

The Confraternities of Modena between the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Rules, Social Profiles and Spirituality

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Summary: This article traces the foundation and development of confraternities in the city of Modena and identifies key events that influenced how lay associations determined the social, spiritual, and cultural responsibilities outlined in their statutes. Over time, however, the confraternities underwent major changes to their corporate identity and subsequently adapted their statutes to reflect those changes. The article also charts the documentary lineage of the regulations that governed Modena's confraternities, revealing the complexity of both internal and external influences that affected the ways in which the societies designed, updated, and enforced their statutes.

Confraternities and their activities contributed greatly to the medieval culture of Modena and continued to occupy a special place in society throughout the Renaissance and Baroque periods.¹ Scholars who have conducted research on the activities of confraternities have used many different sources from Modena's network of archives. Although researchers often favour such texts as statutes and registers, they have also broadened their analysis to include the wealth of available administrative and accounting documentation as well as the artistic patronage that brought lay associations to life.² This article briefly illustrates the situation in the city of Modena, an ancient Episcopal see of the Po Valley, where many important confraternities were at work during the period between the tenth century and the Council of Trent.

A starting point for the establishment of confraternities in Modena is 980 AD, when an association of lay people devoted to Saint Geminianus, the patron saint of Modena, was recorded to have been in charge of lighting in the cathedral (*luminaria*).³ The official beginning of the confraternity movement in Modena, however, is normally set in 1261 with the

¹ This article reflects, with due adaptations, integrations and corrections, the introduction to Al Kalak/Lucchi, *Gli statuti delle confraternite modenesi*.

² For the historiography of medieval Italian confraternities see, among others Gazzini, *Confraternite e società cittadina*, especially pp. 3–57.

³ The document from 980 is now published in Al Kalak/Lucchi, *Gli statuti delle confraternite modenesi*, 69–70.

founding of the flagellant Confraternity of Saint Peter Martyr.⁴ Roughly a decade later, the confraternity was linked, as were many confraternities, to a hospital called *Cadè* or *Casa di Dio* (House of God).⁵ The Confraternity of Santa Maria della Neve (Our Lady of the Snow) was officially founded along similar lines in 1332, although the actual year of establishment was at least 1325.⁶ It was a flagellant congregation, known as *battuti*, that was known for its production of *laude*.⁷

The impact confraternities had on Modenese society was positive in many ways. For example, when the city was beleaguered by plague and violence after periods of internal conflicts, the lay associations were the first to respond. One of these was the company of San Geminiano (thought to be the descendant of the *luminaria* association of 980), which took action to alleviate hardship suffered during and after the Black Death of 1348 but then ceased to exist in the following decades.⁸ Another important society was the confraternity of Saint John the Baptist, which was established in 1372 for the purpose of burying and assisting those condemned to death.⁹

The arrival in the city of San Bernardino da Siena in 1423 imbued the existing confraternal tradition with new life and gave fresh momentum to the lay religious movement in the city.¹⁰ While San Bernardino was visiting, or perhaps a few years afterwards, there were unprecedented developments that were largely encouraged by his preaching. The confraternity of Sant'Erasmus was established a year before his arrival in 1422, and the foundation of the Fraternità della Santissima Annunziata quickly followed in 1423.¹¹ Newly discovered documents reveal that a confraternity of the Gesù was also established in 1423 (not in 1452 as previously believed).¹²

⁴ Soli, *Chiese di Modena*, 3:217–236; Tiraboschi, *Notizie della Confraternita di San Pietro Martire*.

⁵ See Di Pietro, *L'Ospedale di Modena*, 73; Gatti, *L'ospedale di Modena*, 28–44.

⁶ Soli, *Chiese di Modena*, 3:411–422. The statutes of the confraternities were first published in Veratti, “Documenti antichi di dialetti volgari” and now in Al Kalak/Lucchi, *Gli statuti delle confraternite modenesi*, 93–104.

⁷ Bertoni, *Il laudario dei Battuti di Modena*; De Galerijs, *Il laudario dei Battuti di Modena*.

⁸ Soli, *Chiese di Modena*, 3:65–74; Bertoni/ Bertoni, *San Geminiano e la sua confraternita*.

⁹ Kalak/ Lucchi, *Oltre il patibolo*. For some background, see: Prosperi, *Delitto e perdono* and Terpstra, *The Art of Executing Well*.

