

Ideas and Experiences of Peace in Italian Confraternities of the Late Middle Ages: Specifics and Developments

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Summary: Starting from the assumption — underlined by most of the scholarship — that lay devotional association in the Late Middle Ages is largely characterized by its “vocation for peace” and its efforts to attenuate and overcome the conflicts inherent to contemporary urban society, this article seeks to identify in a less generic and more concrete manner the contributions confraternities made to social peace. The first part of the article examines the different meaning that the concept of peace might have had for the men and women who gathered in confraternities; the second part, instead, provides some examples from various Italian cities — Bologna, Assisi, Padua, Bergamo, Venice, and Florence.

I. Introduction

I would like to begin by voicing the strong sense of disorientation I felt the moment I began working on the topic of this paper. It attracted my attention due to the many references to a “vocation for peace” and “conflict resolution” which historians of confraternities — both Italian and otherwise — have come to observe in the devout organizations of the Late Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period. In fact, historians never fail to emphasize the peacekeeping vocation of the confraternities, whose concept of peace usually coincided with both the civil and religious concept promoted by the religious orders (especially the mendicants), as well as the *concordia civium* and local governments’ need for social disciplining.

Such a condensed and clearly defined set of historiographic findings makes any further research and reflection on the topic a gamble and potentially redundant. Moreover, we run the risk of discouraging historians from venturing into terrain that has been thoroughly scrutinized in many ways. The idea of peace, however, is that it “does not take part only in the abstract reasoning of the educated elites, but has to do with the experiences of men and women from the past.”² In this context, peace cannot be separated from “incarnate” ideas and needs that must be understood within

¹ An earlier version of this article was originally published in Italian as “Idee ed esperienze di pace nelle confraternite italiane del basso medioevo: evoluzioni e specificità” in Stefania Pastore, Adriano Prosperi, and Nicholas Terpstra (eds.), *Brotherhood and Boundaries. Fraternità e barriere*. Pisa: Edizioni della Normale, 2011, pp. 87–107.

² *La pace fra realtà e utopia*, 3.

the real situations and contexts that generated them in different times and places and whose expressions they are.

A part of the disorientation derives from the sensation that the confraternities' undeniable contribution to the idea and realization of peace — a polysemantic concept I will return to later — has at times been proposed in the literature in far too “generic” a fashion without clearly explaining the chronological, geographic, and typological contexts (relative to the type of confraternity considered) in which these religious associations promoted peace.

In that “devotional deluge” of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries³ — as Charles de la Roncière called it — it therefore becomes necessary to differentiate among the contributions and peculiarities of the many different religious associations, in order to find a distinguishing feature in their respective peace proposals without losing sight of the considerable, established mutual influences. Here are some of the possible questions: How does the idea of peace perpetuated by the confraternities evolve over the course of the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries? How do their experiments change? What role did individual, social, and political conditions play in such an evolution? Can the hypothesis that the flagellant movement advanced a specific peace proposal be substantiated? Finally: Does it make sense to speak generically of “peace” without pursuing its “historical” meanings and its varying forms?

A further pursuit of this set of questions becomes extremely complex, because the landscape of the Italian confraternities — especially after the immense *devotio* of 1260 — is so colorful and eclectic that the risk of getting lost is quite real

II. Peace for the living and peace for the dead

This complexity must nonetheless be addressed. The attempt to answer the questions above is worthwhile, and it is appropriate to dwell on the last question as we begin. Only by understanding the meaning that peace held for the men and women united in brotherhoods will it be possible to recognize specific contributions and long-term developments. Peace has always been — and still is — a complex topic that touches both the single individual and the community. It involves the individual person in relationship with God; it relates to the living and the dead in a tightly woven fabric of religion, of civil and political life. Perhaps “its extraordinary richness lies precisely in the indivisible relationship between these different levels, which must not however be collapsed onto one another, but understood as coexistent to show their complexity.”⁴ Since Augustine the idea of peace has revealed its polysemy by taking shape — according to the teachings

³ See the extensive essay by de La Roncière, “Le confraternite in Europa.”

⁴ Niccoli, “Postfazione,” 283–84.

of the “church father” that inspired all medieval thought — in an “inner” dimension of penitential nature, in an “external” dimension reflecting the customs and manners of people, and lastly in a direct relationship with Christ, for whom peace constitutes the supreme gift (“Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you.” John 14:27). It is therefore obvious that the confraternities’ propagation of peace spreads out in a multitude of directions. It ranges from abstaining from violence and the use of arms in times of urban guerilla warfare and other conflicts, to a more marked awareness of peace as a “public” good enriched by political hues. It involves efforts to resolve conflicts inside and out of the brotherhood without appealing to public judiciary institutions.⁵ as well as a kind of “pedagogy of peace” implemented by the youth brotherhoods⁶ and the propagation of “irenical” behavior toward neighbors and brethren in accordance with the Scriptures. These behaviors involved “forgiving by mouth and by heart”⁷ and aimed for peace in interpersonal relationships, especially among the members of the same confraternity. It has been justly noted that, in the end, the inner dimension prevailed over public action, conforming to a long-standing practice in most associations of a religious nature.⁸ Nonetheless, broader manifestations of looking beyond a single confraternity and assuming the role of civil peacemakers present themselves cyclically throughout the Late Middle Ages.⁹

