

The Compagnia di San Sebastiano and the Lost Founders¹

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In 1509 the Servites commissioned Andrea del Sarto to paint two cycles in the atrium before their church of the SS. Annunziata in Florence. On the western side Andrea was to complete a cycle, already begun by Cosimo Rosselli, depicting the *Historia beati Filippi Benizi*, and on the opposite wall he was to paint a *Historia beati Sebastiani*.² Andrea del Sarto completed the Benizi cycle by the end of 1510, but rather than beginning the St. Sebastian cycle, directly opposite the first lunette of the Benizi cycle Andrea painted a *Nativity of the Virgin* (1511). In the following years the Servites commissioned other young artists to paint further Marian scenes in the lunettes where the *Historia Sancti Sebastiani* was to have been painted.

The Florentine, Filippo Benizi (c. 1233–1285) was the fifth Servite prior general. In the fourteenth through sixteenth centuries he was the Order's most popular *beato* and the Servite most likely to be canonized. The Virgin was considered the foundress of the Order of the Servants of Mary, thus the pairing of a Marian cycle with one dedicated to St Filippo Benizi, their most eminent member, in the forecourt of the Florentine Servite church has been seen as an obvious choice. The combination of *beato* Filippo Benizi and St. Sebastian is less obvious; nevertheless it was not the first time that the two had been associated at the Church of the SS. Annunziata. Since 1451 a confraternity dedicated to both of these holy men had been meeting there. Its full title was the *Compagnia delle laude della Vergine Maria e di Sancto Philippo e di Sancto Sebastiano e di Sancto Gherardo*. In this article we will consider the origins of this confraternity, its relationship with the Servite Order, with *beato* Filippo Benizi, and, briefly, whether its presence bore significance for the Servites' original choice of subject for the decoration of their atrium.³

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- 1 The following abbreviations are used in this article: ASF: Archivio di Stato, Firenze; BL: Biblioteca Laurenziana (Florence); BNCf: Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze; BR: Biblioteca Riccardiana (Florence); *Cap.* CRS: Capitoli delle Compagnie Religiose Soppresse; *CRSPL*: Compagnie Religiose Soppresse da Pietro Leopoldo; *Con. Sopp.*: Conventi Soppressi; *CRSGF*: Corporazione Religiose Soppresse dal Governo Francese.
 - 2 The contract that reveals that Servites wanted a *Historia Sancti Sebastiani* opposite the Benizi cycle has recently been published; see Carl, "Der Vertrag mit Andrea del Sarto," 373.
 - 3 The present article focuses primarily on the Compagnia di San Sebastiano. A broader examination of the original choice of subject matter for the cycles in the forecourt will be provided elsewhere.

Tradition holds that the Servite Order (Ordine dei Servi di Maria or Order of the Servants of Mary) was founded in 1233 by seven pious Florentine merchants (the *sette santi fondatori*). In 1250, after having withdrawn for several years to Monte Senario, located a short distance from Florence, they built a church in Cafaggio, a marshy area just to the north of the second walls of Florence. The church was then called Santa Maria a Cafaggio or Santa Maria dei Servi.⁴ The Servites began to acquire churches in other Tuscan cities,⁵ and they soon began to encourage the involvement of lay religious groups in the spiritual life of their churches. At the Servite chapter of 1273, held under the Prior General Filippo Benizi in Arezzo, a Marian *laudese* (or praise) society meeting at the Florentine Servite convent was conceded a share the spiritual benefits of the Order.⁶

At the beginning of the fourteenth century the Church of Santa Maria a Cafaggio was embraced by the third walls of Florence (begun 1299, completed 1322–24). Around the middle of the same century, a fresco depicting the *Annunciation to the Virgin* was painted on the back wall of the church's nave.⁷ The image, popularly known as the *Madonna della SS. Annunziata* or the *Nunziata*, was credited with performing miracles and a cult quickly developed around it. As a result the church became a popular pilgrimage site and by the Quattrocento was commonly known as the SS. Annunziata.⁸ The original church underwent various phases of construction and reconstruction. The most important for the present discussion occurred in the middle of the fifteenth century when the nave and transept chapels were regularized, a tribune was built at the altar end of the church, and an atrium before the nave. The atrium, the location of the *Historia Sancti Filippi Benizi*, functioned as an area in which people could wait, sheltered from rain or the hot sun, until the throng of worshipers before the Madonna della SS. Annunziata subsided, allowing them to enter the nave. The atrium also housed the many *ex-voto* left to the Madonna, and so came to be known as the Chiostrino dei Voti. Considering the church's popularity, the atrium was a prime location for the Servites to promote important cults or ideologies.

4 The earliest documentary evidence for the Order is dated 1249 and indicates that it was founded prior to May 1247. O'Brien, "San Filippo Benizi," 63–66.

5 They acquired a church in Siena in 1250 and the following year founded a church in Città di Castello. Dal Pino, *I Frati Servi di S. Maria*, 1:818.

6 Giani, *Della Historia del B. Filippo Benizii*, 201. Dal Pino published an abbreviated version of this document (Dal Pino, *Frati Servi*, 1:956–57; 2:148–50, doc. II. 13, 28 May 1273. See also *Sources for the History and Spirituality of the Servants of Mary: I. from 1245 to 1348*, sotto il Monte BG, 2000, 39, doc. 22). Regarding the lay group see: Dal Pino, "Madonna Santa Maria e l'Ordine dei suoi Servi", 126–27.

7 Wazbinski, "L'Annunciazione della Vergine nella Chiesa della SS. Annunziata a Firenze", 545, n. 7.

8 On this cult and for further bibliography see: O'Brien, *San Filippo Benizi*, 1:90–96; Holmes, "The Elusive Origins of the Cult of the Annunziata in Florence."

