

Scholarly *Confraternitas*: Conferences, Feasts, Anniversaries, and Collections

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Confraternity studies have been marked at critical points by essay collections. In a field still characterized by very localized research, essay collections have been the chief example of collaborative work. Whether the result of a conference or brought together at the prompting of a press or editor, they also reflect the comparative urge that animates much work in the field and the strong sense of sociability that binds its practitioners together. Local work done collaboratively to advance comparative research, essay collections represent a form of scholarly *confraternitas* at work.

Though Gilles Gerard Meersseman's *Ordo fraternitatis* (1977) is frequently taken as the starting point, modern Italian confraternity studies can really be dated by two critical collections: *Il movimento dei disciplinati nel settimo centenario dal suo inizio* (1962) and *Risultati e prospettive della ricerca sul movimento dei disciplinati* (1972), both the outcome of conferences and both the foundation for much subsequent work by scholars around the world. Italian scholars have continued to organize conferences and publish proceedings at a steady rate; among the more recent have been Liana Bertoldi Lenoci's *Confraternite, Chiesa e Società* (1994), a wide-ranging collection with some concentration on southern Italy, and Danilo Zardin's *Corpi, 'fraternità', mestieri nella storia della società europea* (1998), an ambitious effort to set confraternal organization in the broader context of early modern corporatism, with comparisons to guilds, political bodies, and professional groups.

In April 1989 another conference in Toronto signalled the blossoming of confraternity studies in North America and launched the Society for Confraternity Studies. With one eye to sociability and another to ritual, the participants closed their conference with a feast and brought the Society into being with the solemn signing of a place-mat. More permanent marks of the historic occasion were, naturally, an essay collection, *Crossing the Boundaries: Christian Piety and the Arts in Italian Medieval and Renaissance Confraternities* (1991), and this newsletter, *Confraternitas*. Both emerged under the editorial care of Konrad Eisenbichler who, more than any other individual, has shepherded the Society through the past decade. As the Society has grown, its members have produced an impressive number of articles and monographs (with copies held in the Confraternities Collection of the Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies at Victoria University in the University of Toronto). It has maintained the sociability of its origins by bringing scholars together annually in sponsored sessions at the meetings of the International Congress of Medieval Studies in Kalamazoo, the Sixteenth Century Studies Conference, and the Renaissance

Society of America; in fine confraternal tradition, meals always follow these occasions, but place-mats now stay on the table.

As we look back on ten active years, it is appropriate that 1999 will see the publication of two and possibly three essay collections that include the work of Society members from around the world. Each will be reviewed in this and in future issues of *Confraternitas*, but it is appropriate to note them briefly here in order to celebrate the rich variety of substantial scholarship currently underway. Focusing on religion, politics, and the visual arts, these collections underscore the inter-disciplinary nature of the field. With contributions from scholars in Italy, England, Canada, the United States, and Australia, they also demonstrate the international scope of confraternity studies.

The first off the mark is *Confraternities and Catholic Reform in Italy, France, and Spain* edited by John P. Donnelly and Michael W. Maher and released in February 1999 in the series Sixteenth Century Essays and Studies (Thomas Jefferson University Press). Twelve essays analyze the role of confraternities at the critical intersection of religion and politics (particularly in France), explore their significance as models and laboratories for new forms of piety, charity, and parochial life, and study the impact of reform ideas on women and youth. While the greatest part of the collection focuses on the sixteenth century, a few of the essays carry their analysis further into the *ancien regime* (see below in this issue for a fuller review of this volume).

The second collection is *The Politics of Ritual Kinship: Confraternities and Social Order in Early Modern Italy*, edited by Nicholas Terpstra and scheduled for publication by Cambridge University Press in July, 1999. Opening with a historiographical review by Christopher F. Black of developments in confraternity studies over the past thirty years, the collection brings together studies on inter-related issues of gender, class, charity, and political consolidation in Italy. Five essays deal with the medieval and Renaissance roots of confraternal corporatism, while the bulk of the collection explores the shifting social, political, and religious roles of confraternities through the course of the *ancien regime* to their late-eighteenth-century suppression.

The third collection is *Confraternities and the Visual Arts in Renaissance Italy: Ritual, Spectacle, Image*, edited by Barbara Wisch and Diane Cole Ahl, scheduled for publication by Cambridge University Press in late 1999 or early 2000. In contrast to catalogues which document confraternal patronage, this collection approaches art, architecture, drama, and ritual as distinctive expressions of group identity and ambition that can only be understood through a contextual approach and methodology. It encompasses a wide range of works (painting, sculpture, architecture, dramatic spectacle) commissioned by confraternities in Italy from the thirteenth through the seventeenth centuries, and considers them in the context of a wide range of issues, including devotional practices, urban planning, poor relief, education, and the roles of women.

Though their publication together in this anniversary year for the Society for Confraternity Studies (1989–1999) is purely serendipitous, these three examples of scholarly *confraternitas* are the most appropriate way to mark and celebrate

the first ten years of the Society. At least one more volume of essays is currently in the planning stages, and no doubt more will appear in the years to come—inspired, we are sure, by a lively post-conference feast, and sketched out on the back of a place-mat.

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