

Visualizing past in a foreign country: image(s) of Schiavoni/Illyrians in Early Modern Italy

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Source / Izvornik: **Il capitale culturale. Studies on the Value of Cultural Heritage, 2018, 9 - 21**

Journal article, Published version

Rad u časopisu, Objavljena verzija rada (izdavačev PDF)

<https://doi.org/10.13138/2039-2362/1892>

Permanent link / Trajna poveznica: <https://urn.nsk.hr/urn:nbn:hr:131:078361>

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Download date / Datum preuzimanja: **2024-04-12**



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

IL CAPITALE CULTURALE

Studies on the Value of Cultural Heritage

JOURNAL OF THE SECTION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

Department of Education, Cultural Heritage and Tourism
University of Macerata

eum



IL CAPITALE CULTURALE
Studies on the Value of Cultural Heritage
Supplementi 07 / 2018

eum

Il Capitale culturale

Studies on the Value of Cultural Heritage
Supplementi 07, 2018

ISSN 2039-2362 (online)
ISBN 978-88-6056-565-5

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direzionale, via Carducci 63/a - 62100
Macerata
tel (39) 733 258 6081
fax (39) 733 258 6086
<http://eum.unimc.it>
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Layout editor

Marzia Pelati

Progetto grafico / Graphics

+crocevia / studio grafico



Rivista accreditata AIDEA
Rivista riconosciuta CUNSTA
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Visualizing Past in a Foreign Country: Schiavoni/Illyrian Confraternities and Colleges in Early Modern Italy in comparative perspective

This work has been fully 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 (15th - 18th c.)



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

edited by Giuseppe Capriotti, Francesca Coltrinari,
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Visualizing past in a foreign country: image(s) of Schiavoni/Illyrians in Early Modern Italy*

Jasenka Gudelj**

The Ragusan abbot and Vatican library guardian, Stjepan Gradić (1613-1683), acting as president of the Confraternity of St Jerome of Schiavoni/Illyrians in Rome, in 1660 wrote that rebuilding the block of houses next to the national church on Via Ripetta was necessary because «in tutta quella strada questo suo edificio sia il più infelice d'ogni altro, et espressivo di una

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I would like to thank all the participants in the Zagreb conference and in particular Ivana Prijatelj Pavičić, Igor Fisković, Sanja Cvetnić, Ljiljana Dobrovšak and Dubravka Mlinarić for their precious insights. I would also like to thank Giuseppe Bonaccorso and Anatole Upart for coming from far away to give their papers and share their knowledge with us. All members of the *Visualization Nationhood* project have been extremely stimulating fellow researchers: Anita Ruso, Tanja Trška, Danko Šourek, and Daniel Premerl organized the conference making it a smooth sail, while Francesca Coltrinari and Giuseppe Capriotti edited this volume in the most professional and structured way possible. The financial support for the conference and the publication of the special issue of «Il Capitale Culturale» has been provided by Croatian Science Foundation (HRZZ) and Ministry of Science and Education of the Republic of Croatia.

certa barbarie, et ineleganza di costumi della quale molti, seben indebitamente, l'incolpano»¹.

A barbaric and inelegant the house or the *natio* itself? Gradić suggested that building a «casamento di qualche eleganza» would be an act of redemption of the very face of *natio* in front of foreign ambassadors, princes, cardinals, pilgrims, and others using Via di Ripetta – one of the streets leading from Piazza del Popolo, the ancient entrance to the Urbe from the north². The architecture and the works of art it contained were obviously considered the collective face of the national confraternity in question, and therefore, a synecdoche for the whole Early Modern *natio* in *Roma communis patria*, the city of foreigners³. Long before the idea of a nation-state had become predominant on a European scale, numerous foreign communities in Early Modern Rome and other cosmopolitan centers of the peninsula, typically organized in confraternities maintaining a chapel or a church, became representative institutions of their “nations”⁴.

The image(s) of this pre-modern *natio*, as envisioned through their historical collectives, i.e. confraternities and colleges for students that existed throughout Early Modern Italy, was examined at an interdisciplinary conference organized by the Croatian Science Foundation research project *Visualizing Nationhood: the Schiavoni/Illyrian Confraternities and Colleges in Italy and the Artistic Exchange with South East Europe (15th - 18th c.)* at Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb, Croatia, between 30th and 31st May 2017. It explored both visual and linguistic constructs produced or commissioned by members of Schiavoni/Illyrian institutions, questioning intentions and mechanisms behind their creation, as well as the reverberation of their meaning in different contexts. These phenomena were also regarded in a comparative perspective of similar expressions found in proto-national institutions of other foreign communities on the Apennine peninsula in the same period. The conference brought together scholars working in the fields of art history, history, visual, literary and material culture studies, thus broadening the existing understanding of Schiavoni/Illyrian proto-national identity.