The mid-fifteenth century witnessed not only a major change in the physical structure of the church, but also changes in its liturgical and para-liturgical life. New chapels were built and some of the old chapels were transferred to new patrons and perhaps given alternate dedications. A number of new confraternities also began their association with the church in this period, including the Compagnia di San Sebastiano.⁹

The Compagnia di San Sebastiano first begins to appear in the Servites' *Libro di Entrata e Uscita* (income and expenses account book) in 1451. One entry in particular, dated 3 April 1451, refers to the confraternity as the "Compagnia nuova di San Bastiano," suggesting its recent foundation.¹⁰ The following month the confraternity, with the assistance of the prior of the SS. Annunziata Fra Mariano Salvini, drew up its first set of statutes (ASF, Cap. CRS 6, f. 4r). These, however, claim that the confraternity was a revival or 're-forming' of a *laudese* confraternity dedicated to the Virgin and its full title was: *la compagnia delle laude della Vergine Maria e di Sancto Philippo e di Sancto Sebastiano e di Sancto Gherardo* (ASF, Cap. CRS 6, f. 2r) The statutes explain the confraternity's origins and rebirth as follows:

And because the merits of our glorious protectors, masters, founders and originators of our congregation and confraternity excite and illuminate our minds, it pleases them to reform it [the confraternity] and erect it and to newly constitute and order it through the medium of certain statutes and decrees of ours [promulgated] for the confraternity that formerly gathered and was begun and founded in twelve hundred and sixty-three, the day of St. Mary of September, [i.e., 8 Sept, the day of the Nativity of the Virgin] by the glorious and holy men St Philippo and St. Gherardo, and now in the present adopted by us under the same name and title, that is the company of the praises of the Virgin Mary and of St. Philippo and of St. Gherardo, adding and taking anew with our above-mentioned protectors and masters the glorious knight and martyr of Christ mister St. Sebastian, whose merits comfort us in such a way that we will observe the above mentioned statutes to the honour of God and commendation of their good example of one's neighbour and salvation of our souls. And we wish that above the cross of the old sign, a crown, a palm and an arrow be added, in honour of St. Sebastian.... (ASF, Cap. CRS 6, ff. 3v–4r)

The passage dates the original *laudese* confraternity's foundation to 1263, but it undoubtedly alludes to the confraternity that had been referred to in the Servite General Chapter in 1273. The Marian *laudese* confraternity had without a doubt been meeting in the church for some years by 1273. The original document recording the decision of the meeting held at Arezzo has been lost and is known

9 Two other confraternities to be connected with the church in this period were the Compagnia di Santa Barbara dei Tedeschi e Fiamminghi (1448) and the Compagnia della SS. Annunziata (1453). See, O'Brien, *San Filippo Benizi*, 1:106–07, 111, n. 308.

10 ASF, CRSGF 119/689, f. 91r, 3 April 1451. The *Entrata e Uscita* of the previous four years are missing making it difficult to check for evidence of this confraternity in the years immediately preceding.

today only through late copies.¹¹ The Marian confraternity appeared in a list of ten Florentine *laudesi* confraternities that petitioned the city in 1329, thus an independent source testifies to its existence in the fourteenth century. It did not appear, however, in the tax records of 1427.¹² Little else is known about this *laudese* confraternity. Beyond the claims of the statutes of 1451 cited above, there is no evidence of a direct relationship or continuity between the thirteenth-century confraternity and the fifteenth-century Compagnia di San Sebastiano.¹³ This connection should be considered spiritual rather than actual, the early development of a group mythology. Contemporary Florentines probably would have considered them the same confraternity, even if there was not what we would consider today a factual connection.

The ‘Sancto Philippo’ and ‘Sancto Gherardo’ who were mentioned in the confraternity’s statutes can be identified as the Servite *beato* Filippo Benizi, and *beato* Gherardo Mecatti da Villamagna. Although both men were given the title of saint, neither had yet been canonized. Filippo was not canonized until 1671 and, in fact, in 1451 his cult had still not been recognised by the Church. This only occurred in 1516 when Pope Leo X gave the Servites permission to celebrate his feast on 23 August.¹⁴ While it is possible that Filippo founded the earlier confraternity, no evidence has come to light to prove it. The statutes of 1451 are the earliest known document to identify Filippo Benizi as the founder of the earlier confraternity, nevertheless the belief was possibly already a part of the oral environment and became a popular theme in later *Vite* of *beato* Filippo Benizi.¹⁵ The assumption, current in the fifteenth century, that Filippo Benizi founded the Marian confraternity is almost certainly based on the record of the general chapter, but his inclusion there was due to his position as Servite Prior General.

The prior of the SS. Annunziata, Fra Mariano Salvini, who was involved in the composition of the statutes of the Compagnia di San Sebastiano, probably encouraged the confraternity to select Filippo Benizi as an advocate. Filippo had a clearly documented ‘connection’ with the thirteenth-century Marian confraternity and so, by adopting him as an advocate of the Compagnia di San Sebastiano, the group could identify itself as a revival of the thirteenth century Marian *laudesi*,

11 Although the original has been lost, Dal Pino has determined that the language of the record as it survives in the copies is credible. Copies exist both in manuscript and printed forms; see Dal Pino, *I Frati Servi*, 2:149. The licence was still in existence when Giani wrote his *Historia di B. Filippo Benizii*, when it was preserved among the relics of Filippo Benizi at the church of the SS. Annunziata; see Giani, *Historia*, 203.

12 Wilson, *Music and Merchants*, 105.

13 The founding of the Compagnia di San Sebastiano in the thirteenth century has generally been accepted: Weissman, *Ritual Brotherhood*, 180; Henderson, *Piety and Charity*, 471, no. 146.

