

# Conceptual and Material Culture in the Service of Confraternities in Milan

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With arms outstretched and open palms the *Madonna of Mercy* in the Bagatti Valsecchi Museum fresco faces the viewer (fig. 1). Hovering angels place a golden crown on her veiled head, and tend her bejewelled mantle, white with green lining, over the members of a confraternity of *disciplinati*.<sup>1</sup> White mantled devotees, some with flails dangling from their wrists and slits in their robes revealing their flesh tortured for the common good, gather under each of her arms, while a few representative members, men to her right, women to her left, kneel dressed in daily wear. Additional patrons, St. Peter on her right and St. Mary Magdalene on her left, flank the Madonna's stately figure. Painted, signed and dated by Antonio Boselli in 1495, the fresco originally graced the apse of the parish church dedicated to Sts. Vincent and Alexander in Ponteranica (a suburb of Bergamo). Though a youthful work by a minor painter, it is a touching and fairly late representation of this Ur-Catholic theme, perhaps originally derived by Cistercians from numismatic sources.<sup>2</sup>

The fresco was noted *in situ* for the first time by Cavacaselle in 1871. Cited by Thieme-Becker (1910) and Cavalcaselle (1871), it was featured by Toesca (1918) in his work dedicated to the Milanese palazzo of the Bagatti Valsecchi family, after which—although occasionally mentioned by some of today's scholars—its presence in the house was forgotten until re-identified by Angeleli and De Marchi (1975). Presumably acquired in the 1880s, as was much of the mansion's Renaissance and Neo-Renaissance art and decorative arts furnishings, it was installed in the first room of the quarters where Fausto, the elder brother and bearer of the family's baronetcy, lived until his death in 1914. Removed for safekeeping during WWII, the fresco was reinstalled in the 1960s in its original position, as were all objects in this museum, an authentic re-presentation of aristocratic Milanese taste at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup>

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- 1 This contribution is an expanded version of the talk delivered at the Renaissance Society of America conference, 2007, held in Miami. The word "confraternity," or, as found more frequently in Milanese Renaissance documents, "scola," is used here to indicate a group primarily lay in composition and principally dedicated to devotion, expressions of devotion—including the sponsorship of church and chapel construction—and various forms of internal and external charity.
  - 2 Solway, "A Numismatic Source," 359–368. Another late, interesting, example (1525–28) not cited by Solway is by Hans Holbein the Younger for Jacob Meyer, now in the Schlossmuseum, Darmstadt; Snyder, *Northern Renaissance Art*, 390, fig. 454. Bergamo, dominated by Azzone Visconti in 1332, was entrusted to a *podestà* in 1354 becoming a pawn in the chess game between Milan and Venice; the latter took control in 1427, and the city remained in its ambit until the arrival of Napoleon in 1797.
  - 3 When the fresco was reinstalled, the decorative framework was added. Rather than an

Now in Milan, this *bergamasco* fresco brought confraternities, a font of fascinating insight about a complex contemporary nexus, to my attention. Research revealed rich non-Italian sources both general and specific, but which—probably due to a still fairly widespread lingering case of what may be called “Vasari-itis”—hardly ever mentioned Milan, and then only in passing. Significant works in Italian specifically on confraternities in Milan and Lombardy did come to the fore, but even here—where research on the 5 W’s of Milanese confraternities still proceeds—a focus on art and architecture, especially prior to the sixteenth century, was not usually addressed. When the art and architecture of the Milanese confraternities was addressed, as significant as the contributions might be, the focus tended to be on the collections as they have come down to us today, rather than on the confraternity’s/donor’s original commission, or, if regarding a work not commissioned *for* the community, but a pre-existing work *donated* to it, of the work’s acceptance into the religious practices of the community, or its rejection and sale to generate funds for the confraternity’s activities. More attention also needs to be dedicated to less immediately notable, and sometimes quite ephemeral, objects and practices potentially of service to the confraternity as a group, or to individual members: liturgical and processional objects, plague columns, manuscripts, books and pamphlets, charity chits, theatre, music, and so forth.<sup>4</sup>

## Scholarship

The first acknowledged scholarly source on Milan’s confraternities is *Dissertazione 75*, written by Ludovico Muratori as part of his treatment in Latin of Milan (1742), translated into Italian by his nephew a few years later.<sup>5</sup> Typical

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uncharacteristic “shell-motif,” as indicated in the museum’s recent catalogue, an attentive examination shows that it was clearly inspired by the flexed and stylized heavenly cloud motif seen in medieval and Early Renaissance art. For citations and a stylistic discussion of the fresco, see de Capoa, “Boselli. *Madonna della Misericordia*,” 245–46. For further information about the museum, its holdings, its online archival database of late nineteenth-early twentieth century artisans working in Milan and Lombardy, as well as a constantly updated bibliography about the collections and the non-profit museum opened to the public in 1994, see <<http://www.museobagattivalsecchi.org>>. *Collaboratrice* at the museum since the beginning of 2000, I would like to thank the helpful staff of the various libraries and the archives at Università Statale di Milano, the Biblioteca Braidense, the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore-Milano, Kunsthistorisches Institut, Biblioteca d’Arte di Milano, Biblioteca Sormani, Emeroteca Civica di Milano, the Ospedale Maggiore and the Luoghi Pii Elemosinieri. Finally, special thanks to my husband, Prof. Mario Tiengo, for his support, love and patience during the preparation of this and other recent works: *usque ad finem et ultra*.

