

# Searching for Schiavoni intellectuals

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Schiavoni/Illyrian  
Confraternities and Colleges  
in Early Modern Italy  
in comparative perspective

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# Visualizing Past in a Foreign Country: Schiavoni/Illyrian Confraternities and Colleges in Early Modern Italy in comparative perspective

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# Visualizing Past in a Foreign Country: Schiavoni/Illyrian Confraternities and Colleges in Early Modern Italy in comparative perspective

edited by Giuseppe Capriotti, Francesca Coltrinari,  
Jasenka Gudelj

# Searching for Schiavoni Intellectuals\*

Neven Jovanović\*\*

## *Abstract*

The art history term of “Schiavoni” – used for artists born in Croatia, or Dalmatia, and active abroad, mostly in Italy – is completely absent from the Croatian literary history. No such history will, however, dare to omit the category of “Croatian authors outside their homeland”. The paper interprets the theoretical framework that is causing such discrepancy between the disciplines and proposes to consider both artists and writers as intellectuals. In that context, inspired by Antonio Gramsci’s theory of the role of intellectuals in the process of social change, the dynamic relationship between the intellectuals and the Schiavoni community can be fruitfully explored; for example, four intellectuals from the island of Korčula, active in the Schiavoni confraternity of St Jerome in Rome in 1550-1565, can be identified as a small social network strengthened by multiple alliances.

\* This work has been supported by Croatian Science Foundation under the project number 2305 - 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.).

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Il termine storico-artistico “Schiavoni” – usato per artisti nati in Croazia, o in Dalmazia, e attivi all'estero, soprattutto in Italia – è completamente assente dalla storia letteraria croata. Nessuna storia, tuttavia, oserà omettere la categoria di “autori croati al di fuori della loro patria”. Il saggio interpreta il quadro teorico che causa tale discrepanza tra le discipline e propone di considerare sia gli artisti che gli scrittori come intellettuali. In tale contesto, ispirato dalla teoria di Antonio Gramsci sul ruolo degli intellettuali nel processo di cambiamento sociale, la relazione dinamica tra gli intellettuali e la comunità di Schiavoni può essere proficuamente esplorata; ad esempio, quattro intellettuali dell'isola di Korčula, attivi nella confraternita Schiavoni di San Girolamo a Roma nel 1550-1565, possono essere identificati come un piccolo *social network* rafforzato da molteplici alleanze.

At the first glance, it may seem that the field of Croatian literary history – in my specific case, the history of Croatian authors who wrote in Latin from the late Middle Ages to the 20<sup>th</sup> century – has little or nothing to contribute to the theme of Schiavoni, or Illyrian, confraternities and colleges in Early Modern Italy. The fact is that neither the term “Schiavoni” nor “confraternities” appear in conjunction with “Italy” in general histories of Croatian literature, while in surveys of Croatian writings in Latin “Schiavoni” and “confraternities” do not appear at all<sup>1</sup>. The absence itself is worthy of consideration. Does it mean that the arts, politics, religion, and economy *can* provide a context for Schiavoni confraternities in Italy from 1300 to 1850, while only literature *cannot* do so? On the other hand, if we suppose that I am simply not *aware* of the role Schiavoni confraternities have played in Croatian literary history, what has made my ignorance *possible*?

There is actually a disciplinary difference between the ways Croatian art history and Croatian literary history look at their respective fields of study. Here I want, first, to describe the difference in question and propose an explanation for its existence; then I will go on to demonstrate briefly that, once the literary historians change their theoretical framework a little, interactions of Schiavoni confraternities with literature can be identified as an invitation to new interpretations.

### 1. *A disciplinary difference*

In 1991, a traumatic year for Croatia, the seventeenth volume of the series Dani Hvarskog kazališta (Hvar City Theatre Days) was published in Split<sup>2</sup>. The

<sup>1</sup> For general histories of Croatian literature, cf. Vodnik 1913, Kombol 1945, Frangeš 1987. Even the general historical monograph on Croatian diaspora in Venice treats artists and musicians as “Schiavoni”, but separates the writers into another chapter which does not use the term: Čoralčić 2001, pp. 305-345. A survey of Croatian Neo-Latin is Gortan *et al.* 1971.

