

those tormented years, a phenomenon which was common to the rest of southern Italy.

In conclusion, this volume is an essential tool for the scholar of confraternities both because it offers a lucid and scientific approach to the often intricate history of the Carmelite confraternity in Ostuni, and because its primary aim is to establish a continuum between the past and the present.

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Pacini, Gian Piero. *Laici chiesa locale città. Dalla fraglia di S. Maria alla confraternita del Gonfalone a Vicenza (sec. XV-XVII)* (Vicenza: Edizioni Egida, 1994). viii, 266 pp., ill.

A very important contribution to the study of confraternities came in 1977 with the publications of the three volumes of *Ordo Fraternitatis* by Gilles G. Meersseman. This work not only provided a comprehensive overview of the history of many medieval confraternities in Northern and Central Italy, but was also pivotal in establishing a sound methodology for research in this field of study. It discussed questions of terminology, defined criteria for the evaluation of archival sources, and debated the religious, social and historical implications of the confraternities.

For his major work, Meersseman had the collaboration of Gian Piero Pacini, who is a researcher at the history department of the University of Padua. Pacini has continued the research he pursued with Meersseman in this new volume devoted to the confraternity “della Beata Vergine del Gonfalone” (of the Holy Virgin of the Gonfalon) in Vicenza, which stood out as the most prominent of the city’s confraternities from its foundation at the end of the sixteenth century, out of the ashes of a late medieval “fraglia” devoted to S. Maria Pietatis (Holy Mary of Mercy), to its suppression in 1810.

The points of interest of Pacini’s book go beyond a merely local relevance, for the amount of material published so far on confraternities in the Veneto region is considerable and allows a variety of cross-references. Many historical studies, together with editions of archival sources, such as confraternal statutes still preserved in diocesan and civic libraries, point to the rich popular devotional experience of Veneto. Here the confraternities’ associative life often intermingled with the ecclesiastical and political activity of all cities. Pacini relates the foundation and the acts of the confraternity ‘del Gonfalone’ within the context of the Catholic Reform and stresses the complex interaction between the life of the confraternity, the role of the bishop, his relations with the diocesan chapter of Canons, the city government, the nobles and the commoners in the social fabric of the city, and the emergence of new liturgical and devotional practices. In giving a detailed depiction of the confraternity’s life from the sixteenth century, Pacini comes to more general conclusions on issues of ecclesiastical history—for instance on the extant and significance of the Catholic Reform in Veneto—as well as social history, such as the confraternity’s policy of charitable donations and its implications for the social order of the city.

Popular devotion for the Virgin Mary has always been a character of Vicenza's religious life. The civic government even built a sanctuary overlooking the city in the fifteenth century, to give thanks to the Virgin for Her intercession in ending a plague. The image of the *Mater Misericordiae* (Mother of Mercy), with her robe giving shelter to the people of Vicenza from the thunderbolts of the plague, struck a deep chord in popular piety and imagination. This peculiar iconography was reproduced on the banner (*Gonfalone*) of the confraternity.

Pacini illustrates well how the confraternity quickly became the association of choice for the nobles and the rich bourgeoisie of Vicenza; the diocesan canons especially benefited from their association with the confraternity in defending their privileges against the reformist zeal of the bishop, Michele Priuli. At the same time, the bishop saw in the confraternity an occasion for more extended pastoral care and the realization of devotional practices consistent with the new religious sensitivity of the Council of Trent.

Originally the owner of one of the cathedral's chapels, at the end of the sixteenth century the confraternity built an oratory in an area facing the cathedral, thus increasing its distinction in the eyes of the city and attracting more and more citizens to its ranks. The oratory was home to some paintings by the most distinguished painters of Vicenza; this artistic treasure was sadly destroyed during the Second World War.

The charitable donations of the confraternity are well documented. Every Easter and Christmas, the confraternity's officers and their assistants determined the amount of money to be given for alms, and the recipients of this charity. Three groups of people were especially supported, and the preference within these groups always went to the members of the confraternity. First came the "shameful indigents" ("poveri vergognosi"), who were impoverished nobles; the frequency of the donations to this group provides a useful insight into the social changes of that period in the population of mainland Veneto. The second group was that of people jailed for debts. Finally, there were poor women, either widows with children or unmarried girls without dowry; the fact that a great number of women were dependent on this kind of charity is a clear sign of their marginal position within the society of that time.

Pacini's research offers engaging reading for anyone with some knowledge of the history of the Veneto region. However, the reader can detect some flaws in this book. Pacini provides an ample section of archival documents, but they are not edited to the standard of any good diplomatic collection; what is more, there is no index for the published documents. Pacini goes to great lengths in commenting on the statutes of the confraternity, but other documents do not receive much attention, and the reader is left asking herself or himself about their relevance. There are some unnecessary repetitions and the arrangement of the material is sometimes awkward. The text itself is correct, but the style is inelegant.

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