

The Cauldron of St. Venera and the Comb of St. Blaise. Cult and Iconography in the Confraternities of Albanians and Schiavoni in Fifteenth-Century Ascoli Piceno

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Summary: This article analyzes the relocation of specific cults of saints from the Illyrian coast on the eastern shores of the Adriatic Sea to the Marche region of Italy in line with the migration of communities of Albanians and Schiavoni who gathered into confraternities in their new homeland. It investigates the reasons behind the frequency with which these confraternities were named after St. Venera (for Albanians) and St. Blaise (for Schiavoni), both highly venerated by the Illyrian community: the first as protection against the Turks, the second in the hope of a good harvest. In the Marche, however, these cults experienced some specific changes, often influencing artistic production: St. Venera maintained her anti-Turkish function (in memory of the Albanians' escape), but her iconography added a nun's habit and a cauldron; St. Blaise lost his agrarian function but, thanks to his attribute (the carder's comb), his patronage over the weaving and the dyeing trades practiced by the Schiavoni was strengthened.

Introduction

This paper will analyze the relocation of specific cults of saints from the Balkan coast to the Marche region of Italy brought about by the migration of communities of Albanians and Schiavoni who then grouped in confraternities in their new homeland.¹ This objective will be pursued through the analysis of a “micro” case, that is, the realization of two fifteenth century

* 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 (fifteenth–eighteenth century).

¹ By Albanians we mean the inhabitants of the Balkan region that corresponds roughly to present-day Albania. Although Schiavonia or Slavonia is an historic region of eastern Croatia, the Schiavoni who reached the Marche in the fifteenth century came mostly from the Dalmatian coast. Between the end of the sixteenth and the seventeenth century the term “Illyrian” was used to generally define the Balkan territory. The Illyrian colleges of Loreto and Fermo, founded to form priests who would have to evangelize and heal the souls of Christians in the Balkan areas conquered by the Turks, in fact, indiscriminately housed students from Croatia and Albania (but also from Serbia, Bosnia, Macedonia). See Verducci, “Il collegio illirico di Fermo,” and Moroni, “I collegi illirici delle Marche.”

polyptychs, painted by the Austrian painter Pietro Alamanno (Pietro Grill from Göttweig, c. 1430–1497/98) for the two confraternities of Albanians and Schiavoni in Ascoli Piceno.

During the fifteenth century many Albanians and Schiavoni escaped to the Western Adriatic coast, especially (but not only) to the Marche region, for three main reasons: the Ottomans advance, the threat of the plague, and economic need.² The presence of Albanians and Schiavoni in many towns in the Marche, from Pesaro to Ascoli Piceno, is well documented.³ These new immigrants often had humble jobs, sometimes even humiliating ones, such as executioner.⁴ In many cases their stay was strictly supervised and sometimes they were even expelled, as those immigrants were believed to be the carriers of the plague they had brought from the opposite coast.⁵

In order to fight suspicion and prejudice, Albanians and Schiavoni would frequently group in confraternities that fostered their members' integration into the civic and religious life of the new country.⁶ Studies on the "unwanted minorities" in the Papal State in the fifteenth century have indeed shown how, both in central and peripheral areas, the phenomenon of associations, confraternities in particular, is one of the first and most effective integration strategies used by "foreigners" of the Catholic faith in order to fit into the host society.⁷ The presence of confraternities of Albanians and Schiavoni in the Marche Region is well documented from Pesaro to Ascoli Piceno: in some cities we find either a confraternity of Albanians or one of Schiavoni, but in others (such as Loreto, Recanati and Ascoli Piceno), we find confraternities of both Albanians and Schiavoni (fig. 2.1). While the confraternities of Albanians are usually dedicated to St. Venera or Veneranda, the ones of Schiavoni are really varied in their dedications and the only one that so far recurs twice is to St. Blaise,

² See Anselmi, "Schiavoni e Albanesi nell'agricoltura marchigiana."

³ See Bonasera, *La presenza storica degli albanesi nelle Marche*, and Anselmi (ed.), *Italia felix*.

