

increased disproportionately. These groups demonstrated an interest in a stricter devotion similar to that of the Franciscans as well as in para-liturgical ceremonial, consequently attracting the wealthier social groups. Henderson argues that this change reflected a profound psychological shift in society away from a concentration on the sins of the world to emphasis on self-redemption. Not surprisingly, this shift accompanied growing interest in the doctrine of Purgatory as propounded by the Franciscans.

Henderson also argues that the spiritual utility of the confraternity was matched by social utility. The Orsanmichele and other such confraternities supplemented governmental initiatives with respect to poor relief. These confraternities were responding to perceived needs in society in a pragmatic and effective fashion. He suggests that such organizations were partly responsible for Florence's enviable reputation among other Italian cities when it came to poor relief.

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Lisimberti, P. and A. Todisco. *La venerabile fraternità di Maria Santissima del Carmine di Ostuni. Contributi alla storia delle confraternite carmelitane in Puglia* (Bari: Schena Editore, 1995). 187 pp., illustrations.

This is a very well-documented volume on the subject of the Confraternity of Maria Santissima del Carmine in Ostuni, a small city in Apulia. In four chapters, the book relates both the history of the Cathedral and that of the confraternity, from their initial foundation in Ostuni in the late fifteenth century until 1994-1995. The material is organized by century, with an appendix that reproduces a variety of popular devotional poems. Lisimberti and Todisco give particular attention to the primary sources. All the documents mentioned in the book are duly quoted, and often manuscripts consulted are reproduced in facsimiles, thus contributing to a clear and complete overview. Furthermore, the artistic value of the Cathedral is analyzed and illustrated, not only through the study of the history of the numerous works of art in the possession of the confraternity, but also by means of high-quality photographs.

As far as the actual history of the Carmelite confraternity is concerned, Lisimberti and Todisco especially stress the vital role that it played in the city of Ostuni. Its major function was, and still is, that of cementing community life and of promoting the active participation of the citizens in religious ceremonies and other events, as is shown by many of the photographs in the book. As a result, the beauty of the Cathedral owes a great deal to the alms-giving of the believers, by which the purchase of artistic devotional pieces and the restoration of the impressive facade have been made possible through the centuries. Such transactions are attested by many extant chancery letters and documents used by Lisimberti and Todisco. In addition, the authors never lose sight of the relationship between the history of the city and a broader perspective, thus linking its destiny to that of the rest of Italy. This can be seen, for example, in the chapter relating the slow decadence of the feudal system in the early nineteenth century, and the importance of the confraternity in

those tormented years, a phenomenon which was common to the rest of southern Italy.

In conclusion, this volume is an essential tool for the scholar of confraternities both because it offers a lucid and scientific approach to the often intricate history of the Carmelite confraternity in Ostuni, and because its primary aim is to establish a continuum between the past and the present.

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Pacini, Gian Piero. *Laici chiesa locale città. Dalla fraglia di S. Maria alla confraternita del Gonfalone a Vicenza (sec. XV-XVII)* (Vicenza: Edizioni Egida, 1994). viii, 266 pp., ill.

A very important contribution to the study of confraternities came in 1977 with the publications of the three volumes of *Ordo Fraternitatis* by Gilles G. Meersseman. This work not only provided a comprehensive overview of the history of many medieval confraternities in Northern and Central Italy, but was also pivotal in establishing a sound methodology for research in this field of study. It discussed questions of terminology, defined criteria for the evaluation of archival sources, and debated the religious, social and historical implications of the confraternities.

For his major work, Meersseman had the collaboration of Gian Piero Pacini, who is a researcher at the history department of the University of Padua. Pacini has continued the research he pursued with Meersseman in this new volume devoted to the confraternity “della Beata Vergine del Gonfalone” (of the Holy Virgin of the Gonfalon) in Vicenza, which stood out as the most prominent of the city’s confraternities from its foundation at the end of the sixteenth century, out of the ashes of a late medieval “fraglia” devoted to S. Maria Pietatis (Holy Mary of Mercy), to its suppression in 1810.

The points of interest of Pacini’s book go beyond a merely local relevance, for the amount of material published so far on confraternities in the Veneto region is considerable and allows a variety of cross-references. Many historical studies, together with editions of archival sources, such as confraternal statutes still preserved in diocesan and civic libraries, point to the rich popular devotional experience of Veneto. Here the confraternities’ associative life often intermingled with the ecclesiastical and political activity of all cities. Pacini relates the foundation and the acts of the confraternity ‘del Gonfalone’ within the context of the Catholic Reform and stresses the complex interaction between the life of the confraternity, the role of the bishop, his relations with the diocesan chapter of Canons, the city government, the nobles and the commoners in the social fabric of the city, and the emergence of new liturgical and devotional practices. In giving a detailed depiction of the confraternity’s life from the sixteenth century, Pacini comes to more general conclusions on issues of ecclesiastical history—for instance on the extant and significance of the Catholic Reform in Veneto—as well as social history, such as the confraternity’s policy of charitable donations and its implications for the social order of the city.