These times bore witness to relatively frequent moments of political and socio-economic uncertainty, as well as difficult moments for the life of the Church and for churches (for example, when many cities were subjected to interdiction). Generally, the religious offerings of a broad range of devotional organizations, which were articulated through lively rituals (meetings, processions, performances and events), but primarily through “good works” and charitable efforts (hospital services, mutual protection and relief, assistance given to fellow brothers and the unaffiliated poor) helped to provide order and peace to society and life in common. The Augustinian motto “ubi caritas ibi pax” illustrates this concept.

These facts do not, however, render the confraternities “dated” or imply that they were living out of “their” time. They adhered substantially to the models of behavior and values of their contemporary urban societies

⁵ Among the publications on alternative forms of conflict resolution by way of so-called “infra-judicial” practices, see Niccoli: “Rinuncia, pace, perdono” and *Perdonare*. See also Bellabarba, “Pace pubblica e pace privata” and Rovigo, “Le paci private.”

⁶ Taddei, “L’idéal de paix.” Some considerations in Rossi, “Polisemia di un concetto,” 30–31.

⁷ Scaramucci, “Considerazioni su statuti e matricole,” 170–71.

⁸ De Sandre Gasparini, “Movimento dei disciplinati,” 95–97.

⁹ Besides the *magna devotio* of 1260, there is the procession of the Bianchi in 1399 and those promoted by the preachers Venturino da Bergamo and Vincenzo Ferrer in 1335 and 1410 respectively.

and reflected — as is expected — the contradictions, ambivalences and the unrest underlying the social dynamics within which they operated.¹⁰

Scanning the entry for *confrérie* prepared by the *Dictionnaire de Droit Canonique*,¹¹ we find a long series of early medieval conciliar canons that condemn the *conspiraciones* and the *coniurationes* of those that *confratriae vocantur*. Studies also reveal in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries a continuous series of provisions and admonishments from lay and ecclesiastical authorities warning devotional associations not to exceed their “institutional” limits. These would assume a more “immediate peremptory nature” in moments of greater political conflict.¹²

Yet, if we are to identify the concrete ways in which the confraternities contributed to the enforcement of peace, we must go further and investigate a peace process that does not have people in their flesh and bone as protagonists but focuses on the soul after its separation from the body. If, in the liturgy, death is called upon as a destiny of peace and rest (just think of expressions such as *Requiescat in pace* or *Requiem aeternam dona eis Domine*), in the deliberations of theologians and especially in the *imaginaire collectif* of late medieval people, the condition of the souls of the deceased — awaiting their final destiny either in the happiness of heaven

¹⁰ Sociological readings of the confraternities are prevalent in the work of Anglophone scholars, many of whom owe much to Italian scholars. In terms of our theme, Jennifer Rondeau deserves mention. She identified a strongly ambivalent role in Italian confraternities and their efforts to promote peace. The “homosocial” structure — shared by the majority of communal political institutions, which tended toward the achievement of urban pacification — and the inability to turn to the strong potential of female mediation would determine the failure of the confraternities on the “front” of peace, placing them instead within the dynamic of unrest and competition that is typical of “homosocial” structures. See Rondeau, “Homosociality and Civic (Dis)order.”

¹¹ Durand, “Confrérie,” col. 129.

¹² Berengo, *L'Europa della città*, 861. A number of examples have already been examined extensively. During The War of the Eight Saints, in Florence the processions that were organized by the Flagellants and their frequent appeals for “peace” would become difficult to control so much so that the city government became highly suspicious as it feared that protests against the war represented support of the Guelphs. Therefore, in 1377 the “Eight” decreed that “dette chompagnie non si potessino più raunare sotto gravi pene” (said companies may no longer gather, under harsh penalty); Gennaro, “Movimenti religiosi e pace nel XIV secolo,” 109. Again in Florence over the course of the 1400s (until 1470, when it became clear that the groups were under the control of Lorenzo de’ Medici) there were a high number of government provisions against the confraternities — especially the *Disciplinati* — who were considered dangerous centres of conspiracy; see Weissman, *Ritual Brotherhood*, 164–69, Henderson, “Le confraternite religiose nella Firenze del tardo medioevo,” and Eisenbichler, “Lorenzo de’ Medici.” Among the ecclesiastical provisions intended to impose stricter control on the confraternities, see those established by the bishop of Bergamo in 1336 and in 1419, which limited the flagellants of the city to a single organization. Alberigo, “Contributi alla storia delle confraternite dei disciplinati,” 187–88. In general, see Rossi, “Vescovi e confraternite.”

