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## THE ADOPTION OF “COMMON” EARTHQUAKE DEVOTIONS ON THE EASTERN ADRIATIC COAST IN THE 18<sup>th</sup> CENTURY

### Abstract

The custom of invoking specific saints as protectors against earthquakes seems to start in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. Before then, earthquake-affected communities tended to choose which saint(s) to pray individually, for reasons of their own. “Common” earthquake devotions, promoted by influential patrons and publicized by the mass media, appear as an early example of cultural globalization. This paper examines a few traces of their adoption by Eastern Adriatic communities in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

### Introduzione

There is an old Italian saying - *Le montagne stanno ferme e la gente cammina*<sup>1</sup> - that could be a motto for the centuries-old network of relationships<sup>2</sup> that once connected otherwise far-off communities on the western and eastern sides of the Adriatic sea, allowing people and goods, tools and skills, ideas and customs to circulate between them. It left many traces, some material and noticeable enough, others non-material and so more elusive<sup>3</sup>. Religious observances are a bit of both: they belong to the non-material sphere of customs and practices but they also left material traces in buildings and works of art; and they certainly could travel from a country to another. It happened for instance with St. Jerome, whose cult as a “national saint” developed first among Dalmatians that lived in Italy, and only later was introduced to the country of St. Jerome’s birth, according to I. Ivić’s study<sup>4</sup>. Here we examine a similar case, related to another religious practice and to a feature common to both sides of the Adriatic basin: their seismicity<sup>5</sup>.

Over the centuries, people on the two shores of the Adriatic had many occasions to interact in the aftermath of earthquakes, by sending relief, taking in refugees, spreading the news of an earthquake or studying the effects of another. The nuns of Ragusa, left homeless by the 1667 Dalmatia earthquake, found shelter in Ancona<sup>6</sup>. Printers from Ancona and Macerata were among the first to publish journalistic reports on the earthquake of 1667 and the 1750 Rijeka earthquake<sup>7</sup>. Giorgio-Gjuro- Đuro Baglivi (1668-1707) - one of Dalmatia's most

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<sup>1</sup> Mountains stand still but people walk.

<sup>2</sup> Just to quote a single item from a boundless bibliography: *Adriatico, un mare di storia arte cultura*, edited by Bonita Cleri, Proceedings of the Ancona conference, 20-22 May 1999, 2 vols., Ripatransone, 2000.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. the examples of matching “cantilene” (nursery rhymes) from Istria, Tuscany and Latium in R. Gigante, *Folklore fiumano*, Padova 1980 (postumous).

<sup>4</sup> I. Ivić, *The “Making” of a National Saint: Reflections on the Formation of the Cult of Saint Jerome in the Eastern Adriatic*, in “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, Supplementi 7, 2018, pp. 247-278. Ivić observes that before the 15th century “[St. Jerome] was not a patron of any commune in the Eastern Adriatic ...”, nor was there a central place for his worship. However ... [the cult] seems to be rather common among Schiavoni in the Apennine peninsula”. Ivić also points out that the use of the baptismal name Jerome (Jeronim or Jerolim in Croatian) is attested in Ragusa and Trogir only from the 15th century onwards.

<sup>5</sup> Basic data on all the earthquakes cited in this paper are available in the *European Archive of Historical Earthquake Data*, AHEAD, (<https://www.emidius.eu/AHEAD/>). On Eastern Adriatic seismicity before 1667: P. Albin, A. Rovida, *Earthquakes in Southern Dalmatia and coastal Montenegro before the large 6 April 1667 event*, in “Journal of Seismology”, 22, 3, 2018, pp. 721-754; E. Garofalo, *Terremoto e ricostruzione a Ragusa (Dubrovnik) nel 1520*, in “Città & Storia”, 4, 2009, pp. 497-515. On the 1667 and 1750 earthquakes: P. Albin, *The Great 1667 Dalmatia Earthquake. An in-depth case study*, Cham, 2015; P. Albin, A. Rovida, *From written records to seismic parameters: the case of the 6 April 1667 Dalmatia earthquake*, in “Geoscience Letters”, 3, 30, 2016, 9 pp.; D. Herak, I. Sović, I. Cecić, M. Živčić, I. Dasović, and M. Herak, *Historical Seismicity of the Rijeka Region (Northwest External Dinarides, Croatia). Part I: Earthquakes of 1750, 1838, and 1904 in the Bakar Epicentral Area*, in “Seismological Research Letters”, 88, 2017, pp. 904-915.

