

Confraternal Organisation in Early Modern Malta

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Summary: This article analyses how Maltese confraternities were set up, their composition and their internal organization. Most were inclusive and comprised the adult population of the parish, both males and females though a few companies were restricted to the elite or to particular craftsmen. They cooperated with each other and could even allow their members to join other companies, but they could also be great rivals. The Council of Trent had put parish priests at their head, but the brothers contested their leadership and were frequently in dispute with them. At the end of the eighteenth century the confraternal movement was in decline in Europe, but in Malta the brotherhoods remained active.

As elsewhere in the Catholic world, confraternities formed an integral part of the religious landscape of early modern Malta. They are worth studying for at least three reasons. They were a significant group that attracted a good part of the population. Here, besides practising various pious exercises, the brothers and sisters interacted with each other and thereby built a strong community. And if the Maltese had no say in the central government run by the Hospitaller Order of St John (1530–1798) they nonetheless held the reins of power in the parishes through these companies that afforded them, according to Brian Pullan, “opportunities for playing politics without disturbing the fabric of the state.”¹

This article attempts to reconstruct the confraternities’ organisational and social dynamics by looking at how they related to each other, the laity, and the clergy, as well as their recruitment and their inner divisions and activities. Unfortunately, little has been produced locally.² This article is therefore based almost entirely on the archives kept in the various parishes, though other material was also explored at the bishop’s curia in Floriana, the cathedral museum at Mdina, and the Wignacourt museum at Rabat.

Promoting the Divine Cult

A confraternity generally started when a group of devotees met informally in honour of a particular saint, the Blessed Virgin Mary, or the Blessed

¹ Pullan, *Rich and Poor in Renaissance Venice*, 99, 108.

² See, for instance, Mallia, *Il-Fratellanza tas-SS.MU Sagrament fil-Parroċċa ta’ S. M. tal-Portu Salvu il-Belt* and Calleja, *Devozzjoni u Kultura*.

Sacrament. Confraternities did not have to be authorised by the secular authorities since the faithful, as laid down by Clement VIII's constitution *Quaecumque* (7 December 1604), needed only the bishop's approval.³ The ordinary forwarded the faithful's petition to the parish priest and to the ecclesiastical court for their comments. Pastors naturally supported their flock's wish, "which promoted the divine cult and kindled devotion in their parishioners."⁴ However, when the people of Senglea in 1721 asked permission to set up the confraternity of the Blessed Virgin of Mount Carmel the bishop's assessor Don Francesco Agius remarked that there were already five confraternities in the parish and a new one would easily give rise to "confusion, discord and other inconveniences, and, what is worse, rumours and scandals." The assessor went on to say that there were already enough brotherhoods for the people to exercise their Christian piety and added that it would have been better if the brothers showed more fervour and attended the processions on Sundays when often no more than six or eight of them took part. Even so, with all these difficulties the assessor did finally recommend the establishment of a new confraternity. A devout testator had already bequeathed to it a piece of land that yielded a considerable sum of money and willed that every three years a girl from Senglea, chosen by the parish priest and the confratelli, was to be married at the altar of Our Lady of Carmel and given 60 scudi as dowry.⁵

Once their new confraternity was approved, the members asked for a side altar in the parish church at which to worship.⁶ At first, they had no need for their own oratory—that could come later—so members held their meetings in the church or in the sacristy.⁷ What was much more important for the members of the new confraternity was to have their statutes approved by the bishop so that they might earn those "indulgences and privileges granted by the popes."⁸ These statutes were like a lantern with which to walk in the way of the Lord, "leading by Divine favour to the secure harbour of eternal salvation."⁹ They were copied on a parchment and posted in a public place for all to read and to be read out to the members in Maltese so that nobody could plead ignorance to excuse offences against

³ Mombelli Castracane, "Ricerche sulla natura giuridica delle confraternite nell'età della Controriforma," 43–116. Hoffmann, *Church and Community in the Diocese of Lyon*, 105–114.

⁴ WM, *Congregazione del Sacro Cuore*, fol. 2r.

⁵ AAM, RS 4, fols. 105v–106r.

⁶ AAM, RS 1, fols. 269v–270r.

⁷ AAM, RS 5, fol. 570r; PA (Żejtun) 13, fol. 164v.

⁸ AAM, RS 5, fol. 574v. For the importance of statutes, even as religious literature, see Flynn, *Sacred Charity*, 8–11.

⁹ AAM, RS 3, fol. 11v.

the rules.¹⁰ Over time, as the statutes lost their original purpose, causing dissension and disorder, they were revised and significant amendments made for the better government of the company.¹¹

Recruitment

The statutes give some indication of the principles on which the company operated, such as its recruitment guidelines. In Malta confraternities drew their members from across the parish and not from a particular quarter. Nor is there evidence that they actively engaged in recruiting members. A Maltese searching for a brotherhood had no problem which one to approach because, generally, and contrary to the case for instance in Rome, one could be a member of more than one confraternity.¹² Although multiple memberships were common practice, rarely did one join other than the local brotherhoods since confraternities were organised on a parochial basis; they did not spill over beyond the parish's own boundaries but were pegged to the parish.¹³ Giovanni Debono, a resident at the parish of Naxxar, was therefore exceptional in being a member of the sodality of gunners (*sodalità dei cannonieri*) of Valletta.¹⁴

The various methods of recruiting provide important insights into the character of confraternities in Malta. All confraternities were for adult men and women; there seems not to have been youth confraternities on the island.¹⁵ Applicants for membership had to be at least 18 years of age.¹⁶ This was not, however, a strict regulation—underage candidates for membership in the Immacolata Concezione at the church of the Grey Friars in Valletta could join, but on condition that they paid 3 tari for every year of their minority.¹⁷ The moral standing of the applicants was much more important than their age; they were to keep the fear of God before their eyes and not dishonour the company with their bad life.¹⁸ Some confraternities expected so high a level of good conduct that they demanded a waiting or

¹⁰ San Giuseppe, Libro Consulte B, 142; AAM, RS 8, fol. 301v.

¹¹ AAM, RS 10, fols. 63v–66v; Carmine 19, fol. 4r–v.

¹² Esposito, “Men and women in Roman Confraternities”, 83–84, 87–88.

¹³ For the transformation of citywide companies in Renaissance Florence into parish-based brotherhoods in the sixteenth century see Weissman, *Ritual Brotherhood in Renaissance Florence*, 198–220.

¹⁴ PA (Naxxar), Lib. Def. 3, p. 267. On this sodality see Galea, *Il-Konfraternità tal-Bumbardieri fil-Knisja ta' Santa Barbara*.

¹⁵ For youth confraternities in Florence see Eisenbichler, *The Boys of the Archangel Raphael*.

¹⁶ WM, SS. Sacramento, Statuti, fol. 9v.

¹⁷ Immacolata Concezione 13, fol. 135v.