<sup>2</sup> Batušić, Bogišić 1991; from 1975 to this day, the Hvar Theatre Days conference offers scholars a chance to share research on Croatian theatre and literary history.



1991 volume, bringing together papers from the sessions held in Hvar in May of the previous year, was dedicated to the Renaissance Humanism in Croatia, especially in Dubrovnik and other Dalmatian cities. The last paper in the book, written by the distinguished Croatian art historian Kruno Prijatelj (1922-1998), bears the title *Likovni umjetnici 'Schiavoni' iz Dalmacije u 15. stoljeću* (Dalmatian 'Schiavone' artists during the 15<sup>th</sup> century). It opens with a useful definition:

Our art history uses the term 'Schiavoni' for Croatian artists active mostly during the Renaissance, the Mannerism, and the Baroque, who were born on our soil – mainly in the Venetian Dalmatia – but have developed their careers outside their homeland: in Italy, but also in the region from France to Hungary, from Germany to Austria; their works have a distinguished place in the contemporary European art<sup>3</sup>.

Prijatelj's paper, however, is the only one in the Hvar volume to use the term *Schiavoni* for Croatians in the diaspora. The other twenty contributions, written by distinguished Croatian literary scholars of all generations, consistently discuss "Croatian Renaissance humanism" even when focusing on such authors as Ivan Polikarp Severitan (Ioannes Polycarpus Severitanus Sibenicensis, 1472 – after 1525), who spent most of his life in Italy<sup>4</sup>, or Franjo Niger (Pescennius Franciscus Niger Venetus Liburnus, 1452 – after 1523), born in Venice by a father from Senj and a mother from Treviso<sup>5</sup>.

The Hvar Theatre Days volume includes also a theoretical reflection on Croatian Latin authors by Pavao Pavličić, a scholar of comparative literature. The reflection is entitled *Po čemu su hrvatski latinisti naši?* (What is it that makes Croatian Latinists ours?). This is how Pavličić formulates his central problem:

because our writers often worked in foreign countries, using foreign languages, it was to be expected that for some of them a question may arise as to what extent are they truly Croatian writers; in the same way, it was to be expected that the nations on whose soil they worked may consider these writers their own national authors<sup>6</sup>.

The authors "working on the foreign soil" would obviously fit Prijatelj's definition of "Schiavoni", but, as we see, Pavličić does not use the term, speaking instead about the "latinisti", the "Latin authors". It is also to be noted that Pavličić chooses to classify these authors in a strictly binary fashion: they are either "our" and "foreign".

Pavličić's categories are well in line with the traditional framework of Croatian literary history. As Nenad Ivić suggests, in Croatia, the literary history has long depended «on the [literary historiographer's] notion of Croatian

<sup>3</sup> Prijatelj 1991, p. 260.

<sup>4</sup> Glavičić 1991.

<sup>5</sup> Perić 1991.

<sup>6</sup> Pavličić 1991, pp. 44-45.

national history»<sup>7</sup>. The stories told by historians of literature either supplement the history proper (for example, stressing cultural unity and strength of politically heterogeneous and traumatized regions) or reflect it (for example, demonstrating how the extraordinary political freedom of the city-state of Dubrovnik has enabled the expression of artistic individualities). Such stories have little place for the “diaspora” because these national communities exist outside of the (either modern or imagined) national boundaries. The literary historians are, of course, aware of migrations and of their influence on national culture; for example, this is how in 1945 Mihovil Kobil (1883-1955) sees movements happening under Ottoman pressure during the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century:

Indeed, in that age, when the country of their ancestors was divided between mighty neighbors, and too feeble to permit, in the tragic historical maelstrom, the creation of stable centers capable of employing all national forces, many Croats were seeking their fortunes in neighboring lands, offering them their heads and their swords<sup>8</sup>.