or in eternal damnation — had nothing to do with sleep, quiet, or peace.¹³ The consideration of the soul of a departed person is one that is characterized by an overwhelming sense of misery and suffering, by the awareness of an insurmountable barrier that draws it away from God, and it is infused by a consuming desire for peace, eternal peace, which is possible only in the kingdom of God. Yet the soul has no possibility of influencing its fate; it must wait in anguish. It can, however, count on its ties with the living: for they alone can improve its destiny by praying to the intercessors. The world of the living and the world of the departed are actually not far apart, “woven into a common destiny shaped along a close exchange of mutual assistance and constant dialogue.”¹⁴ That is why the congregation of the Verona clergy — the association to which most city priests and laypersons who wished to take part in the *bonorum spiritualium dicte congregationis ... in vita et in morte belonged* — saw the *cura animarum defunctorum* as one of its specific duties. This was not a lay association; it was one of the many clerical congregations made up by priests and secular clerics belonging to more than one church of the same city. Its statutes contain many references to the bonds of solidarity between the living and the dead and to the possibility that the former could mitigate the pains of the departed and affect their path toward salvation and ‘eternal’ peace through good deeds and, above all, prayer and the commemoration of the dead.¹⁵

Consequently, all rituals connected to death unquestionably belong to the spread of “irenic” behavior promoted by devout associations, although it was predominantly (though not exclusively) the death of brethren with which they were concerned. Confraternal communities (together with parochial, monastic, and conventual ones) were among the leading players in the celebration of death and the remembering of the deceased; first, during the funeral service, which was guaranteed by statutes and often financially organized by members of the confraternity; and afterwards, with the celebration of anniversaries, in commemorations of *longue durée* and of cyclical repetition (perpetual masses, anniversaries), which were arranged by the deceased themselves through bequests in their wills. These topics abound in the many sources that the study of confraternities has at its disposal: the statutes, which feature a conscious arrangement of what has been labeled as “attended death”;¹⁶ the funeral *laudae*, which were sung by members during the funerals of their brethren;¹⁷ and the prayers that were pronounced during the meetings of the brotherhoods.¹⁸ A retrospective of

¹³ Martignoni, “*Requiescat in pace*.”

¹⁴ Martignoni, “*Requiescat in pace*,” 119.

¹⁵ On the *congregatio cleri intrinseci* of Verona: Rigon, “La congregazione del clero intrinseco di Verona e i suoi statuti (1323)” and Rossi, *Governare una Chiesa*, 66–86.

¹⁶ De Sandre Gasparini, “La morte nelle campagne basso medievale,” 93.

¹⁷ Some examples are mentioned by Martignoni, “*Requiescat in pace*,” 123–26.

¹⁸ Examples in Thompson, “New light on bl. Giacomo Benfatti o.p.,” 167–68.

the entire range of sources clearly shows the central role death played. In fact, it is clear that everybody was allowed to die “in peace,” considering the possibility of deliverance even after death. It was not denied to enemies, heretics, or the unfaithful—for whom the Disciplinati of Mantua prayed—nor was it denied to sinners who had already been condemned by earthly justice.

This tableau of the confraternities was drawn up by James Banker in his study of the case of Sansepolcro, whose confraternities he analyzed and interpreted in close relation with the meaning of death and its evolution over the centuries of the Late Middle Ages.¹⁹ Recent events in the dynamic historiographic research on confraternities has focused on a specific type of lay association, namely the *compagnie di giustizia*, whose task it was to accompany those sentenced to death to “die in peace.” The condemned would accept the sentence that earthly justice had handed down and then be reconciled with the Church through the administering of the sacraments, which were vital for obtaining grace and, ultimately, peace and eternal life.²⁰

The members of the *compagnie di giustizia* were also responsible for the burial of the condemned, a charitable act that went beyond the narrow scope of the brotherhood, where it was normally practiced, and also extended to the ‘bodies of the damned’ that hung from the gallows of the city squares. Although it is not entirely clear when and where this new act of mercy was born and how it spread, the most reliable evidence allows us to set the initial date in the middle of the fourteenth century.²¹ Nevertheless, there is strong suggestion that the origins of these initiatives of men and women who associated to comfort and bury those condemned to die are connected (although without much evidence) with the movement of the Dominican Venturino of Bergamo.²² Venturino had made “peace,” proposed with obvious social and political ends, his main objective.