¹⁸ AAM, RS 12, fol. 481r.

trial period (*perseveranza*) before the novitiate. Only after this period of selection and investigation did the master of novices start overseeing the ongoing education of the applicant, coaching him on how to be a brother “not only in name but also in fact.”¹⁹ He was instructed in the central tenets of the faith and the confraternity’s statutes and devotions.²⁰ There was no time limit for the novitiate. Some novices could have their probationary period shortened because they were soon to leave Malta or “to thank him for the services which his father had rendered to the confraternity.”²¹ Novices made their final profession at different times depending on the confraternity or the situation—on the feast day of the confraternity’s patron saint, on an important other feast such as Christmas, at the discretion of the parish priest, or at the “opportune moment.”²² Novices could profess even on their death-bed on payment of 20 scudi but if they did not die, they had to complete their novitiate.²³ Candidates from the clergy could be assigned a very short novitiate or be dispensed from it altogether—Padre maestro Fra Giuseppe Zarb, for example, was accepted as a confratello on 9 January 1735 and professed that same day.²⁴ Those who were inducted “at their own pleasure” included members of the Order of St John and especially grand masters such as António Manoel de Vilhena (r. 1722–1736) who joined the Immacolata Concezione in 1728 and the Carità in 1730, or Manuel Pinto da Fonseca (r. 1741–1773) who became a confratello of the confraternity of the Carmine in 1764.²⁵

Not all novices professed because some did fall by the way. Between 1703 and 1735 ninety-eight brothers started the novitiate at the Carmine but only seventy-two (73.4%) completed it. Those who persevered were put to a secret vote by the full membership at a special meeting. With some exceptions, they were unanimously approved, having accomplished all their duties and “edified the company with their behaviour.”²⁶ Induction or profession to full membership followed next.

This rite of induction into the confraternity was full of symbolism. Every new confratello of the SS. Sacramento was given a simple habit of white linen reaching to the feet, plain and without ornaments, as an indication that he was a true follower and imitator of Christ, clean of any

¹⁹ ACM, Misc. 387, p. 32.

²⁰ San Giuseppe, Libro Consulte B, 241–242.

²¹ Carità, Libro delle Consulte 3, fols. 87v, 174r.

²² San Giuseppe, Libro Consulte B, 198; PA (Žejtun) 13, fols. 143v, 152v, 154r.

²³ Immacolata Concezione 12, fol. 41v.

²⁴ Immacolata Concezione 13, fol. 137r; Carmine 102, p. 192.

²⁵ Carmine 101, p. 129 ; Carmine 102, p. 6; Carità, Libro delle Consulte 4, fols. 136r, 170r; Immacolata Concezione 13, fol. 155r.

²⁶ S. Giuseppe. Libro Consulte B, 241–242; PA (Žejtun) 13, fol. 136r.

stain and vice. The hood that covered the face signified the mortification of all the senses and the short cape or mozzetta of crimson worn over the shoulders denoted the flame of the love of God with which the heart of every confratello should be enflamed. He was girdled with a white cord that symbolised continence and chastity, as St Thomas had been girdled by the angels. In one hand he held a torch, in the other the rosary of Our Lady, “who helps us persevere in the grace and love of God in this world and gain glory in the other.”²⁷ The brother was now a full member, as a sign of which he was embraced by the spiritual director and all the members.

Governing structure

The statutes carefully specified the confraternity’s governing structure and the duties of members. Taking Rabat’s SS. Sacramento for our guide the government was vested on a board of thirty-three members, known collectively as the *consulta privata* (private meeting). The sixteen *ufficiali maggiori* (major officials)—the rector, two assistants, two procurators to oversee the company’s affairs, a secretary, eight consultors, a book-keeper (treasurer, *depositario*), and a master of novices—were complemented by seventeen minor personnel (*ufficiali minori*) whose commitment was not as burdensome as the former’s. They included a chaplain, two choristers, a monitor, a standard-bearer, two nurses and three door-keepers. Two *nunzi* or messengers informed the brothers to attend services and kept them informed on sickness, misfortune or death among the other members. The list closed with a master or prefect of the sacristy and four sacristans.²⁸

The health of confraternities depended on having good administrators and therefore only those officials who were zealous for the honour of God, useful for the company, not quarrelsome or opinionated were chosen. Each company had its own way of choosing its officials, either by a simple or by a two-thirds majority of votes.²⁹ Minor officials could simply be proposed by the rector (governor) for the procurators, assistants and the secretary to approve them, as was the case at the Carità in Valletta.³⁰ The brothers of the SS. Sacramento at Rabat elected the *ufficiali maggiori* by drawing up three candidates for a secret vote to be held at the next meeting, when the candidate with the greatest number of votes would be the one selected.³¹

²⁷ PA (Żejtun) 13, fol. 11r–v.

²⁸ WM, SS. Sacramento, Statuti, fols. 17r–27v.

²⁹ WM, SS. Sacramento, Statuti, fol. 10r; AAM, RS 7, fol. 739r.

³⁰ Carità, Libro delle Consulte 5, pp. 9–10.

³¹ WM, SS. Sacramento, Statuti, fol. 13v.

A detailed study of office-holding at S. Giuseppe (Rabat) shows that, though in theory all members could be elected to any post, in practice the most prestigious offices were restricted to the elites. The office of rector, for instance, was dominated by the most highly qualified families. It was held once each by Don Francesco Paolo Xerri and Signor Giuseppe Abela, twice each by Rev. Canon Don Giuseppe de' Conti Preziosi and notary Gioacchino Sauron, three times by Rev. Canon Don Giuseppe Azzupardo Calleja, and four times by Signor Ferdinando Theuma Castelletti. It must be observed that these members were regularly elected to more than one position, which means, as Nicholas Terpstra observes, that they were familiar with their duties before assuming them.³² Between 1779 and 1789 Paolo Sapiano fulfilled the duties of *assistente*, *consultore*, *sagrestano*, *nunzio*, and *procuratore*. Besides, he served in the same office more than once, being five times sacristan and six times procurator for the Good Friday procession. Power therefore was not regularly circulated, but concentrated in a small number of brothers. This may have been a result of general disinterest in office-holding; in fact, in the eleven-year period 1779–1789 only ninety members served the confraternity as office-holders. But if this was a small, self-perpetuating oligarchy, offices often passing around a narrow clique of members, it does not necessarily mean that this was the result of the company's demand for a high degree of service from their members. Office-holding required time and devotion, which not everyone had at his disposal; on 28 July 1782, for example, the standard-bearer Michele Azzupardo and the crosier Paolo Camilleri were replaced by two other members because "their professions did not allow them to take an active part in the company."³³

"A Widespread Adherence"

The Catholic world was rich in confraternities and Malta was no exception. The island was covered with a dense network of lay brotherhoods, some more active than others. In 1783 there were three functioning confraternities in the tiny parish of Qrendi, which had a population of only about 700.³⁴ This suggests that these organizations were satisfying a real need, both spiritual and social.³⁵ This strong interest in lay religious organisations is also borne out by the number of new entrants year after year.

³² Terpstra, *Lay Confraternities and Civic Religion in Renaissance Bologna*, 146.