14 O’Brien, *San Filippo Benizi*, 1:132.

15 See for example: Giani, *Historia di San Filippo Benizi*, 90, 201.

thus acquiring instant antiquity and a consequent increase in dignity. The connection was re-enforced in February 1497 when Andrea da Perugia, General of the Order, renewed the ancient privileges of the confraternity conceded by Filippo Benizi. According to an eighteenth-century text entitled *La Fondazione e storia della Compagnia di San Sebastiano*, which provides a description of the confraternity and its premises, this letter, together with that of Filippo Benizi, hung before the altar of St. Filippo Benizi in the confraternity's *spogliatoio*, or changing room (BR, Moreni 351, f. 14r).

The reason for the association with Gherardo da Villamagna (also known as Gherardo Mecatti) is less clear. Gherardo was born at Villamagna, near Florence, probably in 1174, and was apparently a member of the Franciscan Third Order. No documentary evidence connects him to the thirteenth-century *laudese* confraternity and the motive for his inclusion is unclear. Furthermore, his involvement with the confraternity and its foundation is highly questionable, as he was probably already dead in 1273.¹⁶ He is generally identified as a Franciscan Tertiary, but it is possible that in the Quattrocento the Servites were claiming that he had been a member of the Servite Order, as appears in a contract of 14 March 1465/6 drawn up between the Servites and the Compagnia di San Sebastiano (BR, Moreni 351, f. 98v, clause IX).

The Compagnia di San Sebastiano had a citywide membership.¹⁷ Although the title declares that the confraternity was *laudese*, a *disciplinati* quality was already apparent in the statutes of 1451.¹⁸ A contract drawn up between the Servites and the compagnia in 1498 identified it as *disciplinati* (BR, Moreni 351, f. 69v) and the transformation was codified in its new statutes written in 1520.¹⁹ The statutes of 1451 convey a close relationship between the Compagnia di San Sebastiano and the Servites, understandable considering Fra Mariano Salvini's intervention.²⁰ The Servites were to celebrate for the confraternity a mass for the principal Marian feasts, and those of St. Sebastian and Filippo Benizi. The masses for the Madonna of September (Nativity) and St. Sebastian were to be sung, suggesting their pre-eminence.²¹

16 Da Langasco, "Mecatti, Gerardo". The dates suggested for his death vary between 1242–76, with a stronger probability and preference in the literature for the 1240s. Dal Pino, "Madonna Santa Maria," 126–27.

17 The statutes of 1451 reveal that books of members were held for each quarter of the city. ASF, Cap. CRS 6, f. 15r. On the confraternity's sixteenth-century membership see Weissman, *Ritual Brotherhood*, 180–86.

18 Wilson, *Music and Merchants*, 106.

19 Wilson, *Music and Merchants*, 106. The new statutes are found in ASF, Cap. CRS 364, and BL Ashburnham 971.

20 ASF, Cap. CRS 6, f. 4r, prologue and chapter 1. The corrector was to be selected from among the "frati di detta casa," that is, of the church and convent of the SS. Annunziata. See also: Wilson, *Music and Merchants*, 106.

21 ASF, Cap. CRS 6, ff. 5v, 6v; O'Brien, *San Filippo Benizi*, 138.

Before discussing the confraternity further, it is necessary to explore briefly the broader context of the cult of St. Sebastian at the SS. Annunziata. The Servites' effort "to cherish and increase the devotion of the Holy Martyr" from the mid-fifteenth century on is noted in an eighteenth-century manuscript entitled *La Fondazione e storia della Compagnia di San Sebastiano*. The anonymous author in fact saw the creation of the Compagnia di San Sebastiano as part of the Servites' attempt to promote the cult (BR, Moreni 351, f. 17r–v). Evidence of celebrations in honour of St. Sebastian first appear in the Servites' books in January 1451 (modern reckoning 1452), when they commemorated his feast with a banquet that included 42 pounds of veal.²² The consumption of meat is a significant indicator of the feast's importance. On this occasion the meat was not only for the friars, but also for trumpeters and pipers and other guests. While the meal may have been for a privileged few, there was evidently a public aspect to the celebrations. A reference written a few days previously alludes to expenses for wax used at the *offerta di Sancto Bastiano* of the previous year (*offerte* were alms given by the faithful).²³ These references came from a *Libro di Entrata e Uscita*. Unfortunately the account books of this type that covered the previous four years are missing. The reference to the *offerta*, however, suggests that the feast was celebrated at least from 1451. The reference also mentions the Compagnia di San Sebastiano suggesting the confraternity's close association with the Servites' celebration of the feast and promotion of the cult from the beginning.

In 1480 a reliquary was made for the Servites' *braccio di San Sebastiano*.²⁴ This now appears to be the earliest evidence of the Servites owning an arm relic of St. Sebastian. Nevertheless, it is possible that the cult of St. Sebastian at the SS. Annunziata was already focused on this arm relic from the mid-fifteenth century. The Servites were actively promoting the development of popular devotion to this relic, and in 1484/5 they paid four trumpeters to accompany it in the procession for Sebastian's feast.²⁵ Trumpeters were frequently hired for St. Sebastian's feast.²⁶

22 ASF, CRSGF 119/689, f. 128v: 22 January 1451/2; O'Brien, *San Filippo Benizi*, 2:144.

23 O'Brien, *San Filippo Benizi*, 2:144, Appendix 5(g), 11 January 1451/2; there are also records for the years 1501/2–1506/7; 1513/4–1515/6 large sums of money were collected [p. 143, Appendix 5(f)]. Other references continue in the later *Libri di Entrata e Uscita* of the SS. Annunziata.