III. Cases in point

The semantic expansion of the idea of peace we have been pursuing now makes it possible to outline an evolution of that notion as it was interpreted and disseminated by confraternal institutions. In the thirteenth century, the confraternities — from the penitential orders, to the *societates*, who actively engaged in favor of orthodoxy and papal politics, such as the Militia of Jesus Christ and of the Virgin Mary, as well as the first flagellant associations, for example, in Bologna — interpreted peace in a “political” manner.

¹⁹ Banker, *Death in the Community*.

²⁰ Prosperi, *Misericordie*.

²¹ Prosperi, “Morire volentieri,” 9.

²² Prosperi, “Morire volentieri,” 8–11. See also Fanti, “La confraternita di Santa Maria della Morte,” 74–99.

They stood up to the strife-laden climate in the central-northern Italian cities in a nuanced and sensible way, often adopting a variety of political leanings. Then the confraternities gradually and in step with local developments switched to an “irenica” approach. This still had social implications and held peace as a vital public good, but it became more introspective and concentrated on funeral rites that aimed at ensuring peace for the dead rather than the living. Of course, confraternities still became “directly” involved in “public” events after the thirteenth century — in Assisi, for example, or in other towns of Umbria involved in the political and military unrest that afflicted the area in the first half of the fourteenth century; or in Bergamo after the Dominican Venturino of Bergamo began preaching. In the fourteenth and fifteenth century — and the statutes confirm this quite clearly — the confraternities and their notion of peace embody a shift towards “consolidation” in the direction described above.

To corroborate this, we will draw upon examples from the more intensely studied areas. These have been subject to detailed historical investigations and possess significant primary source editions (especially statutes). We will start with Bologna,²³ which stands out for the quality and the quantity of research it has generated on confraternities, together with Padua, Assisi, Bergamo, Venice, and Florence, which boast both quantity and quality in regards to studies dedicated to confraternities.

1. Bologna

Much has been written about the leading role played by the Battuti of Bologna in terms of the achievement of “urban peace,”²⁴ which so characterized the *magna verberatio* of 1260. The same holds true for discussions of their “political” orientation and the relationship between the rule of the *Disciplinati* and the statutory dispositions issued by two Gaudenti friars, Loderingo degli Andalò and Catalano di Guido di donna Ostia. These two friars were elected *podestà* of Bologna in 1265 and belonged to the the *Milizia della Beata Maria Vergine Gloriosa*, which we have defined as a “militant” and politically engaged²⁵ confraternity. Recently, Marina Gazzini has compared the two statutes; she mapped out similarities and contradictions, pointing to the difficulty in comparing bodies of rules that affected the same groups of people but were in force in different settings.²⁶ Once all the methodological caveats have been carefully taken into account, the leading role of the flagellants and their decisive political opinions on the issue of peacekeeping remain undeniable.

²³ Terpstra, *Lay Confraternities and Civic Religion in Renaissance Bologna*.

²⁴ Fanti, “Gli inizi del movimento dei disciplinati,” 13–25. De Sandre Gasparini, “Movimento dei disciplinati,” 91–92.

²⁵ Gazzini, “*Fratres e milites* tra religione e politica.”

²⁶ Gazzini, “I Disciplinati, la milizia dei frati Gaudenti.”

If, by contrast, we analyze the 1443 statutory *corpus* of the Bolognese Battuti of San Domenico, a “booklet full of roses, of flowers and violets, all picked in the divine garden of the Holy Scriptures,”²⁷ written by observant Dominicans but intended to instruct “secular men” who had “government of goods and family,” we find the system on the whole to be strikingly different from the above-mentioned statute. Above all, a marked propensity to interiorize and to engage in spiritual retreat comes to the fore, and this naturally affected the notion of peace. Once the final echoes of conflict between factions *tempore rumoris* had died down, peace now consisted in “remaining in peace and charity with thy neighbor” and avoiding ending up in court to be “robbed by the judge, the judge’s assistant, the notary, the prosecutor, the solicitor, and other thieves.” If a dispute originated among brethren “either in deeds or in words, about goods or otherwise,” the statute advised refraining from legal action and, instead, turning to the spiritual father, who could count on two or three “sage, practical, and prudent” brethren to resolve the conflict.²⁸ As part of their works of mercy, the members of the brotherhood provided constant prayer for the souls of the dead: “If in purgatory,” they asked themselves, “would we not want the same done for us in order to free our own souls from the scourges of divine justice, the ‘horrible’ fire of purgatory, and aid them on their path toward eternal peace?”²⁹

The issue of peace becomes intensely present in the rule of another Bolognese confraternity of Battuti, Santa Maria della Vita, reformed in 1459: “When he said ‘Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you,’ our sweetest Lord, Jesus Christ gives to his holy disciples and to all believers that very same peace that angelic spirits had entrusted to mankind after Nativity (‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill among men’).” As people cannot live without one another and because the ensuing “common conversation” inevitably leads to “differences” that might upset the peace desired by the angels and Christ, the statutes forbade the brethren to resolve their differences before a judge prior to having first asked the spiritual father for a resolution.³⁰

Thus the pursuit of peace remained a constant prerogative of the Bolognese flagellant movement; the climate, however, had changed, and not only politically. The more “profane” thoughts directed at “things” and those who might “pinch” them, which disrupted the domestic tranquility that was often evoked by the statutes of the brotherhood of San Domenico,³¹ met with the highly dramatic theme of death that progressively became the

²⁷ Meersseman, *Ordo fraternitatis*, vol. 2, 616 and 688.

