

Reviews

La Chiesa della Maddalena. Un santuario per la città. Atti del seminario di studi, Pescia 8 maggio 1999. Pescia: Istituto Storico Lucchese, 2001. 142 pp., ill.

This collection of six articles on the church of the Magdalene in the town of Pescia (Tuscany) originates from a one-day conference held in that town in May 1999. The scope of the “seminario” was to examine the architectural re-structuring of the church’s fabric in the seventeenth century, but inevitably the conference and the proceedings moved out from this very specific theme and incorporated other aspects of the church, both material and devotional, so as to include the church’s omonymous confraternity, its much venerated Crucifix, its “Holy Face” (*Volto Santo*), and the local popular devotion that sprang up around these. Two of that day’s presentations were not submitted for publication – regrettably, one of these was Maurizio Tani’s examination of “The Archival Documents of the Confraternity of the Magdalene,” something that would very much have enriched the value of this collection for our readers. In spite of this significant lacuna (for us), the volume is still of great interest to scholars of medieval and Renaissance confraternities for the information it provides us on the Confraternity of the Magdalene and its place in the local devotional economy.

In his brief, but insightful introduction (“Premessa”, pp. 7–14), Amleto Spiccianni points out that, in spite of the inherent limitations of the genre, this one-day conference brought to light not only significant moments of Pescia’s religious history from the seventeenth century to the present, but also a number of fascinating questions that beg further examination. Under the grand-duchy, the town of Pescia possessed an economic, cultural, and devotional vitality that quickly dissipated once Tuscany became part of a united kingdom of Italy. The vitality, Spiccianni suggests, was due in part to the town’s magnate families, ready to direct their economic and cultural initiatives locally, and in part to the newly created diocese of Pescia that, from 1519 to 1727, was governed not by a bishop but by the cathedral’s canons. In this context, the confraternity of the Magdalene played a significant role, both as a locus of devotional and cultic life, and as an agent of artistic and cultural development.

For our interests, Massimiliano Bini’s article on religious devotions and artistic commissions in the Confraternity of the Magdalene (pp. 21–40) is of great interest. It begins by referring to the confraternity’s 1538 commission from Ridolfo del Ghirlandaio for a panel depicting the titular saint, a work that was then placed on the oratory’s main altar (1541). The presence in Pescia of a work from such an eminent (though admittedly old-fashioned) workshop points to the strong connections with, and clear influence from the Florentine artistic milieu in what was, at that time, borderland territory between Florence and Lucca. Bini then follows with an examination of subsequent acquisitions of devotional and cultic objects (altar stones, missals, etc.) and of architectural

renovations(doorways, vaults, etc.). These developments point to the confraternity's growing economic resources and devotional interests, something that, eventually, would come to rest around the confraternity's processional crucifix, a source of spiritual identity and strength for the confraternity brothers and for the diocese of Pescia.

Although there are serious lacunae in the archival records for the Confraternity of the Magdalene in particular and for the diocese of Pescia in general, it is clear even from this slim volume and from the one-day conference that inspired it that much can still be gleaned from the surviving documents to illuminate the devotional, religious, and artistic life of an early modern provincial town such as Pescia. The activities of other confraternities, the role of the canons in running the diocese, the religious patronage of the town's magnate families, not to mention the vitality of local cultic activity are just some of the areas that merit further investigation. Professor Spicciani and his team of scholars have presented us with a alluring locale for further research into early modern lay religious life.

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CXIX Reglas de Hermandades y Cofradías Andaluzas. Siglos XIV, XV y XVI, ed. José Sánchez Herrero, coord. Silvia María Pérez González. Huelva: Universidad de Huelva, 2002. 224 pp. ISBN 84-95699-34-6.

The fruit of ten years of research from dozens of scholars and local enthusiasts, this documentary collection brings together the official regulations for one hundred and nineteen early modern Andalusian confraternities. Given the size of this project, the University of Huelva has published these regulations in CD Rom format, with the accompanying book constituting a useful complement to the digital version.

Although the vast majority of the confraternities researched originated in Seville or its hinterland, regulations from as far as Córdoba, Granada, Jaén, Jerez, Málaga, and two Castilian towns have also been included. These regulations, officially approved by the local bishop, offer an unparalleled wealth of information on a variety of matters that affected confraternal life. Membership, administration, the role of female members, the election of officials, festivities and processions, and charitable activities constitute, among others, some of the topics covered by the regulations.

Aside from the actual transcription of the original documents, each chapter includes introductory remarks tracing the origin of the specific regulation, the state of the manuscript and a brief history of the confraternity itself. These