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Capriotti, Giuseppe. The Church of Saint Blaise in Ancona: Artistic Patronage of a Confraternity Founded by Schiavoni

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Capriotti, Giuseppe.

The Church of Saint Blaise in Ancona: Artistic Patronage of a Confraternity Founded by Schiavoni.

Zagreb: FF Press, 2020. Pp. 149 + 56 col. ill. ISBN 978-953-175-698-3 (paperback) n.p.

Early modern Italy was home to quite an array of non-Italian populations—from Germans to Iberians, from French to Slavic, from English to Africans. Sometime residents, sometime sojourners, they were actively involved in all aspects of Italian life, from commerce to the arts, from the military to the clergy, and as such contributed to the peninsula's economic prosperity and cultural vibrancy. But they also had to face the complexities of being (sometimes unwelcomed) foreigners. To cope with these difficulties, many founded or joined “national” confraternities where they could gather as a community, pray in their own language, carry out their customary devotions to their homeland's patron saints, maintain their traditions, and provide each other with much needed support. Rome, as the capital of Catholic Christendom, was home to a number of foreign communities and respective “national” churches and confraternities, and so was Venice, the hub of commerce between the Mediterranean and the German/Slavic world north of the Alps. But what we often forget is that there were also communities of non-Italians living in the smaller cities and towns of Italy—a case in point are the communities of Schiavoni (people from the coast and the interior of Dalmatia) in several towns of central Italy, in particular in the Marche and Abruzzi regions. Most had reached Italy for economic reasons, but often behind their emigration lay the need to flee the advancing Ottoman push into the Balkans. In places such as Ancona, Loreto, Pescara, and Ascoli Piceno, for example, the Schiavoni established confraternities to serve their spiritual and social needs.

This book by Giuseppe Capriotti looks at one such church and confraternity in Ancona but also casts a glance at Schiavoni confraternities in Pesaro to the north and in Ascoli Piceno to the south. The volume opens with a chapter that surveys migration from coastal Dalmatia and Albania to the towns and cities of east and central Italy in the late medieval and early modern period and at the particular saints whose veneration these immigrants brought with them—Saint Venera in the case of the Albanian immigrants, Saint Blaise with the Ragusans, and Saint Jerome with the Dalmatians. The second chapter focuses on

the Schiavoni confraternities in Pesaro and Ascoli Piceno that were active in the fifteenth and early sixteenth century before their members integrated fully with the local Italian population. It also looks at their artistic commissions, in particular a polyptych by the Austrian artist Peter Grill von Göttweih, better known as Pietro Alemanno (ca. 1430/40–98), for the confraternity of Saint Blaise in Ascoli Piceno. It also looks at the chapel of Saint Peter in the Pesaro cathedral and the new oratory of Saint Jerome “of the Schiavoni” in the same city.

The book then turns to focus on Ancona and its Schiavoni confraternity dedicated to Saint Blaise, patron saint of Ragusa. Chapter 3 carries out a detailed discussion of the sources for, and origins of, the confraternity, already active in 1439 when it received permission from the Senate of Ancona “to reside in the city without the obligation to serve as executioners” (38), but in return all the Schiavoni in town “would have to pay for and offer an annual standard dedicated to the city’s patron saint” (39). In 1467 a second confraternity of Schiavoni was founded in Ancona, this time in the church of Sant’Agostino and on condition that it “provide the [Augustinian] friars [of the church] with wax, a quarter of bread and flour, a castrated lamb and half a *salma* of good wine on Candlemas” (44).

At this point the book takes an art historical turn. Chapter 4 discusses the now-lost fifteenth-century altarpiece for the confraternity’s old chapel in the church of San Domenico. The chapter then looks at some lost sixteenth-century works commissioned from the local painter Luca di Costantino and from Francesco di Giulio from Sant’Elpidio, just south of Ancona. Capriotti concludes this chapter with an important observation: “Although these works are now lost, the documentation provides information about the ‘lost cultural heritage’ whose study is as important and significant as that of works that have been preserved because it reveals the richness of the artistic patronage of a confraternity in which Dalmatians and Ragusans continued to play an important role well into the sixteenth century” (59).

Chapter 5 opens with a discussion of the confraternity’s various moves and property acquisitions in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, its affiliation in 1615 with the Archconfraternity of Suffrage in Rome, and the building of a new church of its own (1717–18) in the wake of a dispute with the Dominicans who had hosted them up to that point. Chapter 6 opens with the demolition in 1748 of the 1718 church and the construction of a new one on

the same site; it then moves on to talk about the contributions made by the architect Giovan Battista Urbini (1691–1762), the decorators Francesco Maria Ciaraffoni (1720–1802) and Gioacchino Varlè (1731–1806), the altarpiece by Domenico Simonetti called *Magatta* (1685–1754), and other altarpieces by Ciaffaroni and Bernardino Bini. This chapter also looks at Marquis Francesco Trionfi (1706–72), who contributed generously towards the construction of the new church. A useful appendix of documents and an index of names bring the book to a close.

Spanning the fourteenth to the nineteenth centuries, this excellent study of the Schiavoni and Albanian confraternities in the Marche region of Italy, their oratories, churches, artistic commissions, and patronage is a comprehensive and detailed analysis of a fascinating migratory phenomenon that brought with it a rich devotional tradition, its own set of patron saints, a profound social commitment, and a fascinating artistic and iconographical repertoire, all of which contributed to the vitality and diversity that was Italy in the Renaissance. Grounded, as it is, in a vast amount of previously unexplored archival and manuscript sources, Capriotti's study offers plenty of new information for scholars to consider and pursue further.

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