1. *Mapping the Schiavoni/Illyrians/Croatians in Early Modern Italy: towards an image?*

Who were members of the group to whom Gradić suggested a “face-lifting”? They were ethnic Slavs originating from territories roughly corresponding with

¹ Gudelj 2016a, pp. 195, 224.

² *Ibidem*.

³ Salerno 1968, Fosi 2008, Koller, Kubersky 2015.

⁴ Koller, Kubersky 2015.

contemporary Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia, and Montenegro, who moved to Italy for various reasons; many were escaping wars, epidemics and poverty but some were merchants and diplomatic representatives, clergy, intellectuals or artists. These migrations towards what was considered *Italia Felix* have been studied extensively, given the scale and the persistence of the phenomenon from the Middle Ages up to the present, with centuries of Ottoman expansion in the Balkans marking the peak of the exodus⁵.

Between 15th and 16th century, the area of origin of these immigrants underwent important political changes that included the consolidation of the Venetian rule in coastal Istria, Dalmatia and Albania (1409-1420), the gradual retrenchment of territories of the Croatian-Hungarian crown (which was included in the Habsburg crown lands in 1527), and the extinction of the Bosnian kingdom in 1463 as the Ottomans advanced westwards, with minuscule Republic of Ragusa (Dubrovnik) being the only stable entity throughout the said period⁶. These political changes had an obvious impact on economic, social and religious life in the region, whose demographic situation was already weakened by repeating plague epidemics, also provoking further abandonment.

The reformulation of the regional political divisions represented both different points of departure and different treatment of immigrants in various Italian states: for example, Dalmatians from the *Stato da Mar* in Venice were citizens of the *Serenissima*, while in the Papal state their condition was that of foreign subjects. Moreover, the merchant and diplomatic networks developed by Dubrovnik merchants and nobles would have a different standing in the host society than poor immigrants from the Eastern Adriatic, although they spoke the same language and were often members of the same confraternity⁷. The overlapping of these two social networks needs further assessment, but one of the case studies in this volume, the Genoese chapel of Dubrovnik merchants in Santa Maria di Castello studied by Anita Ruso, is a telling example in terms of visual arts.

As was the case with immigrants all over Europe, in order to meet their social and religious needs, Schiavoni/Illyrians organized themselves: the first known confraternities based on the common origin, language and faith are mentioned in Italy from the mid-fifteenth century, the most important ones existing in Venice and Rome, but also in Udine and throughout Marche, Apulia, Abruzzo, and Molise⁸. Moreover, the spiritual attraction of Italian sanctuaries drew pilgrims, while universities and monastic schools attracted students, thus forming a system of short-term mobility between the two shores of Adriatic and beyond,

⁵ Dinić Knežević 1973, Čoralić 1997, Anselmi 1998, Gestrin 1998a and 1998b, Čoralić 2001 and 2003, *Hrvati u Italiji* 2014-2015, p. 368 and the articles in the present volume.

⁶ Čoralić 2003, pp. 184-186, Ivetic 2014 with bibliography.

⁷ On Ragusan diplomacy see Anita Ruso's article in the present volume.

⁸ For a survey of Early Modern Schiavoni/Illyrian institutions in Italy, see Čoralić 1997, Perić 2011, Gudelj 2016b, pp. 5-6.

heavily dependent on “national” colleges and hospices: colleges for formation of Slavic priests were founded in Bologna and Loreto/Fermo in the 16th century, the hospices for pilgrims were maintained by Schiavoni/Illyrian confraternities in Rome and Loreto⁹. Therefore, Schiavoni/Illyrians were present with their rather visible community centers in the territories of the two maritime republics, Venice and Genua, and in the Papal States: in Rome, throughout Marche region and in the university city of Bologna.