⁴ This happened in many towns in the Marche, such as Ancona. An act of council of 25 July 1439, recorded in the city charter, states that "no Illyrian or Slav from whatever parts of Slavonia" (quod nullus Inliricus seu Sclavus de quibusunque partibus Sclavoniae) could be forced to carry out the work of executioner; cf. Archivio di Stato di Ancona, Archivio storico comunale di Ancona, *Statuta Civitatis Anconae, 1394, in copia del 1426 circa, con successivi al 1501*, fol. 51^{r-v}. The act has already been transcribed by Camillo Albertini, *Storia di Ancona*, Libro X, parte I, Additiones, fol. 10^v (Biblioteca Benincasa of Ancona) and mentioned by Natalucci, "Insediamenti di dalmati, slavi e albanesi in Ancona," 99.

⁵ See, for instance, what repeatedly happened in Macerata in the fifteenth century: Ruffini, "Medici e guaritori forestieri nella Marca anconitana," 313–315.

⁶ Sensi, "Fraternite di slavi" and Sensi, "Slavi nelle Marche."

⁷ Esposito, "Le minoranze indesiderate (corsi, slavi e albanesi)."

documented in Ancona and Ascoli Piceno.⁸ The case of Ascoli Piceno is particularly interesting.

St. Venera and the Albanians in Ascoli Piceno

Starting from the mid-fifteenth century, Albanians and Schiavoni encountered problems in Ascoli Piceno when some city council members proposed the expulsion of immigrants coming from Albania on the grounds that they were spreading the plague and causing problems because of their poverty.⁹ In spite of these problems, already in 1482 the *Universitas Albanensium Asculanorum* owned an altar with altarpiece in a chapel in the cathedral dedicated to St. Venera;¹⁰ the authority of a *Università et Repubblica delli Albanesi* was confirmed by the towns' magistrates in 1544, when the municipality approved their statutes.¹¹ The presence of this *universitas*, which was in every respect a sort of confraternity,¹² shows how the Albanian community had progressively integrated in the town life, up to the point of being officially recognized by the council.

As the pastoral visit by Monsignor Giovanni Gambi on 12 January 1714 testifies, in the cathedral of Ascoli Piceno there was a

cappellam antiquam sub titulo Sanctae Venerandae in icona dipinta in tabula deaurata cum imaginibus Beatae Virginis Mariae, S. Joannis Baptistae, S. Nicolai, S. Emidji, et S. Venerandae et cum hac inscrizione in extremitate apposita: Universitas Albanensium Asculanorum fieri fecit anno Domini 1482.¹³

(ancient chapel under the name of Saint Veneranda with a gilded painted icon with the images of the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. John the Baptist, St. Nicholas, St. Emygdus,

⁸ On the history of the confraternity of Schiavoni of Ancona see Capriotti, "Ricordare le origini schiavone nel Settecento."

⁹ Documentation on the presence of Albanians in Ascoli Piceno is provided by Fabiani, *Ascoli nel Quattrocento*, 1:368–369.

¹⁰ The first documentation on the existence of this altar was in the occasion of the pastoral visitation of Monsignor Giovanni Gambi in 1714 (Archivio Diocesano di Ascoli Piceno, *Sacra Visita monsignor Gambi*, 1712–1713, fol. 20^v). Giuseppe Fabiani, *Ascoli nel Quattrocento*, 1:372–373, tells us about several testamentary legacies in favour of this chapel starting from 1495.

¹¹ Cf. Archivio di Stato di Ascoli Piceno, *Liber Supplicationum* (1512–1529), fols. 233^v–234^v. This document was reported by Sensi, "Slavi nelle Marche," 505–506.

¹² In the documents from Ancona of the time, the term *universitas* refers simply to the entire group of Schiavoni present in town. See Capriotti, "Ricordare le origini schiavone nel Settecento."

