

five essays in their proper context, and will thus be the point of focus for the balance of this review. In the initial section of the article, we learn that as early as the second half of the eleventh century, people of various trades united with their peers and formed corporate groups, which were documented beneficent organisations that guaranteed monetary and material assistance for the families of members who fell into difficult times. Spiccianni traces the development of mutual assistance agreements to their confraternal foundation, based on the Christian principles associated with brotherly love, among members of eleventh century Italian confraternities. There follows an analysis of the progressive growth of corporate agreements – founded on the same principles as their religious predecessors – between labourers and artisans of several industries, particularly the mercantile, wool and textile workers of the latter half of the twelfth century. Spiccianni subsequently outlines the way in which some mercantile and banking corporations began to grow in size and in wealth, eventually becoming so powerful that they influenced the political affairs of their respective cities. The newfound political power of the select corporations repositioned their locus of motivation, and they subsequently transformed universal corporate beneficence into solidarity of an exclusive professional group. This camaraderie between professionals eventually (by the beginning of the fourteenth century) developed into the rigid solidarity of a quickly rising social class that advanced its own interests through its political influence. Responsibility for the welfare of colleagues who had fallen prey to hunger and poverty was diverted back to the religious institutions whence the mutual assistance groups originated.

All six essays create a clear and lively picture of socio-economic change in Italy between the 11<sup>th</sup> and the 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, as Amleto Spiccianni highlights with his insight the historical significance of statistics and catalogued information.

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Wilson, Carolyn C. *St. Joseph in Italian Renaissance Society and Art. New Directions and Interpretations*. Philadelphia: Saint Joseph's University Press, 2001. xxi, 281 pp. ISBN 0-916101-36-3 US\$49.95.

Carolyn Wilson's absorbing book is a welcome contribution to our understanding of the role of St. Joseph in Italian Renaissance art and piety. This thoroughly-researched study effectively dismisses the long-held perception of St. Joseph as a marginal figure in pre-tridentine Renaissance art who provides comic relief as he seemingly slumbers through the momentous events at the dawn of the Christian era.

Modern scholarship, as Wilson argues, has misrepresented the role of St. Joseph in Italian Renaissance art. Wilson's book aims to dispel a number of misconceptions, including the traditional view of Joseph as primarily a Counter-Reformation saint, the interpretation of St. Joseph as a largely comic character, the over-emphasis on the saint as the model father figure, and the assumption that all references to St. Joseph

confraternities refer to trade guilds and not devotional confraternities. Pope Sixtus IV's addition of St. Joseph's feast day to the calendar in Rome by 1479 established a new saint to invoke for charitable and social purposes, and to call upon in times of trouble. Previous scholars have noted the marked growth of Masses and Offices in honour of St. Joseph and the dramatic increase of popular devotional literature on St. Joseph published in the early sixteenth century. Wilson demonstrates that this new interest in Joseph also led to the proliferation of churches, chapels, and confraternities named for St. Joseph.

Drawing on archival research, civic histories, and published archival material, Wilson brings to light a significant number of churches, oratories, and altars established in honour of St. Joseph in northern and central Italy at this time, which in turn allows her to re-evaluate the iconography of the pictorial imagery associated with these Josephine foundations. The book is organised into three sections. The first section offers a new reading of the pre-tridentine cult of St. Joseph. The second section examines depictions of St. Joseph in Renaissance altarpieces. Here, Wilson approaches the works according to their subject matter and imagery, with the longest section devoted to the Nativity. Conclusions and areas for future study comprise the final section. The text is complemented by excellent illustrations and an extensive bibliography.

Wilson's thoughtful re-examination of paintings that have a documented connection to the cult of St. Joseph between the time of Pope Sixtus IV and the Council of Trent in the context of a fresh analysis of Josephine devotional literature, above all Isidoro Isolano's *Summa de donis Sancti Josephi* (composed between 1514-1521), reveals the broad range of iconographic nuance conveyed by depictions of Joseph. The result is an entirely new appreciation of St. Joseph in Renaissance art. He emerges as a powerful figure who plays the role of protector of the Church and intercessor at times of crisis. Especially of interest to scholars working on lay religious organizations are Wilson's discussions of confraternal projects. For confraternal studies, this research is rich in implications, pointing the way to many new and promising avenues of investigation. As such, Wilson's book provides a sound point of departure for the future identification of undocumented or incompletely documented altarpieces that may be associated with St. Joseph confraternities.

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