²⁸ Meersseman, *Ordo fraternitatis*, vol. 2, 680, chap. XIV.

²⁹ Meersseman, *Ordo fraternitatis*, vol. 2, chap. XV, 681–82.

³⁰ Alberigo, “Contributi alla storia delle confraternite dei disciplinati,” 236–37 (“Statuto della compagnia stretta *de Madona de Sancta Maria de la vita di Bologna* — 1459”).

³¹ On the topic of “family life” see De Sandre Gasparini, “Tra pietà e opere,” 76.

focus of lay religion; as Arsenio Frugoni wrote, the latter asserted itself as “the only justification for one’s doing.”³²

From peace that was pursued with a strong mixture of religion and politics, the goal had now become *pacifice vivere*, especially regarding neighborly relations, and a *pacifice vivere* for “men of good will” that discourages carrying disputes into court and thereby allows brethren to foster their relationship with God by means of prayer and concentrate fervently on the ultimate purpose of all life in the earthly realm.

2. Perugia

At this point, it is natural to ask whether the notion of peace underwent a similar evolution in the confraternities of Perugia, the city that had been more significantly involved in the *magna devotio* of the flagellants. The political, social, and religious events in the spring of 1260 in Perugia have long been the object of analysis and debate. It has yet to be explained why in Raniero Fasani’s town, of all places, no sign of *disciplinati* confraternities can be found until the first decades of the fourteenth century, when a significant number of flagellant associations appeared and became a permanent feature of the already colorful and complex confraternal scene.³³ Giovanna Casagrande sees the explanation in the widespread “fear” held by political institutions that “conspiracies and/or subversive acts against the (popular and Guelph) authority might be organized under the pretence of *societates* and *fraternitates*.”³⁴ According to Casagrande, such fears were the reason for the frequent measures taken against secret societies that had inhibited the spread of confraternities beginning in 1260. The list of non-*disciplinati* devout associations already existing by the second half of the thirteenth century³⁵ demonstrates that, above all, the flagellants had been kept from expanding. Only a communal decree issued in August 1320 allowed them the opportunity *congregationem facere pro ipsa disciplina fienda et pro capitulo culparum tenendo*.³⁶ This decree annulled all provisions against the *disciplinati*’s right to free assembly and acknowledged their prior existence. It granted the *persone ipsarum fraternitatum* permission to congregate, recall the Passion of Jesus Christ, and to pray to

³² Frugoni, “La devozione dei Bianchi del 1399,” especially (2009) 205.

³³ According to Casagrande’s research, in the fourteenth century there was a Mariano-Laudese brotherhood under the guidance of the apostolic preacher, a similar brotherhood in the church of Saint Augustine, a brotherhood of Saint Mary, another named SS. Trinità, one comprised of clerics and laypeople dedicated to Santa Maria della Misericordia, and finally a brotherhood of clerics that was common in other cities in the Late Middle Ages: Casagrande, *Religiosità penitenziale*, 393–94. Only from 1315 is it possible to draw up a list of twelve *disciplinati* confraternities (*ibidem*, 394); more were created during the second half of the fourteenth century.

³⁴ Casagrande, *Religiosità penitenziale*, 398.

³⁵ Such a list is provided in Casagrande, *Religiosità penitenziale*, 393–94.

³⁶ Casagrande, *Religiosità penitenziale*, 397–98.

Him in perpetuity so that He might maintain the town of Perugia *in statu prospero, pacifico et tranquillo*, and bring it back to a condition of peace, *sedatis scandalis guerre presentis*.³⁷ This decree, which mandated “the political opening toward associations of *disciplinati* confraternities,” implicitly entrusted the flagellant associations with a kind of primacy regarding social peace that could be obtained for the city only by pleading for Christ’s intercession through repentant prayer. The text of the decree seems to assert that peace is Christ’s gift: its implementation does not depend on the brethren’s direct action, nor (we are tempted to add, by slightly forcing the text of the communal decree) on their “political action,” but only on the strength of prayer used to plead for the intercession of the Son of God.