¹³ Archivio Diocesano di Ascoli Piceno, *Sacra Visita monsignor Gambi*, 1712–1713, fol. 20^v.

and St. Veneranda, and with this inscription on the bottom: the University of the Albanians of Ascoli had this done in the year of the Lord 1482)

Thus, in the chapel dedicated to St. Venera, there was a polyptych showing the Virgin Mary in the centre and on the sides the Saints John the Baptist, Nicholas, Emygdus and Venera; furthermore, an inscription certified that the university of the Albanians of Ascoli Piceno had the work realized in 1482. Some notary documents tell us that in December of the same year the painter Pietro Alamanno had an argument with an Albanian over two ducats still to be paid for the realization of the *cona* or altarpiece in the chapel of St. Venera in the cathedral.¹⁴ In 1724, Tullio Lazzari, describing the cathedral of Ascoli Piceno, testifies that the polyptych was still complete.¹⁵ Sometime after 1724 the polyptych was taken apart so much so that in 1970 Baldassarre Orsini was able to locate only the panel with St. Venera in the chapel of the Madonna della Palma in the cathedral.¹⁶ It seems, in fact, that only this panel with St. Venera has survived and it is now preserved in the art gallery of Ascoli Piceno (fig. 2.2).¹⁷ The saint is portrayed as a nun, praying with joined hands, with *paternoster* beads hanging from her hands; on the upper right side a hand is offering her the palm of martyrdom as she is being subjected to it in a cauldron over a burning fire. Who exactly was St. Venera? What is her relation with the Albanians? Why are all the confraternities in the Marche dedicated to her?

The saint's name *Venera* or *Veneranda* come from the Latin *dies Veneris* (in Italian, *venerdì*), meaning Friday; its Greek equivalent is *paraskevi*, the day of preparation for the Sabbath (again, Friday).¹⁸ In the Christian tradition, there are three saints by these names. The first is Venera, a 2nd century Roman woman, so named by her parents because she was born on a Friday. Born into a wealthy family, she refused marriage in order to live as a Christian virgin. To punish her, Emperor Antoninus

¹⁴ See Fabiani, *Ascoli nel Quattrocento*, 2:160 and 262.

¹⁵ "A piè della Nave, passati altri tre Nicchi, ed Altari, come di ordinaria struttura, sta l'altro antichissimo, fabbricato dagli Albanesi, quando, cacciati dalla Patria dal turco, ricoverandosi nella Marca, ed in Ascoli, come l'esprime l'iscrizione: *Universitas Albanensium Asculanorum* ff. 1482. dedicato a Santa Veneranda, o Venere, Vergine, e Martire Ascolana, che vi si vede dipinta entro il Caldaio bollente del suo Martirio, oltre altri Santi, e la Vergine Madre, diligente lavoro di Pietro Alamanni Cittadino Ascolano, allievo del mentovato Carlo Crivelli, che a sua imitazione, e con delicatezza da Miniature la condusse, secondo il gusto di que' Tempi": Lazzari, *Ascoli in prospettiva*, 20.

¹⁶ "Si vede quivi allogata una tavoluccia con Santa Venera, dal volgo detta Veneranda Vergine Ascolana che soffre il martirio della caldaja bollente; è di Pietro Alamanni Ascolano, allievo di Carlo Crivelli. La Santa riposa in questa Chiesa": Orsini, *Descrizione delle pitture, sculture, architetture*, 12.

¹⁷ Papetti, Di Provido, *Pietro Alamanno*, 114.

¹⁸ Detelić, "St Paraskeve in the Balkan Context."

Pius put her in a cauldron of boiling oil and tar, but this method of execution proved to be ineffective; when accused of practicing magic, Venera splashed hot tar from her cauldron into the emperor's eyes and blinded him. Thanks to the saint's prayers, the emperor converted and regained his sight. After many vicissitudes and miracles, Venera suffered a martyr's death when she was beheaded in Rome.¹⁹ The second saint is Paraskeve from Iconium, in Asia Minor. She was an anchorite and missionary who was beheaded under the reign of Diocletian after having refused to sacrifice to the pagan idols. She is usually portrayed as a nun in a red dress with a cross in her hands.²⁰ The last saint is Paraskeve from Epibatas (or Paraskeve of the Balkans). Born from Slavic parents, also on a Friday, she lived between the tenth and eleventh century. Even as a child, Paraskeve was remarkable for her charity towards the poor. Her relics are documented already in the thirteenth century in Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria, from whence they were moved in 1393 to Vidin, in north-western Bulgaria, and from there to Belgrade, Serbia, in 1398, both times in order to save them from the advancing Ottomans. Once in Belgrade, Paraskeve became Petka, from *petak*, the Slavic word for Friday.²¹ In the Balkan countries these three saints are sometimes confused and overlapped, especially at a folkloric level, even though the one most commonly worshipped of the three is the late medieval Paraskeve of the Balkans.²²