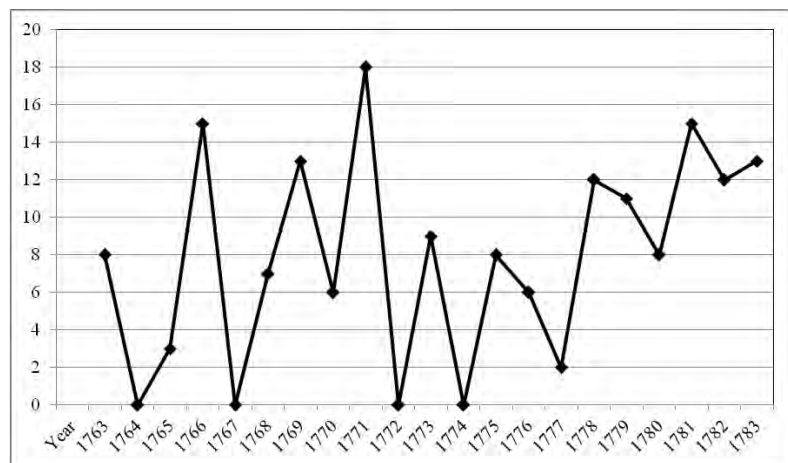
³³ S. Giuseppe, "Degli Officiali dall'Anno 1718," 104.

³⁴ AAM, PV 40, fol. 161r. A similar high participation rate for small towns is noted by Alavedra Bosch for the Spanish town of Sabadell in the sixteenth century; see his "Confraternities: the Sociability of Lay People Despite the Council of Trent," 289.

³⁵ Henderson, "Confraternities and the Church in Late Medieval Florence," 71.

Figure 1 graphs the intake of new members into the confraternity of S. Giuseppe in the parish of Rabat in 1763 to 1783; in those twenty-one years, 166 new members were admitted, for an average of 7.9 members per year. This number fluctuated widely but if in some years recruitment was negligible it climbed again in other years, the highest being 1771 when the company enlisted eighteen new brothers.

Graph 1
Number of professed brothers at S. Giuseppe, Rabat, 1763–1783



Source: Libro Consulte B (1761–1784).

This widespread adherence was helped by the fact that Maltese confraternities did not have a limit on their membership, unlike the Bourras of Marseilles which had a *numerus clausus* of seventy-two members in honour of Christ's disciples.³⁶ Nor were they generally class conscious so that social distinctions were not clearly drawn. An undated matriculation list of Żejtun's SS. Rosario registered priests, a physician, ladies, gentlemen and even Maria, the slave of the Bonnicis, besides the commoners.³⁷ In fact, most of the Maltese companies, as Giovanna Casagrande observes for medieval Italy,³⁸ drew on a wide social base and exhibited an egalitarian spirit, welcoming both the wise and the simple. They recruited at large

³⁶ Barnes, "Cliques and Participation: Organizational Dynamics in the Penitents Bourras," 26.

³⁷ Calculated from data in PA (Żejtun) 65—'Libro Originale ove si notano li nomi e cognomi delli Fratelli del SS.^{mo} Rosario eretto nella Chiesa Parle. del Żejtun sotto titolo di S. Catarina Vergine, e Martire. incominciando l'anno del Sig.^{re} 1743'.

³⁸ Casagrande, "Confraternite senza barriere? Un 'viaggio' tra casi ed esempi," 1–30.

from the population and anybody could join, “of whatever state and sex.”³⁹ The S. Giuseppe statutes at St Nicholas’ Siggiewi compared the company to a huge tree reaching to the skies under which all persons sheltered “without exception of sex, age, condition or state.”⁴⁰ The only requirements that might have made admission beyond the reach of the very poor were, perhaps, the entrance fee, the annual donation (*annualità*), and the contribution to the cost of the candles (*cassa delle torcie*).

Nevertheless, if most confraternities accepted members of different social orders, distinctions around class were quite significant in a few others. The elitist confraternity of the Carmine, characterised by numerous legacies, restricted membership to persons of independent means and was known for its elite members: notaries, painters like Giuseppe Darena and Giovanni Nicola Buhagiar, goldsmiths, judges, for instance “Illustrissimo Signor D. Epifanio Zammit”, nobles and surgeons.⁴¹ Knights were especially welcomed since they bestowed honour to the confraternity and reaffirmed the company’s ties with the government.⁴² Perhaps these exclusive companies were sensitive to social hierarchy and excluded people with lowly jobs from joining because, as the statutes of the confraternity of S. Luigi Gonzaga at the Carmelite church at Valletta put it, “People of low condition are not to be enrolled because they are quarrelsome and almost always bring dissension to the societies they join.”⁴³

Other confraternities were specialised craft companies; these included tailors (confraternità di Sant Homo Bono),⁴⁴ goldsmiths and silversmiths (sodalità degli orefici ed argentieri), blacksmiths (sodalità dei ferrari)⁴⁵ and shoemakers (sodalità di SS. Crispino e Crispiniano).⁴⁶ These all assembled at the parish church of St Paul’s in Valletta, but a confraternity of shoemakers⁴⁷ and another of carpenters⁴⁸ were also to be found at Rabat. These companies were confraternities as well as trade guilds; the rector, who issued licences of master craftsmen to the apprentices, was also the consul of the trade.⁴⁹ They were both religious and secular organisations

³⁹ WM, Sagro Cuore, fol. 2v.

⁴⁰ AAM, RS 6, fol. 223r–v.

⁴¹ Carmine 102, pp. 1, 16, 30, 33, 35, 88, 204, respectively; Carmine 107, pp. 13, 85–86.

⁴² Carmine 107, pp. 91–92.

⁴³ AAM, RS 12, fol. 481r.

⁴⁴ AAM, RS 2, fols. 383r–388r.

⁴⁵ ACM, Misc. 236, fol. 1r–v. A similar confraternity existed also at the church of the Grey Friars in Valletta. See AAM, RS 9, fol. 1189r.

⁴⁶ AAM, RS 9, fols. 25r–26r.

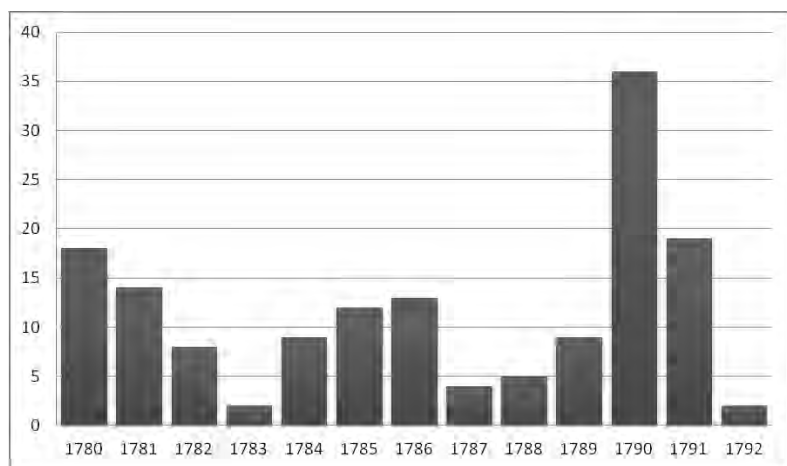
⁴⁷ AAM, RS 1, fols. 25v–26r.

⁴⁸ S. Giuseppe. Quinterno delle Cose Spettanti all’Arciconfraternita di S. Giuseppe, 6.