<sup>6</sup> *Racconto della navigazione di Monsig. Arcivescovo colle Monache di Ragusa, del loro ricevimento in Ancona li 2 Maggio 1667 e di altri successi del già narrato Terremoto*, in Ancona, nella Stamperia Camerale, 1667. Italian interventions in the aftermath of the earthquake in: J. Lucić, *Il soccorso degli Stati italiani alla città di Dubrovnik (Ragusa) dopo il terremoto del 1667*, in “Atti e memorie della società dalmata di storia patria”, 14, 1990-91, pp. 29-40; L. Kunčević, D. Madunić, *Venice and Dubrovnik during the great earthquake of 1667*, in “Dubrovnik Annals”, 19, 2015, pp. 7-56.

<sup>7</sup> V. Andriasci, *Lettera di Ragguaglio, nella quale si sente la totale distruzione della Città di Ragusa dal Terremoto quest'anno li 6 Aprile a ore 14 li Mercoledì Santo [...]*, Ancona, 1667 (reproduction of a letter, written a few days after April 6 by Observantine friar Vitale Andriasci to Diodono Bosdari, a Ragusa trader residing in Ancona, v. P. Albin, A. Rovida, *From written records...*, cit., pp. 38-39); *Breve ragguaglio delle rovine cagionate dal terremoto in Ragusa il dì 6 aprile 1667, per racconto di alcuni signori ragusei pervenuti in Ancona, il dì 23 detto &c.*, Ancona, 1667; *Vera e distinta relazione di un terribilissimo terremoto accaduto nella città di*

illustrious sons (fig. 1) – lived through the great Central Apennines seismic sequence of 1703 (at which time he was a teacher of anatomy and theoretical medicine at the Sapienza University of Rome) and made detailed studies of its effects<sup>8</sup>. Finally, let's not forget what could be the most unexpected of all seismic link between the western and eastern Adriatic coasts: a couple of pictures hidden in a remote corner of the Sibillini mountains (Umbria-Marches, Italy). Up to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the tiny town of Preci was renowned all over Europe for its surgery school, whose graduates were sought after for their professional skills by sovereigns and city-states alike<sup>9</sup>. At least three Preci surgeons were employed in Ragusa in 1667: they survived the 6 April earthquake and expressed their gratitude with a gift of votive paintings to two of the churches of Preci. One of them (fig. 2) is a rare, possibly unique contemporary attempt at depicting the effects of the earthquake on the Dalmatian city<sup>10</sup>.

The network of cultural relationships that linked the two sides of the Adriatic played a role in the propagation of “common” earthquake devotions, or the practice of invoking specific saints as protectors against earthquakes. As far as the available evidence goes, this practice, first heard of in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, was already well established at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century<sup>11</sup>. This paper sets out the evidence available on its adoption by some of the Catholic communities on the eastern Adriatic coast, in the hope to inspire other researchers to embark in the more systematic research required for a more complete reconstruction of the process through which the Eastern Adriatic communities joined the ranks of devotees of “anti-seismic saints” scattered all over the Catholic world.

## Earthquakes and devotional practices

Invoking supernatural help when in need/danger is a propensity probably as old as *Homo Sapiens*. In a Judeo-Christian Catholic cultural perspective, this propensity finds expression in many biblical Psalms, in the oldest known Marian prayer - the antiphon *Sub tuum praesidium*<sup>12</sup>, by which the Virgin Mary is asked for protection “a periculis cunctis” - and in the *Rogationes minores* liturgy, with its prayers for deliverance from lightning, storms, disease, famine, war and ... earthquakes<sup>13</sup>.

Medieval mentality had a strong inclination to single out saints specialized in the protection of body parts, goods or categories (professional, social or national ones) and in averting diseases and dangers. Earthquakes

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*Fiume posta sulle frontiere della Carniola, e dell’Austria in Germania il dì 17. del prossimo caduto mese di dicembre 1750*, Macerata, [1751?].

<sup>8</sup> M. Crespi, Baglivi, Giorgio, in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, 5, 1963, www.treccani.it. The 1703 seismic sequence included three main events, on January 14 and 16 (epicentral location in the Valnerina and upper Reatine areas) and February 2 (Aquila). They devastated the towns of Norcia and Aquila, caused more or less severe damage to much of the present-day administrative regions of Umbria, Marches, Abruzzo, and Latium and slightly damaged Rome. Baglivi felt them in his Roman home and subsequently wrote several dissertations on the subject: *De terraemotu Romano ac urbium adiacentium anno 1703*; *Series magis notabilium observatorum hoc anno 1703 durantibus Terraemotibus in Latio, & finitimis Umbriae Regionibus*; *De progressionem Romani terraemotus ab anno 1703 ad annum 1705*, included in G. Baglivi, *Opera omnia medico-practica et anatomica* from the sixth printing (Lugduni, 1703) onwards.