Between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries Paraskeve was the focus of a strongly felt cult in Albania, where there were 33 churches dedicated to her, more than to any other saint except for the Virgin Mary and Saint Nicholas.²³ Perhaps because her relics had always managed to escape the Ottomans, her cult in Albania and in the Balkans had an anti-Turkish function. Because of the origins of her name, devotees were encouraged to go to mass on her names-day, Friday, and avoid praying in the mosque on the same day.²⁴ By all appearances, then, St. Venera arrived in the Marche region of Italy as the saint of Albanians escaping from the Ottomans — just like the relics of Venera that moved across the Balkans in search of a safe place, so those Albanians who arrived in the Marche as refugees escaping the Ottoman invasion brought with her cult with them.

¹⁹ Janin, "Parasceve, vergine, santa, martire," and Stelladoro, "La tradizione greca manoscritta di S. Parasceve."

²⁰ Popov, "Paraskeva and her "Sisters," 90.

²¹ Janin/Dujčev, "Parasceve, la Giovane, santa."

²² In the Balkans Paraskeve has an important role in the consolidation of the unity and the identity of the Balkan world. See Mesnil, Popova, "*Démone et chrétienne: Sainte Vendredi*," 748–749 and Detelić, "St Paraskeve in the Balkan Context," 94.

²³ Elsie, "The Christian Saints of Albania," 43. According to Mirjana Detelić, "St Paraskeve in the Balkan Context," 101, note 6, the St. Venera venerated in Albania is the Paraskeve of the Balkan.

²⁴ Elsie, "The Christian Saints of Albania," 44.

In Ascoli Piceno, the Paraskeve who arrived with the Albanians was much more closely identified with Venera from Rome, martyred in the cauldron, than had been the case in the Balkans. In Alamanno's polyptych, in fact, we have a clear example of this curious syncretism, perhaps used to grant cohesion and strengthen the identity of a cult present in both the Balkans and in Italy. Eventually, St. Venera became so strongly identified with Ascoli Piceno that between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries some local writers began to argue that St. Venera was actually from Ascoli (and not from Rome), and that she was martyred in the cauldron and buried in Ascoli Piceno.²⁵

St. Blaise and the Schiavoni of Ascoli Piceno

In 1489, the Schiavoni from Ascoli Piceno also commissioned Pietro Alamanno to paint a polyptych for their chapel (fig. 2.3).²⁶ The choice of a foreign artist, who had already worked for the Albanians in town, could be quite significant and the phenomenon would deserve to be better examined. Alamanno seems to have had a penchant for working for minority groups; some time before 1497, he realized yet another polyptych, now lost, in the church of Santa Maria della Carità in Ascoli Piceno for the Lombard community in the city.²⁷ The fact that he was a foreigner himself may have had something to do with this — Alamanno was in fact Peter Grill, born around 1430 in Göttweig, Austria. The epithet *Alemanus* by which he became known was used in the fifteenth century to indicate people of German origin or language. Grill moved to Ascoli Piceno around

²⁵ In 1673 Sebastiano Andreantonelli says that Venera is a martyr from Ascoli "in ferventi dolio positam" (Andreantonelli, *Historiae Asculanae Libri IV*, 107). In 1702 Paolo Antonio Appiani reaffirms that Venera is a saint from Ascoli (and not from France) buried in Ascoli (Appiani, *Vita di S. Emidio vescovo di Ascoli, e martire*, 145–156). Also for Tullio Lazzari, who writes in 1724, there is no doubt that the saint is from Ascoli (Lazzari, *Ascoli in prospettiva*, 20). In 1790 Baldassarre Orsini states that the saint is "dal volgo detta Veneranda Vergine Ascolana" (Orsini, *Descrizione delle pitture, sculture, architetture*, 12), proving how this belief was deeply rooted in town. In 1792 Giuseppe Colucci sums up Appiani's argumentations (Colucci, *Delle Antichità Picene*, 327–331), while in 1797 Giuseppe Ignazio Ciannavei reports again about the same tradition, saying that Venera is a saint from Ascoli whose corpse would be buried in the cathedral in "un antico Altare di varie figure di santi dipinti in Tavola costruito dall'Universalità degli Albanesi nel 1482" (Ciannavei, *Compendio di memorie istoriche*, 27–28). The reasons behind the invention of a Venera from Ascoli between the seventeenth and eighteenth century should be further analyzed. On the tradition of a Gallic Venera see Ventimiglia, *Di S. Venera o Veneranda*.