4 Objects, such as illuminated documents, also were produced by third parties and destined for the confraternities; many have already been discovered, analyzed and published. Their possible influence on the confraternity’s artistic taste and production eventually will be considered.

5 Muratori, “Delle pie confraternità de’ Laici,” 592–607.

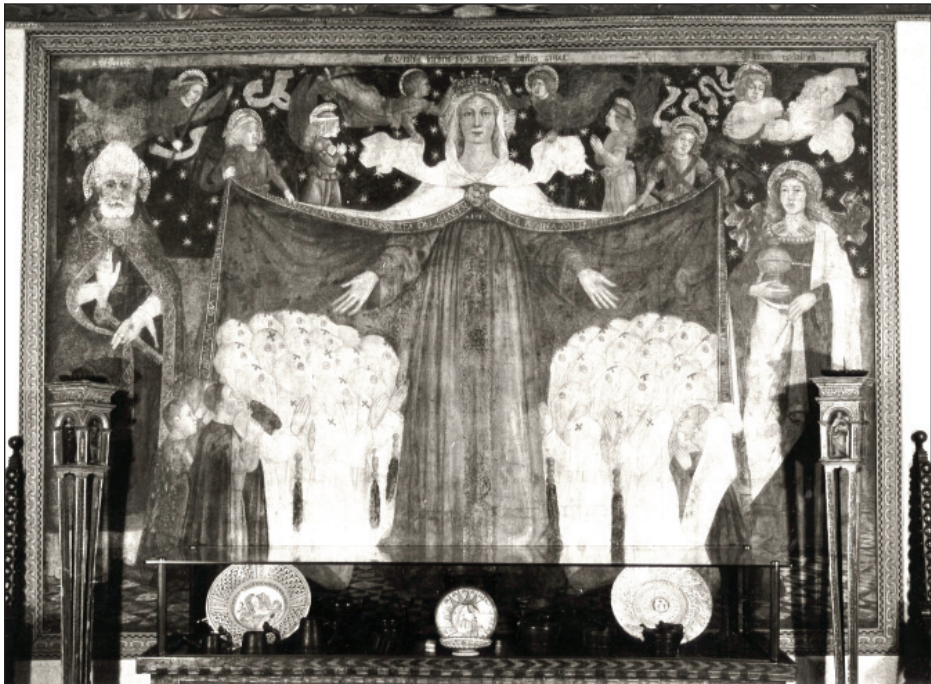


Fig. 1. Antonio Boselli, *Madonna of Mercy*, 1495, Museo Bagatti Valsecchi, inv. n. 1016 (Photo reproduced courtesy of the Bagatti Valsecchi Museum)

of this period of the Enlightenment so few years prior to the French Revolution, which impacted Milan and Italy greatly, Muratori's attention was focused on the abuses and perceived abuses of the confraternity system of his day. The first significant and panoramic modern Italian work on Italian confraternities by Monti (1927) has a tendency to be superficial and erroneous, and did not include the south. While waiting for a sufficient number of focused studies to allow a new attempt, it remains the only work of this kind by an Italian scholar, and is available in summarized form.<sup>6</sup> The second significant work on Italian confraternities by Gilles G. Meersseman, *Ordo Fraternitatis*, though of sound archival methodology, presaged the situation still characterizing Italian studies of confraternities today: a "narrow" focus on a single Order, a single confraternity, a single theme, and so forth. Milan, however, does receive notice in the various works of Brian Pullan gathered together in the monograph *Poverty and Charity*. These and other aspects—still true today—of modern Italian scholarship on Renaissance Italian confraternities were well summarized in English by Konrad Eisenbichler in his "Italian Scholarship on Pre-Modern Confraternities in Italy."

6 Monti, *Le confraternite medievali*, 1927, summarized in Viscardi and Barni, "Le confraternite," 387–416. See, too, the contributions on Milan's confraternities scattered throughout volumes 8 and 9 of *Storia di Milano*, reference to which is often abbreviated as *SMT*.

