

Research Project *Visualizing Nationhood: the Schiavoni/Illyrian Confraternities and Colleges in Italy and the Artistic Exchange with South East Europe (15th - 18th c.)*  
financed by Croatian Science Foundation



### **Susanne Kubersky-Piredda**

Principal investigator of the research group *Roma communis patria. The National Churches in Rome between the Middle Ages and the Modern Era*, Bibliotheca Hertziana, Max-Planck-Institute for Art History, Rome

### **Constructing National Identity.**

#### **Foreign Communities and their Churches in post-Tridentine Rome**

In the early modern period, Rome, more than any other European center, was a hub for foreigners from around the world. The return of the papal curia from exile in Avignon was followed by a rapid growth of the population and marked the foundation of numerous national institutions aimed at assisting pilgrims and immigrants.

In line with the conventions that had governed the mercantile and academic sector since the Middle Ages Rome's foreign communities were referred to as *nationes*, long before the modern idea of a nation state established itself on a continental scale. Over the course of the sixteenth century some of these communities grew considerably, manifesting their presence in the city through the construction of representative churches and becoming increasingly involved in both local and international affairs. While neither the pope nor the various European rulers had initially shown much interest in Rome's foreign institutions, by the sixteenth century they recognized their usefulness as political tools and attempted to attain control over them.

Even though the communities initially opposed to these efforts, they eventually had to accept their new political role. The alliances, dependencies, and conflicts that arose among the various national churches within the Roman urban context reflected on a small scale the power games that were played on the international level.

This conference will trace processes of politicization among Rome's foreign communities by drawing on the example of the three most powerful national communities, the Spanish, French and German ones, which openly competed with each other. Their rivalry found outward expression in the construction of three imposing churches with adjoining hospices in the immediate vicinity of Piazza Navona: San Giacomo degli Spagnoli, San Luigi dei Francesi und Santa Maria dell'Anima.

Each of the three institutions had grown out of an earlier foundation of the fourteenth or fifteenth century; each was led by a confraternity or congregation and had a hierarchically organised governing body of increasing complexity. The study will focus on a number of aspects that modernists have described as defining markers of national identity, such as "shared myths, memories, symbols, values, and traditions" (Anthony Smith), to see if they can be usefully applied to early modern foreign communities. One of the objectives will be to verify to what extent these identifiers found expression in the visual culture, how a sense of belonging to a specific cultural community could arise through the use of recognizable semantic formulae.

The specific case studies regarding Early Modern Rome may offer new insights on the origins of modern notions of nationhood, national identity and nationalism.