

The final chapters of Eckstein's volume deal with the political changes which took place in Florence over the fifteenth century as the Medici family gradually consolidated their power in the city. Eckstein claims that as the power of the civic government was centralized in the hands of a few men the local significance of associations such as Sant' Agnese and the *Bruciata* was weakened, and they became vehicles for the furthering of the Medici's influence in the Oltrarno (p. 199).

Eckstein's work demonstrates that a significant development has taken place in the writing of the history of confraternities. Historians have begun to acknowledge not only the significance of the ceremonies and rituals carried out by confraternities but also the real effect on local communities of the bonds created by members of these associations.

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Henderson, John. *Piety and Charity in late Medieval Florence*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994. xviii, 533 pp.

John Henderson has provided here a much needed overview of late-medieval Florentine confraternities. In so doing, Henderson does more than synthesize previous work in this area. Taking as a starting point the work of both social and religious historians, he proceeds to examine the confraternity as a mediator between the sacred and the secular facets of medieval society. Henderson argues that previous historical work has tended to examine the confraternity as either a religious or a secular institution, but rarely as the two combined, even though the appeal of the confraternity lay in its mingling of the two worlds. This mingling of the secular and the spiritual is visible through the confraternity's practice of charity. Charity was an integral component of the medieval confraternity not only because it bound the individual closer to God, but also because it reinforced bonds of fellowship within society. It was an expression of brotherhood which was itself the very essence of the collective confraternal identity.

In keeping with his intention to examine the meeting of two worlds, Henderson has divided his book into two parts: Piety and Charity. Part I concentrates on the structure of the confraternity itself and how it modelled itself on existing secular institutions, particularly that of the guild (chapters 1-3). Henderson also discusses here the spiritual appeal of the confraternity for the lay individual, especially confraternities concerned with the afterlife of members (chapters 4-5). The final chapter provides a fine transition to the second section. Here Henderson examines one particular confraternity, that of Orsanmichele, which became increasingly important over the fifteenth century and which for him represents the inherent duality of the medieval confraternity. Part II compares the practice of charity before and after the Black Death (chapters 7-8) and during the fifteenth century (chapter 9) in order to understand how practices of poor relief adapted to the changing nature of poverty.

Henderson has drawn a number of surprising and intriguing conclusions from his research. He argues, for example, that even as the number of confraternities grew over the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the number of flagellant organizations

increased disproportionately. These groups demonstrated an interest in a stricter devotion similar to that of the Franciscans as well as in para-liturgical ceremonial, consequently attracting the wealthier social groups. Henderson argues that this change reflected a profound psychological shift in society away from a concentration on the sins of the world to emphasis on self-redemption. Not surprisingly, this shift accompanied growing interest in the doctrine of Purgatory as propounded by the Franciscans.

Henderson also argues that the spiritual utility of the confraternity was matched by social utility. The Orsanmichele and other such confraternities supplemented governmental initiatives with respect to poor relief. These confraternities were responding to perceived needs in society in a pragmatic and effective fashion. He suggests that such organizations were partly responsible for Florence's enviable reputation among other Italian cities when it came to poor relief.

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Lisimberti, P. and A. Todisco. *La venerabile fraternità di Maria Santissima del Carmine di Ostuni. Contributi alla storia delle confraternite carmelitane in Puglia* (Bari: Schena Editore, 1995). 187 pp., illustrations.

This is a very well-documented volume on the subject of the Confraternity of Maria Santissima del Carmine in Ostuni, a small city in Apulia. In four chapters, the book relates both the history of the Cathedral and that of the confraternity, from their initial foundation in Ostuni in the late fifteenth century until 1994-1995. The material is organized by century, with an appendix that reproduces a variety of popular devotional poems. Lisimberti and Todisco give particular attention to the primary sources. All the documents mentioned in the book are duly quoted, and often manuscripts consulted are reproduced in facsimiles, thus contributing to a clear and complete overview. Furthermore, the artistic value of the Cathedral is analyzed and illustrated, not only through the study of the history of the numerous works of art in the possession of the confraternity, but also by means of high-quality photographs.

As far as the actual history of the Carmelite confraternity is concerned, Lisimberti and Todisco especially stress the vital role that it played in the city of Ostuni. Its major function was, and still is, that of cementing community life and of promoting the active participation of the citizens in religious ceremonies and other events, as is shown by many of the photographs in the book. As a result, the beauty of the Cathedral owes a great deal to the alms-giving of the believers, by which the purchase of artistic devotional pieces and the restoration of the impressive facade have been made possible through the centuries. Such transactions are attested by many extant chancery letters and documents used by Lisimberti and Todisco. In addition, the authors never lose sight of the relationship between the history of the city and a broader perspective, thus linking its destiny to that of the rest of Italy. This can be seen, for example, in the chapter relating the slow decadence of the feudal system in the early nineteenth century, and the importance of the confraternity in