Renaissance confraternity studies focusing on the arts still ignore Milan, or mention it only in passing.<sup>7</sup> An important exception is Welch, who, in her groundbreaking study of art and architecture in Renaissance Milan, briefly sketched some fundamental concepts about confraternal life in Milan.<sup>8</sup>

Italian studies of Milanese confraternities are relatively prolific, if often still specific in focus, yet generally lack attention to the arts, perhaps because the structure, ideologies and member lists of many of the confraternities are still being explored.<sup>9</sup> Works concentrating on Milanese material and conceptual culture flower with late-nineteenth-century catalogues on donor portraits, a custom beginning more firmly after the Sforza period, and regaining popularity in the nineteenth century. More recent contributions not only explore the way in which confraternal collections were formed or, following traditional methodologies, how commissions were enacted, but also view the active role of confraternities in shaping perception and representation of patron saints.<sup>10</sup> Still awaiting attention are Milan's *case delle malmaritate* at S. Croce in Porta Ticinese and the *casa delle convertite* in S. Pelagia, while the *casa delle monache rimesse di S. Maria Egiziaca del Crocifisso*, founded in the 1550s, and the *casa delle convertite* at S. Valeria, first founded in 1532 as a kind of "half-way house" for *peccatrici*, but soon was transformed by a papal bull of 1538 into an institution for *stabilite*, or lay women taking cloister vows, were treated by Ruth P. Liebowitz in two conference talks in the 1980s. Liebowitz dedicated more attention to S. Valeria, and the examination focused on the institution and its inmates, without exploring the confraternity of deputies established to manage it, but her work is fundamental, and deserves to be published.<sup>11</sup>

7 For example, *Confraternities and the Visual Arts in Renaissance Italy*; Feinberg, "Imagination All Compact," 48–57; Prandi, "Arte figurativa," 266–289, 289–292, and, by the same author, "Intorno all'iconografia," 496–508; Schiferl, "Corporate Identity," 12–18; Ziegler, "A Historiographical."

8 Welch, *Art and Authority*, see "confraternities" and "Ospedale Maggiore" in the index.

9 Because of the relative rarity of works on Milanese confraternities in English and the difficulty of individuating works in Italian—particularly those in a journal, or anthology—outside of the country, I am preparing an updated indicative bibliography of works in Italian and/or specifically on Milan and Lombardy, which should appear in *Confraternitas* in the near future. In the meantime, the scholar may begin with Gazzini, "Confraternite a Milano," 347–359, which she first delivered, with the title "Confraternities in Milan in the Visconti and Sforza Period: Typology and Conditions of Sources," at the 30<sup>th</sup> International Congress on Medieval Studies, Kalamazoo, 1995.

10 See, for example, Dallaj, "Aspetti della produzione figurativa," 251–284.

11 The women entering S. Valeria were granted a year's probationary period in which to adapt to convent life, and to be approved. At the end of the year, should they have decided to return to the street, or have been judged unacceptable, any patrimony they had deposited, as required, with the deputies of the convent, was returned to them, minus living expenses incurred. Should they have decided to enter the monastery, their patrimony became property of the convent. For the *case* at S. Valeria, S. Pelagia and S. Sofia, see *Regole delle convertite*; Barbieri, "Un personaggio," 3–34; Cohen, *The Evolution*; Gamba, "Le regole," 237–261; Meersseman, *Ordo fraternitatis*, 1:374–75; Verga,

## Confraternities in Milan

Although individual realities must be addressed, it also may be affirmed that Milanese confraternities tended to be organized along some lines similar to their counterparts in other major cities: the earliest thirteenth century communities were organized for devotional reasons, but already by the early fourteenth century emphasis existed on charity; they were usually governed by 6 to 12 (or even 24) deputies elected annually;<sup>12</sup> they had no—or very limited—paid staff; ecclesiastical interference was expressly forbidden, though spiritual guidance was entrusted to the clergy, usually the one ruling the church complex in which the company met, or had a chapel; dues—after confraternity expenses—were used up annually for the confraternity's assistance goals usually administered at the door of the confraternity (hence principally for inhabitants of the 6 different *sestieri* organized according to Milan's city gates), but sometimes also city-wide; though some confraternities allowed women to join, they were usually relegated a very minor role; individualism and duplication of effort reigned (confraternities with the same dedication were scattered throughout town) prior to the Hapsburg and Napoleonic periods; establishing and cementing social roles was no less a benefit than spiritual ones; the farther into the 1400s one proceeds, the more duties were devolved to those coming from the "middle class" possessing practical administrative experience, while further into the 1500s, the process was refined, and duties and restrictions of the members were

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*Storia*, 278. I would like to thank Dr. Liebowitz for sending me photocopies of her unpublished talks, delivered in 1980 (Sixteenth Century Studies, St. Louis, MO) and 1984 (6th Berkshire conference on the History of Women). The silence about S. Valeria in Milan—of which the Milanese Carlo Borromeo was certainly aware prior to his trip to Rome, where, as cardinal, he established a half-way house for penitent women that was eventually transformed into a monastery—in Lazar, *Working*, is probably due to Lazar's concentration on Jesuit realties, while S. Valeria was entrusted to the Augustinians. For female religious experience and nunneries in Italy, see, for example, Paschini, "I monasteri femminili," 31–60; Pellegrini, "Female Religious Experience," 97–122; Rusconi, "Problemi e fonti," 53–75; Tacchi Venturi, *Storia*, 1,1:347ff, 378ff, 390ff, and statutes cited in vol. 1,2, as well as vol. 2,2, 161ff, 183ff; Tacchi Venturi also does not speak of Milan's early *convertite* model. Significant and little discussed is the transcription of an eye-witness account of the Hapsburg and Napoleonic suppressions in Milan: Marelli, *Chiesa e luoghi pii soppressi*.

