

Sebregondi provides brief histories of each company. These are supplemented by a chronological listing and summary description of key documents from all three confraternities. More than half of this exhaustively researched and thoroughly-documented study consists of descriptions of the artworks commissioned by the three confraternities over the past five centuries, and biographies of some of the artists who produced these works.

When they exist, histories of still-functioning confraternities are often little more than celebratory tracts characterized more by glossy pictures and reverential texts than by any critical scholarship. Sebregondi's work, instead, is a scholarly study that establishes a thorough documentary and descriptive art history of the three groups and serves as a point of departure for literary or social historians interested in pursuing interdisciplinary questions. As such, it joins with her first book, *La Compagnia e l'Oratorio di San Niccolò del Ceppo* (Firenze, Salimbeni, 1985) as an important contribution to scholarship on long-living and still-extant Florentine confraternities.

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Christopher F. Black, *Italian Confraternities in the Sixteenth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989. xiv, 321 pp.

This study is a near-rarity in modern confraternity studies: an attempt at a synthetic, comprehensive treatment with fairly broad geographical and chronological boundaries. The first half of the monograph amounts to an extended survey of the research on both pre- and post-Tridentine confraternities on the Italian peninsula. Black devotes the second half to his core arguments, which

concern poverty, attitudes to the poor, and the role of confraternities in philanthropic activity during the sixteenth century.

In the first three chapters of the book, general questions concerning the historical development of confraternities, their types and their distribution are addressed. Black gives attention both to historical specifics and to theory. These chapters could be recommended to non-specialists as an introduction to the topic of confraternity studies.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 treat the internal life of early modern confraternities (activities, administration, etc.). Evidence is drawn from a large and varied body of mostly secondary work and the consequent rapid shifts in place, time and methodology can make for difficult reading. In the chapters and conclusion that follow, however, Black is more expansive, and makes a thought-provoking contribution to the literature on poverty. He discusses both the poor and attitudes towards poverty during the long sixteenth century, then moves on to an analysis of confraternal participation in philanthropic activity.

The extensive bibliography is exceptionally strong on the subjects of poverty and of confraternal philanthropy (up to 1989). The value of the book's contents is sometimes not reflected in its presentation: the publisher should be ashamed of the pitifully small typeface and the very poor quality of the photographic illustrations.

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