24 In this year the Servites paid Benedetto da Maiano for producing an arm reliquary for their relic of St. Sebastian; various references to this commission survive: ASF, CRSGF 119/246, f. 119v, 15 January 1479/80; f. 120r, 19 January 1479/80; f. 121r, 31 January 1479/80; ASF, CRSGF 119/197, f. 106r. See also Teubner, *Zur entwicklung der saalkirche in der Florentiner frührenaissance*, 510.

25 ASF, CRSGF 119/247, f. 184v: 24 January 1484/5; O'Brien, *San Filippo Benizi*, 2:145.

26 ASF, CRSGF 119/247, f. 118r: 21 January 1483/4; ASF, CRSGF 119/247, f. 250v: 20 January 1485/6, ASF, CRSGF 119/701, f. 93v: 22 January 1505/6; O'Brien, *San Filippo Benizi*, 2:145.

Organ music was also used sometimes, probably for the feast day services.²⁷ In June 1487 the Servites paid for the painting of a *barella*, a special litter on which to carry the relic of St. Sebastian in processions.²⁸ This was only a few days after the feast of St. John the Baptist, patron saint of Florence. Although the date may be coincidental, the religious orders, clerics, and lay confraternities of Florence would carry and display their most important relics in the citywide procession celebrating the Baptist. On 23 June 1507 the Servites paid Giovanni di Francesco *dipintore* for repairs to “San Bastiano pella processione”,²⁹ and the date again suggests that the Servites were ‘promoting’ their cult of St. Sebastian in the processions for the Baptist. By the beginning of the sixteenth century the Servites were making regular collections of between 3 and 14 *lire* for the *offerta del braccio di S. Bastiano* on his feast day.³⁰ For a brief period between 1513/4 and 1515/6 the Servites were collecting large sums of money for St. Sebastian’s feast: 228 *lire* and 5 *soldi*, 134 *lire* seven *soldi* and eight *danari* and fifty-six *lire* and nine *soldi*.³¹ The collections were made for a *giubileo di Sancto Sebastiano*. Ten gold florins were sent to Rome as part of the expenses for the jubilee in 1513/4;³² and references appear in the following year to payments for trumpets, for the rewriting of a brief from Rome and other expenses incurred for the feast.³³

The cult of St. Sebastian was focused, almost from the beginning, in an oratory that the Servites began to construct for it in 1452 next to the Chiostrino dei Voti.³⁴ The wall this oratory shares with the atrium was the one where the *Historia beati Sebastiani* was to have been painted. In 1453 the Pucci family began to be involved in the oratory’s construction. The Pucci family had previously reserved the rights to the main chapel of the SS. Annunziata’s tribune in 1444, when the tribune was in the initial stages of construction.³⁵ In 1465 the Pucci officially returned the rights for the

27 ASF, CRSGF 119/247, f. 250v: 20 January 1485/6; O’Brien, *San Filippo Benizi*, 2:145.

28 ASF, CRSGF 119/699, f. 79v, 30 June 1487; O’Brien, *San Filippo Benizi*, 2:33.

29 ASF, CRSGF 119/701, f. 158v: 23 June 1507; O’Brien, *San Filippo Benizi*, 2:146. The reference is unclear what form the “San Bastiano” took, whether it was a painted standard or if this is an abbreviated reference to his *barella*.

30 O’Brien, *San Filippo Benizi*, 2:136–37, Appendix 5(b), 1495/6; there are also records for the years 1501/2–1506/7. In 1513/4–1515/6 large sums of money were collected [p. 143, Appendix 5(f)]. Other references continue in the later *Libri di Entrata e Uscita* of the SS. Annunziata.

31 ASF, CRSGF 119/705, f. 18r: 21 January 1513/4; ASF, CRSGF 119/705, f. 31v: 1–3 January 1514[5]; ASF, CRSGF 119/705, f. 41v: 24 January, 1515/6; O’Brien, *San Filippo Benizi*, 2:143. The significance of *giubileo* is not clear here. It could allude to an indulgence.

32 ASF, CRSGF 119/705, f. 118v: 23 January 1513/4; O’Brien, *San Filippo Benizi*, 2:143.

33 ASF, CRSGF 119/705, f. 153r: 3 February 1514/5; O’Brien, *San Filippo Benizi*, 2:143.

34 See also various references in Casalini, *Michelozzo di Bartolommeo*, 164, 165, 182, 183, 184, 185, 186, 187, 188, 190, 204, 207, 208.

35 Brown, *The Tribuna of SS. Annunziata in Florence*, 67. Teubner, *Zur entwicklung der saalkirche*, 503–05, docs. I, II, IV, V, VI. Teubner associates the first of these documents

tribune chapel to the Servites and acquired those for the oratory.³⁶ Following its completion, the Oratorio di San Sebastiano quickly developed a civic reputation. Giuseppe Richa, the eighteenth-century Florentine church historian, relates that in 1457, during a period of plague, the *signori priori* and the *Gonfalonieri di Giustizia* decided that the *capitudini* would make an offering there.³⁷

Some identify the Oratorio di San Sebastiano as being on the site intended for the original meeting place of the Compagnia di San Sebastiano.³⁸ The confraternity, from the moment of its foundation, or ‘revival’, used a number of sites in the SS. Annunziata complex before finally settling in rooms it built behind the tribune of the church in 1485. A “stanza della Compagnia di Sancto Sebastiano” [that is, a room] was under construction in 1451.³⁹ These are the references that have been associated with the Oratorio di San Sebastiano, but if the confraternity’s rooms were originally being built on the site of the oratory, it gave up its rights before the structure was completed in 1453. Nevertheless, no clear connection between the confraternity’s rooms under construction in 1451 and the oratory has come to light. The documents relating to the *stanza* do not seem to specify its location. The *Fondazione e storia della Compagnia di San Sebastiano* suggests that the confraternity’s first room was “dove in oggi è il Forno, e la Cantina,” (BR, Moreni 351, f. 27r), thus in one of the cloisters next to the church, around which the Servites’ living spaces were arranged. It is also notable that not only the Servites were helping in the construction and furnishing of the confraternity’s rooms, but Piero di Cosimo de’ Medici and Averardo Portinari also made donations toward it.⁴⁰