²⁶ Papetti, Di Provvido, *Pietro Alamanno*, 148–150.

²⁷ On 18 September 1497, the painter agreed with the ministers of the church of Santa Rufina di Cesano to paint a polyptych for 16 golden ducats by Easter of the following year. The work is now preserved in the Abruzzo National Museum in L'Aquila. It was probably modelled on the now lost polyptych for the Lombardi chapel in Santa Maria della Carità in Ascoli; see Fabiani, *Ascoli nel Quattrocento*, 2:162–163.

1470s, perhaps attracted by the presence of a large German community in town.²⁸ He trained with Carlo Crivelli and worked in a *crivellesco* style in the area of Macerata, Fermo, Ascoli Piceno, and Teramo. He died in Ascoli Piceno in 1498.²⁹

In Ascoli the Schiavoni worked mostly in the wool business as weavers or dyers, but they were also employed to carry out hard and humble jobs.³⁰ They gathered in the *Societas illiricorum sive sclavorum scola sancti Blaxii*, a confraternity named after St. Blaise, in the church of Santa Maria della Carità, where most of them asked to be buried.³¹ It is interesting to note the while the Albanians referred to their confraternity as a *universitas*, the Schiavoni called it a *scola*, a Venetian term that reflects their long connections with the Serenissima. The liturgical relations between the prior of Santa Maria della Carità and the members of the *scola* of the Schiavoni were regulated by a contract drawn up in 1489: in addition to a mass on the public holidays of the town of Ascoli, the brothers asked for a sung mass on the feast days of St. Blaise, St. Jerome, St. Michael the Archangel and St. Nicholas, for the fixed payment of one *bolognino* for each mass; furthermore, the priest had to administer the sacraments to members of the confraternity, those alive and those who were about to die; in case he would not fulfill those obligations, the Schiavoni would have been free to move their *cona*, that is Alemanno's polyptych, to a different church.³² The naming of the confraternity after St. Blaise shows that most of the Schiavoni in Ascoli Piceno came from the Republic of Ragusa (today's Dubrovnik)³³, where St. Blaise was proudly worshipped by the inhabitants as the patron saint of the freedom of the Republic against both Venetians and Ottomans.³⁴

According to Jacobus de Varagine's *Legenda aurea*,³⁵ which synthesizes the previous Greek and Latin versions of the legend,³⁶ St. Blaise was a bishop who lived between the third and fourth centuries in Sebastea, in

²⁸ On the lively German presence in Ascoli Piceno see Fabiani, *Ascoli nel Quattrocento*, 1:360–364.

²⁹ Salari, “Grill, Pietro.”

³⁰ See Fabiani, *Ascoli nel Quattrocento*, 1: 364–365.

³¹ See Fabiani, *Ascoli nel Quattrocento*, 2:365.

³² The agreement, discovered by Fabiani, *Ascoli nel Quattrocento*, 1:365–366, was published in whole by Sensi, “Slavi nelle Marche,” 502–503.

³³ This correct hypothesis was first proposed by Fabiani, *Ascoli nel Quattrocento*, 1:366–367.

³⁴ On the importance of the cult of Saint Blaise in the Ragusa/Dubrovnik see Vilač (Ed.), *Sv. Vlaho u povijesti i sadašnjosti*, and Belamarić, “Sv. Vlaho i dubrovačka obitelj svetaca zastitnika,” 29–39.

³⁵ Jacobus de Varagine, *Legenda aurea*, 204–207.

³⁶ The most ancient Greek text is the *Passion of St. Blaise Bishop and Martyr* (BHG 276; PG 116, 817–830), in addition to the Armenian *Passion* (BHO 183). Garitte, “La Passion de S. Irénarque de Sébaste et la Passion de S. Blaise,” and Garitte, “La Passion arménienne de Saint Blaise.”