But the writers, the authors, are not considered in the context of the general diaspora. Their talent makes them exceptional. When they move abroad, they do not simply resettle – they fall into a paradoxical “trap of history” (Frangješ), as exemplified in the career of Janus Pannonius / Ivan Česmički (1434-1472):

he became famous as a Latin poet, but in Italy; became famous as a politician and bishop, but in Hungary; to his homeland, he left the indisputable right to revel in his oeuvre. And though Pannonius cannot be left out of the history of Hungarian humanism, nevertheless he is born in Croatia (which is tenderly mentioned in his poems), nevertheless he is a Croat (that he does not renounce either), and – most importantly – the teachings pronounced every so often by his Muse fit into the traditional insights of the future Croatian literature<sup>9</sup>.

The somewhat bewildering choice of words in Frangješ’s last sentence («*traditional* insights of the *future* Croatian literature») actually announces both the problem of Croatian Latin writers’ allegiance (“what is it that makes them ours?”) and the formula with which Pavličić will try to solve the problem. Some such authors, Pavličić claims, are simply “not ours”: the ones whose “links to their homeland literature and their influence on it” have simply disappeared from history. To the Croatian literature truly belong «only the authors known and read by our writers and our educated people, only those recognized by

<sup>7</sup> Ivić 2007, p. 403.

<sup>8</sup> Kobil 1945, p. 58. For a strikingly similar view of contemporary Italy, cf. a passage cited by Antonio Gramsci (*I quaderni del carcere*, *Quaderno* 7, § 67) from Renaud Przewdziecki, *Ambasciatori veneti in Polonia*, «Nuova Antologia», 1° luglio 1930: «La mancanza di unità patria, di una dinastia unica, creava tra gli italiani uno stato di spirito indipendente, per cui ciascuno che fosse fornito di capacità politiche e diplomatiche, le considerava come un talento personale che poteva mettere, secondo il suo interesse, al servizio di qualunque causa, allo stesso modo che i capitani di ventura disponevano della loro spada». Cf. Soave 2014.

<sup>9</sup> Frangješ 1987, pp. 31-32.

them as their own authors and their representatives – regardless of whether the recognition happens while the humanist is still active, or decades, even centuries later»<sup>10</sup>.

Pavličić carefully avoids any modish theoretical language, but it may be inferred that for him a history of national literature is what we would call *socially constructed*. A writer, or a group of writers, become “ours” because “we” – national literary historians, as well as national consumers of literature – decide we *need* them: «Croatian literature, so poor in cultural centres and authors, finds it very hard to renounce anything»<sup>11</sup>. The purpose of the national literary past is to be *used* – to be used to reinforce the *current* national self and the national culture. Consequently, even a long-forgotten author such as Franciscus Patricius (Frane Petrić, Petriš or Petris / Francesco Patrizi, 1529-1597) may «after he has been recognized as our countryman, become part [of national literature] if he exerts sufficient influence on Croatian literature»<sup>12</sup>.

As potential, unrecognized, unresearched sites of literary life, Schiavoni confraternities in Italy pose a further problem to Croatian literary history. I would call that problem sociological. In Croatia, the literary history traditionally focuses on *individuals* and assigns *communities* only support roles. No history addresses systematically, from the Middle Ages to the Modern Period, «the extent to which particular social structures find expression in individual literary works and what function these works perform in society»<sup>13</sup>. Literary historians share the view of Frangeš that «the complete image of a literature depends first and foremost on works and activities of the greatest writers», and concentrate therefore on great authors and great works. The everyday facts of general, or “average”, literary culture get short shrift. This means that, because we have not discovered a literary equivalent to Carpaccio’s paintings commissioned by the Scuola di San Giorgio e Trifone in Venice, there is no sufficient reason for us to care about Schiavoni confraternities as factors in a system of Croatian literature<sup>14</sup>.

In 1991, the initiative implicitly introduced by Prijatelj’s article – a suggestion to use the art historian concept of “Schiavoni” to reconsider or recontextualize the historical group of “Croatian Latin writers” or “Croatian Humanists” – found no adequate response. In the seventeenth volume of the Hvar City Theatre Days, Prijatelj’s paper remained, to an extent, isolated. But today, twenty-seven

<sup>10</sup> Pavličić 1991, p. 53.

<sup>11</sup> Ivi, p. 48.

<sup>12</sup> Ivi, p. 53.