(dated July 1452) with the chapel in the tribune, but there is no evidence that there was ever a chapel dedicated to St. Sebastian there, and doc. IV clearly indicates that it should be associated with the construction on the site of the oratory. For documents regarding the beginning of the Pucci family’s association with the oratory, see: Casalini, *Michelozzo*, 97, 163, 164, 200.

36 Brown, *Tribuna*, 67. The new contract of 1465 is in the name of Antonio di Puccio Pucci. For a summary of the obligations of the contract, see ASF, CRSGF 119/1270 158, n. 412. It does not, however, provide the precise day or month on which the contract was drawn up.

37 Richa, *Notizie Istoriche delle Chiese Fiorentine*, 8:53.

38 Casalini, *Michelozzo*, 99.

39 The documents relating to the confraternity’s rooms have not yet been systematically collected and analysed. The many references to the construction of the *stanza* of the Compagnia di San Sebastiano found in the *Campione Nero* have been published in Casalini, *Michelozzo*, for example 149, 155, 156, 160, 162, 166, 169, 170. These, however, still need to be cross-referenced with references to the building and decoration of this that can be found in various other administrative books of the church of the SS. Annunziata; for example, ASF, CRSGF 119/689, f. 91r, 3 April 1451; f. 93r, 18 April 1451; f. 95r, 5 May 1451; f. 128v, 21 January 1451/2.

40 ASF, CRSGF 119/196, *Libro entrate e spese del convento libro rosso segnato B*, April 1451–1478, f. 11r, 1451, “E deono avere adi xiiij decto grossi trentaquatro recò frate Mariano di Salvino uno del quale disse avere avuto da Piero di Cosimo per aiutorio di fare la stanza di Sancto Bastiano e grossi otto reco e decto disse avere avuto da Adovardo

The Compagnia di San Sebastiano was required to leave its first rooms in 1465/6 for some unknown reason.⁴¹ According to a contract of 14 March 1465/6 the Servites offered them a new site on which to build new rooms in the second cloister.⁴² The close relationship between the Servites and the confraternity continues in this contract.⁴³ Of particular interest for the present discussion is clause VI, which required the confraternity to participate in the celebrations for St. Sebastian's feast in the Pucci's oratory. This must have added— at least visually—to the occasion's splendor and pomp. On that feastday the confraternity was also to provide a fitting banquet for the Servites (BR, *Moreni* 351, f. 97v).

Florentine confraternities were periodically closed for various reasons (for example fear of political unrest or contagion during outbreaks of plague).⁴⁴ When the Compagnia di San Sebastiano was able to meet again in 1482, after one such closure, the Servites had put its rooms to other uses. The confraternity moved into the Capitolo dei Benizi located between the Chiostro dei Morti and Chiostro Secondo of the SS. Annunziata's convent.⁴⁵ In 1485 Giovanni Benizi objected and prohibited them from meeting there (BR, *Moreni* 351, ff. 29v–30v). He soon gave them a temporary reprieve, permitting them to continue meeting there until June,⁴⁶ while construction of a new meeting place began on land belonging to the Servites behind the tribune of the church. The boundaries of the new meeting house were defined by the tribune of the SS. Annunziata, Via San Sebastiano, which ran down the side of the church (present day Via Gino Capponi), the Servite

Portinarj per decto aiutorio a entrata l'".

- 41 BR, *Moreni* 351, f. 27v. Admittedly, it is an interesting coincidence that in 1465 the Pucci acquired official patronage of the Oratory. Had the confraternity been meeting in the oratory before this date, the family might have wished to free the rooms from use by the confraternity when they officially took on the rights to the space.
- 42 The contract survives as an insert in a later contract of September 1498, which was transcribed into BR, *Moreni* 351, f. 96r–v, clause II. The confraternity was to build a place to meet, at their own expense, in the second cloister near to the rooms of the priore generale.
- 43 According to the contract of 1465/6, the Servites had to provide the confraternity with a priest, the confraternity was obliged to select a corrector from amongst the Servites. The *confratelli* were obliged to attend the burial and suffrages of the Servites, and they had to celebrate their regular feasts at the SS. Annunziata. BR, *Moreni* 351, ff. 95v–99r, clauses I, V, X, XI, XII, XIII.
- 44 Weissman, *Ritual*, 163–90; Henderson, *Piety and Charity*, 63–64; Eisenbichler, "The Suppression of Confraternities in Enlightenment Florence."
- 45 BR, *Moreni* 351, f. 29v. The date and length of closure are not indicated, but apparently the Florentine Republic had made a universal prohibition of the confraternities to meet. Henderson, identifies 1478 as a plague year (*Piety and Charity*, 108).
- 46 ASF, Notarile Antecosimiano 20527, f. 56r–v and ASF, CRSGF 119/49, f. 116v. The confraternity's new meetinghouse was already under construction by 4 April 1485; ASF, CRSGF 119/49, f. 115v.

convent's novitiate, and the rooms of the Compagnia di Santa Barbara (southern chapel, eastern arm of transept).⁴⁷ Cardinal Antonio dal Monte consecrated this final meeting place on 17 January 1516 after consecrating the Church of the SS. Annunziata and the Oratorio di San Sebastiano (BR, Moreni 351, f. 48r). This was the final transfer that the confraternity would have to make until its suppression in 1785. Although the confraternity had an independent entrance into their meeting house that opened directly onto Via San Sebastiano, certain activities such as the burial of their members still required that they enter the church. According to a contract drawn up in 1498, the Compagnia di San Sebastiano's sepulchre was located in the atrium of the SS. Annunziata, where the two fresco cycles were to be painted (BR, Moreni 351, f. 81r).

