



**Capriotti, Giuseppe. The Church of Saint Blaise in Ancona.  
Artistic Patronage of a Confraternity founded by Schiavoni.  
Zagreb: FF Press, 2020**

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Volume 32, Number 2, Fall 2021

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1096489ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33137/confrat.v32i2.40091>

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Publisher(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

1180-0682 (print)

2293-7579 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Hughes-Johnson, S. (2021). Review of [Capriotti, Giuseppe. The Church of Saint Blaise in Ancona. Artistic Patronage of a Confraternity founded by Schiavoni. Zagreb: FF Press, 2020]. *Confraternitas*, 32(2), 47–49.  
<https://doi.org/10.33137/confrat.v32i2.40091>

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## Reviews

**Capriotti, Giuseppe.** *The Church of Saint Blaise in Ancona. Artistic Patronage of a Confraternity founded by Schiavoni.* Zagreb: FF Press, 2020. Pp. 149. ISBN 978-953-175-698-3 (paperback) €14.

Hailed as one of the “most significant” (8) outputs deriving from a research project funded by the Croatian Science Foundation, entitled *Visualizing Nationhood: the Schiavoni/Illyrian Confraternities and Colleges in Italy and the Artistic Exchange with South-East Europe (15<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> c.)*, Giuseppe Capriotti’s monograph essentially seeks to restructure the disparate fragments of three histories: that of the Church of Saint Blaise in Ancona; the Confraternity of the Schiavoni; and the Illyrian immigrants who travelled from modern-day Croatia to Italy’s Adriatic coast.

The volume opens with a short preface by Jasenka Gudelj explaining the origins of the study and making clear Capriotti’s fresh contributions to the disciplines within which he works, all of which will be discussed later. This is followed by a brief introduction by the book’s author, where he sets out the intentions of the study and briefly situates it historiographically. The volume then shifts directly to the main research corpus. Perhaps because Capriotti’s investigations span several centuries and necessarily move within the realms of art history, devotional relic culture, and confraternity studies, while exploring the intricate relationships between “collectives and individuals, locals and foreigners [and] nobles and citizens in Early Modern Italy” (8), the volume is strictly organised into seven chronological chapters. These are then further divided into themed subsections. This layout works extremely well and guides the reader seamlessly and comfortably through the discussion that, in less experienced hands, could appear complicated and convoluted. Accordingly, the reading experience is straightforward, despite the innate complexity of the research. The readers’ facility is further catered to by the closing chapters: an appendix of transcribed documents; the bibliography; and an index of names and places.

Chapter one, entitled “Confraternities of the Schiavoni and Albanians in the Marche,” provides the foundation on which the chapters that follow build. Within this section, the author accomplishes the following explanatory tasks: the definition of key terms; who the migrants were; where these travelers came from; the reasons for the migration of Schiavoni and Albanians during the fifteenth century; the impetus that encouraged these refugees to form confraternities and finally, the saints that the migrants venerated and why.

Having identified the three “most commonly venerated” (21) Albanian saints as Venera, Paraskeve of Ionium, and Paraskeve of Epibatas and the Schiavoni saints as Blaise and Jerome, Capriotti dedicates the second book chapter to the two Schiavoni saints. Employing a late fifteenth-century polyptych created for the Schiavoni of Ascoli Piceno by Pietro Alemanno

(1430–1497 or 1498), Capriotti illustrates how the careful choice of one of Saint Blaise's attributes and the inclusion of Saint Jerome (who, during the fifteenth century, was perceived as an Illyrian guardian) worked to visually situate the Schiavoni migrants within their newly-adopted geographical location and "sought to advance them socially in their new homeland" (29). Additionally, the author's intertextual analysis of archived documentary and visual sources relating to the Confraternity of the Schiavoni confirms that the sodality was, by the close of the *Quattrocento*, operating from a dedicated oratory and had commenced their patronage of the Schiavoni Chapel in the cathedral in Pesaro.