¹⁰ See Fava, *Modena e S. Bernardino da Siena*.

¹¹ For Sant'Erasmus, see Soli, *Chiese di Modena*, 1:413–420; for the Annunziata, see Al Kalak/ Lucchi, *Le regole dello spirito*; Torricelli, “La confraternita della SS. Annunziata”; and Soli, *Chiese di Modena*, 1:63–72.

¹² Mucci/ Trota, “L'ospedale della Confraternita del Gesù,” esp. 109.

A confraternity dedicated to San Bernardino was established in 1450, the same year Pope Nicholas V beatified the friar.¹³

In the years that followed, three new confraternities were also founded: the confraternity of Saint Roch (1480), whose archive is almost entirely lost; the confraternity of San Geminiano, which adopted new statutes in 1492; and the confraternity of Saint Sebastian, founded in 1501 as a direct response to yet another outbreak of the plague.¹⁴ The company of Saint Joseph was established in 1532 on the basis of a pre-existing Società dei Marangoni (Society of Master Carpenters), a guild of carpenters founded in 1426.¹⁵ Lastly, in 1552, the medieval confraternities of Gesù and of Sant'Erasmo joined forces to address the difficulties they both faced — the Gesù had lost its oratory, which had been demolished during extensive urban development in the area, but had good membership figures and Sant'Erasmo had lost much of its membership, but had an oratory. To solve these difficulties, a group of citizens managed to persuade the communal magistrates (the Conservatori) to suggest to the Gesù a merger with Sant'Erasmo. The two sodalities agreed to the merger and even joined the names of their titular saints (the appellation *Agonizzanti* was later added).¹⁶

The merger of the confraternity of Sant'Erasmo with the confraternity of Gesù marks the end of the medieval period of Modenese confraternities; the Council of Trent (1545–1563), instead, marks the start of a new season characterized by the Council's influence on confraternities in terms of both corporate identity and function. In the wake of the Council, in addition to the many changes that had an impact on existing confraternities, new sodalities were created in Modena including the Compagnia della Misericordia in San Silvestro (1583), the Carità Crociata (1586), and the Stigmata (1605). The structure of the new confraternities was heavily influenced by new requirements and new precepts.

To summarize, we can see that from medieval period until the Council of Trent, three main events influenced the establishment of the confraternities of Modena. First, the arrival of the movement of the *Disciplinati* in

¹³ Soli, *Chiese di Modena*, 3:155–159. A missal, now belonging to the Chapter of Modena, may have belonged to the Confraternity of St. Bernardino; Salardi, “Il missale vetus,” 56.

¹⁴ For Saint Roch, see Soli, *Chiese di Modena*, 3:237–248. Its few surviving documents are kept in ASMo, *Soppressioni*, bb. 1273–1297. For Saint Sebastian, see Soli, *Chiese di Modena*, 3:275–284.

¹⁵ Soli, *Chiese di Modena*, 3:211–217; Masinelli, *Cenni storici intorno all'antica compagnia di S. Giuseppe*. The confraternity's statutes are no longer extant, but there is a composite copy at the BEUMo, *Raccolta Campori*, γ.F.1.9.

¹⁶ Soli, *Chiese di Modena*, 3:107–108. According to Soli, it seems that until 1604 the two confraternities maintained a certain independence. The appellation *Agonizzanti* was added when it joined the Archconfraternity of the Congregation of the Nativity of Rome known as the *Agonizzanti*; Tiraboschi, *Notizie*, 40–41.

1260 that sparked a rise in devotional activities. Then the various plagues and epidemics, especially the Black Death of 1348, that devastated the city, creating a need for charitable organisations willing to aid the community. Finally, the spiritual reforms of the early fifteenth century supported by distinguished figures such as Saint Bernardino of Siena that renewed the city's devotions and practices. Certain aspects of the sequence of events briefly outlined above are discussed on the following pages, with particular attention paid to the regulations adopted by the confraternities and to the social and charity-related dynamics that characterised each case.