To this point, one can only hypothesize that things might have gone differently and that the flagellants of Perugia might have claimed a precise sphere of action for themselves regarding the issue of peace in such a turbulent period for the communal institutions, and thus provoked a staunch reaction from the dominant political forces.³⁸ Nevertheless, in Perugia only those generically “devotional” *fraternitates* whose statutes did not contain any specific references to social peace could operate undisturbed during the second half of the thirteenth century.³⁹

What provoked the change in attitude regarding the flagellant associations? Giovanna Casagrande lists many factors that can explain the government of Perugia’s opening towards *disciplinati* confraternities: first, there is a more robust affirmation of the political party of the *popolo*, firmly in government since 1303 and thus less suspicious of any “congregation”; secondly, the important role the city played in Umbrian Guelphism under the pontificate of John XXII; and finally, the fact that one of the *priori* of 1320 who were responsible for the above mentioned decree in favor of the *disciplinati* was a member of the fraternity of San Francis.⁴⁰ I fully agree with Casagrande’s interpretation but would like to add as a further motivation a kind of “conscious retreat” within the movement of Perugia *disciplinati* itself. Although they did not abstain from promoting the idea of peace as a civic good or from the commitment to contrast those forms of violence and conflict that were endemic to late medieval cities, they had relinquished a “politically active” role in their territories. This would also provide a potential answer to a question many scholars have posed

³⁷ Casagrande, *Religiosità penitenziale*, 398.

³⁸ A point already made by Bartoli Langeli, “La situazione politica in Umbria e a Perugia.”

³⁹ The statutes of the Perugia confraternity in the name of the Virgin Mary, connected with the Dominicans and active from the mid-thirteenth century, do not mention either peace among brethren or social pacification. Meersseman, *Ordo fraternitatis*, vol. 2, 1012–13 (indulgences), 1063–66 (statutes).

⁴⁰ Casagrande, *Religiosità penitenziale*, 398–99.

regarding the lapse of time between the itinerant phase of the movement and the existence of a large number of confraternities by the thirteenth century.⁴¹

3. Assisi

In Assisi — the “land of the *disciplinati*”⁴² — something different occurred. Of 14 confraternities, all of them dating back to the fourteenth century, 11 were *disciplinati*. The possibility of analyzing most of the statutes of these associations — thanks to the publication of the important volume *Le fraternite medievali di Assisi*, which made an entire corpus of urban confraternal statutes consultable, the third initiative of its kind after Padua and Bergamo — permits an analysis of the role of the *disciplinati* in favor of peace. In the case of Assisi, as well, the earliest references to flagellant associations date back to the second decade of the fourteenth century. They seem to have reached their greatest diffusion between 1320 and 1330, the era immediately following the short, turbulent Ghibelline *signoria* of Muzio di Francesco (1319–1322),⁴³ an era that marked the hegemonic expansion of Perugia over Umbria. To quote Ugolino Nicolini, it is certainly possible to claim that “no convincing explanation has been advanced for this unusual consolidation, but the dramatic activities in the area and in citizen participation in political developments of those years could offer valuable evidence for understanding the phenomenon.”⁴⁴ It was no coincidence that the statutes of certain brotherhoods that came into being in that same period echoed concerned appeals for peace. Here peace was understood as the charitable spiritual disposition towards one’s neighbors, as the wish to extinguish the enmities that can undermine interpersonal relationships, as an inclination towards the *statum pacificum*, and finally as an oration addressed to God, to plead for such a “state of pacification.”⁴⁵ Nevertheless, in addition to these generic appeals that set the tone for the profound religious dimension of a legal text, there is conformity among the rules of certain confraternities in signaling situations of latent tensions and factional struggles within the city. They forbid partaking in any kind of guerrilla action near the city gates or elsewhere.⁴⁶ They prohibit members from using weapons, especially inside the confraternity’s premises,⁴⁷ with the exception of those about to embark on dangerous

⁴¹ Apart from Casagrande, this question is addressed by Frugoni, “Sui flagellanti del 1260,” especially 192, and by Meloni, “Topografia,” 23–29.

⁴² I take the expression from Casagrande, *Religiosità penitenziale*, 411. See also De Sandre Gasparini, “I luoghi della pietà laicale.”

⁴³ Brufani, *Eresia di un ribelle*.

⁴⁴ Nicolini, “La fraternita dei disciplinati di San Rufino,” 105.

⁴⁵ Menestò, “Statuto della fraternita dei disciplinati di Santo Stefano,” 242.

⁴⁶ Brufani, “La fraternita dei disciplinati di Santo Stefano,” 72.

