

Thesis Abstracts

Gazzini, Marina. "*La 'Scuola della Divinità' nel secolo XV.*" Tesi di laurea, a.a. 1989-1990, relatore prof. G. Soldi Rondinini. Università degli Studi di Milano. 2 vols.

The thesis explores the 15th-century history of a Milanese confraternity, the "Scuola della Divinità," founded in 1429 by Donato Ferrario of Pantigliate, a rich merchant. Forms of charitable activities, economic and patrimonial behaviour, as well as social status of members are examined in detail.

Though the Scuola della Divinità quickly became one of the most important pious institutions in Milan, it has not received much scholarly attention. This thesis is therefore not only a contribution to the history of this institution, but also to the knowledge of the complex organization of charitable institutions in late medieval Milan.

The first volume of the thesis (197 pp.) consists of the following chapters.

Chapter 1 offers a brief overview of the basic characteristics of 15th-century Milanese charitable institutions: hospitals, confraternities, alms *consortia* or *scholae*. Most of these institutions were founded or governed by laymen. The political, social and economic conditions of the Late Middle Ages, together with the growth of a new economic pauperism and the rise of spiritual and religious tensions, created a propitious climate for the development of devotional and charitable confraternities.

Chapter 2 examines the origins of the Scuola di Divinità. Its principal promoter, the merchant Donato Ferrario, is a typical example of the middle merchant class of the period. Not very famous even in his own land, he succeeded in acquiring wealth through a variety of business interests (cotton and woollen

cloths, wine, corn, cheese, cattle) and real estate investments, both in the city and in the countryside. His social status rose and was confirmed by his founding of the confraternity, a direct result of a dream in which God exhorted him to do just such a thing for the benefit of the poor people of Milan. Although the dream may be merely a literary topos, the influence of Franciscan Observant preachers may be a more realistic inspiration for the event.

Chapter 3 is devoted to a study of the confraternity's membership. The Statutes required members to be laymen (only one clergyman was admitted) and to be dedicated to assisting the poor. There were usually 12 members, all of whom were of high social rank, and were often officers in other pious institutions in the city (such as in the Ospedale Maggiore, or in the Monte di Pietà). By the end of the 15th century, in fact, there were a number of people in Milan who seemed to be pursuing a "Confraternity office career." The practice of charitable activities through the management of hospitals and confraternities seemed a suitable road to prestige and wealth to some men of the upper classes. Some of these men were further bound to the ducal government, which was thus able to exercise some influence on the activities of these associations.

Chapter 4 examines the manner in which the Scuola della Divinità dispensed its charity. The Statutes stipulated that assistance to the *pauperes Christi* be given without specific distinction. Given sufficient profits, the company was to assist marriageable girls, prisoners, and *pauperes verecundi*. The documents do not reveal the exact figures. We know, however, that four, bread and wine were distributed every day near one of the six city gates, and that at Christmas, Epiphany, and Easter the company also distributed meat, clothes, and cloaks to each poor person who had already received a coupon from the confraternity. The funding for such charity was drawn from rental income, not from gifts or legacies.

Chapter 5 examines the confraternity's real estate holdings and their management. Donato Ferrario had donated all his goods, including his houses and shop in the city, and his land

and farms in the country. During the 15th century the confraternity's real estate holdings grew as a result of gifts and legacies from benefactors, as well as wise purchases made by the brotherhood.

The second volume of the thesis (451 pp.) consists of three documentary appendices. The first is a transcription of the Statutes and of Donato Ferrario's will. The second contains the register of wills compiled by Boniforte Gira, the confraternity's notary, between 1473 and 1499. The third appendix is a register of the seven wills drawn up between 1478 and 1491 by Diamante Ferrario, a descendant of Donato and himself a member of the confraternity.



Church of the Madonna del Soccorso and procession (1693), from M. Fanti. *Il Santuario della Madonna del Soccorso*, p. 45. (see Publications Received, p. 46)



The processions of the Bianchi (reproduced from G. Sercambi. *Cronache lucchesi*), in M. Fanti. "L'ospedale e la chiesa di S. Maria della Carità." (1981): 27. (see Publications Received, p. 45)