<sup>9</sup> A. Fabbi, *La scuola chirurgica di Preci*, Preci, 1974; F. Davidson, *Lithotomists, cataract-curers, and hernia-carvers: The Surgical School of Preci*, in “Journal of Medical Biography”, 24, 4, 2016, pp. 440-452.

<sup>10</sup> A. Fabbi, cit., p. 137. The painting shown in fig. 1 was offered to the dedicated to the Madonna della Peschiera shrine. It includes a long legenda in verse with the donors’ names and a description of their experience: “Terremoto maggior mai fu nel mondo, / che in un’ave Maria tutta Ragusa / città cadde nel fondo. / Stava operando la sua chirurgia / Giovanni Bacchettoni con suo figlio, / salariato di quella Signoria, / et dentro colti nel fracasso stuolo / da alto cadde e tra sassi giacia. / Morto era quasi e dell’aiuto, solo; / ma la madre di Dio, dico Maria / lo cava fuori dall’acerbo duolo / Ritrova il figlio che nudo giacia / e il liberò dal foco, rimaso quasi a nòto. / Alla benedetta grazie e voto. / 16 aprile 1664 [sic]”. Biographies of the donors in G.F. Cruciani, *Cerusici e fisici preciani e nursini dal XIV al XVIII secolo. Storia e antologia*, Preci, 1999, 423 pp. (p. 122). Another votive offering was an altarpiece in the Preci parish church, depicting the Virgin Mary with a kneeling donor, identified as a survivor of the Dalmatian earthquake by the legend “Infirmus inter lapides Ragusae” (R. Cordella, *La frontiera aperta dell’Appennino: uomini e strade nel crocevia dei Sibillini*, Perugia, 1998, p. 143). Both churches were damaged by the 2016 earthquakes; the current whereabouts of the paintings are unknown.

<sup>11</sup> V. Castelli e R. Camassi, *A che santo votarsi. L’influsso dei grandi terremoti del 1703 sulla cultura popolare*, in “Settecento abruzzese. Eventi sismici, mutamenti economico-sociali e ricerca storiografica” edited by R. Colapietra, G. Marinangeli, P. Muzi, L’Aquila, 2007, pp. 107-130; V. Castelli, *Ricordarsi del terremoto. Tracce senesi di una “memoria sismica” collettiva*, in “Bullettino senese di storia patria”, 116, 2009, pp. 316-347.

<sup>12</sup> Dated to the early 3rd century A.D. in its earliest, Greek form. Cf. D. Balboni, *De prece “Sub tuum praesidium” (Papyrus Rylands 470, saec II)* in “Ephemerides liturgicae”, 68, 1954, 245-247.

<sup>13</sup> The origins of the *Rogationes* hark back to 474 AD in Dauphiné (France), where a local bishop led his flock in a three-days experience of prayer, fasting and processions after the region was struck an earthquake and other natural disasters. Cf. Dom Prosper Guéranger, *L’Anno liturgico*, vol. III, *Tempo pasquale – Tempo dopo la Pentecoste*, Verona, 2016 (1<sup>st</sup> edition *L’Année Liturgique*, Le Mans, 1841-1866).

were a noticeable exception, however: there was not a specific saint to invoke against them<sup>14</sup>. Earthquakes were neither less common nor less disruptive in the Middle Ages than in other historical periods<sup>15</sup> but all the available evidence shows that, when coping with them, people tended to address their pleas for help to God first (directly or through the mediation of His Mother) and, secondarily, to the patron saints of one's hometown, i.e. the official spiritual guardians of that town against any kind of danger. As a third option, single communities, after having experienced an earthquake on a given day, sometimes decided to single out as their special protector against future earthquakes the saint whose feast coincided with the day on which that earthquake had occurred. In the 14<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries the citizens of Norcia (Umbria, Italy) seem to have considered St. Barbara as their special protectress against earthquakes, because on her feast-day (4 December) an earthquake had devastated their town in 1328<sup>16</sup>. This practice, nowadays all but forgotten, seems to have been popular up to comparatively recent times: when the municipal authorities of Gubbio (Umbria, Italy) officially elected St. Theresa of Avila as co-patroness of their hometown, they put on record that she had been particularly venerated there from as early as 1693, on account of an earthquake that in that same year "minacciò così altamente questa città" on St. Theresa's feast-day, the 15 of October<sup>17</sup>.