⁴⁷ Chap. LII of the confraternity of the *disciplinati* of San Rufino, entitled *Quod nullus intra locum debeat portare arma*; Nicolini, “Statuto della fraternita dei disciplinati di San Rufino,” 327.

journeys or missions to defend the town, and of those who had such enemies as to legitimize resorting to violence.⁴⁸ They invite avoiding all disputes, quarrels, or *partialitatem contra comunem statum et pacificum nostre civitatis*; moreover, they prescribe avoiding displays of joy on the occasion of a victory that had involved bloodshed and death, unless over the unfaithful.⁴⁹ Lastly, there are rules that prohibited members from becoming mercenaries and raiding *ubi civitas, castrum seu villa capiatur*.⁵⁰ The political situation of Assisi, which had suffered a period of intense violence, consequently leaves ample room for the flagellants, particularly in relation to peacekeeping. This “active” and prominent proposal for peace stigmatized and forbade ordinary behavior oriented toward bloodshed (such as supporting factions, guerrilla warfare and war games, becoming mercenaries for *condottieri* and looting), although, in fact, it favored the existing political regime.⁵¹

That this “peace proposal” was typical for the confraternal world of the *disciplinati* as a whole can probably also be proven by a quick look at other devotional associations. The statutes of the confraternity of the Raccomandati della Vergine — an association of such religious and social prestige in Assisi that the bishop himself intervened on its behalf⁵² — do not contain any reference to peace or peace-keeping, unlike those of the *disciplinati* confraternities, whose rules contain frequent references to peace in all possible perspectives. Moreover, the fact that the *battuti* constituted a homogeneous and well-united group — “like a chorus of praying brethren” — in Assisi becomes evident in the well-known *Ordo ad faciendum disciplinam* of the Compagnia di Santo Stefano, a text from 1329 in which the members of the confraternity are presented as “bound to all the faithful in the communion of the saints, but especially to the brethren of the city’s brotherhoods: San Gregorio, Santa Maria, San Rufino, San Pietro, Santa Chiara, Sant’Antonio, Sant’Antonino, and San Francesco.”⁵³

4. Padua

Padua is one of the other areas to offer a rich and homogeneous edition of statutes.⁵⁴ This allows for a comparison between the flagellant environment (well represented in the Veneto city) and the more generic sphere of devotional brotherhoods (also well represented), which consisted of a wide

⁴⁸ Brufani, “La fraternita dei disciplinati di Santo Stefano,” 63.

⁴⁹ Brufani, “La fraternita dei disciplinati di Santo Stefano,” 64.

⁵⁰ Chap. XXXI of the statute of San Rufino, in Niccolini, “Statuto della fraternita dei disciplinati di San Rufino,” 319.

⁵¹ Brufani, “La fraternita dei disciplinati di Santo Stefano,” 64.

⁵² Casagrande, “La fraternita dei Raccomandati di Maria.” Casagrande, “Lettere di indulgenza e di concessione di benefici spirituali.” Casagrande, “Statuto e matricola della fraternita dei Raccomandati della Vergine.”

⁵³ Niccolini, “La fraternita dei disciplinati di San Rufino,” 107.

⁵⁴ De Sandre Gasparini *Statuti di confraternite religiose di Padova nel medioevo*.

range of associations. Unlike in other cities, where as we have seen, the preoccupation with peace seems to have been the prerogative of the *battuti* (Florence⁵⁵ and Bergamo⁵⁶ should be added to the cases already discussed), in Padua all the different municipal *societates* seem accustomed to the issue of peace. The *disciplinati* of Santa Maria dei Colombini (whose earliest statutes date back to 1298) were highly concerned as were the brethren at St. Anthony,⁵⁷ at Corpus Christi, at the confraternity of the Holy Cross,⁵⁸ at St. Nicholas of Tolentino,⁵⁹ and at St. Lucia.⁶⁰ Almost all of these groups discouraged members from resorting to civic justice. Instead, they were advised to see the “administrator” (*gastaldo*) or the “guardian” as the person entitled to *dare operam et fatigare ut ... questio seu discordia removeatur et pax et concordia inde fiat*, both in the case of an internal disagreement among brethren as well as regarding quarrels between their own members and outsiders. The religious associations in Padua did not seem, however, to have considered a public course of action, even though they unanimously and collectively approved the proposal of pursuing peace between brothers. This had happened (although in politically different and doubtlessly more turbulent circumstances) in Bologna, Perugia, Assisi, and Bergamo. Not even the statutes of the *fraternitas alborum* studied by Giuseppina De Sandre⁶¹ (founded on October 13, 1399 in Montagnana, not far from Padua, exactly one week after the end of the processions of the Bianchi) contain any reference to a publicly proclaimed peace. According to Daniel Bornstein, the association must surely have institutionalized some of the characteristics that had belonged to the Bianchi movement. The thrice-repeated cry: “mercy, mercy, mercy” (*misericordia*), for example, became part of the brethren’s ritual of confession. However, they did not adopt the second invocation “peace, peace, peace” that devout pilgrims repeated almost obsessively during their journeys, and thus broke the unbreakable hendiadys that had characterized the Bianchi demonstrations. The invitation to “make peace with others” (*alios pacificare*) is the exact

⁵⁵ Weissman, *Ritual Brotherhood*, 50–56.