- 12 By the Imperial period, Milan's ancient Roman walls had six gates with bridges over the canals and moats. When the medieval walls were built—then rebuilt, after their destruction in 1162 by the Hohenstaufen Fredrick I Barbarossa—the alignment and organization by city gate was maintained, and continued to condition the urban growth of the city, including the third and final construction of walls by the Spanish Hapsburgs beginning in the mid sixteenth century. This identification remains, though diluted, today, after the destruction of the walls, beginning during the Austrian Hapsburg period in the eighteenth century, and continuing—accompanied by the covering of most of the city's canals—into the second half of the nineteenth century, by which time Italy had become an independent nation. The symbolic association with the 12 disciples and the 24 elders is obvious.



more and more clearly specified, and the management tended to be monopolized by patricians increasingly interested in controlling not only growing poverty, but also the poor; and so forth. After the period of S. Carlo Borromeo (d. 1584, canonized 1610) and the Council of Trent, there was a proliferation of types and bureaucracy, of standardization and centralization.

Assistance could be devolved in kind, or money, and this is equally true for the dowries disbursed.<sup>13</sup> Donations could be free of restrictions, tied to activities in remembrance of the deceased testator, or with preference for disbursement given to members of the testator's family. Revenues resulted sometimes from entry fees, sometimes from collections during meetings, or during authorized city-wide collections, and from the sale, or rental, of properties. Donated properties also could be destined for use by the confraternity, itself, for headquarters and dormitories. To date, no trace has been found in wills examined, at least up to the mid-sixteenth century, of donations for the specific purpose of *producing* material or conceptual culture for in-house consumption.

So, what made the Milanese situation in general, and its confraternities in particular, special, if anything? Besides the fractious, changeable and often heretical nature of medieval and Renaissance Milanese, as so aptly evidenced in Bernardino Corio's sometimes eyewitness *Storia di Milano*,<sup>14</sup> Milanese had various early spiritual alternatives, beginning with their strong self-identification with the figure of S. Ambrogio, and the ancient liturgy that still bears his name, today. Closer to the period of the appearance of the confraternities were well-known groups, both orthodox and heretical, that attracted great followings in Milan and Lombardy: the Patari (mid eleventh to early twelfth century lay reformers accepted by the Orthodox church); the Catari (mid twelfth to early thirteenth century heretics propounding, for example, the dualism of Christ's nature, and who had a powerbase in the Paduan plains and Milan, which was weakened by the growth of officially sanctioned groups);<sup>15</sup> the Alleluja movement of the early thirteenth century; the Valdesians, or "Poor Ones of Lyon," already well established in Lombardy by the first decades of the thirteenth century; the devotional groups more closely tied with the new mendicant religious Orders, and founded to counteract heresy, as seen in

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13 The seemingly tender-hearted concern for poor girls unable to marry without dowry assistance more often than not is belied by the testators' restrictions of the dowries first to someone of their own descent, revealing a predominant concern, not for the girls themselves, but for the respectability of the family's name.

14 Corio, *Storia*. It is highly regrettable that these fascinating volumes do not have an index to names, places and subjects.

15 A witness of Milan's violent conflicts with the Catari was and is an important original component of the Broletto, the Commune's new city hall, its first one separate from the *brolo*, or garden-like area of the episcopal palace where town leaders met for centuries under the auspices of the imperially-sanctioned local bishop-prince: the 1229 equestrian sculpture by an artist of the Antelami family of the town's *podestà*, Oldrado da Tresseno, represented under a fading painted image of the imperial eagle, as saying, "Catharos, ut debuit, ussit" commonly translated as, "Cathars, as is my duty, I burned."

the “Fede” group founded by St. Peter Martyr upon arriving in Milan in 1232;<sup>16</sup> the great following of unlucky Guglielmina of Bohemia;<sup>17</sup> and, finally, the *Umiliati*, legendarily begun by humbled Milanese nobles returning home after imprisonment in exile in Germany at the hands of Frederick I Hohenstaufen, though papal approval came from Innocent III in 1201. This group was a formidable force in Milan, offering, as it did, three flexible alternatives for personal spirituality: cloistered existence, as a monk, or nun; chaste existence in mixed gender agricultural communities, such as Mirasole just outside Milan;<sup>18</sup> or dedicating oneself, as a Tertiary, to devotion, while living at home, as exemplified by one of Milan’s principal early voices, Bonvesin da la Riva.<sup>19</sup> The *Umiliati*—angered by the interference and call to rigid reform of Cardinal Carlo Borromeo, the Milanese archbishop—ceased to be an alternative for males when the Order was disbanded soon after their 1569 attempt on the cardinal’s life, and their goods were passed to the new Order of the Jesuits, who soon built themselves a new complex on the Brera site of the original *Umiliati* headquarters;<sup>20</sup>