⁴⁹ See AAM, RS 12, fol. 555r–v. WM, Confraternità SS. Crispino e Crispiniano (1775–1809).

and overlapped in their structure, members, and rules, though which came first is difficult to say.⁵⁰

Graph 2
Recruitment of consorelle at the B.V. del Carmine, 1780–1792



Source: B. V. del Carmine 44 (*Consorelle*).

Consorelle

Another factor that encouraged parishioners to join was the fact that Maltese confraternities harboured no sexual barriers. Trent had enclosed nuns within the convents,⁵¹ but women could still express their religiosity as tertiaries (*bizocche*)⁵² and inside conservatories⁵³ and especially as members of confraternities. Unlike the *scuole grandi* of Venice, most Maltese confraternities did not shut lay women out but admitted both sexes; their statutes considered women's presence normal. There was no need, therefore, for women to demonstrate in front of some male

⁵⁰ Le Bras, *Études de Sociologie Religieuse*, 2:436–437.

⁵¹ Schroeder, *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, 220–221.

⁵² Esposito, "I gruppi bizzoccali a Roma nel '400 e le sorores de poenitentia agostiniane," 157–88. Hartdegen, "Third Orders", 93–96. For how de Paul's Daughters of Charity managed to escape enclosure, see Dinan, "Confraternities as a Venue for Female Activism during the Catholic Reformation," 191–214.

⁵³ For the Conservatorio Sagnani set up in 1742 see Ciappara, *The Roman Inquisition in Enlightened Malta*, 53.

confraternity to let them join.⁵⁴ As graph 2 illustrates, between 1780 and 1792 the Carmine company recruited an average of eleven women every year. Between 1740 and 1750 the SS. Crocefisso located at the conventual church of the Minims in Valletta enrolled twenty women.⁵⁵ Żejtun's SS. Sacramento started accepting female members in 1740 and continued recruiting consorelle regularly: 17 in 1772, 12 in 1773, 21 in 1774 and 6 in 1775.⁵⁶ An undated membership list of the SS. Rosario in the same parish, broken down into male and female, contains the names of 966 men (51.7%) and 901 women (48.3%).⁵⁷ Women's participation is also noted in the Immacolata Concezione of Valletta, even if they are all either wives of confratelli⁵⁸ or nuns from the monastery of S. Caterina.⁵⁹

Involvement in mixed-gender confraternities gave women the opportunity to care for their spiritual salvation as well as to socialise. Nevertheless, they played a secondary role in confraternal life.⁶⁰ The study of the situation in Malta strengthens the view that women's presence in confraternities was suspended "between mere presence and real worth."⁶¹ Women were members on the margins and were not admitted on equal terms with men. They did not wear a robe as did male members and did not attend the general meetings. It was the male *consulta privata* that decided on their admission and fixed the day of the ceremony. This difference between the sexes is also evident in the number of masses said for one's soul. In 1777 the Immacolata Concezione in Valletta offered fifty requiem masses for men but only forty for women.⁶² The *statuti*, composed by men, made it very clear that women were to concern themselves only with confraternal piety—prayers, processions, requiems, feasts, and communion.⁶³ Women's role in the confraternity reflected their domestic duties at home; for example, they were to ensure that the "altars of our church are provided with clean coverings, purificators, corporals, and other necessary

⁵⁴ For one such case see Terpstra, "Women in the Brotherhood: Gender, Class, and Politics in Renaissance Bolognese Confraternities," 193–212.

⁵⁵ Vassallo, "The Crucifix Confraternities," Table 1, p. 51.

⁵⁶ PA (Żejtun) 13, p. 3.

⁵⁷ Calculated from data in PA (Żejtun) 65.

⁵⁸ One exception was *Signora* Cleria Ciara, who in 1662 was accepted for her "good qualities": Immacolata Concezione 12, fol. 41r.

⁵⁹ Immacolata Concezione 13, fol. 81r.

⁶⁰ Weissman, *Ritual Brotherhood*, 212–213; Flynn, "Rituals of Solidarity in Castilian Confraternities," 61–62.

⁶¹ Casagrande, "Confraternities and Lay Female Religiosity in Late Medieval and Renaissance Umbria," 65.

⁶² Immacolata Concezione 13, fol. 81r; Immacolata Concezione 14, p. 76.

⁶³ Zardin, "Le Confraternite in Italia Settentrionale fra XV e XVIII Secolo," 96.

vestments" for public worship.⁶⁴ They mended the altar cloths, washed and repaired vestments, swept the chapel or oratory, provided flowers, and dressed and adorned the patron saint with their handiwork.⁶⁵

Nicholas Terpstra has suggested that this minor position of women was due to the fact that confraternities were governed on the model of artisanal guilds in which women played no administrative part.⁶⁶ Terpstra also proposes that the masculine character of confraternities reflected men's fear that women led them into temptation and sin.⁶⁷ Confirmation of these hypotheses comes from the confraternity of the SS. Viatico at St Mary's church in Mosta; the sisters could accompany the Viaticum only in daytime and not at night because it was deemed indecent for them to be outside after sunset. They were relegated to positions of spectators and acquired more merits if they prayed for the infirm with "angelic modesty" at home and "hung lights and lanterns from the windows" as the Viaticum passed by.⁶⁸

This lowly position of women is also substantiated by the few cases of sororities. The consorelle of the SS. Crocefisso, who every January elected their own head or prioress together with two councillors, were separate from the men's company of the same name, but were subordinate to the men's rector and his two assistants, who ran the entire confraternity. Ultimate authority lay with the men. The Compagnia dell'Agonia in Tarxien might possibly offer an exception since it was initially composed of women, *solamente alcune femmine*, but it must have been no more than a loosely structured group without statutes. When in 1674 it became a fully-fledged confraternity the men excluded women from the decision-making process and the administration of the confraternity.⁶⁹

"Sowing Darnel"

The confratelli were supposed to maintain peace with one another and not forget that they were "brothers in Christ." No legal suits, for instance, could be filed against another member of the confraternity. The prologue

⁶⁴ ACM, Misc. 387, pp. 58–60.

⁶⁵ For the marginal role of women see Esposito, "Men and Women in Roman Confraternities", 93–97. See also Lazar, *Working in the Vineyard of the Lord*, 60, 79. That women's roles lay primarily in the family and the domestic sphere see Cavallo, *Charity and Power in Early Modern Italy*, 154 and Farr, "The Pure and Disciplined Body: Hierarchy, Morality and Symbolism in France During the Catholic Reformation," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 21.3 (1991), 391–414.

⁶⁶ Terpstra, "Women in the Brotherhood," 195.

⁶⁷ Terpstra, *Lay Confraternities*, 123. Terpstra, *The Politics of Ritual Kingship*, 53.

⁶⁸ AAM, RS 5, fol. 722v.

