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**Katarina Horvat-Levaj, edited by (2019), *The Collegiate Church of St. Blaise in Dubrovnik*, Dubrovnik: The Dubrovnik Diocese – The Collegiate Church of St Blaise; Zagreb: Institute of Art History; Zagreb: ArTresor Publishers, 460 pp.**

By telling the history of the collegiate church of St. Blaise in Dubrovnik, from its foundation to the completion of its most recent restoration in 2016, this monograph tells the complete history of a city which is one of the most important harbours on the Adriatic coast. While reading this book, one can truly see the history of the city unfolding, because St. Blaise, having become its patron, became the epitome of Dubrovnik and of the entire history of the city reflected in the church dedicated to him. As told in the introduction by Mate Uzinić, the Bishop of Dubrovnik, this volume «brings before the public for the first time, in a clear way, the results of scholarly research into the history of the construction, furnishing and renovation, architecture and artworks, and the historical and artistic context of the present baroque building and the late-medieval church that preceded it on the

same site» (p. 13). In effect, as the editor of the book, Katarina Horvat-Levaj, wrote in her *The Historical Interpretation of the Church of St. Blaise*, a group of specialized scholars finally dealt with the problem of reconstructing the history of an important church, on which we have so far had only individual and disconnected, albeit important, research studies, published since the 1950s on a number of different occasions. Thanks to this book, the spirit of a Dalmatian city, with all its Adriatic and Mediterranean connections (from Venice to Ancona, from Milan to Puglia, from Naples to Genoa), clearly emerges. The book is structured in 3 parts, containing a total of 12 chapters, each of which is divided in small paragraphs with specific subtitles, making it a lot easier for the readers to follow the line of argumentation and to easily find the part they are interested in. The first introductory part is composed of only one chapter, written by Nella Lonza and entitled *Saint Blaise, the Divine Patron of Dubrovnik, Guardian of its Liberty and Peace*. The author gives a history of worshipping of Dubrovnik's patron saint, who became the symbol of freedom of the Republic

against the Venetians (and afterwards the Turks). She also clarifies how at the beginning of his history in Dubrovnik, St. Blaise was not alone. However, between 1153 and 1158 the city appointed the fourth-century martyr from Cappadocia as the town's patron saint, as it happened in Split with St. Domnius and in many Italian cities, to create a strong identity through the choice of a patron saint. Still under the Venetian domination, the cult of St. Blaise suffered no restrictions, co-existing without any conflict with the cult of St. Mark, the patron of Venice. After the arrival of the relics in 1346, the cult of the saint became more solid, and in the 15<sup>th</sup> century the very famous legend of the apparition of the martyr to Don Stojko in 971 was told and written for the first time. These are the reasons why the figure of St. Blaise is still present everywhere in Dubrovnik, appearing in visual documents from different centuries.

The second part, *The Church of St. Blaise from the Beginning of the City to the Fire in 1706*, is composed of two chapters. In the first one, *The first church of St. Blaise in Dubrovnik*, Danko Zelić rebuilt the captivating history of the first church dedicated to St. Blaise and documented since 1255, solving in particular the problem of the location of the building. We have literary sources for two different locations: in the area near the monastery St. Claire and in the Placa (where the church is located now). Analysing many different typologies of sources (archival documents, legends, literature, urban data), the author clarifies that the original location was a marginal area of the city, previously occupied by the Poor Clares, probably near a tower. At the same time the author discusses the obsessive care for the relics of the patron, assigned to the procurators, and the important foundation of a confraternity of laymen dedicated

to the saint. This essay is striking due to the ability with which the author is able to reconstruct the very distant history of the church, combining an extraordinary variety of controversial and contradictory sources.

Archival documents are the focal point of the amazing essay by Ana Marinković, entitled *The Late-Medieval Church of St. Blaise*. Passing from the periphery to the centre, the church was built in the Placa as a votive building against the plague in 1348. The author quotes many testaments that contain donations for the building of the church and gives the names of some important protomagisters: the first one is Anđeo from Zadar, culturally connected with the architecture of Puglia; other protomagisters came from Tuscany; and the last important name is the one of Bonino da Milano (from 1417), who used more Venetian models. Thanks to the records of pastoral visits, the author reconstructs the positions of the altars, the relevant presence of the *pala feriale* by Lovro Dobričević and the important patronage of the Gučetić and Visconti families. In general, the chapter is an extraordinary example of how to deal with the lost heritage, working mainly on the documents. This chapter is amazingly illustrated not only with floor maps, but also with a 3D model reconstruction that clearly explains the shape of the old church.

