

Early Modern Confraternities in Europe and the Americas. International and Interdisciplinary Perspectives. Eds. Christopher Black and Pamela Gravestock. Aldershot, UK / Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006. xi, 290 pp. ISBN 0-7546-5174-6 US\$ 99.95

This collection of articles was inspired by the lively discussions on confraternity scholarship at the March 2003 Renaissance Society of America Conference in Toronto. Christopher Black and Pamela Gravestock co-edited this collection with the aim of providing a comprehensive coverage of the diverse range of confraternity studies, including both the geographical and chronological spread of the associations, as well as the inter- and multi-disciplinary scope of current research.

The volume includes articles on confraternities in Ireland, France, the Netherlands, Italy, South America, and the Far East. Dylan Reid's article on "Piety, Poetry and Policies: Rouen's Confraternity of the Immaculate Conception and the French Wars of Religion" examines the shifting interests of a small but prestigious confraternity in Rouen. Founded in 1486, the ideals of the Confraternity of the Immaculate Conception were centred on brotherhood, charity, and a shared love of poetry. However, with the outbreak of the Wars of Religion in 1562, the confraternity began to engage in a strong Catholic opposition against Protestants. Two radical Catholics who had recently joined the confraternity saw the association as a beacon for garnering enthusiasm for the Catholic resistance. As the membership started to change, so did the confraternity's role in civic society. Reid's article discusses the effect these changes had both on the city of Rouen and the confraternity itself.

In an effort to fill a significant gap in current research on confraternities in the Americas, Susan Verdi Webster's article on those of colonial Quito (present-day Ecuador) focuses on their role as patrons of architecture from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century. She states that these confraternities were often responsible for the commissioning and construction of religious structures such as chapels, churches, and hospitals, providing both financial backing and actual physical labour. She points out that in one of the confraternity's account books there were records of hundreds of properties and mortgages held by the confraternity. These investments earned several thousand *pesos* a year for the sodality and this, bolstered by outside donations and alms, allowed the confraternity to invest in at least one major building venture in the mid-seventeenth century. This insightful analysis offers extensive evidence for the patronage of confraternities at the local level in colonial America, a topic that, until now, has been very much underexplored.

The collection ends with a chapter by Nicholas Terpstra that explores the changing meaning and dynamic of confraternal organizations from the late Middle Ages to the eighteenth century. Referring to previous articles in the book, Terpstra discusses the rise of confraternities not only in Europe, but in the Americas and in Asia as well. Confraternity research, he writes, is an indispensable resource for understanding a wide swath of historical topics, including overseas expansion,

religious schism, individual and social security, and the relations between mainstream and marginal groups.

While the introduction to this volume provides an excellent overview of the history and context of confraternities in the medieval and early modern world, the articles provide exceptional insight into the micro- and macrocosms of confraternity life, architecture, and policy both in Europe and the worlds beyond.

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Gazzini, Marina. *Confraternite e società cittadina nel medioevo italiano*. Itinerari medievali, 11. Bologna: CLUEB, 2006. xii, 366 pp. ISBN 88-491-2386-8

One of the many merits of this book by Marina Gazzini is to establish scientifically the state of the discipline in confraternity studies. Not only, but the author provides a strong theoretical and also historiographic frame of reference that establishes effectively the otherwise semantically shifty word-object “confraternita”.

After doing this, the author analyzes a number of late-medieval Italian confraternities from a coherent and methodologically precise urban perspective, focusing on their relations as well as their interactions with other contemporary social realities. In so doing, Gazzini presents Milan and the towns of the Po valley as part of a unique town-based network of confraternities that, for its own nature, deserves to be investigated. In her work, the web of confraternities in the Po region can be examined from a variety of angles for the different religious, economic, cultural, social functions of these sodalities. From this perspective, Gazzini’s book is a very interesting achievement in the field of medieval studies and confraternity studies.

The book is divided into three distinct, as well as sequentially linked parts: *Tradizione storiografica e processi storici* (“Historiographic tradition and historical processes”); *Reti confraternali nell’Emilia comunale* (“Confraternities networks in municipal Emilia”); *Confraternite a Milano in età signorile e ducale* (“Confraternities in Milan during the seignior and the ducal age”). Gazzini brings together a vast number of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources are often quoted from other works or repertories, but, especially in the last part (which is original indeed), they are the result of original archival research (mainly in the Archivio di Stato of Milan). We can say that Gazzini’s work skilfully links primary and secondary literature in order to frame the confraternal phenomenon firmly within its social context and also “historiographically.”

Gazzini ranks confraternities among some of the fundamental and constituent elements of the medieval Italian towns, as important as the town walls themselves, or the town’s Christian-civic spirit, its merchants and craftsmen, and so forth. Clearly, the implication is that confraternities have to be viewed as a major medieval