

Reviews

La chiesa del Purgatorio di Fasano. Arte e devozione confraternale, ed. Antonietta Latorre. Fasano: Schena, 1997. 287 pp., ill.

Somewhere between heaven and hell there lies Purgatory. In Dante's *Divine Comedy* this way station on the road to heaven is represented as a mountain—an uphill climb that leads to paradise. On this mountain, a parade of souls toil ever upward to purge the nagging sins that linger even after death. Their burden, however, may be lightened by the prayers of the living who, in turn, look to the penitents for intervention in their mortal lives. Given this symbiotic relationship, it is not surprising that Purgatory finds itself amply represented in Christian religious art. Further, the nature of Purgatory, a sort of *post mortem* second chance for the “not so bad” but “not so good” either, makes it logical that lay organizations made up of ordinary men might identify strongly with the plight of those wending their way up its rocky slopes. In *La Chiesa del Purgatorio di Fasano: arte e devozione confraternale*, Cosimo Damiano Fonseca suggests yet another reason for the popularity of Purgatory as a focal point for lay confraternities. Purgatory, as a place of transition, provided a spiritual parallel to the earthly works of Post-Tridentine confraternities. The efforts of lay societies to provide not only spiritual but financial and social assistance to their members, and thus better the human condition, find a natural counterpart in the purgatorial quest for spiritual perfection. It follows that the socially ambitious nature of some confraternities also found a natural counterpart in the spiritual ambition inherent in the purging process. It is to any one of these factors or to a combination of them, Fonseca suggests, that we owe the profusion of sixteenth and seventeenth-century confraternities and confraternity churches dedicated to the souls in Purgatory.

The Chiesa del Purgatorio in Fasano is one such example. Established and funded by the Confraternita del Pio Monte del Purgatorio (The Confraternity of the Pious Mount of Purgatory) it represents both the religious focus and social aspirations of its members. In a detailed account of the history of the confraternity from the seventeenth to the twentieth century, Antonietta Latorre explores not only the devotional practices of the Pugliese variant of the confraternity, but also the social, economic, and political pressures affecting the confraternity over the last three centuries. Starting from a brief overview of lay organization in the modern era, Latorre quickly delves into an examination of the emergence in late-sixteenth-century, early-seventeenth-century Fasano of a number of confraternities dedicated to the cult of the dead. The formation of the Confraternity of Pio Monte del Purgatorio, as with other confraternities formed during this period, represented an attempt by an upwardly mobile middle class to emphasize its new social status. The chapels of these new social clubs with restricted admissions to their crypts functioned, to a certain extent, as status symbols. Membership in a particular confraternity, and especially in the Pio Monte, was considered a definite sign of social belonging. Latorre notes that class distinctions among lay confraternities were maintained through the decoration and furnishing

of their respective chapels, the value of which were greatly enhanced by the stature or fame of the artisans commissioned by the association. Latorre's research into the Pio Monte's accounts, charters, contracts, and inventories provides the reader with a tangible record of the daily workings of a confraternity. The illustrations included with the text—reproductions of letters, architectural plans, contemporary drawings of Fasano, together with photographs of the modern activities of the confraternity—paint a vivid picture of confraternity activity that takes Latorre's essay beyond historical reporting. Her account of a dispute between the confraternity and the Catholic Church in the 1960s over the Confraternity's use of a statue of the Madonna during Holy Week observances provides a fascinating glimpse into the enduring solidarity of confraternities even in the Modern era. One can only imagine the depth of member loyalty in centuries past. Latorre concludes her history of the Pio Monte with a somewhat anti-climactic summary of the cultural activities that now take place in the confraternity's church. After reading Latorre's accounts of the Pio Monte's battles with other confraternities for social eminence, the arduous task of funding and building a church, and the decade-long battle to use a revered statue in a procession, a computerized bar chart showing 1989 membership at 65 seems vaguely sad. Nonetheless, Latorre's comprehensive account of the Pio Monte's history is an invaluable evolutionary record. Rather than a snapshot of a golden era, as historically relevant as that may be, Latorre's approach has produced a record of the confraternity as a social element as vulnerable to social evolution as any other.