In the absence of extant fifteenth-century primary sources directly relating to the diurnal operations of the Confraternity of Saint Blaise in Ancona (such as *entrata e uscita* ledgers), the book's third chapter is essentially an assessment of documents produced by the sodality between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries. This is undertaken in order to properly understand the confraternity's existence during the *Quattrocento*. These documents (which number ten and reference or record various deeds, inventories, *capitoli*, histories, and the like) when analysed intertextually with *Quattrocento* notarial records and other coeval civic documents work to illustrate the changing status (over time) of Schiavoni immigrants, both within the macrocosm of the confraternity and within the microcosm of the Marche.

Similarly, chapter four pieces together documentary and visual sources in order to track a lost *Quattrocento* altarpiece commissioned by the Schiavoni of Ancona. Despite the trail running cold, as happens so frequently in quests for once-extant artworks that have been lost to time and circumstance, Capriotti's assessment of the evidence and his understanding of other similar paintings executed for Ragusan patrons residing on the western Adriatic coast, provides two positive outcomes: it delivers new information concerning "lost cultural heritage" and allows an unprecedented insight into "the extraordinary richness" of Schiavoni patronage (59).

Moving the investigation on to the early eighteenth century, Capriotti uses the volume's fifth chapter to transfer the discussion onto the Church of Saint Blaise, its altar, reliquary, and the representations of other saints associated with the Schiavoni. The highlight of this chapter is Capriotti's unique presentation of a reliquary of Saint Blaise that, through careful archival investigations, can now be identified as one commissioned by the Anconan Confraternity of Saint Blaise of Suffrage.

The sixth and final chapter brings Capriotti's restructured journeys of church, migrant *Fratelli*, and lay sodality to a close. Initially focussing on the demolition and subsequent reconstruction of the church of Saint Blaise during the 1740s, the author determines that the late seventeenth-century edifice was the work of the architect Giovan Battista Urbini (1691–1761). He then proceeds to address the interior sculptural decoration of the building by focussing on the works therein of Francesco Maria Ciaraffoni (1720–1802)

and Gioacchino Varlè (1731–1806). The penultimate section of this chapter then transfers attention to the painted works of Domenico Simonetti (1685–1754), also known as Magatta, and other altarpieces by the aforementioned Francesco Maria Chiaffoni and lesser-known artists. The chapter concludes with a round-up of memories from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries concerning the origins of the Schiavoni confraternity in Ancona.

Given that this monograph promises and delivers several new contributions to the various disciplines that the author traverses, while simultaneously reconnoitring the diverse interconnections between confraternity and individual, migrant and native, rich and poor, and artist and patron, it is a surprisingly navigable volume; made so perhaps, by the author's decision not to get embroiled in the minutiae of lengthy art historical analyses or over-long explanatory footnotes. While the art historians among us would likely crave more of the former detail and the pedants amidst us more of the latter, Capriotti has included all that is necessary to take the reader on the clear, author-led journey that was promised in the preface. For confraternity scholars, this volume provides a worthy example of how to extract maximum data from limited primary sources – a critical skill, given the historical suppression and amalgamation of lay sodalities of the Italian peninsula that encouraged the destruction and dispersal of lay associations' working documents beyond that which occurs naturally. Accordingly, for this reason alone, the book should prove a useful resource for confraternity scholars. Similarly, scholars looking to further investigate the lesser-known artists and architects operating in the Marche during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries or those interested in topics surrounding immigration into Italy from the Eastern Adriatic may also find that this volume is a useful secondary source of information.

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**Capriotti, Giuseppe, Francesca Coltrinari, and Jasenka Gudelj, eds.** *Visualizing Past in a Foreign Country: Schiavoni/Illyrian Confraternities and Colleges in Early Modern Italy in Comparative Perspective*. Macerata: Edizioni Università di Macerata, 2018. Pp. 289. ISBN 978-88-6056-565-5 (paperback) €25. Also online at <https://www.academia.edu/36507782>.

The thirteen articles in this volume originate from the conference by the same title held at the University of Zagreb on 30–31 May 2017 under the auspices of the research project “Visualizing Nationhood: the Schiavoni/Illyrian Confraternities and Colleges in Italy and the Artistic Exchange with South East Europe (15th–18th c.)” funded by the Croatian Science Foundation (HRZZ). The aim of the project, the conference, and the book was to examine the migration in the Early Modern Period of Slavic (*Schiavoni*) and Dalmatian