

Preface

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In studies of early modern Italy, Modena is often eclipsed by its more famous and powerful neighbours — Ferrara, Florence, Genoa, Milan, Venice. This lack of interest (at least in Anglo-American scholarship) in Modena may possibly be due to the fact that throughout this period the city and its territory constituted the “junior partner”, as it were, of the Este lands that, until 1598, had Ferrara as its main city. That is not to say, however, that Modena lacked anything; the city was, in fact, a thriving economic centre with a rich cultural and artistic life. As the three articles in this special issue reveal, Modena also had a rich spiritual life thanks, in part, to its thriving confraternities. The city’s lay religious organizations contributed in significant ways to private and public devotion, but also to the management of hospitals, the commissioning of religious artworks, and the city’s ceremonial expressions of faith. After Ferrara devolved to the papacy in 1598, the Este family transferred its ducal seat to Modena and made the Emilian city the capital of their reduced, though still prosperous duchy, thereby further fostering the city’s cultural life.

This special issue on confraternities in early modern Modena is the result of a pleasant conversation, new friendships, and a spirit of collegiality that crosses the ocean and the disciplines. I wish to thank Drs. Alyssa Abraham and Matteo Al Kalak for having eagerly accepted my invitation to gather articles for this special issue and for their enthusiasm for the project. They quickly enlisted Dr. Simone Sirocchi, whose enthusiasm was equally strong. I regret that developing health issues in the family prevented a fourth contributor from completing and submitting an article on the Jewish confraternities in the city (home at that time to a thriving and numerous Jewish community), but remain hopeful that in the future and under more propitious circumstances we might see that article, and even more articles, on Modenese lay religious associations published in *Confraternitas*.

Editor, *Confraternitas*