

"Project '94"
A Report on a Collection of Studies and
an Exhibition on Confraternities
in the Puglie, Italy

The Centro Ricerche di Storia Religiosa in Puglia has completed its "Progetto '94," which had been dedicated to research on confraternities in the Puglie. The project resulted in two major contributions to research and learning, one an international congress on confraternities entitled "Confraternite, Chiesa e Società. Aspetti e problemi dell'associazionismo in età moderna e contemporanea" (proceedings edited by Lian Bertoldi Lenoci through Schena Editore) and the other an exhibition entitled "Confraternite, arte e devozione in Puglia (secc. XVI-XVIII)," with catalogue edited by Clara Gelao Savona.

The proceedings from the congress include articles not only by Italian scholars, but also from scholars working elsewhere in Europe, the USA, and Canada. They also cover areas of interest that extend throughout Italy and across a number of disciplines.

The exhibition, mounted at the Pinacoteca Provinciale di Bari, was inaugurated on 9 October 1994 with the participation of Prof. Francesco Sisinni (General Director of the Ministero dei Beni Culturali), Prof. Cosimo Damiano Fonseca (President of the Università della Basilicata), and Prof. Franco Cardini (professor of Medieval History at the Università di Firenze), dott.ssa Clara Gelao Savona (Director of the Pinacoteca Provinciale di Bari). The exhibition is the third such presentation (after those mounted in Genoa in 1982 and in Palermo in 1993). Work on the exhibition was spearheaded by the Centro Ricerche di Storia Religiosa in Puglia in order to highlight the extent and variety of confraternity commissions. Research began with a thorough archival search which then fanned out to a variety of fields including architecture, iconography, documents, artworks, etc. In so doing the exhibition cast its net very widely in order to illustrate more fully the development of confraternity commissions from the initial associative stage to the later economic, charitable, political, and social aspects of confraternities. The importance of such confraternal commissions is reflected in

the aesthetic beauty and material value of the commissioned objects, an indication of the growing status of individual confraternities.

Commissions reveal not only a devotional component with artistic overtones, but also a social aspect. The exhibition thus sought to illustrate not only the multiplicity of objects or their artistic value, but also the delicate state of conservation and supervision in which they currently survive, subject not only to contradictory directives from the administrative bodies entrusted with their preservation, but also to the uncertainties posed by the constant dangers of thefts or deterioration (which are in turn aggravated by unsuitable or insufficient protection or cataloguing). Aside from depriving scholars of a vast area of research and study, the current situation places an artistic patrimony of truly national significance in grave danger.

The exhibition is complemented by a thorough and extensive catalogue that contains not only the required entries for the objects on display, but also a number of scholarly essays on the history of confraternities in the Puglie and their art.

In light of the popular success enjoyed by the exhibition, the thoroughness of its catalogue, and the high quality of the essays gathered in the volume on "Confraternities, the Church, and Society," the Centro Ricerche di Storia Religiosa in Puglia is pleased with the results of its "Progetto '94." They are an important first step in the "de-provincialization" of research on confraternities in the Puglie, one that brings international attention both to the phenomenon and the field.

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