⁵⁶ Little, *Libertà, carità fraternità*. For the statute of the *disciplinati*, see Tammi, “Lo statuto dei disciplinati di Santa Maria Maddalena di Bergamo,” 261, chap. X (“De non andare ni correre a lo rumore per partialitate), but also VIII (“De li discordie da fi redute a pace e concordia”) and VII (where it is prescribed that the *canevaro* should have a Mass celebrated “for the good and peaceful state of the city and district of Bergamo.”) On the subject, see also De Sandre Gasparini, “Movimento dei disciplinati,” 105–06.

⁵⁷ De Sandre Gasparini, *Gli statuti di confraternite religiose di Padova*, 102, chap. 18. The earliest known statutes date from 1334. On this association, see De Sandre Gasparini, “Lineamenti e vicende.”

⁵⁸ De Sandre Gasparini, *Gli statuti di confraternite religiose*, 301.

⁵⁹ De Sandre Gasparini, *Gli statuti di confraternite religiose*, 238, chap. 1 (*Che entro i frate de la fraia sia paxe, amore e concordia*).

⁶⁰ De Sandre Gasparini, *Gli statuti di confraternite religiose*, 69, chap. 7.

⁶¹ De Sandre Gasparini, “Un’immediata ripercussione,” 363.

wording) remains part of the rules, but it is not known whether this expression also extended the invitation to “those outside the confraternity.”⁶²

The explanation for such a situation partly lies in the fact that the brotherhoods developed during the centuries of the *signoria* of the Carrara and of the Venetian domination. Neither of those political regimes were inclined to tolerate attention-seekers who became “carried away” regarding the social issue of peace or to accept that the cry *pace, pace, pace* echoed in their territories beyond a precise political orchestration.

Even in nearby Verona, characterized by a similar fourteenth-century *signoria* government that was highly vigilant in terms of religious demonstrations, the confraternities were unable to express themselves as freely on the matter of peace as was possible in many other contemporary cities. The local confraternities were closed off from those movements — from the Flagellants of 1260 to the Bianchi of 1399 — which had set the associational movement into action.⁶³ The late medieval municipal statutes of Verona strictly forbade anybody *ecclesiastica vel secularis, cuiuscunque sexus vel conditionis* to go *in aliquo consilio magno vel parvo, concione et predicacione, societate aliqua vel universitate vel in aliquo alio loco civitatis vel districtus Verone* *criolare vel rumore facere dicendo “Pax!”, “Tregua!” vel “Concordia!”*⁶⁴

IV. Conclusions

I conclude this study of the phenomenon of lay associations, although much more could be said on the subject, but the questions raised at the beginning of this paper have been answered and sufficiently documented. The results clearly show that the claim that the *disciplinati* most commonly intervened on the issue of peace, in all its meanings, holds up to scrutiny. Wherever late medieval city governments, political situations, or the social arrangement of the associations allowed it, the *disciplinati* tended to go beyond the constraints of the confraternal sphere and propose a model of peace that was not only directed at harmony and brotherly love between brethren, but also that involved the entire city. As we have seen, during the frequent episodes of social and political turbulence, they did not refrain from taking sides, especially when the influence of papal politics was felt. Furthermore, the argument that flagellant activities had different expressions and forms depending on the context and on the more or less favorable religious, ecclesiastical, and political settings in which they happened to operate is supported by written accounts.

These answers, however, generate new questions. I would like to conclude this paper with a few of them. If clear interest in peace is a given,

⁶² Bornstein, *The Bianchi of 1399*, 194.

⁶³ De Sandre Gasparini, “Confraternite e cura animarum.”

⁶⁴ Bianchi/Granuzzo, *Statuti di Verona del 1327*, libro III, posta LXXXVII, 485.

what were the results in terms of implementation? And, above all, what kept this interest alive throughout the centuries?

For the moment, these questions must go unanswered. Yet potential for further research abounds if one widens the range of sources, e.g. by looking at the more “intrinsic” documents of the associations, such as prayer books or the proceedings of confraternity gatherings. Proceedings in Perugia, for example, mention discussions taking place in the Compagnia di San Francesco because two members had not made efforts to start peace talks with the rival town of Spoleto, thus violating the statute of the association.⁶⁵ This delicate question was put into the hands of the *priori* of the three most important *disciplinati* confraternities of the town: we do not know what happened, or whether the serious decision of expelling the two powerful members of the *disciplinati* association was taken, as had occurred with a second pair of members who had quarreled and failed to make peace with one another. Surely these episodes demonstrate that the rules were actively applied and that interest in peace — both public and private — was real and capable of mobilizing the entire *disciplinati* movement.

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⁶⁵ Ardu, “Documenti attinenti,” 534–35; Nicolini, “La fraternita dei disciplinati di San Rufino,” 106; Casagrande, *Religiosità penitenziale*, 404, 407.

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