

two churches associated with the confraternity. Included in Fumarola's chapter is a series of photographs of the Holy Friday procession still celebrated by the confraternity, attesting to the very real and continuing presence of the confraternity ethos in present-day Mottola.

The bibliography and appendix of documents that follow will be of enormous value to those scholars actively involved in historical research into the continuing activities of confraternities and into their devotional focus. The continuing value of this publication, it seems to me, lies in the comprehensive approach it takes to a single confraternity; locating it historically, socially, and geographically, thus providing a witness to a rich past while securing the foundations for future study.

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*Il buon fedele. Le confraternite tra medioevo e prima età moderna.* ([Verona]: Quaderni di storia religiosa, 1998), 286 pp., 2 ill., 2 graphs

More in the tradition of Meersseman than Weissman, the essays in *Il buon fedele: le confraternite tra medioevo e prima età moderna* emphasize the devotional function of Italian confraternities over their civic or social roles. Solidly rooted in Italian or European approaches to the study of confraternities, the essays also provide evidence of increased communication between Italian academics and those studying Italy in other parts of the world. Included in the volume are references to studies of Italian confraternities by several "English-speaking scholars" over the past decade.

The essays address several aspects of the devotional activities of confraternities. These include preaching to confraternities (Laura Gaffuri), the information contained in account books of Roman confraternities (Anna Esposito), and reform and confraternities in Milan during the time of Carlo Borromeo (Danilo Zardin). In her introduction, "Le confraternite medievali: studi e tendenze storiche," the editor of the volume, Lorenza Pamato, while noting that non-Italian scholars have called for more wide-ranging studies of confraternities across the Italian peninsula, is unrepentant about the regional approach of these essays. She suggests that non-Italian scholars who bemoan the *campanilismo* of Italian local studies are too "extreme" (p. 10) and that broad-ranging studies of confraternities across the peninsula are rather "premature" (p. 11). At the same time, Pamato identifies the "North American" socio-anthropological approach to confraternity sources as beneficial to the discipline and argues that the dialogue between different methodologies must continue (p. 32).

Regional studies such as those included in this volume continue to have value for Italian and non-Italian scholars alike; no scholar can do without the references which these works contains. However, studies of individual confraternities such as those included here are sometimes hampered by a too-narrow use of sources or the absence of a larger context for the historian's claims. To illustrate, I would

like to concentrate on one essay in this volume, the article entitled “Mille e più donne in confraternita: il *consorcium Misericordiae* di Bergamo” by Maria Teresa Brolis and Giovanni Brembilla. In the essay, the two historians raise the important—and somewhat neglected—question of women’s participation in confraternities. They base their research on an important document for the history of female membership in confraternities: a matriculation list containing the names of about 1700 women who subscribed to Bergamo’s confraternity of the *Misericordia Maggiore* during the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. They argue that the list provides evidence of a “consistent female presence” in the confraternity. Further, they state that it suggests the *Misericordia* was particularly successful with the female population of the city. In support of this argument they cite the company’s founding rule, which stated that all members of the *Misericordia*, both male and female, derived equal spiritual benefits from the confraternity’s devotional activities.

Although the discussion of the matriculation list provides valuable evidence for a large number of women joining a medieval confraternity, the article does not take into account questions regarding the actual nature of women’s membership in the confraternity. In particular, we need to know more about the women’s experience of the *Misericordia* compared to that of its male members. A study of a wider variety of sources in the *Misericordia*’s archive suggests some answers to those questions. For instance, an examination of the confraternity’s account books reveals that in relation to male members, women made few charitable donations to the *Misericordia*. The distribution of charity to the poor was one of the main reasons for the company’s existence, and yet female members as a whole did not participate in this aspect of confraternal experience. Such findings suggest that in theory women participated equally with men in the devotional life of the organization, but in practice women derived fewer spiritual benefits than men from the experience of membership in the *Misericordia*.

While it is in some ways unsatisfying, this article serves as a step forward for research into confraternities. By exploring the experience of women within the *Misericordia*, Brolis and Brembilla raise questions about the gendering of confraternity membership and its consequences for men’s and women’s pious lives. Similarly, the other contributors to this volume also address issues relevant to scholars of confraternities in Italy and elsewhere. Their work challenges us to join the debate about interpretations of lay piety in the past.

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