Table 1
The Confraternities of Modena (10th–16th centuries)

Confraternity	Founding Year
Luminaria della cattedrale	980?
S. Pietro Martire	1261
S. Maria della Neve	1332
S. Geminiano	1348
S. Giovanni Battista della Morte	1372
S. Erasmo	1422
SS. Annunziata	1423
Gesù	1423?
S. Bernardino	1450
S. Rocco	1480
S. Sebastiano	1501
S. Giuseppe	1532
Gesù and S. Erasmo	1552

The Statutes of Modenese Confraternities

Scholars have often considered confraternity statutes to be one of the main sources of information on the life and organisation of lay religious organizations. Despite the fact that there are considerable differences between the normative models and the actual daily practices of confraternities, regulations adopted by confraternities do allow us to reconstruct the ideal experience and spirituality of these associations. In the case of Modena the surviving statutes are not generally the first or original statutes, but later,

updated versions compiled to reflect the reforms that were implemented over time.

The earliest statutes to have come down to us are the statutes of the confraternity of Saint Peter Martyr revised on 25 March 1439. As the document says, they modernized the “ancient ordinations” (*antighe ordinatio-ne*) but did not abrogate them; instead, they sought to strengthen them (*ma più tosto fortificandole*).¹⁷ The regulations that governed the lives of the members of Our Lady of the Snow (Santa Maria della Neve) were drawn up between January 1334 and September 1388.¹⁸ Although the original 1372 statutes of the confraternity of Saint John the Baptist are now lost, we do know they were reformed on 24 June 1452 and later revised by the Prior of the Benedictine Monastery of Saint Peter in 1482.¹⁹

The situation with the confraternity of Sant’Erasmus is more complex. Its original statutes have been lost and the only surviving set is dated 1581 (with additions until September 1582, and insertions from before 1555 and after 1623).²⁰ This set of statutes falls beyond the chronological limits for this article and concern the period after the confraternities of Gesù and Sant’Erasmus merged together (1552) but it should nevertheless be taken into consideration because the text appears to reflect the late medieval style of statutes and because the two sodalities, now amalgamated, were founded in the medieval period and were particularly important in Modena.

The situation with the Annunziata is clearer. According to a seventeenth-century record, its statutes date back to 1436, the year before the confraternity was reformed.²¹ Those of San Bernardino were drawn up a few years later, in 1450, and what remains of the statutes of the company of Gesù dates to 1 January 1452.²² The regulations of the Compagnia di San Geminiano were promulgated on 16 January 1492 and were followed, a short while later, by the chapters of the confraternity of Saint Sebastian (20 January 1501).²³ The statutes, original or reformed, of the confraternities of Saint Roch and Saint Joseph, have been lost.

¹⁷ Al Kalak/Lucchi, *Gli statuti delle confraternite modenese*, 71–92; cit. 73.

¹⁸ Al Kalak/Lucchi, *Gli statuti delle confraternite modenese*, 93–104.

¹⁹ Al Kalak/Lucchi, *Gli statuti delle confraternite modenese*, 125–154.

²⁰ Al Kalak/Lucchi, *Gli statuti delle confraternite modenese*, 233–254.

²¹ Torricelli, “La confraternita della SS. Annunziata,” 55, 75; Al Kalak/Lucchi, *Le regole dello spirito*, 36–37. Published in Al Kalak/Lucchi, *Gli statuti delle confraternite modenese*, 155–164.

²² Al Kalak/Lucchi, *Gli statuti delle confraternite modenese*, 175–196 (San Bernardino) and 165–174 (Gesù).

²³ Al Kalak/Lucchi, *Gli statuti delle confraternite modenese*, 105–122 (San Geminiano) and 197–232 (San Sebastiano).

Table 2
Statutes of Modena

Confraternity	Dates of available statutes
S. Pietro Martire	25 March 1439
S. Maria delle Neve	Jan. 1334 – Sept. 1388
S. Geminiano	16 Jan. 1492
S. Giovanni Battista delle Morte	1482
S. Erasmo	—
SS. Annunziata	1436
Gesù	1 Jan. 1452
S. Bernardino	25 March 1450
S. Rocco	—
S. Sebastiano	20 Jan. 1501
S. Giuseppe	—
Gesù and S. Erasmo	1581–1623

An overview of surviving regulations sheds light on the historical and philological structural relationships that existed in the statutes of Modenese confraternities, often created from the same basic outline.²⁴ Schematically speaking, there were two families of statutes (now called A and B), plus three anomalous statutes — those of Santa Maria della Neve, of the Annunziata, and of San Sebastiano — that bear no significant similarities to those in families A and B.