Asia Minor, during the reign of the Emperor Diocletian. As soon as he was appointed bishop, Blaise was forced to hide in a cave order to escape persecutions against Christians. While in the cave, he was repeatedly visited by wild animals, wounded or ill, which he healed with his blessing. One day, the governor's soldiers on a hunting session found him and seized him. Along the way into town, Blaise met a woman who was desperate since her son was in danger of dying because of a fish bone stuck in his throat; Blaise healed him with a blessing. Because he refused to worship pagan gods, Blaise was first tortured with steel combs (similar to the combs used by wool carders) and then thrown into a pond. Making the sign of the cross, Blaise turned the water into solid and avoided drowning. The governor then made his soldiers march into the pond, but they all drowned. At this point, the governor had Blaise beheaded.

According to this legend, there is no direct connection between St. Blaise and the Republic of Ragusa. A reason for the relation with the Dalmatian city can be found for the first time in writings by Serafino Razzi, prior of the Dominican convent in Ragusa at the end of the sixteenth century.³⁷ In his chronicle, the friar mentions a miracle that happened in 971:³⁸ the parish priest Stoicus told the Senate that in a dream he had seen his church full of weapons and a bearded man with a crosier in his hand. The man first revealed that he was St. Blaise and then said that he had chased away Venetian ships that had come to conquer the town. Because of this vision, the saint became the guardian of the freedom of the Republic, first against Venice and then against the Ottomans. Although the cult of St. Blaise is present all over Europe as the guardian of harvests and animals and as a "physician" for throat diseases of the throat,³⁹ in Ragusa he had a special connection with the Republic as its protector, so much so that Ragusa was explicitly called Republic of St. Blaise. In Ragusa, in fact, St. Blaise was almost exclusively portrayed with a model of the city in his hand,⁴⁰ as a guardian of the city walls and of the Ragusan fleet, as it is emblematically shown in the polyptych by Nicholas of Ragusa (Nikola Božidarević or Niccolò Raguseo, pre-1460–1517), now in the Dominican Convent Museum in Dubrovnik (fig. 2.4).⁴¹

³⁷ Razzi, *Povijest Dubrovnika*, 37.

³⁸ The miracle is told in the *Annales ragusini anonymi* whose date of composition is uncertain; *Annales ragusini anonymi*, 20–22.

³⁹ On the diffusion of the cult of St. Blaise in the West see the well documented volume Tchouhadjian, *Saint Blaise, évêque de Sébaste*. Besides a detailed review of the places of cult, the author provides interesting information on the presence of the saint in literature, music, and art. See also the analysis contained in Colafranceschi, Contri, Grimaldi Fava (eds.), *San Biagio Patrono di Cento*.

⁴⁰ See Giukić-Bender, "Prikazi Dubrovnika u Slikarstvu" and Giukić-Bender, "Sveti Vlaho — trajno nadahnuće slikara."

⁴¹ Belamarić, "Nikola Božidarević" and Cvetnić, "Božidarevićev Triptih obitelji Bunića i ikonografija Marije u Suncu."

In Alemanno's polyptych, however, St. Blaise loses his Ragusan feature, that is, the city model, and keeps his more traditional feature, the carder's comb with which the saint was martyred (fig. 2.5); such an attribute, named after the cardoon flower and used in ancient times to clean wool, is probably connected to the work the Schiavoni carried out with great profit in Ascoli, the wool craft.⁴² In this manner, in Ascoli, the patron saint of the Republic of Ragusa became the guardian saint of the finances of a group of migrants who sought to advance socially in their new homeland.

In Alemanno's altarpiece there are other saints, as well, to whom the confraternity used to dedicate masses. One of them is particularly significant on account of his national identity, St. Jerome, the Church Father who translated the Bible into the Vulgate. Born in Stridone, in Istria (part of Illyria), already in the fifteenth century he had become the saint representative of the Illyrian nation.⁴³ The church of the Illyrian nation in Rome is dedicated to St. Jerome and is currently known as Saint Jerome of the Croats.⁴⁴ The other two saints, Michael the Archangel and Nicholas of Bari, do not have a specific identity value, but their cult is also pronounced on the Dalmatian coast.⁴⁵

Conclusions

In the specific case of St. Venera and St. Blaise in Ascoli Piceno, it is possible to point out how the arrival of new cults thanks to the migration of groups of Slavs into the Marche caused significant modifications both in the saints' patronage and in their iconography. St. Venera maintained her anti-Turkish function (in memory of the Albanians' own escape from the advancing Ottoman forces), but her iconography now also included the cauldron specific to the Roman, not the Slavic, saint, thereby providing a link between the two coasts. St. Blaise lost his favoured connection with the Republic of Ragusa, but, thanks to his more common attribute (the carder's comb), his patronage over the Schiavoni weavers and the dyers in Ascoli was strengthened.