<sup>13</sup> Lowenthal 1932.

<sup>14</sup> Precisely in the case of the Venetian Scuola di San Giorgio degli Schiavoni, a recent reinterpretation of an anonymous Latin hymn and a prayer to St Jerome “the Illyrian”, composed in 1498 and preserved among the papers of Jeronim Vidulić from Zadar (1440-1499), shows that the Schiavoni confraternity may have encouraged literary production as well as artworks; Špoljarić 2018.

years later, scholars may profit from exploring ways to meaningfully integrate the categories of “Schiavoni” and “Latin writers”.

One such way consists in applying Antonio Gramsci’s theoretical framework of intellectual activity to the phenomena of Renaissance cultural history, as outlined in 1978 by Margaret L. King.

Here we do not need to go into all the aspects of Gramsci’s theory of the role of intellectuals in the process of social change. It will be enough to let the Italian philosopher remind us that there is a common category for artists and writers: both groups are intellectuals. Moreover, in Gramsci’s terms, both groups belong to the “traditional intellectuals”:

Traditional intellectuals include those persons most of us would spontaneously consider being intellectuals: philosophers, artists, writers, and perhaps teachers, religious leaders, and journalists. These intellectuals share a common language, the refined language of high culture acquired through meticulous education, and a common heritage extending back to Plato and beyond. Joined by these rich cultural links, traditional intellectuals tend to see themselves and to be seen as detached from society, from the shifting currents of economic and political life. They perceive themselves and are perceived as an independent social group. But they are not; they too are possessed by history. Generation after generation, they are absorbed into new social groups through the activity of the organic intellectuals of these groups<sup>15</sup>.

On the other hand, members of Schiavoni confraternities may be considered as Gramsci’s *organic* intellectuals:

Organic intellectuals are the members of each social group who, whatever their profession or economic role, create the ideas which rationalize and justify the interests of their own social group and its claim to dominance. Within the ruling class, they might include engineers, managers, bureaucrats; within the proletariat, trade union leaders<sup>16</sup>.

Here we should also bear in mind that within the “intelligentsia” there are differences in quality; the spectrum of talent forms a pyramid, at the base of which «reside those intellectuals most closely related to the economic activity characteristic of the social group in question, and who perform routine types of intellectual work (managerial, administrative)»<sup>17</sup>.

The Schiavoni diaspora communities in, for example, Venice or Rome certainly did not, would not strive to achieve cultural or political hegemony in their respective cities. They did, however, as aliens and strangers, need to secure the respect of their fellow citizens. To that end, they must have adopted the same strategy Gramsci, on a much grander scale, recognizes in effecting social change: they «harnessed the energies of traditional intellectuals»<sup>18</sup> to organize

<sup>15</sup> King 1978, p. 25.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>17</sup> Ivi, p. 27.

<sup>18</sup> Ivi, p. 26.

and present the Schiavoni, or Illyrian, or Croatian identity in a conception shared and appreciated by all members of the social group.

The traditional intellectuals to be engaged by Schiavoni communities obviously did not have to come from across the Adriatic themselves (as was the case with Carpaccio in Venice, or the painter Giuseppe Puglia in Rome), just as the intellectuals of Slavic, or mixed, origin may have been recruited by Italian “organic intellectuals” (of the authors mentioned above, Polikarp Severitan by the della Rovere, Dukes of Urbino, or Franciscus Pescennius Niger by the Ippolito I d’Este, the Cardinal of Ferrara)<sup>19</sup>. If we follow Gramsci instead of Pavličić, a vision in which a national literature is defined by national borders, and by the (current) needs and values of the nation inside these borders, may be replaced by a vision of a much more dynamic, fluid, open cultural arena. There nation interacts with class and the native with the immigrant.

## 2. *Croatian Renaissance intellectuals and the national confraternity of St Jerome in Rome*

To demonstrate the new vista which opens to literary historians with a shift of perspective from the traditional *belles lettres* to general intellectual activity, I will briefly consider a group of intellectuals from the island of Korčula, active in 16<sup>th</sup> century Rome, and connected with an important Schiavoni institution.

