

Preface

During the Renaissance, Italy was a magnet for many Europeans. Scholars such as Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam, philosophers such as Michel de Montaigne, artists such as Albrecht Dürer, scientists such as Andreas Vesalius, travellers such as Thomas Coryat, nobles, soldiers, churchmen, and all sorts of other persons curious to see the world and, in particular, the sights, art, culture, and antiquities of Italy streamed into the peninsula and then returned to their own countries with stories, anecdotes, and a new outlook that, in turn, influenced the arts and letters of their homelands. We should not, however, forget that along with this throng of cultural tourists, there were also thousands of less wealthy and less learned people who emigrated to Italy in search not of culture and the arts, but of work and, in some cases, safety. This special double issue of *Confraternitas* looks at one such group of immigrants, the Illyrian or *Schiavone* population from the eastern shores of the Adriatic Sea, that is, from the coastline of Dalmatia.

After centuries of competing attempts by Venetian, Croatian, Hungarian, and Bosnian rulers to control the region, by 1420 nearly the entire Dalmatian coast had become part of the Republic of Venice. Here it remained until 1797 when Napoleon's forces captured Venice and brought the thousand-year-old republic to an end. The only notable exception to Venetian rule in Dalmatia was the small Republic of Ragusa (today, Dubrovnik) in the south, which acquired its independence from Venice in 1358 and managed to survive into the early nineteenth century by not getting in anybody's way and, from 1458 on, by paying tribute to the Ottomans who protected it, so to speak, against Venetian intentions.

Many of the Schiavoni who emigrated to Italy came from coastal communities in Dalmatia — Arbe (Rab), Segna (Senj), Zara (Zadar), Spalato (Split), Sebenico (Šibenik), Cattaro (Kotor), and more — as well as from the Republic of Ragusa. Their language and culture were a mix of Latin (Venetian) and Slavic (Croatian, Bosnian). Other immigrants, instead, were Christian Slavs from further inland who, fleeing the Ottoman advances in the Balkans, found temporary refuge and safety in the Venetian territories along the coast. Their language and culture were Slavic. A variety of factors led Illyrians and Schiavoni to emigrate to peninsular Italy where, in cities such as Venice and Rome, but also in smaller towns such as Pesaro, Ancona, Loreto, Recanati, Jesi, Macerata, Ascoli Piceno, and more, they first found economic opportunities and then a new permanent home. While working hard to integrate into their new societies, they also sought to maintain their cultural identity and native traditions. They did so by gathering into “national” confraternities where they could maintain the rituals, devotions, culture, and memories of their place of origin. They were not the only ones to do so — German, French, Florentine, Lucchese,

and other such national groups established similar confraternities of expatriates in their own places of emigration both in the Italian peninsula (in particular in Rome and Venice) and north of the Alps (for example, in Lyons and Avignon). Whatever the case, “national” confraternities provided immigrants with a familiar set of cultural, linguistic, and even religious referents to support them as they tried to navigate the difficult transition, be it physical, cultural, or social, from their old to their new home.

The four articles in this special issue focus on several confraternities of Illyrians / Schiavoni in Italy. More specifically, they seek to determine how these confraternities used art and architecture to retain and maintain their particular cultural identity away from the homeland while, at the same time, advance their expatriate community’s status in the new country. While affirming their own presence in the territory, these confraternities also served as dynamic links between the old country and the new. As such, they functioned as conduits between the communities “back home” and Italy, and vice versa.

Though this special issue focuses on the art and architecture of the Illyrian / Schiavoni confraternities in Italy, there is much also to be said about the role these confraternities played in advancing professional, commercial, and economic exchanges between the two coasts of the Adriatic. Some of the articles hint at this when they mention, for example, Italian artists such as Matteo Ponzone, who found work (and fame) in Dalmatia thanks, in part, to his earlier connections with Illyrian / Schiavoni confraternities in Italy. Clearly, the field is wide open and a lot of innovative research is still waiting to be done to determine the economic impact of “national” confraternities on both sides of the diasporic divide. For the moment, however, we will leave that suggestion for future scholars to ponder and pursue while we appreciate, instead, the four current articles on the art and architecture of expatriate Illyrian / Schiavoni confraternities and the contributions they made both to their local communities and to individual members and artists.

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Editor