The Compagnia di San Sebastiano was undoubtedly involved in the Servites' celebrations to honour the *braccio di San Bastiano*, however, by 1520 the compagnia had acquired its own relic of St. Sebastian. Chapter fifteen of the new statutes is entitled *Della Reliquia e nostre feste* (about the Relic and our feasts), and prescribes when the relic would be displayed and the conditions under which it could leave the meeting house (ASF, Cap. CRS 364, ff. 38v–40r). For St. Sebastian's feast day it was carried in procession under a baldachin and accompanied by torches. Beyond that, only the Signoria or the Archbishop of Florence could command its departure from the confraternity's meeting place. It was also to be exposed for the feasts of Christmas, the Resurrection and the Holy Spirit.

The relic was probably donated to the confraternity by a member of the Nasi family around the beginning of the sixteenth century. When Piero di Bernardo Nasi enrolled into the confraternity in February 1523/4, it was recorded that he was 'won' (that is, accepted into the confraternity) because his father had donated a relic of St. Sebastian to the confraternity.⁴⁸ In 1605 the Servite historian Arcangelo Giani identified Monsignor Giovanni Battista di Bernardo di Lutozzo de Nasi, a Florentine who had been a member of the household of Pope Leo X, as donor of the relic to the confraternity. The confraternity had apparently forgotten the name of this benefactor, which Giani managed to identify with the assistance of Signor Francesco Bonciani, nephew, through his mother, of Alessandro Nasi.⁴⁹ The patronymics suggest that the two men were brothers, rather than father and son as the record of Piero Nasi's enrollment into the confraternity would imply. Considering that Piero Nasi's enrollment occurred much closer to the period in which the donation was made, and the allusion to the relic appears

47 BR, Moreni 351, ff. 30v–31r, 102v, 31 December 1484. For location in relation to the church, see O'Brien, *San Filippo Benizi*, fig. 38b, room numbers 15–19.

48 ASF, CRSPL 1869, Ricordi e Partiti 1516–1706, f. 34r; O'Brien, *San Filippo Benizi*, 2:140.

49 Giani, *Historia*, 91, n. z.

as an aside, it is probably the more reliable reference.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, the belief that a member of the pope's entourage had donated the relic would have bestowed it with greater authenticity, and in 1636 a record in the confraternity's *Libro dei Partiti e Ricordi* again identified Monsignor Giovanni Battista de Nasi, as the donor of the *reliquia del capo* of St. Sebastian. It even suggested that he may even have donated it during Leo X's papacy.⁵¹

By acquiring its own relic of St. Sebastian, the confraternity gained a degree of independence from the Servites. It was an object that the *confratelli* could control autonomously from the Servites, as their statutes demonstrate. This is not to suggest that the confraternity was disengaging from the activities in the Servite church, since its meeting rooms were still on the Servites' property and they selected their corrector from among the Servites at the SS. Annunziata. Furthermore, chapter fifteen reveals that they were to perform processions with the Servites and the Servites' relic for St. Sebastiano's feast. The relics were to be carried on a *barella* under a baldachin, and, according to a pact with the Servites, the confraternity's relic was always to be located on the right.⁵² But this was not the only way in which the confraternity was taking more control of the course of its spiritual life, as an examination of its devotion to the cult of *beato* Filippo Benizi will reveal.

The contract drawn up between the confraternity and the Servites in 1465/6 (when it built new rooms in the second cloister) stipulated that the compagnia was to celebrate *beato* Filippo's feastday: "Said confraternity and men and said persons of the confraternity were held and are obliged, for the veneration of the said Order, to have a meeting and congregate in the day of the Feasts of *beato* Filippo Benizi and *beato* Gherardo, formerly friars of the said Order."⁵³ The celebration of Filippo's feast was already prescribed in the confraternity's 1451 statutes. The emphasis on its celebration might suggest a lapse in, or sluggishness toward the devotion on the part of the compagnia. In the statutes of 1520 the confraternity came to be exclusively entitled: "Compagnia del Santissimo Martire Santo Sebastiano" (ASF, Cap. CRS 364, f. 1r). The prologue of the new statutes mentions "Filippo Vergine" and "Gherardo devoto heremita" in passing, but their feasts disappear from among those of obligation. Thus it would seem that by 1520 the confraternity had almost completely abandoned the cult of Filippo (and Gherardo).

50 Furthermore, Giani's source did not seem absolutely certain of his information.

51 ASF, CRSPL 1869, f. 365v; O'Brien, *San Filippo Benizi*, 2:141; BR, Moreni 351, f. 64v.

52 ASF, Cap. CRS 364, f. 38v–40r; O'Brien, *San Filippo Benizi*, 2:138–39.

53 BR, Moreni 351, f. 98v, clause IX. Although the contract suggests that Gherardo da Villamagna was a Servite, he is usually identified as a Franciscan tertiary; Da Langasco, "Mecatti, Gerardo", coll. 257–58.