In other geographic areas, such as in the modern Puglia, it is possible to observe how, in the specific case of St. Blaise, the martyr occasionally maintains its typical Ragusan attribute, that is, the city model — such is the

⁴² On the work carried out by the Schiavoni in Ascoli Piceno see Fabiani, *Ascoli nel Quattrocento*, 1:303–304.

⁴³ Ivić, *The cult of Saint Jerome in Dalmatia in the Fifteenth and the Sixteenth Centuries*; Russo, *Saint Jérôme en Italie*; and Rice, *Saint Jerome in the Renaissance*.

⁴⁴ See Gudelj, "San Girolamo dei Croati a Roma."

⁴⁵ See in general Tasic, Detelic (eds.), *Kult svetih na Balkanu*.

case, for example, in Barletta.⁴⁶ This phenomenon is probably interpreted as an expression of a stronger “cultural resistance” by Schiavoni from Ragusa who, in Barletta, remained more firmly attached to their traditions, while those in Ascoli Piceno (or in Ancona), tended instead to adapt their traditions to their new cultural context.⁴⁷

This examination of the cults and iconography elaborated by the Albanians and Schiavoni in Ascoli Piceno provides an excellent example of cultural adaptations as populations migrated from one shore of the Adriatic to the other and the role played by national confraternities in preserving while, at the same time, adjusting native traditions to new environments.

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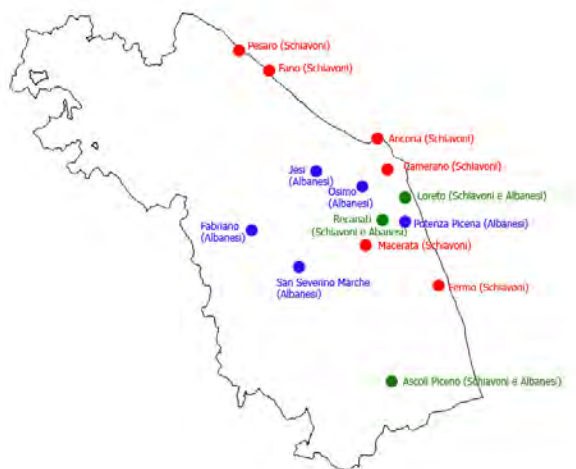
⁴⁶ Lupis, “O dubrovačkoj baštini u Italiji i nepoznatim prikazima sv. Vlaha u Barletti.” On the cult and iconography of St. Blaise in Puglia see also Bianco, “Un santo taumaturgo dall’Armenia alla Puglia.”

⁴⁷ On similar episodes of resistance or adjustment of cults coming from the eastern Adriatic coast see Giancristofaro, “Il Verde Giorgio e la Madonna Odigitria.”

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2.1. Map of the Confraternities of Albanians and Schiavoni in the Marche Region (graphic elaboration by Giada Contardi)



2.2. Pietro Alamanno, *St. Venera* (1482). Ascoli Piceno, Pinacoteca Civica. By permission, Archivio Iconografico dei Musei Civici di Ascoli Piceno.



2.3. Pietro Alamanno, *Polyptych of the Schiavoni* (1497). Ascoli Piceno, Pinacoteca Civica. By permission, Archivio Iconografico dei Musei Civici di Ascoli Piceno.



2.4. Nikola Božidarević, *Triptych of the Bundić family* (ca. 1500). Dubrovnik, Dominican Convent Museum. By permission, Dominican Convent Museum of Dubrovnik.



2.5. Pietro Alamanno, *Polyptych of the Schiavoni* (1497), detail. Ascoli Piceno, Pinacoteca Civica. By permission, Archivio Iconografico dei Musei Civici di Ascoli Piceno.