Based on the “national” key, such institutions inevitably formulated their identity on their “otherness” in respect to the host society and other groups of foreign origin¹⁰. In the case of Slavic immigrants from South East Europe in important urban centers like Rome, Venice, and Bologna, the question of self-definition inspired the geo-historical research and linguistic inquiries¹¹, but also the formulation of certain narratives constructing the prominence of the nation through deeds of great men and national saints and their relics, and, ultimately, of the national institutions themselves. A particularly fortunate narrative construct for a notoriously ethnically and politically divided area from which the members of these institutions originated, was the Illyrian discourse beautifully analyzed by Zrinka Blažević using, among others, the writings of the early 17th century members of the Roman Illyrian confraternity Ivan Tomko Mrnavić and Jeronim Paštrić¹². Recent interdisciplinary conference organized in Zagreb by Trpimir Vedriš and Luka Špoljarić further questioned the issue of national visions and ethnic loyalties formulated both in the Historical Croatian lands and among the Schiavoni immigrants in various parts of Europe in the Renaissance¹³.

The visual arts, as we have seen from abbot Gradić’s words, played an important part in the fashioning of the identity of the immigrants that chose to live in the artistically most influential region during the Early Modern period. In order to understand the mechanisms of commissions and the politics of the image(s) of the *natio* carefully constructed by Schiavoni/Illyrians collectives across the Apennine peninsula, it was important to compare and contrast different phenomena: a series of case-studies examined by researchers affiliated with the project *Visualizing Nationhood: the Schiavoni/Illyrian Confraternities and Colleges in Italy and the Artistic Exchange with South East Europe (15th - 18th c.)* and other invited

⁹ A short-lived college also existed at Santo Stefano Rotondo (Gargano) between 1636 and 1647, Perić 2011, p. 152.

¹⁰ See Keller, Kubersky 2015.

¹¹ For example, a large map of Illyrian provinces has been drawn in 1660 by Pier Andrea Bufalini as visualization of the sentence of Sacra Rota of the right to use Roman institutions maintained by confraternity of St Jerome. The map became one of the maps of the Illyricum published in the historical study by another member of the confraternity, Ivan Lučić *De Regno Dalmatiae et Croatiae libri sex* (Amsterdam 1666), encountering a considerable fortuna critica, see Gudelj 2016a, pp. 190-191, Mlinarić *et al.* 2012. On the study and the use of the Croatian language in papal universities see Krasić 2009.

¹² Blažević 2008.

¹³ Conference *National Ideas and Ethnic Loyalties in Renaissance Croatia*, Colloquia Mediaevalia Croatica III, Zagreb, 24th February 2017.

scholars at the conference *Visualizing past in the foreign country* thus represent a platform to discuss the Schiavoni strategies of differentiation from the Other in various environments.

The approach owes much to the methodology used by Susanne Kubersky and other members of the *Roma communis patria* research project of the Bibliotheca Hertziana Max-Planck-Institut, and depends on the results of inquiries by Lovorka Čoralić and Jadranka Neralić for the Schiavoni/Illyrian confraternities in Italy¹⁴. The possibility of further comparison between different national groups in Italy and their use of the urban soil is provided in articles by Antal Molnar, Claudia Conforti, Federico Bellini, Donatella Calabi and Giuseppe Bonaccorso¹⁵. Moreover, significant insights for the relationship between confraternities and visual arts are delivered by Barbara Wisch and Diane Cole Ahl, an investigation broadened by Diana Bullen Presciutti¹⁶, and in the “Illyrian” lands, by Egidio Ivetic, Ana Lavrič, and Ivana Prijatelj Pavičić, just to mention a few¹⁷.

The comparative research between different Schiavoni/Illyrians’ built hubs in Early modern Italy has revealed some more nuanced common features and interesting parallels. Namely, exploration of the architecture of their churches and other buildings has brought to light the property systems and esthetic and moral values leading their commissioners. Particularly productive has been the investigation into the existence of a national pantheon of saints and heroes, analogous to explorations by Zrinka Blažević. Moreover, a possible new light might be shed on the artists called Schiavoni, a 19th century constructs deeply embedded into Croatian art history, here re-proposed within the paradigm of its importance for the national character, confraternities and artistic and intellectual exchange.

2. The face of the nation: Schiavoni/Illyrian institutions in Italy and their architecture

Schiavoni/Illyrian institutions in important urban centers of Early Modern Italy, such as Rome, Venice, Bologna and Ancona, invested in churches and surrounding complexes, thus creating the façades representative of the nation in question. A first assessment is now possible thanks to the comparative research of the investments by Schiavoni institutions across Italy.