In the group of anomalous statutes, those of the company of Santa Maria della Neve (1334) and those of the Annunziata (1436), reflect the tradition prior to the “awakening” that followed Saint Bernardino’s visit to Modena in 1423. Though this is not surprising in the case of Santa Maria della Neve, founded in the previous century, it is surprising with the Annunziata, whose regulations were drawn up thirteen years after Saint Bernardino’s visit. In spite of this apparent incongruence, the chapters of the Annunziata “still reflect statutory regulations of a medieval character” and their form is very far from that of other contemporary statutes.²⁵ Together with the statutes of Santa Maria della Neve, they are the most ancient example we have and can provide insight into the structure and

²⁴ Torricelli, “La confraternita della SS. Annunziata,” 75.

²⁵ Torricelli, “La confraternita della SS. Annunziata,” 75.

formulation of the rules adopted by the confraternities of Modena before to their fifteenth-century reform. Certain textual convergences suggest that the model used for the chapters of the statutes of the Annunziata forms the basis of Family A, which will be examined below. The statutes of Saint Sebastian, on the other hand, are quite a different matter — they were drawn up in the refined style of the new Renaissance humanist culture and were articulated in such an original way as to clearly distinguish them from pre-existing statutes.

The statutes in Families A and B fall between the extremes characterized by the older models of Santa Maria della Neve and the Annunziata and the Renaissance model of Saint Sebastian.

The statutes of the confraternities of Gesù, San Giovanni Battista, San Geminiano and the later statutes of the combined confraternities of Gesù and Sant’Erasmus can all be assigned to Family A, the larger of the two groups. The statutes of San Pietro Martire and the derived statutes of San Bernardino belong to the smaller group, Family B.

Table 3
Chronology of the statutes of Modena

Medieval statutes	Fifteenth-century statutes	Sixteenth-century statutes
S. Maria della Neve	Family A (Gesù; San Giovanni Battista; San Geminiano; Gesù e Sant’Erasmus)	S. Sebastiano
Annunziata	Family B (San Pietro Martire; San Bernardino)	

As previously mentioned, the influence of the medieval statutes of the Annunziata on the statutes in Family A requires further analysis. Various lexical clues in the documents do suggest that there is a close relationship between them. A synoptic comparison between the chapters in the statutes of the Annunziata and those of a confraternity belonging to group A, such as that of San Giovanni Battista, shows how the first chapter of the Annunziata (a concise list of precepts and admonitions) was partially incorporated and reworded in the chapters of San Giovanni or, again, in the list of admonitions and regulations at the end of the chapters of San Geminiano.

Synopsis of the Statutes

Chapter 1 of the Annunciation reads:

Do not speak ill of your neighbour. Do not excuse yourself when you are accused. Speak little. Do not blaspheme. Do not lie, but always tell the truth. Never swear, and speak whatever you know with confidence. Moderate your passions. Do not laugh or raise your voice. Do not look at the world with the eyes of self-conceit. Be chaste out of wedlock, as God commands us all. Flee from women and their wiles, as do the servants of God. Do not be gluttonous. Recite the Lord's Prayer and the Hail Mary before and after dinner and supper. Wear at least a nightshirt when you sleep. Neither touch nor look at your naked body. Sleep seven hours out of twenty-four. Fast on the eves that the Church commands, during Lent, the Ember Days and Friday. Do Friday penance and if you do more, more merits you will acquire. Think, every day, about death and that you also will die: then you will never sin, you will never be proud, nor quick-tempered, envious, avaricious, gluttonous, lustful, indolent. Lastly, beware of evil driven by fear, and direct yourself towards good works for the love of God.