In Croatian cultural history it is well known that a Schiavoni/Illyrian national confraternity functioned in Rome from the year 1453, at the Ripetta, on the left bank of the Tiber, near the Mausoleum of Augustus; the brotherhood provided social support to immigrants and pilgrims from the other side of the Adriatic, but also kept the Roman Schiavoni community «in constant touch with the homeland, providing access to very different angles for defining oneself as a Schiavone/Illyrian»<sup>20</sup>. Almost a century after its official founding, in 1544, the confraternity statutes were confirmed, and forty-five years later, in 1589, its Church of Saint Jerome was rebuilt, while at the church a college of clerics was established as well. The institution functioned until 1901 when it was transformed into a college “for the Croatian people”.

In 1826, Matej (Matteo) Kapor (1789-1842), a historian from the Croatian island of Korčula, compiled a list of members of the Schiavoni confraternity of St Jerome in Rome connected with Kapor’s native island. More than 150 years

<sup>19</sup> This is a conscious simplification and vulgarization of Gramsci’s much more nuanced theory; recruitment of traditional intellectuals by the organic cannot, of course, be reduced to commissioning art works or educational tractates. My intention here is primarily to sketch an alternative to the commonly held opinions of Croatian literary historians, not to develop a systematic explanation of cultural dynamics in Renaissance diasporas.

<sup>20</sup> Gudelj 2016, p. 20.

later, Ambroz Kapor published the list from the manuscript<sup>21</sup>. Reading it, a historian of Croatian literature will notice four familiar names.

First, during 1528-1564 various positions were held by Jakov Baničević (Giacomo Banisio) the Younger, president of the confraternity in 1555-1556 and 1559-1560. He was the nephew of the Habsburg and papal diplomat of the same name (1466-1532). The uncle is famous in Croatia as one of Erasmus of Rotterdam's correspondents, Dürer's model, and sponsor of several humanist publications. From Baničević the Elder the nephew inherited several church duties and benefices in Trento. Nothing is known, however, about the literary activity of Baničević the Younger.

Second, from 1560-1568 – overlapping partly with Baničević – the Schiavoni confraternity was administered by another nephew of Baničević the Elder. This nephew's name was Nikola Petrović (Nicholas Petreius or Petreo, 1486-1568)<sup>22</sup>. Petrović was not a priest; he is known as a Latin poet, translator from Greek, and a teacher. He has learned Greek in Apulia during the 1520s, then studied in Padova, spent most of the 1530s in Rome, and later taught in Dubrovnik for twelve years (1538-1550). In 1550 Petrović returned to Korčula, visiting occasionally Venice and Bari, before relocating, in 1559, to Rome, where he stayed until the end of his life (on leaving Korčula he prepared his will). In Perugia, there is an autograph manuscript with fifty of his poems, eleven orations and sermons, and five translations from Greek.

Kapor's list goes on to record Antun Rozanović (Antonio Rosaneo or Ružić), who served the confraternity in 1560-1564 (again, concurrently both with Baničević and Petrović; Petrović was Rozanović's immediate successor as president of the confraternity). Prior to Rozanović's Roman stay, we find him in 1524 at the University of Padova; afterwards, in 1571, the priest will organize the defence of his native city of Korčula against the Ottoman pirates prior to the battle of Lepanto, when some 150 islanders managed to repel 20 Ottoman galleys from the fortified city. To commemorate the heroic struggle, Rozanović composed a Latin history and two lyric poems<sup>23</sup>.

The fourth distinguished member of the Schiavoni confraternity is Vinko Paletin (1508-1575), who joined in 1564, just when Rozanović's activity in Rome ended. From Rozanović's history of Korčula's defence we know that Rozanović and Paletin were distant relatives<sup>24</sup>. Paletin was a Dominican

<sup>21</sup> Kapor 1983.

<sup>22</sup> Jurić 1993. Petrović himself refers to Baničević as his *avunculus* in a Latin letter from Rome, written in 1537: *quanto amore ac benevolentia Jacobum Banisium, avunculum meum, dum viveret, prosequeris*, quoted in Ivi, p. 172.