⁶⁹ AAM, RS 1, fol. 541r. AAM, RS 2, fols. 350r–351v.

to the statutes of the Sodalità dell'Anime in Valletta voiced the guiding principle that if ever a confratello quarrels with another, the two of them should not go to sleep before resolving their differences.⁷⁰ However, as in Zamora (Spain),⁷¹ the reality fell short of the ideal in practice; in fact, notwithstanding these warnings, confraternity minutes reveal that a sense of fellowship was not always maintained within the companies, to the extent that a brother would be described as “a disturber of the company and a rebel who sowed darnel.”⁷² If the public face of confraternities was pious and charitable, its private face was lack of discipline. There are references to “discord, revolts, scandals” and to members shouting obscenities in anger and calling each other liars.⁷³ “One can easily imagine,” Louis Châtellier observes, “the discussions, and the sometimes heated proposals and counter-proposals during meetings.”⁷⁴

Not even the rector would be spared. In 1727 Don Francesco Allegritto, the secretary of the Carità of Valletta, “ill-treated the rector with injurious, contemptuous and indecent words.”⁷⁵ The brothers could even contest the rector’s right to hold meetings at the time and day he wanted and he could be hailed before the general council to render an account of his administration.⁷⁶ At Rabat in 1784 five S. Giuseppe brothers led by Gaetano Pace presented a “vulgar and an insolent report full of falsehoods” to the bishop against the election of Rev. Canon Calleja as rector. Wishing “peace and good harmony among the members,” Calleja went to see Pace at his home to hear his complaints, but to no avail. The consultor Don Pietro Ellul suggested that they should be expelled if they did not belie themselves in the oratory. The five did not turn up, but instead presented a memorial in which they humbly asked to be reintegrated, which they were on 25 July.⁷⁷

The confraternities, in fact, had within themselves the mechanism for the composition of disputes with which to welcome the repentant members back (*aggraziati*) after they had been “sufficiently humiliated” (*bastantemente mortificati*).⁷⁸ This was necessary because members not only fell short in their brotherly love, but also failed to attend diligently to their

⁷⁰ AAM, RS 4, fol. 409Av.

⁷¹ Flynn, *Sacred Charity*, 39–43.

⁷² Carmine 102, p. 209.

⁷³ Immacolata Concezione 14, pp. 90–92.

⁷⁴ Châtellier, *The Europe of the Devout*, 122.

⁷⁵ Carità, Libro delle Consulte 4, fols. 110v–111r.

⁷⁶ Carmine 19, fols. 6r–10v, “Relazione riguardo il Metodo nel tenere le Consulte della V.da Confraternità di N. S. del Carmine.”

⁷⁷ San Giuseppe, Libro Consulte B, 272–278, 282–285.

⁷⁸ San Giuseppe, Libro Consulte B, 184–185.

duties. On 5 January 1736 the secretary of the Carmine recorded that “there are many brothers who almost never attend the functions in the oratory.”⁷⁹ Sometimes no quorum was reached and the few brothers who did attend returned home.⁸⁰ In 1748 the procurator of Żejtun’s Confraternità della Carità reported to Bishop Paolo Alphéran de Bussan (1728–1757) that the company was almost defunct because members never turned up for meetings.⁸¹ Between 1769 and 1770 thirty-six confratelli of the SS. Sacramento at the same parish did not attend the funerals of fellow members; twenty-one had absented themselves only once but others were regular absentees, the worst being Giovanni Darmanin with ten absences.⁸²

The only members who were granted exemption from attending the company’s engagements were the *giubilati*, that is, the aged or the sick, and individuals who were granted special exceptions, such as Captain Mattheolo Corbelli, a member of the Carità of Valletta, who was exempted in 1702 when he went corsairing.⁸³ Those who showed no valid reason for their absences were fined, deprived of their office or of “active and passive voice” for a set period of time, often a year.⁸⁴ They could be made to start the noviciate again or, an example of ritual shaming, to kneel in the middle of the oratory and kiss the floor.⁸⁵ Those who did not pay their yearly dues (*annualità*) could be deprived of suffrages after their death.⁸⁶ And those who failed to pay for the torches marched in processions with their arms crossed (*con le mani legate*). Those who did not keep vigilance of the Holy Sacrament during the Forty Hours devotion (*Quarant’ore*) paid in kind, ½ *rotolo* of wax.⁸⁷ In 1747 Michele Grima, who had challenged another brother to a duel, was sentenced to kiss the feet of the confratelli.⁸⁸

A few confratelli were permanently excluded because they had committed serious infractions, such as if they left the island without permission.⁸⁹ They had their name struck off the list of the brothers (*cancellato*

⁷⁹ Carmine 102, p. 192.

⁸⁰ PA (Żejtun) 15, unnumbered.

⁸¹ AAM, RS 6, fol. 387r–v.

⁸² PA (Żejtun) 37 “Annualità”. PA (Żejtun) 254, pp. 58–59.

⁸³ Carità, Libro delle Consulte 3, fols. 124r, 102v.

⁸⁴ Carmine 19, fols. 32r–34v; San Giuseppe Consulte B, 178; AAM, RS 11, fol. 209r–v.

⁸⁵ Carmine 102, p. 11; PA (Żejtun) 15, unnumbered.

⁸⁶ Carmine 103, p. 85. In 1782 Don Agostino Psaila was exempted from paying for having made several sermons gratis to the Carità. See Carità, Libro delle Consulte 5, p. 357.

⁸⁷ Carmine 102, p. 97.

⁸⁸ Vassallo, “The Crucific Confraternities,” 67–68.

⁸⁹ Carità, Libro delle Consulte 3, fol. 125v. For a copy of such a “patente a chi delli nostri fratelli dimanderà la licenza per andar a qualche luogo o terra” see Carità, Statuto (1710–1720), 90–91.

dal rollo dei fratelli) and, written on a piece of paper, burnt in *pubblica consulta*, signifying their “infamous death” (*morte infame*).⁹⁰ Expulsion seems to have been the only way a brother left the company since rarely would a confratello leave of his own accord. One such exception was Nicolò Camilleri; when, on 11 January 1789, he was sentenced to kneel during the recitation of the rosary he burst into rage and exclaimed that he did not care to remain a brother of the Carità.⁹¹

A Spirit of Autonomy

The council of Trent sought to reform confraternities mainly in two ways: first, the conviviality associated with banquets was replaced with more devotion and, second, confraternities were placed under the strict authority of the bishops, who were authorised to review their accounts and administration.⁹² Post-Tridentine synods reinforced these requirements at the diocesan level and made the local pastor the head or rector of the companies.⁹³ He was given as much power over the parish as the bishop over the diocese and “for this indisputable reason no [...] confraternities can be set up without the clause *sine pregiudizio iurium parochialum*.”⁹⁴ The parish priest helped the brothers draft the statutes, cast two votes at elections, nominated one of the two procurators, kept one of the three keys to the coffer where the money was kept, and every new member professed in his hands.⁹⁵ He also celebrated scheduled masses and funerals, for which he was paid. The statutes of San Giuseppe at St Mary’s church in Mosta (1765) clearly stated that “the brothers could spend nothing without his knowledge, nor introduce any novelty or accept or exclude any confratello without his consent.”⁹⁶

This was the Counter-Reformation’s ideal that Carlo Borromeo, following in the footsteps of Gian Matteo Giberti (1495–1543), bishop of Verona, propagated—confraternities were parochial associations under the authority of the parish priest.⁹⁷ That said, however, these companies

⁹⁰ Carmine 102, pp. 11, 32; Immacolata Concezione 13, fol. 90v.

⁹¹ Carità, Libro delle Consulte 5, pp. 439–440.