Studies by Tanja Trška established the chronology of the site of Scuola piccola di San Giorgio e Trifone in Venice, with its uneasy co-habitation with scuola di

¹⁴ Čoralić 1997, 2001 and 2003; Neralić 2017.

¹⁵ Bonaccorso 1997; Calabi, Lanaro 1997; Bonaccorso 1998; Bottin, Calabi 1999; Bellini 2007; Conforti, Sanchez de Madariaga 2007; Molnár *et al.* 2017.

¹⁶ Wisch *et al.* 2000; Bullen Presciutti 2017.

¹⁷ Prijatelj Pavičić 1997 with bibliography; Ivetic 2015, Lavrič 2014, 2016 and 2017.

San Giovanni al Tempio and the new facade built by Giovanni de Zon, also unveiling some previously unpublished drawings¹⁸. Analogous research has been conducted by Danko Šourek for Collegio Illirico Ungarico in Bologna, where Bolognese architect Giovanni Battista Torri has been firmly accredited with the project of the complex, its typology close to Spanish and other national colleges in the university city¹⁹. Giuseppe Capriotti conducted research on the previously unpublished church of St Blasius in Ancona, finding the name of the architect, Giovan Battista Urbini, and establishing the prominence of a confraternity church within its urban context²⁰.

The Schiavoni institutions in Rome were part of the larger system of national churches: here Giuseppe Bonaccorso investigates those of subjects of Serenissima, thus giving the urban and political context for San Girolamo degli Schiavoni at Ripetta, with an interesting literary investigation into possible places of Ragusan visitors to Rome. My own research on Roman community established the importance of the papal interventions for the transformations of the complex of St Jerome at Ripetta, from its compact block containing the single-naved church, hospital, and houses for rent to still-existing church, built between 1586 and 1591 according to Martino Longhi the Elder's designs, and, finally with now lost «casamento di qualche eleganza» wanted by abbot Gradić and designed by Pier Andrea Bufalini²¹. Finally, in the 18th century, Schiavoni invested in rental-apartment blocks planned by Nicola Michetti defined in the confraternity documents as «casamenti per le persone oneste»²².

Therefore, all the investments were made to maximize the functionality of the complexes, using local architects, materials, and typology – but they were also important investments into visibility of the natio, its faces without typical characteristic of the homeland, but clean, elegant, decent: all the characteristic of a good citizen, not an unwanted immigrant or unstructured wandering student.

3. *The National Pantheon: Saints and Heroes*

If architecture commissioned by Schiavoni institutions in Italy tried to construct the image of decent, not an opulence-seeking group, paintings that embellished these architectures introduce eloquent iconographical elements of saints and relics in national key, as well as the great men of the nation, often depicting Illyrians as Catholic Heroes of *antemurales christianitatis*.

Pioneering studies of this matter by Daniel Premerl on the early 18th century

¹⁸ Trška in print.

¹⁹ Šourek in print.

²⁰ Capriotti in print.

²¹ Gudelj 2015, 2016a and 2016b.

²² Curcio 1989.

frescoes of the refectory of Collegio Illirico-ungarico in Bologna are well known: his research of Bolognese images of Croatian past has set a methodological path for the study of Illyrian political iconography, especially for the narratives on the Croatian-Hungarian kingdom and history of Zagreb dioceses. Danko Šourek and Daniel Premerl in the present volume further their investigation in this direction, by examining printed images of Croatian soldier and St Ladislav produced in circles of Bolognese Illyrian college, accentuating the heroic nature of the nation in question but also establishing this Illyrian institution as a hub of circulation of visual models between Central Europe and Central Italy²³.

A military and anti-Ottoman subtext is also recognized by Ana Marinković in her analysis of the relics and hagiographic horizon of Scuola piccola di San Giorgio e Trifone, the gathering place of Dalmatians (and some Ragusans) in Venice, given their involvement in the maritime professions. This collective devotional spirit is somehow given a more personal touch in the *sala superiore* of the school, as arises from Tanja Trška's examination of the paintings representing important scenes from the lives of scuola holy protectors, accompanied by portraits, coats of arms and views of the eastern Adriatic cities, all painted by Venetian (or adopted Venetian, but not Schiavoni) painters.

