

Reviews

Chen, Andrew H. *Flagellant Confraternities and Italian Art, 1260–1610. Visual and Material Culture, 1300–1700*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018. Pp. 234 + 13 plates, 66 b/w ill. ISBN 978-94-6298-478-4 (hardcover) €95.

Allegedly founded in Perugia by the Franciscan hermit Raniero Fasani at the end of the thirteenth century, the flagellant movement at first consisted of a loose set of bands of lay and religious men who saw self-flagellation as a mean to express piety and devotion towards God. They wandered in procession from city to city across the Italian peninsula performing a penitential rite that involved prayer, self-flagellation, and ritual bleeding. Notwithstanding the cyclical nature of these spontaneous religious demonstrations, historians agree in stating that the flagellant movement reached its peak in the fourteenth century. Following the Black Death of 1349–51, the movement spread outside Italy, chiefly Germany and the Netherlands, where flagellants often gave themselves over to mystical blood frenzies and indulged in anticlerical and anti-Semitic violence.

Despite the progressive “domestication” of the movement in Italian lands due to the hostility of the Catholic Church — Pope Clement VI officially condemned the bands in a bull of 20 October 1349 and instructed Church leaders to suppress them — the companies of *flagellanti* or *disciplinati*, as they were called, retained a certain importance within the cultural framework of late medieval and early modern Italy. In order to do so, the radical and rebellious movement turned into a series of well-organized confraternities whose members practiced self-flagellation, normally behind closed doors. Like other confraternities of the time, flagellant confraternities in late medieval and early modern Italy were patrons of the arts. They received art works as gifts and commissioned art works to celebrate their achievements, their mission, or their own forms of piety. In *Flagellant Confraternities and Italian Art, 1260–1610: Ritual and Experience* Andrew H. Chen analyzes some of these artworks produced over a period of about 350 years.

After a brief introduction, the book divides into two parts corresponding roughly with the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Part 1, “Art and Ritual, to 1450” provides an overview of flagellant confraternity art and ritual in the late Middle Ages. Chapter 1 outlines the various locations used for ritual flagellation and the various typologies of visual art that medieval Italian confraternities commissioned for them. Chapter 2 examines the wall paintings and other artworks found at the entrance to confraternity premises, with a special focus on those in Siena. Chapter 3 is a study of the visual and experiential contexts of the Mass in Siena,

Venice, and Bologna, with an analysis of an illuminated missal now at the Biblioteca del Museo Correr in Venice. Chapter 4, one of the most interesting of the book, illustrates the confraternities' use of small painted wooden panels and illustrated books in their efforts to comfort people condemned to death. Chapter 5 focuses on the use of processional banners and public acts of flagellation.

Part 2 presents an argument for a historical transformation in visual apparatuses and ritual practices in flagellant confraternities between the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period. Chapter 6 thus provides a brief history of a confraternity in Pavia that gave up the practice of flagellation before the middle of the fifteenth century and the influence this decision had on the iconography of the company's late fifteenth-century altarpiece. Chapter 7 deals with works by Luca Signorelli and Rosso Fiorentino. Chapter 8 is concerned with reform activities and new church art in Florence and Milan, with special attention to the Confraternity of San Giovanni Battista del Gonfalone in Milan. An epilogue hinting at the peregrinations of flagellant confraternal traditions from Italy via Spain to the New World closes the book.

The book as a whole makes an original contribution to our knowledge of Italian flagellant confraternities and their art by offering a fresh perspective from which to examine a subject that does, indeed, deserve more attention. The images Chen discusses are astonishing for the vivid and passionate richness of their iconography, deeply rooted within flagellant devotion. For this reason alone, *Flagellant Confraternities and Italian Art* makes a significant contribution to the cultural history of a little understood and much-denigrated tradition that, in modern times, has often been reduced to an erotic outlet or Othered as something devious within mainstream representations of extreme forms of religious devotion.

Though innovative and significant, the book is not without flaws. A constant impression is that one is reading an unfinished work of great potential. The structure of the book, in fact, does not seem to be able to provide the reader of a clear theory on these masterpieces and the sociocultural context of the confraternities commissioning such artworks. Chen's analysis of some of the artworks is compelling but, as a whole, the book lacks cohesion. One reason for this might be the impressive time frame the author has chosen to consider — from 1260 to 1610. To bring together works produced over the Italian peninsula during a 350 years period of extreme complexity and divisiveness is a daunting and difficult task. The epilogue, which attempts to extend the scope of inquiry even further to Spain and the Americas, does not solve the problem.

Though lacking a clear theoretical framework and in spite of the over-extension of the field of inquiry, this book is nonetheless an innovative

work of great interest that contributes significantly to the history of Italian art and confraternities in the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

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Webster, Harriett R. (ed.). *The Annals of Dunstable Priory*. Trans. David Preest. Woodbridge, UK: The Boydell Press, 2018. Pp. xlvii, 304 + 1 map. ISBN 978-1-8438-3813-5 (hardcover) \$130.

The *Annals of Dunstable Priory* is of interest to many scholars, including those interested in religious guilds, confraternities, and the relations between religious institutions and lay, secular or towns people. The annals are a source for the Barons' War of Henry III's reign (r. 1216–72) and for thirteenth-century England generally. These annals involve the Augustinian house at Dunstable, founded by Henry I in Bedfordshire, thirty miles north of London at the meeting of the Icknield Way and Roman Watling Street, two of the most ancient roads in Britain (ix). Moreover, the annals record the events up to the Ninth Crusade. Richard de Morins, prior of Dunstable, began the annals and may have written the first half (xvii, xxxii–xxxiii): he, for instance, attended the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, and studied at the University of Bologna. This volume discusses the Second Barons' War and the conquest of Wales under Edward I after the death of his father, Henry III. David Preest provides a new translation. The Latin text appeared in an edition by Thomas Hearne in 1733 and in another by H. R. Luard in 1866; for this first translation into English, Preest uses Luard's (xliii). Harriet R. Webster edits the edition and provides an informative introduction.

Webster tells us that the annals go from the Incarnation of Christ until the year 1297, but that, as with many medieval chronicles, the early part of the work is copied from other texts while the section from 1200 to 1297, the subject of this English translation, is an original composition. She notes that the record is not just of national and international events, but of daily business and the interactions of the canons with the townspeople or what we might call the local lay world. The annals also detail the politics of England in the reign of King John, the civil war there under Henry III and Edward I's military campaigns in Wales, Scotland and Gascony (ix). Dunstable was a monastic town and the king retained only the royal gardens and houses. Webster says that monastic towns like Dunstable, St Albans, and Bury St Edmunds, "inevitably saw strife between clergy and citizens, probably because secular lords were often absent and perhaps more tolerant" (x). Henry I, although later buried at the Benedictine abbey