

history of each such institution in Italy, giving a short description of every commune where one was found. In 1899 all confraternities of the Misericordia in Italy joined into a federation to facilitate the dispensation of charity throughout the country. The history of the federation is briefly sketched out in the volume. An address by Pope John Paul II attests to the continued social and spiritual value of the organization in contemporary Italy.

Some questions of interest to historians remain unanswered. For example, why did confraternities of the Misericordia spring up in centres as diverse as Florence, Venice and Arezzo, but not in centres such as Bologna or Rome? What were the patterns of membership? What was the long-term or perhaps even the immediate impact of such organizations on the political and social fibre of their cities and towns? What were their financial and economic resources? How did they manage them? Such questions are, of course, more appropriate to formal scholarly inquiry and not to a commemorative volume published by the organization itself. Given this, Niccolai's book is an interesting popular introduction to Italy's confraternities of the Misericordia.

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Polizzotto, Lorenzo. *The Elect Nation. The Savonarolan Movement in Florence 1494-1545*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994. 488 pp.

The volume is a fascinating and exhaustive study of the Savonarolan movement and in particular of his followers, popularly known as the *Piagnoni*, who sought to effect a social, political and spiritual renewal of Florence in accordance with Savonarolan doctrine. Among the *Piagnoni* there were some of the most influential minds of the later Italian Renaissance—men such as Lorenzo Lorenzi, Domenico Benivieni, and Jacopo Salutati. After the expulsion of the Medici in 1494, the *Piagnoni* sought to implement a thorough reform of city polity. Though some measures gained the consent of the current government, antagonism to Savonarola's influence grew and ultimately brought about his execution in 1498.

The Dominican friar's influence on civic reform, however, survived long after his death. Polizzotto argues convincingly that, with few exceptions, the *Piagnoni* remained loyal to Savonarola's concept of a renewed polity and worked towards such a renewal over a period of several

decades. He attributes the Piagnoni's long survival in the politically unstable environment of their times to their inherent diversity. Though drawn from similar social and cultural circles, the Piagnoni were nevertheless men holding differing political and spiritual views. Their cohesiveness stemmed from a broadly-shared platform of civic reform which they were willing to adapt to changing circumstances.

Although the focus of the monograph is on Florentine politics and intellectual life, it has much to interest historians of confraternities. Many Piagnoni were active members of confraternities. Pietro Bernardino, for one, belonged to at least three: the *compagnie* of the Purification of the Virgin and St. Zanobi, the Archangel Raphael, and St. John the Evangelist. Polizzotto shows, furthermore, that a significant component of the Savonarolan reform program sought to gain increasing control over the Florentine confraternal movement. Prior to his execution, Savonarola and his Piagnoni took over and revitalized the confraternities of the Buonomini di San Martino and that of San Michele Arcangelo in order to improve their charitable work. For example, the Buonomini's mandate to aid the "shame-faced poor" was extended to include other types of indigent. Similarly, the once thriving confraternity of San Michele Arcangelo became exclusively dedicated to charitable activities such as visiting the sick and paying for their hospital stay. Polizzotto suggests that control and revitalization of confraternities was considered a means by which the poverty and misery of the people could be alleviated, thereby paving the way to a moral reform of society. Such control, however, was also clearly used to strengthen the bonds of loyalty of confraternity brothers to the Savonarolan movement and the Piagnoni regime.

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