When we compare this passage to the relevant sections in the statutes of San Giovanni Battista (ch. 12) and San Geminiano (final admonitions) we have the following:

Annunziata, chapter 1

Non dire male del proximo. Non te excusare quando tu sei incolpato. Parla pocho. Non biastemare. Non dire la bosia, ma sempre la veritade. Non zurare mai, di' certamente le cusi. Regular li sensi. Non ridere, alzando la voce. Non guardare la edeza cum li ochi a le vanitade. Stare casto fora del matrimonio; è comandamento de Dio a zaschuno. Fugere le femene e le lore domestechenze como fano tuti li servi de Dio. Non essere gioto de golla. Dire el pater noster e l'ave maria nanze e dreto a desenare e a cena. Dormire vestito almeno ne la camisa. Non te volere vedere né toccare nudo. Dormire septe hore de vintequatre. Dezunare le vigilie comandate e la quaresema e le quatro tempora e lo vegnere. Fare disciplina el vegnere e se più farite più merito haverite. Pensa ogne dì de la morte

come tu debe morire anchoi e mai non peccarai, non harai superbia, né ira, né invidia, né avaritia, né golla, né luxuria, né accidia e così anche te guarda dal male per timore e inducite al bem fare per amore.²⁶

S. Giovanni Battista, chapter 12

Per essere ornato de le sancte virtù, fratelli mei, non giurate e non dite busie, vivendo pacificamente e sença biastemare e dire male del proximo e sempre fuçendo ogni domesticheçe de femine. E per questo volemo che mai nesuna femina, né puti de sedeci anni in giù, non possi intrare de la giesia in fora in niuna nostra stancia. Con ciò sia cosa, cari fratelli, che la più cara cosa che ne desse Idio in questo mondo fu el tempo del quale conveniremo rendere razione se l'averemo male expeso. Adunque operamelo bene, dormendo octo hore de le vintequattro, tenendo la camisa indosso, non tocandosi né volendosi vedere nudo, solamente per volere fugire ogni tentatione di carne, spendendo il tempo vacante cum lacrima e sospiri de li nostri peccati. Et a ciò che non siamo represi dal vitio de la ingratitudine de ogni benefitio receuto da Dio, per più effectuale amore ciascaduno debia dire uno pater noster inanci pasto e dre' pasto, regratiando lo nostro Signore di tanti beneficii receuti da lui.²⁷

S. Geminiano, Final admonitions

Non dicti mal del proximo. Non ve excusati quando siti incolpati. Parlati pocho. Non dicti la bosia, ma sempre la verità. Non çurati, ma dicti certamente le cossi. Non biastemati, ma regulati li sensi vostri. Stati casti fuora de matrimonio perché è comandamento de Dio. Non guardati in qua e in là cum li ochii vani. Fuçite le femine e le lore familiarità como fano tuti li servi de Dio. Dormiti vestiti almancho cum la camisa. Facti la disciplina il vegnere e più secundo che pare a li fratelli. Non ridete alçando la voce. Non vi vogliati vedere né toccare nudo. Dormite septe hore de vintequatre. Deçunate le viglie comandate cioè la quadregesima, le quatre tempore e il vegnere e chi non potesse deçunare faciasi dispensare al padre spirituale.²⁸

²⁶ Al Kalak/Lucchi, *Gli statuti delle confraternite modenesi*, 155–156.

²⁷ Al Kalak/Lucchi, *Gli statuti delle confraternite modenesi*, 150.

²⁸ Al Kalak/Lucchi, *Gli statuti delle confraternite modenesi*, 124.

The passages cited above were drafted prior to the fifteenth century “reformed” statute and, in one way or another, circulated among the confraternities classified as Family A.

If the book of statutes for the Annunziata is assumed to be the *Urtext* of Family A (though probably it is not the only one), then the relationships between the various regulations attributable to it remain to be contextualised. To understand the matter more clearly, one must bear in mind that the statutes of San Giovanni Battista, drawn up in 1482, were the result of revisions and corrections (essentially stylistic adaptations and the addition of scriptural and patristic citations) of a text, no longer available, drawn up in 1452, that is, in the same year in which the statutes of the confraternity of Gesù were compiled. It is difficult to establish whether the two versions of the statutes — only one of which has survived — are related to each other, or if they both stem from a common source. What is certain is that the statutes of the confraternity of San Geminiano were derived from them, or from the model from which the statutes of the Gesù were derived. Evidence of this lineage is found in the chapters that repeat the errors present in the statutes of the Confraternita di Gesù. At the same time, however, the revised 1482 statutes of the confraternity of San Giovanni Battista do not repeat these errors, which suggests that they do not derive from the same prototype. The description is simplified in the diagrams below:

Chart 1
Statutes of the Modena confraternities (Family A)