Devotional practices found visual expression in works of art, and contributed to the evolution of well-known iconographic models, that in this case vary from comparatively simple ones such as those of "Our Lady of Mercy", with her mantle spread out to protect her kneeling devotees (fig. 3), or of the "protector urbis" holding the city in his/her arms, to the progressively more elaborate compositions of the Baroque age, staged in such a way as to symbolize the many layers of the saints' intercessory action. A fine example of the latter is the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century Lecce (Apulia, Italy) altarpiece of fig. 4, in which the town patron saint, Orontius, hovers protectively from a cloud on the townspeople as they kneel in prayer outside the town walls, with an helpful legenda to explain that the whole scene is related to the Northern Ionian earthquake of 20 February 1743. The painted space here is divided in sectors arranged hierarchically, according to an upward scale of importance: the praying community at the bottom, the holy protector midway, and at the top the Divinity to whom all prayers are addressed (here only alluded to by the light that shines through the clouds and is pointed at by St. Oronzo to the people). This is a kind of composition that can be found replicated in countless artworks all over the Catholic world, with a number of variations that can include: 1) the explicit representation of the supreme recipient of the plea for help (either as God the Father, as Jesus Christ or as the whole Trinity); 2) a place of honour for the Virgin Mary, as foremost of all mediators between humankind and God; and 3) the addition of other saints as reinforcement of or substitutes for the town's patron-saint in the capacity of protectors against earthquakes.

Only Italian evidence for this phenomenon has been provided so far, but the phenomenon itself was not confined to Italy. It surfaces in most Catholic countries exposed to seismic risk<sup>18</sup>, the Eastern Adriatic regions included. The "earthquake-day saint" type of devotion (i.e. the practice of singling out as protector against earthquakes to come, the saint whose feast-day happened to coincide with an earthquake past) is attested in Ragusa-Dubrovnik after the Dalmatia earthquake of 17 May 1520. The first ordinance issued by the civic magistracy of Ragusa after the earthquake (on May 19) stipulated that – as 17 May of that year happened to coincide with the feast of the Ascension of Christ to Heaven, thenceforth the feast of the Ascension would be celebrated with special solemnity by the townspeople "ut memoria ad posteris nostris continuis temporibus transferatur". Later on, for the same reason, a votive chapel dedicated to the Ascension of Christ was built along the Corso (*Stradun*) of Ragusa. The small building survived the 1667 earthquake and is known today as Sv. Spas or St. Saviour<sup>19</sup>. According to a 19<sup>th</sup> century source, the fear caused by the 1520 earthquake found

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<sup>14</sup> See for instance the case of the Fourteen Holy Helpers, described by J. Huizinga as "the heavenly first intervention squad" (J. Huizinga, *L'autunno del Medio Evo*, Firenze, 1966, pp. 234-236; 1<sup>st</sup> edition *Herfsttij der Middeleeuwen*, 1919). The "heavenly squad" was invoked against a wide range of dangers but not against earthquakes.

<sup>15</sup> P. Alexandre, *Les séismes en Europe occidentale de 394 à 1259. Nouveau catalogue critique*, Bruxelles, 1990.

<sup>16</sup> Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, ms. Vat. Lat. 7934: *Narratio terremotus in Districtu Spoleti, comitatus Nursiae et in terra Cassiae die VI novembris anno MDXCIX*, cc. 38r-44r. According to this narrative, the earthquake of 1599 led the Norcini to shift their allegiance to St. Leonard, whose feast-day is November 6.

<sup>17</sup> Sezione di Archivio di Stato di Gubbio, *Archivio storico del Comune di Gubbio, Riformanze*, 89, ff. 237r-v (14 October 1731).

<sup>18</sup> On Spain and Portugal B. Vincent, *Les tremblements de terre en Espagne et au Portugal*, in "Les catastrophes naturelles dans l'Europe médiévale et moderne", edited by B. Bennassar, Toulouse, 1996, pp. 77-94.

<sup>19</sup> E. Garofalo, *Terremoto e ricostruzione a Ragusa (Dubrovnik) nel 1520*, in "Città & Storia", 4, 2009, pp. 497-515 (on p. 497): "Da Slano all'area di Konavle (Canali) e fino all'isola di Mljet (Meleda) si registrano lesioni e crolli in numerose case e in complessi appartenenti a ordini religiosi, fratture e cedimenti nei canali dell'acquedotto, nei mulini e in alcune dimore extraurbane dislocati nelle

another outlet in the widespread practice of affixing “over all the houses” of Ragusa the IHS or Christogram device, made popular by 15<sup>th</sup> century preacher St. Bernardine of Siena<sup>20</sup>. As to the custom of turning for help to the city's patron saint in the event of an earthquake, it will be enough to mention, for Ragusa again, the invocation in Latin verses to St. Blaise, that was composed on the occasion of the 28 July 1639, Montenegro earthquake, when “tutto il fabbricato [*di Ragusa*] fu scosso da’ suoi fondamenti”<sup>21</sup>.