The cult of the *beato* Filippo Benizi, like that of St. Sebastian, was a significant cult at the Church of the SS. Annunziata. Its beginnings at the church, however, dated back much further than Sebastian's. By 1336 there was a lamp of 'San Filippo',⁵⁴ and in the following years it is apparent that wax images, probably votive offerings, were being left to him.⁵⁵ In 1337 appear the first known expenses for a feast in his honour.⁵⁶ References to the feast appear intermittently in the administrative books from this period on.⁵⁷ The early cult of *beato* Filippo Benizi was probably located next to the fresco of the SS. Annunziata.⁵⁸ On 2 June 1404 a devotee left 2 *soldi* to the *tonicha di San Filippo Benizi* (the tunic, or undershirt, of St. Filippo Benizi).⁵⁹ This relic became the central focus of Filippo's cult at the SS. Annunziata and in 1442–43 a tabernacle was built for it.⁶⁰ The payment from June 1487, mentioned above, for a *barella* for St. Sebastian also included expenses for a *barella di San Filippo*.⁶¹ Thus we can surmise that the Servites' relic of Filippo Benizi was also being promoted in citywide processions such as those held for St. John the Baptist. Furthermore, in common with the feast of St. Sebastian, the Servites recorded in their account books feast day *offerte* for Filippo's relic. These began to appear regularly in the books from the end of the fifteenth century.⁶² By this time the cult had been relocated to the chapel of the Tedaldi family, immediately to the left of the church's high altar.⁶³

St. Filippo Benizi was included in the title and devotions of the Compagnia di San Sebastiano, almost certainly under the influence of Fra Mariano Salvini, who undoubtedly hoped that the confraternity would be a means of promoting Filippo Benizi's cult. By 1520 the confraternity clearly demonstrated their disinterest in this program. Eventually, at the end of the sixteenth century another confraternity was established at the SS. Annunziata in Filippo Benizi's honour,

54 ASF, CRSGF 119/611, f. 11r, 26 July 1336; O'Brien, *San Filippo Benizi*, 2:31.

55 ASF, CRSGF 119/611, f. 34r, 28 July 1337; O'Brien, *San Filippo Benizi*, 2:31. Shelves were built for the figures a few years later. ASF, CRSGF 119/682, f. 130v, September 1341; O'Brien, *San Filippo Benizi*, 2:32.

56 ASF, CRSGF 119/611, f. 37r, 11 September 1337; O'Brien, *San Filippo Benizi*, 2:21.

57 O'Brien, *San Filippo Benizi*, 2:21–28, Appendix 2c. This appendix provides only a sample of references to expenses for the feast.

58 O'Brien, *San Filippo Benizi*, 1:155–57.

59 Crociani, "Immagini e Culto di San Filippo Benizi" 114; O'Brien, *San Filippo Benizi*, 1:155.

60 ASF, CRSGF 119/688, f. 90v, 30 April 1442; f. 94r, 19 June 1442; f. 119r, 20 September 1443; f. 147r, 15 February 1443/4.

61 ASF, CRSGF 119/699, f. 79v, 30 June 1487; O'Brien, *San Filippo Benizi*, 2:33.

62 O'Brien, *San Filippo Benizi*, 1:159–60; 2:28–31, Appendix 2(b). Between 1491 and 1529 the amounts varied from 3 to 10 *lire*. These were almost consistently less than those received for the *offerta del braccio di San Sebastiano* [I, 168, 2:136–37, Appendix, 5(b)], though the amounts are reasonably close.

63 O'Brien, *San Filippo Benizi*, 1:157–58.

this time called the Compagnia di beato Filippo Benizi. It constructed its meeting house under the *loggia dei Servi* across from the church in the Piazza della SS. Annunziata.⁶⁴

Returning to the fresco cycles, we know that in July 1509 Andrea del Sarto was commissioned to paint *Historie* of beato Filippo Benizi and St. Sebastian. Andrea had finished the Benizi cycle by December 1510. On 25 December 1511 Andrea received his first payment for the Marian lunette, indicating that within a year and a half of the contract the Servites had decided against depicting the *Historia beati Sebastiani* on the wall opposite the Benizi cycle. It is unlikely that the confraternity's interest in Filippo's cult waned in precisely these years. Although the confraternity seems to be the strongest point of connection between the two cults, it is unlikely that its dedication to these two holy men determined the choice of subject matter for the forecourt's decoration. Furthermore the Servites were promoters of both the cults of beato Filippo Benizi and of St. Sebastian, thus it is unlikely that the confraternity's dedication determined the selection of these two saints for such an important site, or the Servites' decision not to have the *Historia beati Sebastiani* painted. Nevertheless, the *confratelli* at the beginning of the sixteenth century were probably still aware of Filippo's connection with the confraternity. Although the confraternity's main devotional activity was practiced in the meeting house which had a private entrance onto the street that ran along the side of the SS. Annunziata, their sepulchre was located in the Chiostrino dei Voti that was thus a part of their ritual space. Had the cycle of the *Historia beati Sebastiani* been painted, there would potentially have been dynamic connections and meanings playing across the Chiostrino dei Voti for the members of the Compagnia di San Sebastiano. They would have seen depicted there the life of their confraternity's founder Filippo Benizi contrasted with that of their titular patron saint, Sebastian.

The Compagnia di San Sebastiano eventually rediscovered its devotion to Filippo Benizi (and Gherardo da Villamagna), but not until the following century. It is possible that this again occurred under the influence of the Servites. In 1605, their Servite Father Corrector Ruberto Orlandi donated a bronze portrait bust of beato Filippo (a copy of a bust with Filippo's deathmask that was held in the SS. Annunziata) to the compagnia.⁶⁵ In August 1636 the confraternity admitted that for many years its founders, Filippo and Gherardo had been forgotten, and now the confraternity wished to make amends by renewing its devotions to these two figures and making their feasts obligatory for the *confratelli*. The result was

64 Sebregondi, *Tre confraternite fiorentine*, 25–26.

65 BR, Moreni 351, f. 55v. In the following year he encouraged them to make a reliquary for their relic of the *zoccolo di San Gherardo*; ASF, CRSPL 1869, f. 297v, 1 May 1606.

codified soon after with the addition of a new chapter to the statutes of 1520. This was confirmed October 1636 (ASF, CRSPL 1869, f. 363v).