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- 16 A Dominican preacher and fervent anti-heretic Inquisitor at Milan’s S. Eustorgio, Peter was martyred returning from Como to Milan in 1252, and canonized in 1253, soon after which another devotional group, dedicated first to his name, then also to that of the Blessed Virgin Mary, was founded at the church; a third group dedicated to S. Peter Martyr, the Crociati, was founded toward the middle of the fifteenth century. S. Peter Martyr’s role in these early intensely personal forms of orthodox spirituality is well-treated in Meersseman’s main opus.
- 17 Guglielmina was a lay woman, legendarily a Bohemian princess, who moved to Milan with an illegitimate child. After the child’s death, she dedicated herself to charity, and died in the odour of sainthood, but her reputation was marred by the heretical assertions of a handful of her more fanatical followers. Her bones, reportedly buried in a small simple mausoleum still visible in the *camposanto* behind the Cistercian Chiaravalle not far out of Milan, were disinterred, judged heretical in an early fourteenth century Inquisition held in the small *Umiliati* Milanese church of S. Simone and Giuda (1272), and burned. The little church, after various vicissitudes, was deconsecrated in 1975, and transformed into the Teatro Arsenale still found on via Cesare Correnti, a straightened version of the *stradone* of S. Simone. Apparently, not much more of the original church than the heavily restored narrow façade remains.
- 18 Upon suppression of the male part of the Order, the possession of Mirasole was passed to the Collegio Elvetico (in whose buildings in Milan now are housed the city’s archives). When the school was suppressed by Napoleon in 1797, he gave the little Mirasole church, reconstructed at the end of the fourteenth century-beginning of the fifteenth century and decorated with some fifteenth and sixteenth century frescoes, the residence, partly refurbished in the eighteenth century, and the stalls, advanced for their day, to the *Ospedale Maggiore*, which had cared for his soldiers. A program of reconstruction and transformation is planned to include a permanent gallery for the hospital’s collection of donor portraits.
- 19 da la Riva, *Le Meraviglie*; Bonvesin resided in the Navigli area along one of Milan’s many erstwhile canals, hence the name identifying him as one living on water banks.
- 20 The adjacent fourteenth-century church was deconsecrated and reworked in the early nineteenth century, in order to create the Napoleonic rooms still in use by the *Pinacoteca di Brera*, today. Fragments of the original façade are visible in the Museo di Arte Antica in the Sforza Castle.

the female part of the Order<sup>21</sup> was allowed to survive until the suppressions, which shall be treated shortly.

In addition to the many typical devotional options offered by the city's variously dedicated confraternities, the city's attempts at controlling the rebellious bands or companies of youths, often aristocratic in nature, is worthy of mention. The *Scole Senum et Iuvenum*, established at the parish church of S. Giovanni sul Muro, the now destroyed site of many of the city's confraternities, had its rules reformed in 1421, but already by 1422 had merged with the church's principal confraternity dedicated to S. John the Baptist and to the poor and elderly, and within a few decades had lost its focus on Milan's youth.<sup>22</sup> Free public schools, founded by devout private individuals, such as Tommaso Grassi (1482), helped to keep unruly poor boys off the streets, as did the later Jesuit school founded in their new palazzo, as well as the second attempt at creating a boy's confraternity in Milan, the *Compagnia dei Servi dei Puttini in Carità*, founded by Padre Castellino in 1536, and recognized as a confraternity in 1555.<sup>23</sup> An early example of "tough love," particularly recalcitrant boys could be committed temporarily by their parents to the Malastalla prison located near the Commune's governmental seat, the Broletto Nuovo. Confinement could also be effected in one of the city's many single-sex orphanages, the first of which was due to the efforts of a certain deacon Dateo during the Carolingian period.

Another way in which the Milanese situation could be different from that of other cities was the early attempts, albeit not entirely successful, at central control of confraternities. Independently minded groups acting and meeting in private could be seen as a political threat. In 1260, as noted by Terpstra, Milan's civic (pre-Visconti) government turned the Bianchi away.<sup>24</sup> Various Visconti rulers—usually indirectly, in the form of tax benefits, but also directly, as in the case of Bernabò (d. 1378)—supported charity to the poor, as allocated by the city's "hospitals," which

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21 A fragment of the female convent dedicated to S. Erasmus was reconstructed in the piazza of the same name, not far from its original location, and re-adapted during post-WWII urban renewal; it still can be seen.

22 Gazzini, "Confraternite e giovani," 65–84. The many works of dott.ssa Gazzini are of fundamental importance for the study of Milanese confraternities, and were significant for the writing of this contribution, as will also be clear in the upcoming bibliography.

