

chapels, each of which is examined individually. These are followed by an examination of the main altar, the cupola, and the parish hall. Chapter five looks at the artistic and cultural value of the decorative stonework and painting in the church while simultaneously contextualising its religious iconography and ornamentation within the larger framework of church decoration in Italy, thus moving the study beyond its local context.

This volume is an excellent chronicle of the spiritual and secular history of the confraternity and its two churches. Though the study is largely focused on the modern period, it is a fine example of the wide-ranging impact a confraternity can have in shaping the cultural, social, and artistic identity of a city over time.

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**Thelen, Emily S. (ed.) with the collaboration of Susie Speakman Sutch. *The Seven Sorrows Confraternity of Brussels. Drama, Ceremony, and Art Patronage (16th–17th Centuries)*. Turnhout: Brepols, 2015. Pp. xi, 168 + 22 b/w ill. ISBN 978-2-5035-5333-7 (paperback) Euros 45.**

The Confraternity of the Seven Sorrows of the Virgin in Brussels was part of the rapid expansion of a new devotion throughout the Low Countries in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. It both benefitted from the support of rulers and the highest echelons of local society, and at the same time had an enormous mass membership (reaching 6000 within its first year of activity). It was founded by a Chamber of Rhetoric (a literary association), and its leaders included some of the city's leading writers and artists.

Many confraternities have been studied for their patronage of art, music, or literature, but it is notable to find a study that explores a single confraternity's relationship to all three of these arts together. Confraternities touch on a wide range of specializations that are all too often examined separately. This collection of essays brings together scholars from various disciplines and eras to examine the association's relatively rich documentation from many angles. This approach not only enables fruitful comparison between its artistic, musical, and literary activities, but also encourages examination of the relationship of this artistic production to other areas of study, including religion, politics, society and economics.

After a brief introduction and chronology of the confraternity, the first two chapters examine in depth two particularly rich but complex

documents from different eras, each providing key information about the confraternity's history, including a comprehensive membership list, foundational documents, and a property inventory. The middle two chapters look at, respectively, the confraternity's role in sponsoring theatre and music. And the final three chapters look in depth at different aspects of the confraternity's patronage and use of art, ranging from practical chapel accoutrements, through popular prints (whose sale helped to raise funds), to full-scale sculptural and painted works.

The varied approaches in the collection showcase a range of interesting methodologies for using confraternal sources. For example, Brecht Dewilde and Bram Vannieuwenhuyze look at a seventeenth-century manuscript that includes a brief history of the confraternity and an inventory of its property throughout the ages not so much for its content, but rather as a window into the compiler's mind-set. They show that the written presentation of the confraternity's material goods is, itself, an exercise in history-writing that gives insight into how confraternal leaders and members understood the confraternity and its place in society. It is an approach that opens up a whole additional layer of interpretation for a source that might at first glance seem like merely a useful compilation of information.

The book was prompted in part by the recent discovery of the association's account book from 1499 to 1516. Thanks to this source, the various articles on literature, music, and art provide a peephole into the economics of culture in the early sixteenth century—how singers, artists, and writers operated and put together a living through various types of clients—and also the sociability of culture—how social networks shaped artistic production. We even get a peek into theatrical special effects, such as the hollow lance prop used to pierce the side of Christ, presumably filled with false blood. The final chapter, by Tine L. Meganck and Sabine Van Sprang, looking at a later era, does interesting work connecting the confraternity's artistic patronage to the politics of the early seventeenth-century Catholic Low Countries. Throughout, the crucial role of all three art forms in the propagation of the devotion and the ongoing vitality of the confraternity becomes apparent.

As well as providing valuable insight into this confraternity and its role in Brussels' cultural life, society, and politics, the book sets the stage for future research. The Brussels confraternity of the Seven Sorrows appears to have been a "civic" confraternity—one intended to represent the city as a whole rather than a specific group within it. So, as Susie Speakman Sutch notes in her essay, it would be interesting to investigate further its links with the elite, both at the ducal court and within Brussels' civic leadership. Another intriguing aspect for future study would be the nature of the relationship between the various Chambers of Rhetoric that

founded and supported the confraternity, and the confraternity itself. They were closely intertwined, both administratively and artistically, yet had distinct organizations and goals. Such's comments (p. 38) about the complex set of registers she carefully deciphered could easily be applied to the confraternity and its documentation as a whole: "Its investigation will remain a rewarding activity for scholars for years to come."

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**Valcke, Juliette.** *Théâtre de la Mère Folle: Dijon XVI<sup>e</sup>-XVII<sup>e</sup>.* Orléans: Éditions Paradigme, 2012. Pp. 247. ISBN 978-2-86878-291-5 (paper-back) € 33.

Juliette Valcke's book sheds light on one of France's lesser-known "confraternities": the joyful companies that were concerned not with religious devotion but with literary endeavours, in this case theatre (7). Valcke points out that, despite the great interest of scholars in French theatre from the end of the Middle Ages to the sixteenth century, the joyful companies are a phenomenon they have largely neglected (7), an omission she resolutely seeks to address. To do so, Valcke focuses on the Mère Folle of Dijon, one of the most significant of the French joyful companies, having been active from the last quarter of the fifteenth century to its closure some 150 years later (7). The Mère Folle is particularly remarkable because of its plays were bilingual, written in both French and in the local language, Burgundian (7).

Section one opens with a comprehensive history of the Mère Folle. The group was founded by Engelbert de Clèves, governor of the French Bourgogne region, who modelled the group after the Société du Fol created by Count Adophe de Clèves in 1381 (13). The joyful societies evolved from the youth-abbeyes of rural France, whose social norms and activities provided an important cultural blueprint (28–29). In this section, we also learn about the members of the Dijon company, which at its peak in the late sixteenth century had from 200 to 500 members and was comprised of men from various socio-economic backgrounds (37). The Mère Folle did not include any female members and, in fact, even the character of Mère Folle herself was portrayed by a man (37). We learn that until 1630 the Mère Folle had a dual role: on the one hand, it participated in solemn festivities in Dijon, while on the other hand it functioned as critic of its fellow citizens and local authority figures (59). For example, in 1574 the