### A devotion for modern times: saints specialized in defense against earthquakes

No matter how varied they were, all the devotional practices that medieval Christians developed to cope with earthquakes had in common their individuality. Each community (village or town, religious order or city-state with jurisdiction over a larger territory) chose its own earthquake protector(s) by itself and according to its own experience. Later on, however, a new kind of earthquake devotion made its appearance: it was not anymore a “one-of-a-kind” practice linked to the individual experience of a single community, but a “common” practice, initiated by a specific promoter at a given time and place, but virtually shareable or replicable elsewhere, everywhere and at any time.

In Italy, the earliest documentary traces of a cult tributed to saints considered particularly effective as protectors against earthquakes for themselves (and not because of any special relationship between them and their devotees) date back to the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. The subjects of these cults are three almost contemporary saints: Francis Borgia (1510-1572), a Spanish grandee and the third General of the Society of Jesus, beatified in 1624, canonized in 1671; Philip Neri (1515-1595), an Italian priest and educator, founder of the Oratorian order, canonized in 1622; and Francis Solano (1549-1610), a Spanish observantine friar and missionary to South America, beatified in 1675 and canonized in 1726.

As far as the available evidence goes, the anti-seismic cult of St. Francis Borgia seems to be the earliest instance of “common” earthquake devotion on record. It made its first appearance a few years after the beatification of St. Francis, when a strong earthquake hit the Santa Fe region (Bogotá, Colombia) in 1628. Its first sponsor was a local magistrate, himself a Borgia, who hastened to make it known that the earthquake had been foretold by the prodigious sweating of an image of his recently beatified grandfather. The devotion spread through South America so effectively that in 1641, when Peru was hit by another earthquake, it was rumoured that it had damaged only those towns that had omitted to elect St. Francis Borgia as their patron or co-patron<sup>22</sup>. The cult was introduced to Italy after the strong Irpinia-Basilicata earthquake of 8 September 1694 by the then vicereine of Naples, herself a relative of the Borgia family<sup>23</sup>.

The cult of St. Philip Neri was an Italian innovation, following the big earthquake that hit Benevento (Campania, Italy) on 5 June 1688. The local archbishop (Cardinal Vincenzo Maria Orsini, afterwards Pope Benedict XIII) was dug out alive and almost unscathed from under the debris of his collapsed palace. Attributing his safety to the miraculous protection of St. Philip, he promptly caused an account of his experience to be published (fig. 5). This pamphlet, with its several Italian, Spanish and Portuguese reprints<sup>24</sup>

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contrade più prossime a Ragusa (Gravosa, Ombla, Breno)”; archival reference and transcript of the ordinance in Id., p. 500. Description of the 1520 earthquake in S. Razzi, *La storia di Raugia*, Lucca, 1596.

<sup>20</sup> “L’anno 1520 [...] è un anno di grande calamità per i Ragusei. Il dì 17 Maggio una violenta scossa di terremoto atterrava molte case; il duomo e le altre chiese, non meno che i pubblici edifizii, venivano grandemente danneggiati. E giusta quanto concordemente asseverano gli scrittori ragusei, il danno totale ne sarebbe ascenso a circa 100 mila zecchini. Il terrore fu grande; tanto più in quanto da quel giorno le scosse sismiche si ripeterono ancora a certi intervalli, per ben venti mesi. In mezzo a tanta strage, di fronte a tanti pericoli altro non restava alla città che mettersi nelle mani della Provvidenza, e si votò al Salvatore, il cui monogramma (IHS), da quel tempo impoi [*sic*], si prese più comunemente a scolpire su tutte le case” (G. Gelcich, *Dello sviluppo civile di Ragusa considerato ne’ suoi monumenti storici ed artistici*, Ragusa, 1884, pp. 75-76).

<sup>21</sup> “In tale occasione furono fatti questi versi a S. Biagio: Dum quatitur saevo tellus Epidauria motu, / Ah ruit auspiciis urbs bene freta tuis! / Serva urbem, Pater, & cladem disperde minantem, / ut servata Deo serviat, atque tibi” (F.M. Appendini, *Notizie storico-critiche sulle antichità, storia e letteratura de’ ragusei*, tome I, Ragusa, 1802, p. 324).