The civic cults, present as noted already in the name of the Venetian confraternity and indicating that most of its members came from Kotor and Bar in Boka kotorska bay, are also used by Francesca Coltrinari and Giuseppe Capriotti as a key identifier of Schiavoni confraternities in the Marche, enabling them to speculate on the provenance of confraternity's members²⁴, with St Blaise indicating Dubrovnik and St George the town of Bar.

Particularly interesting in this regard is Capriotti's and Anita Ruso's inquiry into the civic cult iconography of St Blaise as Ragusan patron saint outside Dubrovnik, in Ancona and Genua: translated to Italy, the civic cult uses more universal message, understandable both by its Ragusan expatriate commissioners but also by local users of the sacred spaces. Capriotti also suggests that the iconography of Split protector St Doimus has possibly influenced the 15th century representation of St Blaise in Ancona, thus confirming the iconographical overlapping of Eastern Adriatic civic cults within probably mixed confraternity in the most important Adriatic port city of the Papal States.

Nevertheless, the central and most comprehensive regional cult is St Jerome, whose patronage might indicate an even more mixed provenance of members of the immigrant Schiavoni/Illyrian confraternity bearing his name: his cult as national saint is here analyzed by Ines Ivić, who argues that for Schiavoni, the Church Father was a figure legitimizing their origin, language, and alphabet. The protagonist of the Carpaccio's cycle and important yet unofficial cult for Schiavoni confraternity in Venice, Jerome is most notably the patron saint of

²³ Also Šourek 2017.

²⁴ Capriotti 2016a and 2016b, Coltrinari 2016.

the Roman Schiavoni/Illyrian confraternity, the post-Tridentine frescoes in their church showing him winning the discussions with the infidel and the orthodox²⁵. The same visual cycles, executed by Giovanni Guerra and his team of so-called Sistine painters is also featuring Split civic protectors Rainerius and Doimus, but also a pair of Dalmatian popes, St John and St Gaius, likewise present in 18th century Bologna frescoes analyzed previously by Daniel Premerl²⁶.

An interesting pair of interconfessional saints, Cyril and Methodius, suggest an apostolic role in the Slavic lands longed for by the late 16th-century community at Ripetta²⁷, a role also practiced by Ruthenian monks linked to the Roman church of St Sergius and Bacchus, here explored by Anatole Upart. The similarity among Slavonic languages made every Slavic priest a potential missionary, given the political and religious situation in the Eastern Europe.

The national pantheon should also contain a rather specific cult that is Santa Casa of Loreto, the flying architecture connecting the two coasts of Adriatic in a particularly strong manner. Studies by Ivana Prijatelj Pavičić, Francesca Coltrinari and Danko Šourek have shown how this cult was also important for oscillation of the image of the Schiavoni as “bad” people from whom the holy house has escaped towards *Italia Felix*, only to be redefined as saviors of Christianity and courageous warriors, and is one of the most important Marian cults of the Eastern Adriatic coast²⁸.

The presence of relics and different cults, as many of the articles in this volume show, mirror the war for the national prestige, and in some cases, reach the importance of a political program.

4. *A new paradigm for Schiavoni?: Artist&Intellectuals and circulation of (artistic) knowledge*

Books, language, translation, and alphabet were important part of the life of Schiavoni communities in Italy: Roman confraternity financed the publication of translations of the holy scripts, while the Franciscan friar Matija Divković, after printing his catechism in Croatian, entrusted the Venetian confraternity with Illyrian letters for printing books in 1616, reminding us of importance of Venice as printing center. The Holy Mass in “Illyrian” was also an important part of the life of both confraternities and their spaces: the Venetian confraternity was granted the permission to serve mass in “lingua Illirica” shortly after its foundation, while the knowledge of the language was a condition for becoming

²⁵ Gudelj, Trška in print; Gudelj 2015.

²⁶ Premerl 2014, pp. 65-72.

²⁷ Gudelj 2015.

²⁸ Prijatelj Pavičić 1994 and 1998, pp. 64-78; Coltrinari 2016 and 2017; Šourek in print b. On the Slavic Orthodox participation in the Loretan cult see Živković 2017.

the canon in Roman church of St Jerome, as the only national chapter in Rome was established in 1589. Therefore, it is not surprising that their sites feature images of intellectual effort deeply embedded in Catholic culture they so proudly defended: Carpaccio's famous St Augustine in his study in Venice, and St Thomas Aquinas's vision in his study in the Roman church do suggest construction of an intellectual image for the *natio*.