⁹² Schroeder, *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, 157.

⁹³ Cocco Palmerio, *Synodus*, 133–136.

⁹⁴ AAM, RS 3, fol. 682v.

⁹⁵ AAM, RS 4, fol. 243v; Carità, Libro delle Consulte 4, fol. 43r–v; PA (Attard), SS. Rosario, fol. 130r; AAM, RS 8, fols. 498v–501r; PA (Žejtun) 338, p. 14.

⁹⁶ AAM, RS 8, fol. 305v.

⁹⁷ On this topic see Zardin, “Riscrivere la tradizione. Il mondo delle confraternite nella cornice del rinnovamento cattolico cinque-seicentesco,” 194. He criticises Prosperi, *Il Concilio di Trento: una introduzione storica*, 115.

exhibited in Malta, as in other Catholic countries, a keen sense of autonomy and were far from being submissive to their parish priests.⁹⁸ As Gabriel Le Bras pointed out, “the history of these conflicts occupies a great place in the annals of the parishes.”⁹⁹ William Christian Jr. cites a parish priest in Toledo who complained bitterly that “with so many brotherhoods, the laymen are in such firm control that they order the priests around as if they were day-labourers.”¹⁰⁰ It must be emphasised, though, that this discord did not signify, as John Bossy claims, that confraternities were a parish within the parish.¹⁰¹ Generally speaking, confraternities collaborated closely with the pastor in cultivating the devotional practices of the parishioners.¹⁰²

In short, relations between priest and confraternity were not necessarily quarrelsome. The companies donated their share for building the parsonage and the sacristy or for buying clerical vestments.¹⁰³ In 1782 the canons of St Paul’s in Valletta and members of the Carità jointly organized the Forty Hours devotion held during the three days of carnival;¹⁰⁴ and on 30 November 1790 the two sides signed a six-point agreement to bring their differences to an end, “so necessary in the house of God.”¹⁰⁵ The SS. Sacramento in Żejtun had excellent relations with Don Andrea Xuereb (1743–1769). He accepted their request to build an oratory and they in turn consented to his condition that aside from the door giving on to the main street there was to be another entrance connecting the confraternity with the church and that he was to keep the keys of both doors.¹⁰⁶ As a sign

⁹⁸ Gutton, “Confraternities, *Curés* and Communities in Rural Areas of the Diocese of Lyons under the Ancien Régime,” 202–211. For Bologna see Prodi, *Il Cardinale Gabriele Paleotti (1522–1597)*, 2:188–189. For the claim that “the Tridentine ideal was usually well beyond full-scale implementation in Malta” see Ciappara, “Trent and the Clergy in Late Eighteenth-Century Malta,” 1–25.

⁹⁹ Le Bras, *Études de Sociologie Religieuse* 2:454–462. See also Zardin, “Beyond Crises: Confraternities in Modern Italy between the Church and Lay Society,” 331–351. Garrioch, “La persistance des confréries Milanaises,” 61, 64–65. Tackett, *Priest and Parish in Eighteenth-Century France*, 200–202.

¹⁰⁰ Christian Jr., *Local Religion in Sixteenth-Century Spain*, 166.

¹⁰¹ Bossy, “The Counter-Reformation and the People of Catholic Europe,” 53; Bossy, *Christianity in the West*.

¹⁰² Ciappara, “The Parish Community in Eighteenth-Century Malta,” 671–94. On the relationship of confraternities and the Tridentine Church, and especially with the priests hired to celebrate mass in the confraternity, see Eisenbichler, *The Boys of the Archangel Raphael*, chapt. 7.

¹⁰³ AAM, RS 6, fols. 561v–563v; Carità, Libro delle Consulte 4, fols. 28v, 43v.

¹⁰⁴ Carità, Libro delle Consulte 5, pp. 359, 362.

¹⁰⁵ Carità, Libro delle Consulte 5, pp. 582–586, 655. NAV, Not. Alessandro Patrizio Spiteri, R 445 / 7, fols. 358r–366r, 30 Nov. 1790.

¹⁰⁶ AAM, RS 6, fols. 159r–160v.

of this friendship at his death the confratelli paid for extra high masses for his soul on top of the usual suffrages.¹⁰⁷

Yet, alongside these cases that demonstrate how confraternities did not operate free of clerical influence, there are many other cases that reveal that the authority of the parish priest was contested.¹⁰⁸ Some of the difficulties arose from the fact that confraternities could function without rules long after their foundation, governed “according to tradition” (*per traditionem*) or “in the blind” (*alla cieca*).¹⁰⁹ To take one extreme example: the SS. Sacramento in the church of St Philip in Żebbuġ (Città Rohan) had been set up in 1575 but presented its statutes to be approved by the ecclesiastical court only in 1777.¹¹⁰ As Matthew Thomas Sneider has observed for the companies in San Giovanni in Persiceto, Bologna, relations between the two sides were often characterised by dissension.¹¹¹ Parish priests were anxious to protect their jurisdiction while confraternities contested the hierarchy’s attempt to centralise, claiming that “priests were their chaplains and not their masters.”¹¹² Symbolic of this animosity was the petition mounted by the brothers of the Carità in Valletta in 1721 to expel the parish priest from the confraternity or, at least, to deprive him of the right to vote.¹¹³

Brothers claimed they had the right to choose their own spiritual director and to hold their meetings in his absence.¹¹⁴ However, most differences generally arose over financial matters, parish priests being apprehensive lest the liturgical services of the confraternities interfered with those in the parish church to the detriment of their financial interest.¹¹⁵ In 1784 all the confraternities at St George’s Qormi demanded that the parish priest pay for the clergy who came from outside the parish to confess the people on feast days.¹¹⁶ The parish priest Don Gaetano Palma (1770–1793) won his case this time, but he overreached himself in 1778 when he claimed the right to choose the two girls for the Cascun marriage legacy. He refused to give communion to the brothers and expelled them when they assembled

¹⁰⁷ (PA) Żejtun 13, p. 21

¹⁰⁸ Ciappara, “Parish Priest and Community in 18th-Century Malta,” 329–347.

¹⁰⁹ AAM, RS 9, fols. 717r–718v. AAM, RS 5, fol. 789v.

¹¹⁰ AAM, RS 10, fol. 57v.

¹¹¹ Sneider, “Sacred Territory, Sacred Brotherhood: Confraternities in the Bolognese Contado,” 15–20.

¹¹² Zardin, “Relaunching Confraternities in the Tridentine era,” 190–209. Black, “Confraternities and the Parish in the Context of Italian Catholic Reform,” 1–26.

¹¹³ Carità, Libro delle Consulte 4, fols. 47v–48v.

¹¹⁴ AAM, RS 3, fols. 682r–685v.

¹¹⁵ AAM, RS 9, fol. 1168r–v.