Capitolo XXI Of the feast of our first founders, that is Beato Filippo Benizzi, and the Beato Gherardo da Villamagna

...we order, by virtue of this present *Capitolo* that our first holy Founders are honoured and revered as we find they formerly were in ancient times by our brothers. Whence, considering how such devotion was already for many years discarded, we newly order that it be returned to light, and that a feast is made at their time, that is for B. Filippo, the 23rd day of August and for B. Gherardo the Monday of Pentecost conforming to the custom in Villamagna in the church dedicated to him where his Holy Corpse lies. The feasts are done in this way; the apparatus, with our drapes, is put on the major altar, the images of the said saints adorning it at the pleasure of the administrator and sacristans. The morning of the said feasts the Holy Mass is celebrated by our Father Corrector, or another priest, then the Sunday within the octave the solemn Office is sung in honour of the said saints. And further, we wish that in all our meetings, that following the commemoration of our Protector Martyr St SEBASTIAN the commemoration of the said saints is done, provided that there is no impediment of a double feast, in that case then all the commemorations are left....⁶⁶

In September, however, even before the chapter had been confirmed, they demonstrated their commitment to their new undertaking by commissioning Simone di Pasquino Pignoni, painter and member of the Compagnia di San Sebastiano, to produce pictures of the two founders.⁶⁷ Then on 14 September 1636 they made a procession to the parish in Villa Magna where Gherardo's body lay. On their return to Florence, they entered the church of the SS. Annunziata where the *testa di Beato Filippo* was presented to them so they could pay their respects to it.⁶⁸ Upon entering the church, with their new-found sensitivities to Filippo's cult, they probably took closer notice of Cosimo Rosselli's and Andrea del Sarto's representation of Filippo's life and miracles in the forecourt, little realising that a cycle to their protector and advocate St. Sebastian had once been intended to accompany it.

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⁶⁶ BL, Ashburnham 971; O'Brien, *San Filippo Benizi*, 2:139–40.

⁶⁷ ASF, CRSPL 1869, f. 364v. They were finished within a year; see, f. 369v, 27 September 1637.

⁶⁸ ASF, CRSPL 1869, f. 363v. On this head of Filippo Benizi, see O'Brien, *San Filippo Benizi*, 1:55–56.

Appendix

ASF, Cap. CRS 6, ff. 3v–4:

Et impero rischaldate e elluminate le nostre menti per gli meriti de nostri gloriosi protectori e padroni e fondatori e principiatori di questa nostra congregazione e compagnia piaciuto a loro di riformarla e dirizzarla e di nuovo compore e ordinare per mezzo nostro certi capitoli e ordinamenti per essa compagnia sia altra volta ragunata e principata e fondata nel mille dugento sessanta tre il dì di Sancta Maria di Settembre da gloriosi e sancti huomini Sancto Philippo e Sancto Gherardo e hora al presente da noi rilevato sotto il nome e titolo medesimo cioè la compagnia delle laude della vergine Maria e di Sancto Philippo e di Sancto Gherardo aggiugnendo e pigliando nuovamente con nostri sopradecti protectori e padroni el glorioso cavaliere e martire di Christo messer Sancto Sebastiano de quali i meriti ci rischaldino si factamente che noi observiamo i sopradetti capitoli ad honore d'Idio e comendazione loro buono exempro del prozimo e salute dell'anime nostre. Et vogliamo che'l sengno vechio aggiugnendo sopra la croce una corona una palma e una freccia ad honore di Sancto Sebastiano e tutte le nostre divozioni e tornate si faccino e sieno nel luogho de frati de Servi di Madonna Sancta Maria luogho decto l'Annunziata e altrimenti chiamata cioe Sancta Maria di Cafaggio nella habitatione ordinaria luogho loro per loro a noi assengnato +.

BL, *Ashburnham* 971:

Capitolo XXJ Della festa de nostri primi fondatori cioè il Beato Filippo Benizzi, e il Beato Gherardo da Villamagna. Per honorare, e magnificare Iddio ne santi suoi, ordiniamo in Virtù del presente Capitolo che sieno honorati, e riveriti e nostri primi SS. Fondatori si come già per antico tempo troviamo che da nostri fratelli si faceva. Onde considerando come tal devotione era già per molt'anni stata tralasciata, ordiniamo di nu[ov]o si rimetta luce, e di essi se ne facci festa a tempi loro, cioè del B. Filippo il dì xxiiij d'Agosto, e del Beato Gherardo il lunedì della Pentecoste conforme a che usa in Villamagna nella Chiesa a lui dedicata dove giace il suo Santo Corpo; le quali feste si faccino in questo modo. L'apparato sia con li nostri drappi, mettendo in su l'altare maggiore l'immagine di detti Santi con adornalo a piacimento del Proveditore, e sagrestani, e la mattina di dette feste si facci celebrare la S. Messa da nostro Correttore, o altro sacerdote, di poi la Domenica in fra l'ottava si canti solenne Offitio in honore di detti Santi e di più vogliamo che in tutte le nostre tornate che doppo la Commemoratione del nostro Protettore martire S. SEBASTIANO si facci commemoratione delli detti Beati purché non vi sia impedimento di festa doppia che allora in tal caso si lasciano tutte le commemorazioni, e tutto a laude, e gloria di Dio, e salute del anime nostre. Tu autem domine miserere nobis.

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