In this context, the article by Neven Jovanović in the present volume, who proposes the study of Schiavoni intellectuals who were also members of Roman confraternity and were writing in Latin (thus becoming linguistically almost as universal as images) does provide an interesting and potentially productive historical framework for literary historians. Reflecting the linguistic turn in historical studies, in her analysis of Illyrian ideogeme, Zrinka Blažević focused on textual material, particularly writings by the members of Roman Illyrian confraternity. Evidently, words, painting, architecture were part of the same intellectual efforts on constructing a decent, Catholic, heroic identity of the Schiavoni/Illyrians in Rome, but also in other confraternities and colleges throughout Early Modern Italy.

Some members of these confraternities were also visual artists: as Laris Borić has shown in his example of Ivan Gapić from the island of Cres, whose activity and circle of important Roman patrons he reconstructs for the first time. In the second part of the 16th century, among active members of the Roman confraternity, there were Gapić, engraver Natale Bonifacio, and sculptor Nikola Lazanić and they all did some work for the confraternity, albeit almost all lost. It is therefore only to be expected, as Francesca Coltrinari proposes, that numerous Schiavoni artists, sculptors, *lapicide* and *tagliapietre*, who also circulated the Eastern Adriatic stone, were members of different "national" brotherhoods in the Marche²⁹. The circulation of artists between the shores of Adriatic and beyond evidently also happened through the social network provided by the national institution, while the same hub has also been used for exportation of Italian models and projects, the example of Dubrovnik cathedral whose ready-made design was sent overseas from Roman confraternity speaking volumes in this regard³⁰.

Yet, no confraternity which would exclusively gather builders or visual artists from Schiavonia existed: there is no evidence that the national group in question has ever created an occupational-national brotherhood, and the visual artists have not appeared in the confraternity membership records in the 17th and 18th centuries. As already noted, all architectural projects for Schiavoni in Italy have been designed by Italian architects and virtually all the existing visual artworks are by Italian artists: the construction of the national image has been formulated through local commissions and visual language, and the stylistic analysis of the

²⁹ Coltrinari 2017 and her article in this volume.

³⁰ Gudelj 2016a. Also on Dubrovnik cathedral now see The Cathedral of the Assumption of the Virgin in Dubrovnik (2016).

surviving work of those artists that were confirmed members of the Schiavoni confraternity reveal personalities that blended into host visual culture.

In this regard, it is interesting to compare the characterization of the so-called Schiavoni artists in the sources and art-historical historiography. The embedding of Schiavoni artists into Croatian national art-historiography is generally attributed to 19th century Croatian cultural historian Ivan Kukuljević Sakcinski, who included in his *Slovník umjetnikah jugoslavenskih* (Dictionary of Yugoslavian artist, Zagreb 1858) also artists whose Eastern Adriatic origin is rather obscure (like Andrea Meldola) in order to create more cultural heroes for his national political agenda³¹. But much before that, an interesting investigation by Ivana Prijatelj Pavičić of the 16th and 17th century sources on the origin and character of some of the most prominent Kukuljević's Schiavoni (Giulio Clavio, Andrea Meldola, and Niccolo dell'Arca) has revealed typical identity stereotypes of barbaric and choleric character attributed to the artists of known or assumed East Adriatic origin³²: although no known records connect these particular individuals with Schiavoni/Illyrian confraternities existing in Italy, the notion of barbaric, expressed by abbot Gradić in his letter to the confraternity regarding the façade-face of the nation in 1660, returns and becomes more clear in understanding the strategies of confraternities and colleges in visual and textual terms analyzed at the conference *Visualizing past in the foreign country*. Hopefully, the discussion of these strategies has only been tackled by the articles in the present volume.

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³¹ On Kukuljević and his role in the construction of the Croatian national identity see Mance 2012.

³² Prijatelj Pavičić 2014.

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JOURNAL OF THE SECTION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE
Department of Education, Cultural Heritage and Tourism
University of Macerata

Direttore / Editor
Massimo Montella

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Anita Ruso, Danko Šourek, Tanja Trška, Anatole Upart

<http://riviste.unimc.it/index.php/cap-cult/index>

eum edizioni università di macerata



ISSN 2039-2362
ISBN 978-88-6056-565-5

Euro 25,00