The last two thirds of the publication are dedicated to a series of essays on the history, architecture, and adornment of the Pio Monte's church, La Chiesa del Purgatorio. In her essay, "La Chiesa del Purgatorio di Fasano esempio di committenza confraternale," Tiziana Luisi considers the erection of the church a combination of the Pio Monte's social aspirations and the commitment of its members to joint effort and shared experience. The Chiesa del Purgatorio is therefore a physical manifestation of the confraternity phenomenon as it existed in seventeenth-century Puglia. Luisi's essay will be of particular interest to architectural historians given its attention to architectural and construction details. The accompanying photographs will be of great assistance to those who are not architectural experts and who may have difficulty visualizing the precise features noted in the text. Similarly, the essays which follow, "Opere d'arte pittorica nella chiesa del Purgatorio di Fasano" (Paintings in the Church of Purgatory of Fasano) by Massimo Guastella, "Il tesoro della Confraternita" (The confraternity's treasure) by Giovanni Boraccesi, "I tessuti della chiesa" (The church's fabrics) by Maria Pia Pettinau Vescina and "Arredi musicali e sacre funzioni *ad remedium animae*" (Musical furnishings and sacred rituals for the healing of souls) by Elsa Martinelli will be, with their meticulous attention to detail and great number of accompanying illustrations, of great interest to art historians. Salvatore P. Polito's essay, "Note per una storia della cartapesta in area brindisiana. Gli esempi di Fasano" (Notes on the history of papier mâché in the Brindisi area), is particularly fascinating. The genesis of these often disturbingly lifelike figures, originally substituted for live participants in Easter and

other religious processions, can be traced to the imitation of the great wooden sculptures imported from Venice and Naples. Although they represent a unique regional cultural heritage, amidst the great artistic patrimony of Italy they are often relegated to second class status. Their importance to Pugliese confraternities, however, is indisputable and the photographs of these figures, in particular that of the dead Christ on p. 176, are a haunting reminder of the religious devotion out of which the confraternity movement was born.

Margherita Latorre's closing essay "I restauri" (The restorations) provides a ray of hope consistent with the Pio Monte's faith in the restorative power of Purgatory. The detailed account of the continuing efforts to repair the damages of water, insects, time, and neglect in an effort to restore the church to its Baroque glory suggests that the role of confraternities may be changing. Its new role as guardian of the past may breathe new life into an organization whose membership over the past decades has been waning considerably. The combined efforts of its members to preserve a part of their history echoes what Tiziana Luisi called "committenza confraternale" and may revive the confraternity's sense of social relevance.

The purpose of this book is not, however, to speculate about the future of lay societies, but rather to document one particular case of lay religious association and trace its evolution in all of its dimensions. Accordingly, the appendices include the original enabling legislation, the statutes of the confraternity, the statutes of the "Consorelle della Vergine dei Sette Dolori" (The Sisters of the Virgin of the Seven Sorrows), the sister society of the Pio Monte, the Diocesan statutes of the confraternity, lists of the brothers and sisters of the Pio Monte, and an index of notable names, places, and subjects. This volume will be an invaluable research tool and source document for anyone interested not only in the Pugliese variant of confraternal association but also in studying the activities, organization, and evolution of a confraternity that spans three centuries.

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Eisenbichler, Konrad. *The Boys of the Archangel Raphael: A Youth Confraternity in Florence, 1411–1785*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998. 474 pp, illustrations.

This richly documented study by Konrad Eisenbichler is a significant contribution to a number of scholarly fields. In the first place, it helps to fill the significant gap in narrative descriptions in English of confraternity life. Eisenbichler's choice of subject, the Compagnia dell'Arcangelo Raffaello in Florence, with its impressive membership, theatrical performances, and artistic possessions, is a particularly rich subject for such a study. Furthermore, by examining a lay religious organization for the young, he addresses many questions of interest to those studying children and youths in early modern Europe. Finally, Eisenbichler's interdisciplinary approach