

Theses Completed (Abstracts)

Cossar, Roisin. *The Work of Salvation: Civic Piety in the Misericordia Maggiore of Bergamo, 1265–1365*. Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, Toronto, 1999. Supervisor, Professor Joseph Goering.

One of the defining features of society in the later Middle Ages was the attempt by lay people to achieve personal salvation while maintaining their commitments to household, work, and community. The increasing interest in pious action among lay men and women during this period contributed to the formation of confraternities throughout Europe. Several recent works have examined the importance of these lay religious associations to the pious and social life of medieval and Renaissance communities. However, for the most part scholars have been more interested in examining the groups' collective activities rather than how the social circumstances of members shaped the structure and activities of confraternities. Two notable exceptions to this rule are Nicholas Terpstra's *Lay Confraternities and Civic Religion in Renaissance Bologna* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), which includes a valuable discussion of female confraternity members, and Nicholas Eckstein's *The District of the Green Dragon: Neighbourhood Life and Social Change in Renaissance Florence* (Florence: Olschki, 1995).

Employing a variety of archival sources and an approach that includes both case studies and quantitative methods, my study investigates the convergence of individual identity and pious activities within Bergamo's confraternity of the Misericordia Maggiore during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The study also seeks to place the Misericordia's civic actions within a social and pious context, and I argue in particular that the confraternity's charitable programme reflected the values of the entire community.

The Misericordia Maggiore was the largest charitable confraternity in the northern Italian city of Bergamo during the Middle Ages, providing its members and the community at large with security in this world and the promise of salvation in the next. Founded in 1265, the Misericordia quickly became one of the city's wealthiest landowners. It drew its large membership from all of the city's neighbourhoods (*vicinie*) and from a wide swath of the city's social strata. In my study of the Misericordia, I employed the confraternity's matriculation lists as well as notarial documents, such as wills and land conveyances, to examine the identities and social status of confraternity members and officials. I turned to similar sources to examine the relations of the confraternity with the city's poor and local civic authorities. My conclusions encompass several concepts, including the impact of gender and social status on distinctions between members; the confraternity's development of a civic profile through its close relationship to the local government; and the levelling effect of the search for salvation on social boundaries within the community.

Gender distinctions determined certain aspects of membership in the Misericordia. The rituals of entrance into the confraternity appear to have differed for men and women. Men wishing to join the Misericordia faced a year-long novitiate, after which those selected to become members participated in an entrance ceremony. Women, by contrast, likely did not undergo a novitiate, but were instead inducted into the Misericordia upon expressing a desire to join the confraternity. The distinction between the entrance rituals for men and women reflected their relative importance to the administration of the company. Members were also subject to another type of division. As in other companies, women could not serve as officials of the Misericordia. Among the men, only a select group became *fratres* of the organization and were allowed to serve as confraternity officials. Perhaps as a result of these distinctions, social and kinship ties between individuals often motivated their entrance into the organization and likely remained important after they joined it. For example, we can identify instances of all the female inhabitants of a household or several members of a religious house joining the Misericordia at the same time.

While there were divisions in the structure of the Misericordia's membership, both men and women of all social ranks placed similar demands on the confraternity as they sought physical security for themselves and their families as well as salvation for their souls. For instance, both men and women looked to the Misericordia to provide shelter and other necessities for themselves or their family members during periods of civil strife. Accordingly, the confraternity made houses and land available to those who had been exiled from the city or to others contemplating the exile of their relatives from other communities. In their search for personal salvation, rich and poor Bergamasks of either sex left a variety of pious bequests to the Misericordia, explicitly breaking down the social barriers which separated them in life, a subject I consider at length in Chapter Three of my dissertation, "Public Trustee and Pious Body: Bequests and Donations to the Misericordia."

Although it served as an agent of social stability within the city, the Misericordia was formed primarily to assist needy individuals in the city and surrounding area. Sources such as the confraternity's inventories and its records of charitable visits to the poor reveal that it expanded its charitable distributions substantially during the late thirteenth century. For example, inventories reveal that during the 1270s the capacity of the confraternity's wine barrels grew from 4400 litres to 18,000 litres. This rapid growth of the confraternity's storage capacity was matched by a related rise in the company's distribution of alms to the poor during the period. The rapid growth in the confraternity's wealth during the late thirteenth century is another indication of its increasing capacity to distribute alms to inhabitants of the city. I analyzed the confraternity's cash holdings between 1267 and 1308 in Chapter Five, "*Pro Opere Misericordie in Concordio*: The Misericordia and Civic Government in Bergamo."

While the Misericordia provided alms to the poor throughout Bergamo and its region, the confraternity's clients were not simply passive recipients of its charity. An analysis of records describing the poor reveals that some members of

needy groups also made charitable donations to the Misericordia to benefit their own souls (in particular, I examined the city's wine porters and domestic servants, and found members of each group alternately receiving alms from the Misericordia and giving charitable donations or bequests to the association). Some of these individuals also became members of the confraternity. The experience of paupers within the confraternity as clients, members, and donors, should serve as a reminder that the relationship between medieval confraternities and the poor was never entirely one-way. Instead, the poor, like other citizens, treated the Misericordia as both a social and a pious organization.

Finally, during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the Misericordia, a stable institution in a politically unstable city, established a close rapport with local civic authorities. Through this connection the confraternity became the charitable arm of the government, providing, with the support of civic officials, alms to the poor. The civic government's support for the confraternity encompassed cash donations, tax privileges, and the simplification of legal procedures in the company's favour. The connection between the Misericordia and local civic officials once again illustrates the nature of civic piety in the Middle Ages, as both government and pious organizations sought the same ends—security and salvation for all—through their involvement in local issues such as assistance for the poor.

Medieval confraternities such as the Misericordia provide us with essential information about lay people's pious and social lives. The community outreach in which the Misericordia engaged, the structural divisions of its membership, and its cultivation of close ties with local governments all formed the foundation of civic piety in the later Middle Ages. Civic piety articulated through groups such as the Misericordia reflected the urban laity's twin commitments to social and pious principles, and, therefore, the interdependence of secular and spiritual spheres within medieval society.

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Dehmer, Andrea. *Painted Processional Banners of Religious Lay Confraternities in Northern and Central Italy from their Beginnings Until the Era of Counter-Reformation*. M.A. Thesis, University of Regensburg, Germany.

The thesis surveys for the first time the surviving art works on canvas called *gonfaloni* produced in Northern Italy between the late Middle Ages and the end of the Renaissance. Commissioned mostly by lay confraternities, their functional, iconographical and technical analysis as well as their documentary integration in church and art historical contexts, will serve two significant purposes: (1) to illustrate the devotions and intentions of these companies who distinguished, represented, and even identified themselves with their signs; (2) to point out the considerable role played by the *gonfaloni* in the rapid spread of some religious motives and especially of painting on canvas in Italy.

The reception of *gonfaloni*-display in literature and art, a hitherto almost absolutely neglected field in art history, is examined in a separate chapter. The