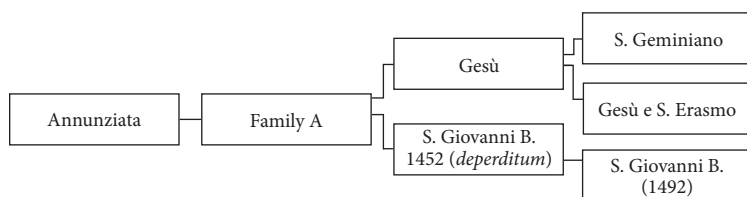


Chart 2
Statutes of the Modena confraternities (Family B)



The documentary lineage described above raises the important question of how the statutes circulated from one confraternity to the other. One possible answer may be found in the cultural terrain of the city, where processions, charitable works, and religious services enabled members of confraternities to meet frequently and speak with each other. Nevertheless,

one must consider the individual identities of the confratelli, whose good offices, family ties, and the friendships they maintained probably enabled them to create a channel through which information about different statutes could be exchanged. An investigation into the family relationships among the members of different confraternities, verification of confratelli belonging to more than one sodality, and a systematic comparison of names could resolve the matter. Even if systematic investigations in this area may be lacking, it is evident that in order to be understood correctly the philological data must be considered in a wider context than just that of the statutory regulations.

Social Composition and Charitable Roles of the Confraternities

The problems discussed above indicate that a reconstruction of the social and cultural dynamics behind the confraternities is an inevitable part of analysing the regulatory documents. In this regard, important hints about the composition of Modenese confraternities are provided by the membership rolls (*registro*) that were kept and routinely updated. For instance, the membership rolls of Sant'Erasmus (1422–1552) contain the names of artisans (carpenters, painters, blacksmiths, etc., all bearing the title of *mastro*, master), a few friars, some tertiaries, and certain well-to-do citizens (identified by the title of *ser* or *messer*).²⁹ The *registro* of San Pietro Martire, which dates back to the fifteenth century, mentions a tertiary brother (“frater tercii ordinis”), various artisans (*mastri*), gentlemen (*ser*, *messer*), and a nobleman (specifically, a *dominus miles et doctor*).³⁰ There are many titled names in the fourteenth century *registro* of the confraternity of Santa Maria della Neve: in many cases the title is *miser* or *sir*. *Magister* appears several times and there are various *domini*. Certain professions are sporadically indicated: a *pilizaro* (furrier), a *pescadore* (fisherman), a *tintore* (dyer), a *feraro* (blacksmith), a *fuitarolo* (fruit seller), etc..³¹ Research into the confraternity of the Annunziata has shown that there were prominent members in the sodality such as civic authorities and community councillors (there is even a *giudice alle vettovaglie*, a civic official responsible, among other things, for the provisioning of supplies), as well as notaries, dyers, blacksmiths, sword makers, carpenters, shoemakers, and helmsmen.³²

²⁹ ACMo, SE 1, fols. 48^v–52^r (register for the years 1422–1490, with updates to 1552).

³⁰ ACMo, SPM 2(6), fols. 19^r–20^r (register from 1439 to the middle of the sixteenth century).

³¹ BEUMo, *Congregazione di Carità*, Deposito n. II, fols. 1^r–6^r.

³² Torricelli, “La confraternita della SS. Annunziata,” 67–70.

Membership rolls provide insights into the proportion of women in a sodality, a topic that scholars have only recently begun to examine.³³ Torricelli suggests that in the Annunziata women were of little importance and their membership in the sodality was mostly a factor of their kinship with male members.³⁴ The same seems to be true in the confraternity of Santa Maria della Neve whose membership rolls include very few names of women.³⁵

Membership rolls also provide information on patterns of policing and exclusion. The *registro* of the confraternity of Sant'Erasmus reveals that 73 of the 183 members who joined the sodality from the time it was founded until it merged with the Gesù in 1552 were expelled; this is almost 40% of the total. In the Annunziata the expulsions appear to have been fewer (approx. 20% of the membership).³⁶ In the confraternity of San Pietro Martire the situation is similar to that of the Annunziata; between the reforms of 1439 and the middle of the sixteenth century, 25 confratelli out of 120 (approximately 20%) were expelled (if we assume that the names that had been crossed out refer to members who have been expelled).³⁷ We can therefore conclude that in Modenese confraternities at least one member out of five was subjected to disciplinary measures, evidence of the importance placed on compliance with the statutory regulations and the principles that inspired them. From the sixteenth century onwards, the number of expulsions decreased substantially, most likely due to the major changes that were affecting confraternities during the Tridentine period.