<sup>22</sup> Francisco Garcia, *Epitome de la vida de S. Francisco de Borja quarto duque de Gandia, tercero general de la compañía de Jesus, y patron de Napoles. Escrito por el p. Francisco Garzia de la misma compañía*, en Alcalá, y de nuevo en Napoles, 1695.

<sup>23</sup> I. Mauro, *La diffusione del culto di s. Francesco Borgia a Napoli tra feste pubbliche e orgoglio nobiliare*, in “Revista de l’Institut Internacional d’Estudis Borgians”, 4, 2012, pp. 549-60.

<sup>24</sup> *Narrazione de’ prodigij operati dal glorioso S. Filippo Neri nella persona dell’Em.mo Signor Cardinale Arcivescovo di Benevento in occasione che rimase sotto le rovine delle sue Stanze nel tremuoto che distrusse quellacittà a’ 5 di Giugno 1688*, Napoli, 1688; another under the same title, Napoli and Firenze, 1688; *Relacion del prodigio obrado por S. Felipe Neri en la persona del eminentissimo señor cardenal Vicente Maria Orsini arzobispo de Benavento; en ocasion que se halló baxo las ruinas de su quarto, en el terremoto, que arruino aquella ciudad à 5 de Junio de 1688, Venida de Genova à esta ciudad; y mandòle traducir de italiano en español un devoto del Santo*, Barcelona, 1688; *Relacam dos prodigios obrados pelo glorioso S. Felipe Neri na pessoa do eminentissimo senhor cardeal Ursino arcebispo de Benevento, quando ficou dabaixo das ruinas do seu Palacio no terremoto, que assolou aquella Cidade a*

helped establishing the fame of St. Philip's anti-seismic abilities. As to Francis Solano, the main reason for crediting him with a special power as protector against earthquakes could be connected with his presence in Lima in 1609, during an earthquake that his preaching was said to have stopped<sup>25</sup>.

The seismic sequence of 1703 allowed these three "common" earthquake devotions to take firm roots in Italy. The Roman Jesuits promoted the cult of their Borgia brother as "particular Protector of the faithful in the Perils of Earthquakes" and many Italian towns took him as co-patron in consequence<sup>26</sup>. The Oratorians priests of Norcia survived the collapse of their home, gave credit for their safety to their founder, St Philip Neri, and they too had a report of their experience printed<sup>27</sup>. Meanwhile in Bologna, where the strongest shocks of the sequence had merely been felt without causing any damage, the Observantine Friars Minor promoted the cult of their brother Francis Solano, that in later years spread mostly in the Bologna hinterland and in the nearby Emilia region<sup>28</sup>.

The origins of the longest-lasting among "common" earthquake devotions also hark back to 1703. Nowadays, the Borgia, Neri and Solano saints are all but forgotten in this "anti-seismic" capacity, at least in popular opinion. Most contemporary people, if asked to name the saint that can protect against earthquakes, would probably name (if any) St. Emygdius, bishop, martyr and the patron saint of Ascoli Piceno (Marche, Italy).

This town was situated on the outskirts of the area most grievously affected by the earthquakes of 1703, but suffered only comparatively slight damage from their shocks. The Ascolani gave due credit to their patron saint for keeping them safe and, in addition to various locally performed acts of thanksgiving, embarked in a decades-long lobbying campaign, whose aim was trying to persuade several successive Popes that St. Emygdius – a local saint, venerated only within the boundaries of the Ascoli diocese – should be proposed to the whole Catholic world as a protector against earthquakes. It was quite an audacious pretension, for the obscure patron of a provincial Italian town, as shown by the refuse that meet the official attempts on record (made in 1727 and in 1756). It was only in 1783, in the wake of the uproar caused by the disastrous Calabria earthquakes of that year<sup>29</sup>, that an influential Ascoli prelate finally convinced Pope Pius VI to give a very mild sort of official acknowledgment, authorizing bishops to introduce the devotion in their dioceses, if they wished. In the meantime, however, the fame of St. Emygdius's anti-seismic qualities had spread quickly and widely on its own, both in Italy and abroad, by word of mouth and devotional literature (biographies, miracle reports, specially composed prayers) and chad images that were repeatedly published and updated in the wake of several strong earthquakes that struck Italy and other European and non-European Catholic countries in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. A painting (fig. 6) donated by the civic magistracy of Poggio Mirteto (Rieti, Latium) to the local cathedral in 1712 gives very early evidence of this unofficial recognition of St. Emygdius' anti-seismic role. The 1703 earthquakes had strongly shaken Poggio Mirteto, and caused some little damage too. The magistrates, clearly bent on getting as good a spiritual insurance as possible against future risks, included in their votive offering the latest comer among earthquake-protectors alongside veterans such Philip Neri and Francis Borgia.

