

Reviews

Artusi, Luciano and Antonio Patruno. *Deo gratias. Storia, tradizioni, culti e personaggi delle antiche confraternite fiorentine*. Firenze: Newton Compton, 1994. 448 pp.

Luciano Artusi and Antonio Patruno have researched and assembled a remarkable study of 83 Florentine confraternities founded between 1131 and 1673. Organized by confraternity, each chapter provides a brief history of the association in question, its membership, location, activities and artistic patrimony. Also included are the crest and motto of each organisation, which serves as an appropriate way to introduce and conclude the entries. Some of the mottoes are particularly entertaining, and reflect the spirit of autonomy espoused by these associations. For example, the Compagnia dei Santi Re Magi detta la Stella has, for its slogan, "Chi ha il mestolo in mano, fa la minestra a modo suo" (He who holds the ladle makes the soup in his own way).

Artusi and Patruno stress the pivotal role that lay associations played in Florence, citing the sense of civic pride the confraternities fostered, especially given the fact that they were microcosms of civic life, each with its own statutes, hierarchy and traditions. According to the authors, the complexity and variety of confraternity culture reveals "another Florence," one which is often ignored by historians. They are quick to note that despite this "otherness," Florentine confraternities are by no means to be understood as a "marginal" part of Florence's civic life. All of the city's social groups, and both genders, were represented within confraternities, and involvement was widespread: by 1783, the majority of the adult population was affiliated with at least one organisation.

Ironically, it was during this time of flourishing membership that Grand Duke Pietro Leopoldo commanded the dissolution of almost all of the confraternities in Florence in 1785, sparing only nine of them. He viewed lay associations as instruments of a retrograde, antiquated, outmoded culture, and replaced them with the less successful "Compagnie della Carita," which were run by parish priests and restricted to public assistance. Artusi and Patruno lament the demise of confraternities, and state that, even with the Real Consiglio di Reggenza, which revived former confraternities and permitted the formation of new ones, the new incarnations did not compare, in terms of strength and spirit, to the original institutions.

Extremely user-friendly, the indices provide a concise synopsis of each confraternity, and the bibliography is both extensive and impressive. *Deo gratias* is an important addition to the libraries of scholars of Florentine civic history and confraternities alike.

Anne-Marie Sorrenti
University of Toronto