¹¹⁶ AAM, RS 10, fols. 681v–683v.

in the sacristy for the election.¹¹⁷ The bishop's assessor admonished him that the brothers were only following the testator's conditions and so the priest had to back down.¹¹⁸

Confraternities were powerful corporations, with connections and patrimony. It was dangerous to quarrel with them and parish priests could pay dearly for taking them on. Take the case of Don Giovanni Battista Crispo of Cospicua (1728–1758), a man accused by the parishioners of being avaricious and interested only in grabbing all he could.¹¹⁹ In 1744 he reached an agreement with the SS. Crocefisso over several points, especially over payments he received for funerals and sermons, but by 1753 they were at loggerheads again so that the brothers paid him no surplice fees when they acted as godparents in baptism.¹²⁰ At St Philip's the people, led by the brothers of the SS. Sacramento, resented Don Giuseppe Marco Azzopardi (1741–1762) so much that they exhumed his body from the presbytery where he had wished to be buried and carried it to the choir where priests were interred. Don Francesco Maria Xuereb (1769–1801) of Żejtun also faced defeat at the hands of the same confraternity; the confratelli did not want him to rule over them, so they locked the church and did not allow him to enter. Eventually a coadjutor was appointed till he died in 1801.¹²¹

The strained relations confraternities sometime had with the diocesan clergy were echoed in their differences with the religious.¹²² Convent and confraternity did not always develop close relationship, even though brothers could contribute to a new bell or a new pulpit or to repair a chasuble, the organ, or the roof of the church.¹²³ The confratelli frequently complained of the “insults” they suffered at the hands of the friars and even threatened to take them to court.¹²⁴ Financial matters were again the cause of dissension. The friars unilaterally raised the “cost of the masses” and, like the parish priests, demanded that confraternities did not appoint any other preachers but

¹¹⁷ AAM, Dicta 27, no. 24 and AAM, RS 10, fols. 344v–345v. Forty brothers, including the rector, notarized the election of the two girls, Anna Mizzi and Antonia Bonavia. NAV, Not. Paolo Camilleri, R 138 / 6, fols. 591v–593r, 25 Dec. 1778.

¹¹⁸ “Two of the poorest girls of Città Pinto elected by the confraternity's *procuratore* and his successors, independently of the parish priest.” For Cascun's will see NAV, Not. Tomaso Magri, R 308 / 56, fols. 14r–21v, 8 Sept. 1774.

¹¹⁹ ACM, Misc. 24, fols. 70r, 431v–432r.

¹²⁰ AAM, RS 6, fols. 154r–157r; AAM, RS 7, fols. 764r–765r.

¹²¹ For the incident see Ciappara, “Parish Priest and Confraternity,” 3–14.

¹²² On this topic, Terpstra, “Confraternities and Mendicant Orders,” 1–22.

¹²³ Carità, Libro delle Consulte 4, fol. 97v; Immacolata Concezione 12, fol. 118v; Carmine 24, fol. 126r.

¹²⁴ Carmine 23, p. 362; Carmine 102, p. 82

them.¹²⁵ In 1647 the Dominicans of Valletta, having allowed the Rosarianti to meet on their premises, claimed for themselves the legacies left to the company.¹²⁶ In 1752 they also demanded, besides a key of the confraternity's oratory, a financial report from the confraternity and for the brothers to pay for various liturgical services, including the Christmas novena.¹²⁷

Matters could reach such an impasse that the confratelli left their oratory for some other church. The confraternity of S. Vincenzo Ferreri, based at the same Dominican convent in Valletta, was created in 1744 but the following year quarrelled with the friars "to the great detriment of the congregation and the convent." The brothers claimed the right to collect alms during high mass and opposed the friars' demand to be paid for the singing of lauds and that a *padre procuratore* audit the finances of the company every year.¹²⁸ By 1749 relations seem to have improved because the confratelli allowed the friars to hold administrative posts in the sodality,¹²⁹ but in 1762 the brothers refused to honour their promise to contribute their share for the building of the sacristy. In retaliation, the *padre sacrestano* restricted their access to the oratory, forbidding them to pass through the convent on their way to do their spiritual exercises on Tuesday night after the Ave Maria. The brothers left the oratory and went to the nearby dell'Anime church, where they found that the cupboards in which they kept their vestments had been closed with bars.¹³⁰ In another case from 1760, the confratelli of Rabat's San Giuseppe clashed with the Minims over the choice of preachers, the collection of alms in church, and the "cost" of sung masses. As a result they held the Christmas novena as well as the feast of their patron saint at St Paul's parish church while they moved to the chapel of S. Maria ta' Doni for their spiritual exercises. Peace was reached only after three years. On 10 April 1763 the brothers came in procession from the ta' Doni church to the convent of the Minims, where they were welcomed by the friars holding lighted candles in their hands. The *Te Deum* was sung as well as the antiphon *Joseph Fili David* while the ceremony ended with the guardian father shouting, "Viva San Giuseppe."¹³¹

¹²⁵ Immacolata Concezione 13, fols. 39v, 40v; Immacolata Concezione 14, p. 69. In 1731 the confratelli of the Carmine won their case against the prior of the convent when they appealed to the Venda. Congregazione dei Vescovi e Regolari. Carmine 130, pp. 125–126.

¹²⁶ Montanaro, *Storia della Ven.da Arciconfraternità del SS.mo Rosario e della Misericordia*, 29–33.

¹²⁷ Montanaro, *Storia della Ven.da Arciconfraternità del SS.mo Rosario e della Misericordia*, 44–55.

¹²⁸ AAM, RS 6, fols. 194v–200r.

¹²⁹ AAM, RS 6, fols. 455r–456r.

¹³⁰ AIM, AC 526, fols. 133r–143v.

¹³¹ S. Giuseppe, Libro Consulte B, 2–6, 22–34.

“So Many Dissensions”

Confraternities could share the same vestments, the same chapel, or oratory.¹³² They held liturgical services together, participated in each other's funeral masses, titular feasts, and processions, as well as provided candles for each other's altars.¹³³ All the confraternities at St George's Qormi in 1775 signed a notarized agreement to buy eighteen bronze *mascoli*, weighing 8¼ rotoli, with which to fire petards during their feasts.¹³⁴ Even so, despite this solidarity they were great rivals and often feuded. These unpleasant dissensions make the constitutions of Valletta's SS. Crocefisso truly exceptional; they urged the members to seek the most humble places and reject worldly honour.¹³⁵

Most confraternities, however, shunned humility and sought precedence.¹³⁶ Disputes over processional order were especially widespread.¹³⁷ In a case from 1750 Rabat's confraternity of the Holy Sacrament petitioned the bishop to acknowledge its precedence over the other brotherhoods of the parish. In his reply, dated 6 June 1751, the pro-vicar general denied the request saying that the Holy Sacrament had been set up only in 1664, that is after S. Giuseppe, the SS. Rosario, and S. Antonio Abbate, and added that S. Giuseppe was already in existence in 1345 when its members accompanied the Viaticum to the sick.¹³⁸

The SS. Sacramento, being generally the first to be established, disturbed the peace of other parishes. At Żejtun its confratelli claimed that only they had the right to stay in the presbytery. How violent this controversy could be, “causing so many dissensions and disturbances,”¹³⁹ is illustrated by an incident on the feast of St Catherine's in 1755. Don Alberto Abela assaulted the rector and a confratello of the SS. Rosario when they occupied this reserved place. The priest threw one of them to the ground while the other had the torch that he held in his hand seized and broken

¹³² PA (Żejtun) 254, p. 68; ACM, Misc. 236, fol. 1r–v; Carmine 101, p. 136; Carità, Libro delle Consulte 5, p. 66.