<sup>23</sup> Pantar 2012 has shown that at least two manuscripts of Rozanović's history differ significantly: the version dedicated to the Venetian doge Nicolò da Ponte (doge 1578-1585) omits passages on founding of the city of Korčula, on Hungarian customary law regarding property that is used in the inland Korčula, on miraculous intervention of the Virgin in the decisive battle.

<sup>24</sup> Rozanović writes: «Ex ea [Palletinorum familia] Pater Vincentius Theologiae Magister insignis ex ordine Praedicatorum fuit Archidiacono [Rosaneo] amicissimus, et jure sanguinis quarto gradu conjunctus», Pantar 2012, p. 56.

missionary in Latin America 1530-1541, later a student at Bologna and teacher at Vicenza. He also served as a diplomat of the king Philip II of Spain, as geographer and translator. Having moved to Rome in 1563, the Dominican from Korčula first held the post of a penitentiary of the St Peter's basilica. From 1564 he was also a member of the monastery of St Nicholas in Korčula. The monastery will sustain damage during the Turkish siege in 1571, the one that Rožanović will write about; as the abbot of the monastery, Paletin will help repair the damage.

The small group of educated men from the Dalmatian island of Korčula located in Rome during 1550-1565 functioned on several levels. As intellectuals (three of them priests: Baničević, Rožanović, Paletin), they were members of an international, cosmopolitan community (all of them studied in Italy; remember also Paletin's missionary work, Baničević's benefices in Trento). Three of them were authors of writings that their time would classify as literature (Petrović, Rožanović, Paletin). As islanders from Korčula, they shared local, regional, national, religious identity; as often happens in a small community, they shared familial ties as well (Baničević with Petrović; Rožanović with Paletin). Their distinguished duties in the confraternity, chronologically overlapping, suggest that they may have supported each other in the elections, perhaps having used the authority of the famous countryman and relative Jakov Baničević the Elder as a starting point for their network.

What we don't know, however, is whether the *intellectual* work of the four men from Korčula interacted with the Schiavoni emigrant community in Rome – whether they managed to contribute to the communal identity, or whether, in return, the needs and interests of the community affected the intellectuals' writings and ideas<sup>25</sup>. In other words, we do not know whether the Schiavoni community in Rome at the time tried, as Gramsci and King put it, to “harness” the intellectuals. Neither do we know whether their interests might have *clashed* with those of the community – as was the case, for example, some twenty years later with Aleksandar Komulović from Split (1548-1608), member of the confraternity from 1576, expelled from it in 1579, but returning again in 1582 as the confraternity's president, no less, who requested (and obtained) from the confraternity financial support to print a catechism in Croatian; nevertheless, soon afterwards, in 1590, as the first archpriest of the Schiavoni community in Rome, Komulović quarreled with the confraternity again and was again expelled<sup>26</sup>.

<sup>25</sup> Support of the national confraternity might have been financial, because it seems to have functioned as a savings bank as well; Nikola Brautić (Brauzzi, Brautius) from Dubrovnik (1566-1632), member of the confraternity from 1587 and its president in 1594, bishop of Sarsina 1602-1632, and a Latin poet, had deposited with the confraternity on interest, at least from 1612, a sum of 500 scudi; Körbler 1912, p. 69.

<sup>26</sup> Pignatti 2004 and Gudelj 2015, p. 316; Komulović's tumultuous relationship with the Schiavoni community has not been sufficiently recognized or explained in Croatian scholarship.



The scattered facts we possess about the intellectuals from Korčula in the national confraternity in Rome – Jakov Baničević the Elder as a prestigious figure to whom two of the confraternity's presidents were related; a certain political dimension of the former president Rozanović's memoir of the Korčula siege, provocative enough to be suppressed in a version dedicated to the Venetian doge; our inferences about later cultural interests of the confraternity itself, as visible from paintings in the chiesa di San Girolamo dei Croati<sup>27</sup> – it all suggests that a search for the 'Schiavoni' preoccupations of the four men from Korčula could enable us to understand their intellectual activity better. This understanding could lead us, also, to reconsider what we usually include or exclude in the national literary history, as opposed to the national art history.

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<sup>27</sup> For an interpretation of the paintings' programme, see Gudelj 2015.



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