The devotion for St. Emygdius travelled through most of central and southern Italy, in the aftermath of the earthquakes of 1732 (Irpinia), 1741 (Fabrianese), 1747 and 1751 (Umbrian-Marchesan Apennines), 1779 (Bolognese), 1781 (Faentino and Marchesan Apennines), to quote only the most relevant ones. Official records of its adoption by several communities are often available, and official evidence is lacking it is possible to detect traces such as the presence in local churches of images and/or relics of the saint, or evidence of the celebration of his feast-day and of the use of the baptismal name Emidio or Emiddio.

In the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the cult of St. Emygdius started spreading throughout Europe, first west, reaching the Iberian Peninsula as early as 1756, in the aftermath of the disastrous Lisbon earthquake of

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5 de Junho de 1688, Lisboa, 1688. The pamphlet was reprinted in 1702 (when another quake hit Benevento) e in 1726, when Cardinal Orsini became Pope.

<sup>25</sup> *Compendio della vita del glorioso apostolo dell'Indie, e protettore contro il flagello del terremoto S. Francesco Solano minor osservante, coll'aggiunta di un brieve metodo di novena ad onore di esso Santo*, Parma, [1774].

<sup>26</sup> *Id.*, p. 175 and p. 237.

<sup>27</sup> *Relazione d'un miracolo fatto dal glorioso S. Filippo Neri in preservatione di tutta la congregazione dell'Oratorio di Norcia cioè sette Padri, & un Fratello di essa Congregazione nelle presenti ruine de Terremoti sentiti in questo Anno 1703*, Roma, s.d. [1703]; *Id.*, Napoli, De Bonis, 1703; *Relazione d'un miracolo fatto dal glorioso S. Filippo Neri*, Roma e Bassano, 1703.

<sup>28</sup> *Bologna [Gazette]*, 20 February 1703; L. Chracas, *Racconto istorico de terremoti sentiti in Roma, e in parte dello Stato Ecclesiastico, e in altri luoghi la sera de' 14 di Gennajo, e la mattina de' 2 di Febbrajo dell'anno 1703 (...)*, Roma, 1704 (p. 238).

<sup>29</sup> Whose fame resonated through Europe: v. for example M. Torcia *Kurze Beschreibung des Erdbebens, welches den 5ten Februar 1783. Meßina und einen Theil Calabriens betroffen*, Nürnberg, 1783; *Description historique et géographique de la ville de Messine, etc. etc. et détails météorologiques du désastre que cette ville vient d'éprouver (le 5 février 1783) par le tremblement de terre*, Paris, 1783; Wm. Hamilton, *An Account of the Earthquakes in Calabria, Sicily, etc.*, Colchester, [1783].

November 1, 1755. From Spain and Portugal, it reached South America and the Philippines. In Eastern Europe it reached as far as Hungary, after the 1763, Komárom<sup>30</sup> earthquake.

### “Common” earthquake devotions on the Eastern Adriatic coast

For what concerns the adoption of these devotions by Eastern Adriatic countries, the evidence available to the author of this paper is sparse and mostly consisting of artistic and literary clues related to Fiume-Rijeka and Ragusa-Dubrovnik.

In the case of Rijeka, it seems likely that the adoption of “common” earthquake devotions occurred in conjunction with the seismic sequence of November-December 1750, the most relevant among the few earthquakes known to have affected Istria in the 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries according to the *European Archive of Historical Earthquake Data*<sup>31</sup>. The main shock of the sequence - on 17 December, at about 5:30 p.m. local time - caused “danni considerabili ... a Fiume, e Buccari, e luoghi vicini dell'Istria Austriaca”<sup>32</sup> and was followed by lesser quakes felt at intervals in 1751-1753. In this same volume M. Pintari describes how in that occasion the community had recourse to the protection of St. Philip Neri, dedicating to him an elaborate votive altar erected in the Collegiate church of Rijeka. Its altarpiece, by Lorraine-born painter Valentin Metzinger (1699-1759), presents a compositive scheme that is remarkably similar to that of the Lecce painting in fig. 4. The painting also provides St. Philip with a reinforcement - St. Emygdus – in the same spirit of the Poggio Mirteto painting in fig. 6. These seemingly minor, quirky details, could be credited to Metzinger’s inventiveness by a viewer unaware of the complex history of earthquake devotions. In the wider cultural context explored in this paper, these details suggests that either the Rijeka-based artist was aware of and followed the Italian stylistic trends in this particular fields or perhaps that he had directions from influential advisors, such as the clergy of the Collegiate church or some other prominent public figure with Italian connections. It would also be interesting to discover whether - in Rijeka as elsewhere - St. Emygdus ended by superseding St. Philip as a protector saint against earthquakes. To this end the local public archives should be checked in order to find out whether any public acts of devotion were decreed in 1776, when another earthquake of some size was felt in Rijeka and Buccari<sup>33</sup>. For the time being, the only available evidence of a particular local interest for St. Emygdus is the custom of baptizing children with his name<sup>34</sup>.

