt Guide to Montenegro. The first volume of her book appeared in 2003, and it immediately became the most authoritative guide in any language to the newly emerging state. With its excellent photographs and clear and sensitively written text, it was much more than a travel guide in the technical sense and helped define the identity of emerging Montenegro in the English-speaking world. The book grew from the 70,000 words of the first edition to more than 170,000 in the fourth. It sold very well for a book of its kind and during one of the last meetings I had with Annalisa, in autumn 2013, she let slip that she had been invited by Hilary Bradt to revise the book for a fifth edition. Sadly, that was never to be.

Annalisa was born into a privileged family but was brought up by her mother after her father was killed in fighting near Caen in the aftermath of the D-Day landings when she was only three years old. She was an only child, and her mother never remarried. From an early age she showed signs of much independence, and after a sometimes tense education as a convent girl, trained as an actress, against a background of strong reservations by some members of her family. After studying at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London, she married young, and as the wife of a British diplomat, Alastair, travelled widely and lived in many different parts of the world. It was the time of the Cold War, and it was during these years and living in foreign postings, that she became seriously interested in the societies in Eastern and South East Europe and started the extensive reading and private study of history, geography and culture that was later to underpin her Montenegrin researches and writing.

Like many others in London, she became increasingly focussed on the collapsing Yugoslavia after 1990, and was active in the debates about the future of the war torn lands. As something of an 'insider' in terms of her knowledge of diplomacy and international relations, she regarded the end of the 'FRY' as inevitable, and began to travel more

and more frequently to the region, Montenegro in particular, and to study the rapid changes in society that were taking place there. With her vibrant and ever energetic personality, wonderful sense of often anti-establishment humour and knack of getting on with everybody, whatever their background, she was made for the wide open spaces of Montenegro. She had a vibrant curiosity about every aspect of Montenegrin life, however small or recondite, and a sharp eye for the swirling complexities of Montenegrin and Serbian politics, and carefully avoided the pitfalls linked to involvement with particular groups. She always stood for an open and democratic society and genuine Montenegrin independence. She was a very hard worker, once describing her Guide as 'a labour of love-equal emphasis on both the L-words', but admitting that with Annalisa and Montenegro, 'it was love at first sight'.

Her book described for the first time in English – at least since nineteenth century travellers like Revd W. Denton – many places scarcely ever visited by foreigners, and she made a strong stand for the protection of the wonders of the Montenegrin natural environment against the depredations brought on some parts of the coast by modern mass tourism . When serious illness came on the horizon, two or three years ago, she fought it bravely and overcame her original problems successfully. In the last weeks of her life after ill health had returned, she was able to remain at home with Alastair in their house in Chelsea which they had shared for thirty two years. Unusually for a British Balkan author, she had very few critics or enemies and she will be deeply missed by all who were fortunate enough to know her.

James Pettifer