23 Mention of the *Compagnia dei Servi dei Puttini in Carità* is made by Tacchi Venturi, *Storia*, 1,1:341–342.

24 Terpstra, *Confraternities*, 2; see, too, his "Charity," 23–25. In 1260, communal Milan was effectively ruled by the Della Torre family. Ottone Visconti (d. 1295) was nominated archbishop of Milan in 1262, but succeeded in taking possession of the seat only after his 1277 defeat of the Della Torre at Desio, to the north of Milan. The Visconti hold on power was far from sure until Matteo the Great returned to imperial favour in 1310, though the official title of duke was not received until Giangaleazzo succeeded in obtaining the honour, in exchange for a large sum of money, from the emperor Sigismund in 1395. The direct line ceased when Filippo Maria, father of Bianca Maria, who was married to Francesco Sforza, died in 1447 without male issue.



sometimes reverted to confinement. Dissatisfaction with hospital management of general charity led to a late fourteenth-century attempt by Gian Galeazzo Visconti to centralize assistance to the poor, but it was slow in realization, and fell apart when he died in 1404, though the following year the ecclesiastical institution, the *Ufficio della Pietà*, was founded; one of their principal duties was to round up, and confine, vagrants. A generation later, during the short-lived Ambrosian Republic (1447–1450), the office of *Deputati sopra le Provvisioni dei Poveri* was created with powers to investigate charitable institution accounts, and seize inappropriately managed funds. The deputies were not “new men” once deprived of power under the Visconti, but rather the same group who had managed similar previous programs of assistance to, and control of, the poor. In 1448, during the short-lived Ambrosian Republic, the Archbishop of Milan, Enrico Rampini, issued an episcopal bull admitting clerical mismanagement, citing lay confraternity management as a model, and setting up civic control over the city’s principal hospitals: the confraternities and the civic body of The Twelve became nominating bodies in a complex appointment system designed to thwart undue pressure and influence by outside groups. Though it retained a semblance of curial control, as evidenced by the very existence of the bull itself, the system allowed the body to function independently and efficiently, and remained essentially the same for about 300 years. Finally, during the fifteenth century, in response to the bungled management of general charity by the many hospitals’ administrative bodies, confraternities dedicated to charity emerged, and health-related issues were relegated more and more to the city’s hospitals, although the situation was by no means clear cut. During Sforza rule, hospital care for the poor was centralized by the creation of the *Ospedale Maggiore*, founded in 1456, to which smaller realities were associated, and which was governed by Sforza favourites, though confraternities dedicated to charity remained essentially free of Sforza penetration.<sup>25</sup>

What is particularly intriguing, however, is a real, or perceived, aspect: that early Milanese attention to public assistance, that is, charity outside the confraternal circle, was (and is) seen as an expression of *milanesità*, or “Milanese-ness.” To-date, an examination of available statutes and the activities of various early Milanese confraternities evidences this civic self-awareness: for example, “of Milan” could be included in a confraternity’s title. In fact, Milanese lay charity groups were early and largely concerned with public charity, as witnessed by the 1305 date of the founding of the *Quattro Marie*, one of the city’s most important and long-lasting confraternities. After the formation of the Italian state as we know it today, in the second half of the nineteenth century, direct and official charitable intervention began in earnest.<sup>26</sup> Closer to our own day is the fascinating example

25 See especially Welch, *Art and Authority*; the first hospital beds were available in the 1470s.

26 For those interested in gender, costume, craftsmanship and nationalism issues, for example, the establishment of institutions for young girls at risk to learn to make Milanese lace would be a fruitful field for investigation.

of *Humanitaria*, founded at the end of the nineteenth century by an industrialist to give his factory workers, fresh from the countryside, the chance to attend free night school in order to better themselves. Nevertheless, the unconditional observation, so proudly stated and restated, that Milanese confraternities, indeed, its citizens' natures, were impregnated with benevolence to the poor also reveals a continuing Milanese self-perception as the "moral capital" of Italy, a self-perception that might color Italian scholarship, despite the tarnishing of the image wrought by the *mani pulite* ("clean hands") bribery scandal of the late twentieth century.

Of the approximately 39 confraternities surviving up to the end of the eighteenth century, none had been founded prior to the fourteenth century, 6 had been founded in that century (including 2 of the 5 that survived: Quattro Marie, Misericordia), 14 had been founded in the fifteenth century (including 2 of the surviving 5: Divinità, Carità in Porta Nuova), 13 were established in the sixteenth century, 4 in the seventeenth century (including 1 of the surviving 5, Nostra Signora di Loreto), and 2 unlucky confraternities just had been founded in the eighteenth century,<sup>27</sup> when Emperor Joseph II's reforms, planned in 1784, and effected in 1786, suppressed and aggregated many confraternities and monasteries in the Lombardo-Veneto area then under his control as Austrian emperor. The Milanese confraternities were bundled, according to function, into 5 main groups, each with its own administrative staff, though the accounts of the 39 confraternities continued to remain separate. The descriptive title of a contemporary and informative economic document allows a glimpse of the hopes for the great upheaval: *Riassunto de' bilanci consuntivi per l'anno 1784 di tutte le pie fondazioni della città di Milano, nel quale però non si vedono gli effetti del Nuovo Sistema sia per la concentrazione degli Uffici, e risparmio de' Salarj, che per le notabili miglurie nella parte delle Entrate, quali risulteranno dai Bilanci da pubblicarsi per il susseguente Anno 1785*.<sup>28</sup> Unfortunately and surprisingly, during these vast Hapsburg suppressions, no inventories were done, or have yet come to light.