Going to the second part of the monograph, that is, *The Baroque Church of St. Blaise from its Construction (1706-1715) to the Present*, we find an interpretation of the art and architecture of the present church. The core chapter, *The Baroque Church of St. Blaise – A Design by Marino Gropelli*, is written by the editor of the book, Katarina Horvat-Levaj, who explains the double unicity of the church: whereas the main buildings of

the city were destroyed by the earthquake in 1667, the church of St. Blaise survived; while all the buildings (in particular the cathedral and the Jesuit church), which had been destroyed by the earthquake, were rebuilt after the Roman model, the church of St. Blaise, which was burnt down in 1706, was rebuilt by a Venetian architect Marino GropPELLI.

After having analysed the results of a rich archival research, thanks to which we are able to learn a lot about the difficult process of selecting the right architect and the relationships that the artist continued to have with the city for a long time, the author masterfully illustrates the architecture of the church, with in-depth descriptions of each detail. Thanks to these analyses the author shows the artist's connections with the late baroque and neo-Palladian Venetian architecture, also touching on the issue of the training of the architect in the workshop of Giuseppe Sardi. At the same time, GropPELLI was able to converse with the heritage of the old Dubrovnik that, after the earthquake, was still under reconstruction as a big Roman baroque building site. The chapter is also a sort of an exhaustive monograph on GropPELLI as an architect and a sculptor. After these analyses, we enter the part dedicated to *The Furnishings of the Baroque Church*, composed of 7 chapters. Two chapters are written by Daniel Premerl, who first writes about the gilded silver statue of St. Blaise from the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the only survivor of the 1706 fire. The author discusses the possibility that this statue was part of the documented altar, conceived by Niccolò of Florence and Francesco of Bergamo. In the second chapter written by the same author, the *Organ and Church Furniture* are analysed thanks to the new data gathered from the *General Journal*. Premerl discusses the work of the wood carver Francesco and

the organ builder Moisé, born in Trieste, as well as interesting relationships with organ builders from Ancona in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Other two chapters are written by Radoslav Tomić. The first one is dedicated to the *Sixteenth to Eighteenth Century Sculpture*. The author first analyses the documented statues of Nikola Lazanić, St. Jerome and St. Blaise, after which he provides a comparative monographic study of Marino GropPELLI's sculptural oeuvre, including not only the works in the church and in Dubrovnik, but also in Venice, Fratta Polesine, Udine and St. Petersburg (commissioned by the Russian Tsar Peter the Great). The chapter is also a survey on the activity of GropPELLI's sons, Gianbattista and Francesco. The latter is known in particular for having created the main altar of the church. Tomić is also the author of a very rich chapter on *Paintings in the Church of St. Blaise*, in which he analyses the polyptych commissioned by the Gučetić family in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and the problem of its attribution and cultural collocation. Secondly, he deals with the cycle of four evangelists, painted in the workshop of Mattia Preti, and the cycle of paintings by Petar Mattei for the choir, rebuilding in both cases the circumstances of their production. The author underlines the important presence of a rare iconography in Dubrovnik in this last cycle, that is, the martyrdom of St. Blaise. At the end of the essay the author also discusses an interesting 18<sup>th</sup> century painting that represents St. Blaise or St. Emygdios, protecting the city from the earthquake. The remaining three chapters are dedicated respectively to the liturgical items, the votive gifts and textiles. The first one, written by Bojan Goja, shows the connections of Dubrovnik with Venice, Naples, Rome, Milan and Genoa, documented by rich liturgical material in gold and silver. Željka Čorak works on

the votive jewellery, as documents of the rich religious life of the population and its devotion to the patron saint of the city during many centuries. The article by Silvija Banić deals with an extraordinary richness of *Textiles and Embroidery*.

The book is enriched by two other significant chapters: thanks to the first one, written by Ivan Viden on *The Architecture and Furnishings in the Church from the Fall of the Dubrovnik Republic to the 1970s*, you discover the productivity of the contemporary period in the church, like for instance the presence of stained glass windows from the workshop of Franz Götzner (1913), a statue of St. Blaise by Ivan Meštrović (1924) and stained glass windows by Ivo Dulčić (1972). Until now, the heritage from this period was completely unexplored. The last chapter, *The Restoration of St. Blaise's Church after the Homeland War (1993-2016)*, written by Antun Baće, is dedicated to the history of the restoration of the church of St. Blaise after the damage it had suffered in the Homeland War in the 1990s.

The volume is also equipped with a synthetic catalogue of all the examined works of art, that allows the reader to easily find the works in the book, and with a rich appendix of *Documents about the Church of St. Blaise*.

In conclusion, we can state that the book is supported by a very rich archival research, verifiable in the documentary appendix and in the endnotes of each chapter. The methodology used in the essays exceeds the traditional history of art (as history of style), often going toward the cultural and anthropological history, in particular when the issues of religiosity and popular worship are dealt with. The book is amazingly illustrated thanks to a photographic campaign, allowing the reader to clearly understand

all the new discoveries provided by the authors.

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