¹³³ AAM, RS 8, fol. 78r; Immacolata Concezione 13, fol. 75r; AAM, RS 6, fol. 223v; Carità, Libro delle Consulte 4, fols. 35v–36r, 32r; Carmine 107, pp. 12–13.

¹³⁴ AAM, RS 9, fol. 1069r.

¹³⁵ ACM, Misc. 387, p. 61.

¹³⁶ WM, SS. Sacramento 4, p. 10.

¹³⁷ AAM, RS 1, fol. 457r–v.

¹³⁸ WM, SS. Sacramento 1, pp. 5–10. On this thorny problem see Azzopardi, “400 Sena ta' Storja (1575–1975),” 8–14.

¹³⁹ AIM, AC 507, fols. 191r–192r.

to pieces.¹⁴⁰ The two confraternities clashed again in 1771 when the SS. Sacramento demanded that the high mass on the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary should be sung at the high altar and not at the chapel of the SS. Rosario. The bishop rejected their demand and declined to go against a custom practised since time immemorial and which “excited the devotion of the people towards Our Lady.”¹⁴¹ In another incident from 1773 the procurator of the SS. Sacramento protested when the SS. Rosario claimed, contrary to the decrees of the synod of Bishop Cocco Palmieri (1648–1711), that the blessing of the candles on Candlemas Day should be held in their chapel and not at the high altar.¹⁴²

This rivalry and temper with which the confraternities defended their independence was reflected also in the common dispute that arose over the right to hold the baldachin under which the host was processed.¹⁴³ At St Nicholas’ Siggiewi matters became so bitter that in 1779 the parish priest petitioned the bishop to allow the baldachin to be carried only by priests.¹⁴⁴ Brotherhoods also obstinately refused to take orders from each other. The confratelli of Żejtun’s SS. Sacramento, for example, did take part in the procession of the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross on 3 May 1768, but not on orders from the Sodalità dell’Agonia that organised the procession but “simply as veneration towards the holy cross.”¹⁴⁵ In a case from 1725 the same company at St Dominic’s claimed that the other brotherhoods of Valletta should take part in the Corpus Christi procession which it organised. They not only refrained from attending but they also appointed a procurator in Malta and another one in Rome to defend their cause. It would have been a moment of triumph for the SS. Sacramento if they attended, but the other companies would not let them enjoy it.¹⁴⁶

Conclusion

By the late eighteenth century confraternities in Europe were being undermined by new simple forms of Muratorian devotion and by the centralising efforts of the state.¹⁴⁷ These institutions, associated with baroque piety, were

¹⁴⁰ He took refuge in the oratory of the confraternity but then on 19 Dec. 1755 he presented himself at the bishop’s prisons and was suspended *a divinis*. See AAM, Dicta 25, no. 7.

¹⁴¹ AAM, RS 10, fol. 54v.

¹⁴² Palmieri, *Synodus Dioecessana*, 111, 135–136.

¹⁴³ Carità, Libro delle Consulte 4, fol. 11v; AAM, RS 2, fol. 69r–v; AAM, RS 10, fols. 286v–287r.

¹⁴⁴ AAM, RS 10, fol. 334r–v.

¹⁴⁵ PA (Żejtun) 39 “Notamenti Diversi” (1 May 1768); PA (Żejtun) 13, pp. 85–87.

¹⁴⁶ Carmine 102, pp. 112, 123, 304.

¹⁴⁷ Ludovico Antonio Muratori (1672–1750) was an Italian parish priest and historian who pressed for a simple form of religion. His book *Della regolata divozione de’ cristiani* was the

little compatible with modernity as understood by the Enlightenment.¹⁴⁸ In 1785 Grand Duke Peter Leopold suppressed them in Tuscany, leaving just one company in every parish; the same happened the next year in the Habsburg empire, while in France they were abolished in 1792, their property being put up for sale.¹⁴⁹

Table 1
Recruitment by Crucifix Confraternities, 1790–1798

Year	Cospicua	Valletta	Vittoriosa	Total
1790	6	11	25	42
1791	4	8	29	41
1792	5	10	15	30
1793	6	12	7	25
1794	10	12	14	36
1795	7	11	1	19
1796	5	3	8	16
1797	7	5	12	24
1798	4	4	21	10
Total	54	66	123	243

Source: Vassallo, “The Crucifix Confraternities”, Table 2, p. 58.

Confraternities in Malta, on the contrary, remained free from government interference.¹⁵⁰ In fact, Grand Master Emmanuel de Rohan-Polduc (r. 1775–97) was even the protector of the confraternity of Our Lady of Carmel.¹⁵¹ In Malta, as in places such as Mexico and Zamora (Spain),¹⁵² confraternities neither decreased in number nor in activities. The “dechristianisation” identified by Michel Vovelle in Provence did not

best expression of the Catholic enlightenment.

¹⁴⁸ Le Bras, *Études de Sociologie Religieuse*, 2: 437; Delumeau, *Catholicism Between Luther and Voltaire*, 220–221; Angulhon, *Pénitents et Franc-Maçons dans l’ancienne Provence*, 139–143.

¹⁴⁹ Eisenbichler, “The Suppression of Confraternities in Enlightenment Florence”, 273–278 and Eisenbichler, *The Boys of the Archangel Raphael*, 292–306.

¹⁵⁰ NLM, Libr. 429, vol. 8, fol. 289r–v.

¹⁵¹ Carmine 107, p. 48.

¹⁵² Brading, “Tridentine Catholicism and Enlightened Despotism in Bourbon Mexico”, 11–22; Flynn, *Sacred Charity*, 138–139.

take place in Malta.¹⁵³ On the contrary, between 1750 and 1795 no fewer than forty confraternities were founded in Malta.¹⁵⁴ And as table 1 shows, they lost none of their popularity, but continued their dynamic existence, recruiting new members and showing no signs of decay. By 1794 Żejtun's confraternity of S. Giuseppe had become so numerous that with the resulting extra income it could afford to establish a *settenario*, or seven sung masses, for its living and dead members during the seven days prior to the patron saint's feast.¹⁵⁵

In Malta, confraternities were the most significant institutions in the parish. This article focussed on their origin, their statutes, their methods of recruitment, and their government, as well as their autonomy from the parish priest and the battles they fought against each other especially over precedence. These "artificial families"¹⁵⁶ served to strengthen the ties between the members,¹⁵⁷ soften class relations, blur social differences, and promote what Sharon Strocchia calls "fictive kinship."¹⁵⁸ They were even invaluable suppliers of social services, such as dowries for poor girls and assistance to the sick and the destitute. They comforted the condemned to death, ransomed Christian slaves held in Muslim lands, and distributed food and alms to the poor. They also patronised art and architecture, enriched literature and music, and, above all, helped the inhabitants lead a strong religious life. These topics still remain to be researched.

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¹⁵³ Vovelle, *Pieté Baroque et déchristianisation en Provence au XVIIIe siècle*.

¹⁵⁴ Calculated from data in AAM, RS 6–12.

¹⁵⁵ AAM, RS 11, fol. 413r.

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