Further aggregations and centralizations were effected during the various Napoleonic phases, including the establishment of a single *Congregazione della Carità* at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Heir to the undifferentiated and amassed stock of goods confiscated during the Hapsburg era from confraternities and monasteries, when the inventories were finally begun, they could only register provenance from that moment on, whether due to then-new suppressions of institutions that previously had escaped attention, the "exchange" of works with Paris and other institutions, or the transferral to the new Pinacoteca di Brera of things from the stock that had been consigned, as a learning tool, to the Brera painting academy, itself uprooted from the Biblioteca Ambrosiana, where it had been established by

27 Tables, differing in completeness although all quite parsimonious, are reproduced; see, for example, the Consorzio Teledata, *Archivio storico*.

28 The copy preserved at the Braidense National Library in Milan bears the collocation number ZD.VII.6.

Cardinal Federico Borromeo at the beginning of the seventeenth century.<sup>29</sup> Pre- and post-Unification mutations in the management of public assistance, as well as the art collections and archives, resulted eventually in today's LL.PP.EE, or Luoghi Pii Elemosinieri, headquartered in the Palazzo Archinto since 1853.<sup>30</sup>

For those studying Milanese confraternities, there is good news and bad news. The bad news is that throughout the ages, fires and loss have devastated the archives of the individual Milanese charities. Then, shortly after centralization of all the city's documents began under the Hapsburgs, fires devastated the newly gathered archives, destroying many documents. The most recent and devastating fire for the LL.PP.EE. archives, however, was caused in 1943 by the bombs that fell directly onto Palazzo Archinto, and which brought down all but the exterior shell of the palazzo, including most of the precious ceiling frescoes by Tiepolo.<sup>31</sup> Unfortunately, not all of the archives had been moved yet, so some confraternities lost all their archives, while for others only fragments are left. The implications for research are as clear as they are bleak: it will often be impossible to trace commissions, in order to do thorough research into patron, audience, gender, economic, theological and social issues. Most of the city's pre-Baroque confraternal material patrimony has been destroyed, dispersed, or forgotten and not yet traced. In addition, no special indications for *confraternal* art have been found, yet, in the writings of Carlo Borromeo, Gabrielle Paleotti, or Federico Borromeo.

There is, however, good news. For some of the confraternities, such as the Quattro Marie (one of Milan's oldest and most important), it is possible that all of the archives have survived, including statutes, IN-OUT money registers, *giuspatronato*, and so forth. Next, Statutes of 14 of the 39 confraternities surviving until the end of the eighteenth century not only exist, but have also been published, and so are more readily available for those not able to consult the archives easily in person.<sup>32</sup> Years of effort to inventory Lombard archival holdings, and to make the catalogue available—in printed and online form—are beginning to reap welcome, albeit still incomplete, results. The already cited *Guida generale* by Consorzio Teledata is available in printed form, while PLAIN (Progetto Lombardo Archivi in INternet) is

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29 The implications of this inventory of the holdings of the Brera Pinacoteca are much wider than they might seem at first glance: works from deconsecrated churches and closed monasteries and confraternities were channelled from the entire north Italian Napoleonic holdings to the Brera. Hence, the inventory, though often parsimonious with information, will be of extreme interest to all confraternity scholars for cities within this area: *Inventario napoleonico*. Similarly, two contributions trace works first brought to Brera, but now dispersed or lost: *Brera dispersa*; *Brera nascosta*.

30 For a panorama of the institution, its headquarters and collections, see *Il tesoro dei poveri*.

31 One part was saved, and is still visible in the collection of A.L.P.E., the Archive of the Luoghi Pii Elemosinieri, to whose director, dott. Marco Bascapè, and staff I would like to extend special thanks.

32 See Noto, *Statuti*. Tantalizing hints found in other authors that at least a few other statutes might still survive will be pursued.



Fig. 2. Antonio da Lonate, *Chapel of S. Catherine of Alexandria*, ca. 1540, San Nazaro Maggiore, Milan (Photo of the author)

available online: <<http://plain.apnetwork.it>>. This last source is particularly helpful, in that the online records also give a brief historical summary of and a bibliography for the institution in question. There may also be more that has survived in the State archives than is usually thought, though the various reorganizations it has undergone make a study of the institution itself fundamental in order to understand the holdings.<sup>33</sup> Finally, a significant portion of the numerous confraternal holdings dating to the sixteenth-to-nineteenth centuries of the Braidense national library in Milan are contained in the publication edited by Belsten in 1982.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>33</sup> See, for example, Natale, *L'Archivio generale del Fondo di religione*.