An understanding of the dynamic environment in which Modenese confraternities existed and functioned would not be complete without considering the presence and role of religious orders in the establishment and daily functioning of the lay religious associations. During the medieval period, the regular and secular clergy do not seem to have played a determining role: as previously mentioned, tertiaries, friars, and priests joined confraternities, but the organizations remained firmly in the hands of the laity. According to town chronicles and statutes, confraternities were mostly established on the initiative of men and women who had not taken

³³ On women in confraternities, see: Brolis, et al., *La matricola femminile della Misericordia di Bergamo*; Casagrande, "Confraternities and Lay Female Religiosity"; Esposito, "Donne e confraternite"; Gazzini, "Donne e uomini in confraternita"; and Terpstra, "Women in the Brotherhood."

³⁴ Torricelli, "La confraternita della SS. Annunziata," 64–66.

³⁵ BEUMo, Congregazione di Carità, Deposito n. II, fols. 1^r–6^r.

³⁶ For members expelled from Sant'Erasmus, see ACMo, SE 1, fols. 48^v–52^r. For members expelled from the Annunziata from 1423 to 1522 (90 out of approximately 450 confratelli), see Torricelli, "La confraternita della SS. Annunziata," 72–73.

³⁷ ACMo, SPM 2(6), fols. 19^r–20^r.

holy orders. The Fraternità della Santissima Annunziata was established by young people who had been meeting in a house near the Benedictine monastery of San Pietro as early as 1422.³⁸ Similarly, the Compagnia del Gesù was established “by several young men who decided [...] they wanted to live under the sweet yoke of Christ” (“d’alquanti çoveni li quali se deliberono [...] volere vivere soto el suave çove de Christo”), and the fourteenth-century statutes of the *battuti* of Santa Maria della Neve were drawn up by thirteen lay confreres who had been “duly appointed according to the desire and consent of the entire company” (“azò deputati de volontà e consentimento de tuta la dicta compagnia”).³⁹

After the reforms of the third and fourth decades of the fifteenth century, and even more so from the last decades of the Middle Ages, precise references to the contributions of the clergy began to appear. Such references shed light on the activities of the Dominicans and Franciscans who assisted the members of San Pietro Martire and San Bernardino, respectively, and the Benedictines who were charged with revising the statutes of San Giovanni della Morte.⁴⁰ Furthermore, documents from the confraternity of San Geminiano mention that a priest, Tommasino Barozzi, taught the confratelli.⁴¹ As the Council of Trent began to demand the implementation of certain reforms in confraternities, new and old religious orders began to have a more significant impact them.

Prior to the Council of Trent, however, fundamental changes to the corporate identity and function of many Modenese confraternities were precipitated not by the Council of Trent but by the actions of the Commune. From the very beginning Modenese confraternities had devoted themselves to intensive social and charitable works. The companies of San Pietro Martire, Santa Maria della Neve, San Geminiano, San Giovanni Battista, and Gesù all worked with poorhouses and hospices. The members of San Pietro Martire were entrusted with the management of the hospital of *Cadè*, which had been founded in 1260 by Guglielmo della Cella, while the hospital of Santa Maria, established in 1284 by Rainero da Castello, came under the care of Santa Maria della Neve. Hospitals named after the confraternities that founded them were created in 1348 (hospital of San Geminiano), in 1372 (hospital of San Giovanni Battista, or della Morte), and in the first half of the fifteenth century (hospital of the Santissimo

³⁸ Soli, *Chiese di Modena*, 1:63.

³⁹ Al Kalak/Lucchi, *Gli statuti delle confraternite modenese*, 165 (Gesù), and 93 (Santa Maria della Neve).

⁴⁰ Al Kalak/Lucchi, *Gli statuti delle confraternite modenese*, 83 (San Pietro Martire); 186 (San Bernardino); and 128 (San Giovanni della Morte).

⁴¹ Al Kalak/Lucchi, *Gli statuti delle confraternite modenese*, 105.