In the case of Dubrovnik, the cult of St. Emygdus was undoubtedly adopted in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but it is still unclear which earthquake aroused the local interest in it. Apart from a few 18<sup>th</sup> century devotional medals depicting the saint, owned by the town museum, it seems that St. Emygdus was formally adopted as co-patron of Ragusa before the year 1808, in which year a local almanac states that 9 August was the day appointed for his celebration in the liturgical calendar of the Ragusa Diocese<sup>35</sup>. However, some in-depth research in the municipal archives would be necessary in order to find out exactly when the devotion first reached Dubrovnik and which earthquake was responsible for leading the community to adopt it.

At least two pictures representing St. Emygdus are known to be preserved in the Dubrovnik Collegiate Church dedicated to St. Blaise, the town’s *patronus principalis* (figs. 7a-7b) The oldest-looking, an oil on canvas of modest size (private devotion painting?) in the church’s sacristy, shows a saint extending his hand protectively towards some tottering buildings in the background. The iconography is clearly reminiscent of one of the most popular depiction of St. Emygdus, widely circulated via cheap commercial prints (fig. 8) and often taken as a model for producing more formal paintings such as this one or even for altarpieces. Conversely the features of the main figure (elderly, white-bearded bishop) are more consistent with the traditional iconography of St.

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<sup>30</sup> Now Komárno (Slovakia), U. Eisinger, R. Gutdeutsch, Ch. Hammerl, *Historical Earthquakes in Central Europe*, in “Abhandlungen der Geologischen Bundesanstalt”, 48 (1992), pp. 33–50.

<sup>31</sup> For a summary of the historical research performed on the 1750 earthquake by seismologists v. D. Herak, I. Savić, I. Cević, M. Živčić, I. Dasović, and M. Herak, *Historical Seismicity of the Rijeka Region (Northwest External Dinarides, Croatia). Part I: Earthquakes of 1750, 1838, and 1904 in the Bakar Epicentral Area*, in “Seismological Research Letters”, 88, 2017, pp. 904-915 (pp. 906-908).

<sup>32</sup> *Bologna [Gazette]*, 2 February 1751, n. 5.

<sup>33</sup> A chronicle of this earthquake was published in Madrid by the gazette *Mercurio Historico y politico* (July 1776, p. 26).

<sup>34</sup> V. the 19th century printer Emidio Mohovich (1838-1898) founder of the historic Stabilimento Tipo-litografico fiumano (*Mohovich, Emidio*, in “Hrvatska enciklopedija”, 2021, <http://www.enciklopedija.hr/Natuknica.aspx?ID=41537>) and the fictional Emidio Orlich, a protagonist of Franco Vegliani’s novel *La Frontiera* (Milano, 1964), for which v. C. Magris, *Lo scrittore sulla frontiera. Un ricordo del triestino Franco Vegliani* in “Il Corriere della Sera”, 10 September 1982, p. 25.

<sup>35</sup> An (undated) 18th century document of the election of St. Emygdus as co-patron is cited in G.D.F., *Biblioteca di fra' Innocenzo Ciulich nella libreria de' RR. PP. Francescani di Ragusa*, Zara, 1860 (p. 78).

Blaise than with the youth and lack of beard traditionally connotating St. Emygdus<sup>36</sup>.

No such misunderstanding is possible in the case of the 19<sup>th</sup> century painting decorating the right aisle altar of St. Blaise's church, since in it Blaise and Emygdus are shown side by side. Again, only more extended research will tell us more about the circumstances (related to the occurrence of a 19<sup>th</sup> earthquake?), in which this work was painted by Trieste-born Father Giuseppe Rossi (1843-1890).

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<sup>36</sup> R. Tomić. *Paintings in the Church of St. Blaise*, in *The Collegiate Church of St. Blaise in Dubrovnik*, edited by K. Horvat-Levaj, Dubrovnik-Zagreb, 2019, 460 pp. On p. 98 the author discusses the sacristy painting avowing the difficulty of ascertaining whether it represents St. Blaise or St. Emygdus (or maybe a conflation of both?).