<sup>34</sup> *Confraternite dei sec. XVI–XIX*. Verification in progress has already revealed a few works overlooked by the publication, but it is, on the whole, an accurate representation of the Braidense library's holdings, the oldest of which are listed only in the early handwritten registers, currently being examined by the author. Nineteenth century holdings up to the most recent decades are present only in the card catalogue. The digital catalogue, containing works acquired, or consulted, after that period, is not accurate for journal holdings, which must be verified in the card catalogue. Many, but not all, Italian library catalogues, including that of the Braidense, are now available online, whether directly from the institutional web site, or via a centralized system, such as OPAC, or the meta-OPAC, AZALAI-MAI: <<http://azalai.cilea.it>>. Particularly helpful are the sites for the Kunsthistorisches Institut and the Bibliotheca Hertziana because their system catalogues individual contributions in anthologies, though an effort should be made to

So, what has survived from the pre-Baroque period of Milanese confraternities? A scarce number of manuscript statutes, some of them beautifully illuminated with scenes of the charities' benevolent activities; some suburban Renaissance confraternal items added after the suppressions to the central LL.PP.EE. patrimony;<sup>35</sup> the aforementioned books of printed statutes, indulgences, rules and prayer manuals;<sup>36</sup> some printed confraternal emblems perhaps date, if not physically, at least in design, to the pre-Baroque period, although establishing this will be a scholar's nightmare because they were cut out of their original contexts, and pasted together thematically following archival criteria in vogue in Milan in the late eighteenth-early nineteenth century. The metal chits distributed to the needy by confraternity deputies, and to be redeemed for charity, are present both in the LL.PP.EE. archive, as well as the civic numismatic collection, though they principally date, at least physically if not in design, to the seventeenth and later centuries. Of the architecture, art and furnishings, a few things have come to light, despite the well-known destruction of silver liturgical objects, sent to the city's mint for smelting during the various waves of Hapsburg and Napoleonic suppression.

One route to enriching our knowledge of the material and conceptual productions by *and* for Milanese medieval and Renaissance confraternities is to rediscover objects dispersed, but not destroyed, or to document them, if destroyed. Another route is to re-evaluate known objects, perhaps under our eyes every day, in order to look for confraternal associations forgotten or ignored. This route has already been demonstrated by scholars for Leonardo da Vinci's two versions of the *Virgin of the Rocks*, once in the Chapel of the Immaculate Conception, first on the right upon entering S. Francesco Grande, once behind S. Ambrogio.<sup>37</sup> The church was re-adapted, then destroyed, during the Hapsburg and Napoleonic suppressions, and replaced with military barracks still in use by the police today. Various other examples in Milan may be pinpointed, for example, the mid-sixteenth century chapel attached to the left flank of S. Nazaro Maggiore, and dedicated to S. Catherine of Alexandria for use by the confraternity dedicated to that saint (fig. 2),<sup>38</sup> or the seat,

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pursue this exceptionally helpful goal fully, and not leave selection to the discretion of the cataloguer rather than to the scholar seeking information.

35 Special care must be paid to distinguish those devotional objects that once belonged to Milanese and suburban confraternities from devotional objects donated to the same, and destined—unless of particular merit—to be sold in order to generate money to sustain the confraternity's charitable acts. As opposed to commissioned pieces, no case has come to my attention, yet, of the survival in Milan's public assistance collections of an object that a medieval, or Renaissance, confraternity had bought readymade, or was given, and which it had used for its own devotional purposes, essentially transforming the object, by their very acceptance of it, into confraternal art.

36 Much work remains to be done to identify the works read by the confraternity members, whether commissioned by them directly or not; see, for example, Gazzini, "Scuola, libri e cultura," 215–261; ID., "Patriziati urbani," 491–514.

37 See, for example, Cassinelli, "Camillo Procaccini," 199–211.

38 A chapel dedicated to S. Catherine was present here from the period of Bernabò Visconti,



frescoed by Luini and now incorporated into the Biblioteca Ambrosiana, of the confraternity S. Corona, whose chapel—fourth on the right in S. Maria delle Grazie—still contains its original mid-sixteenth century frescoes by Gaudenzio Ferrari and disciple, though the contemporary painting by Titian of Christ being crowned with thorns was stolen by French soldiers in the late eighteenth century and ended up in the Louvre, where it remains, today.<sup>39</sup> To obtain these results, “excavations” in confraternal and non-confraternal archives, inventories and historic city guides need to continue, as do the “excavations” in collection catalogues of all kinds, trying to bring together the two selvages—the dislocated object (or knowledge of it) and the existing documentation—of the torn historical fabric.

Bagatti Valsecchi Museum  
Milan, Italy

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near whose palace complex the church was located. In addition to the Renaissance portal to the exterior, over which is a stained glass designed perhaps by Lucas van Leyden, on an axis of which are the original frescoes by Lanino, disciple of Gaudenzio Ferrari, a passage between the Renaissance chapel and the church’s left hand transept also existed in the Renaissance. In fact, this second portal, rediscovered in 1971, probably would have been on an axis with the Neoclassical altar, set perpendicular to the niche with Lanino’s frescoes. Today, the exterior door is sealed, and the chapel is accessible up a few stairs through a very narrow, extremely plain rectangular door set in the wall between the chapel and the transept, whose profile is unlikely to follow that of the Renaissance doorway. For further information about the basilica, see *La basilica degli Apostoli*, and Touring Club Italiano, *Milano*.

39 Although Gazzini notes that the painting by Titian is no longer present, she errs in asserting that the frescoes have also not survived, Gazzini, “Scuola, libri e cultura,” 246, n. 120. The Louvre version features the imperial ancient Roman bust over the doorway.

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