Nome di Gesù).⁴² Given the frequent correlation in Modena between the establishment of confraternities and the management or creation of hospitals, a major turning point for the confraternal movement in Modena occurred when the Commune established the so-called *Santa Unione* (1541–1542), which consolidated all the hospitals under a common authority known as the *Santa Unione*.⁴³ This consolidation was met with considerable resistance that led many confraternities to challenge, unsuccessfully, the Commune's decision. The creation of public institutions of social assistance continued, but confraternities increasingly had to concede to the consolidation of public health services, a process that was strongly supported by the duke of Ferrara, who ruled Modena, and by the Commune.

Although a common feature of Modenese confraternities was their management of hospitals and of charitable works, their truly unifying feature was their devotional character. One of their common devotional practices was self-flagellation (*disciplina*). As is clear from the statutes and from literary and iconographic sources (fig. 1.1), almost all Modenese confraternities practiced self-flagellation. The presence of musical codices (*laudari*) to accompany the flagellation rites in the confraternities of San Pietro Martire (also called *della Scova* after the implement used for physical penitence) and Santa Maria della Neve (also called *dei Battuti*) leaves no room for doubt. Regulations governing self-flagellation can be found in the statutes of other confraternities. The extent to which the flagellation ritual survived in confraternities after the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century reforms remains uncertain. Studies exploring these issues have noted that the original spirit progressively faded and probably began to regain importance only during Baroque period when a new approach to mortification of the flesh gained ground.⁴⁴

What is clear from the statutes of Modenese confraternities is that flagellation interacted, sometimes more sometimes less, with liturgical texts, sacred songs, and rites ranging from the recital of psalms to processions. Many of the Modenese documents confirm this practice and place it within the broader Italian context, revealing an extensive exchange of statutes, texts, and devotional practices among confraternities from different geographical areas. For example, the statutes of Modenese confraternities reveal connections between other sodalities in the region of Emilia and reveal that, in certain cases, regulations were effectively twinned. Evidence of this is found in the regulations of San Pietro Martire and San Bernardino, which both enshrine the duty of providing hospitality to their brothers

⁴² Mucci/Trota, "L'ospitale della Confraternita del Gesù," 107–108.

⁴³ On the *Santa Unione*, see Santus, "La nascita della Santa Unione" and Fontaine, "Organizing Charity."

⁴⁴ Peyronel Rambaldi, *Speranze e crisi nel Cinquecento modenese*, 43–44.

from Bologna (*fradey da Bologna*)⁴⁵ or in the statutes of the Bolognese confraternity of San Domenico which were drawn from those of San Pietro Martire in Modena.⁴⁶

The complex history of the statutes of Modenese confraternities offers insights into the high level of social and cultural activity that characterised the city's lay associations during the Middle Ages and Early Modern period. Although the cases described in this article confirm many of the developments in the confraternal movement in Italy, further research can still reveal the particular interests of individual sodalities and their members, especially when one considers the wealth of documentation that is waiting to be examined.

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CITED WORKS

Abbreviations

ACMo = Archivio Capitolare di Modena

ASMo = Archivio di Stato di Modena

BEUMo = Biblioteca Estense Universitaria di Modena

Manuscript Sources

Archivio Capitolare di Modena (ACMo)

Sant'Erasmo (SE) 1

San Pietro Martire (SPM) (6)

Archivio di Stato di Modena (ASMo)

Soppressioni, bb. 1273–1297.

⁴⁵ See Al Kalak/Lucchi, *Gli statuti delle confraternite modenese*, 83–84. The brothers mentioned in the statutes of San Pietro Martire are those of the congregation of San Domenico of Bologna, founded in 1418; on the latter, see Terpstra, *Lay Confraternities*, 43 and *passim*, and Meersseman, *Ordo fraternitatis*, 2:610–627. On Bologna, see also Fanti, *Confraternite e città a Bologna nel medioevo e nell'età moderna*.

For San Bernardino, see Al Kalak/Lucchi, *Gli statuti delle confraternite modenese*, 186–187. In this case, the confreres mentioned are those of the Bolognese confraternity of the same name, founded just before that of Modena.

⁴⁶ Torricelli, "La confraternita della SS. Annunziata," 56.

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Fig. 1.1. Saint Geminiano enthroned with four confraternity members wearing their confraternal gown. Detail from the Office of Our Lady, Confraternity of San Geminiano. BEUMo, *Raccolta Campori*, γ.M.1.7, unnumb. folio.

Photo: Matteo Al Kalak.