

Editor's Note

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We are happy to publish in this issue two of the three presentations delivered last spring in the “Recent Trends Panel” at the Renaissance Society of America (Toronto, Canada, 29 March 2003). This is a formal, plenary-session panel the RSA mounts at its annual meetings in order to focus scholarly attention on new and exciting developments in a discipline or in a general research field. It was not without some pride, therefore, that I accepted the RSA’s invitation to organize such a panel for 2003 on the topic of “Recent Trends in Confraternity Studies” — pride for a research area that in the last fifteen years I had seen grow well beyond my wildest dreams. Back in 1989, when William R. Bowen and I co-organized the first international conference to focus exclusively on the intersection of art, literature, theatre, history, and devotion in medieval and Renaissance lay religious organizations, neither of us thought we would be presiding over the birth of an entire new discipline — “Confraternity Studies”.

That first conference, “Ritual and Recreation in Renaissance Confraternities” (Toronto, Canada, 28–30 April 1989), brought together scholars from Canada, the USA, Australia, France, Italy, and the United Kingdom. Its aim was to reach out, across national and disciplinary boundaries, and begin a dialogue between scholars working independently and, at times, at great distances from each other, on medieval and Renaissance confraternities. It worked! Something happened at that conference — a match was struck and a fire was lit; colleagues became friends and began to talk, to share ideas and information, to support each other’s work and to foster it along. Those three days of scholarly dialogue gave birth to a number of scholarly endeavours: two collections of articles on confraternities were published directly from the work of the conference;¹ a special collection of books and offprints dealing with confraternities was established at the Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, in Toronto;² the Society for Confraternity Studies was founded and began to organize sessions on confraternities at the annual meetings of the RSA (in late March), of the Kalamazoo Medieval Congress (in early May), and of the Sixteenth Century Studies Conference (in late October); and this modest but thriving journal, *Confraternitas*, came to life.

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- 1 The first was a special issue of the journal *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Reforme*, vol. 25:1 (Spring 1989), edited by William R. Bowen and containing nine articles; the second was the volume *Crossing the Boundaries. Christian Art and the Arts in Italian Medieval and Renaissance Confraternities*, EDAM Monograph Series, 15 (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Medieval Institute Publications / Western Michigan University, 1991), edited by Konrad Eisenbichler, containing another twelve articles.
 - 2 See the holdings of the collection at www.library.utoronto.ca/crrs/Confraternitas or follow the links from www.crrs.ca

In the following decade the “collection” model advanced scholarship on confraternities and helped focus attention on various aspects of lay religion in pre-and early-modern Europe. John Patrick Donnelly and Michael W. Maher brought out their *Confraternities and Catholic Reform in Italy, France, and Spain* (Kirksville, Missouri: Thomas Jefferson University Press, 1999); Nicholas Terpstra his *The Politics of Ritual Kinship. Confraternities and Social Order in Early Modern Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000); Barbara Wisch and Diane Cole Ahl their *Confraternities and the Visual Arts in Renaissance Italy. Ritual, Spectacle, Image* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). These were eclectic collections that gathered a medley of scholars from various disciplines using different approaches. In so doing, the collections and the scholars highlighted the vitality of current research on confraternities.

Such vitality was re-affirmed by a number of significant monographs that appeared in the 1990s — Maureen Flynn’s *Sacred Charity. Confraternities and Social Welfare in Spain, 1400–1700* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), Ludovica Sebgondi’s *Tre confraternite fiorentine* (Firenze: Salimbeni, 1991), Blake Wilson’s *Music and Merchants. The Laudesi Companies of Republican Florence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), John Henderson’s *Piety and Charity in Late Medieval Florence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), Nicholas Terpstra’s *Lay Confraternities and Civic Religion in Renaissance Bologna* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), Nerida Newbigin’s *Feste d’Oltrarno. Plays in Churches in Fifteenth-Century Florence*. Firenze: Leo S. Olschki, 1996), Konrad Eisenbichler’s *The Boys of the Archangel Raphael. A Youth Confraternity in Florence, 1411–1785* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998) — just to mention the monographs published by some of the participants at that 1989 conference! And there were others, on both sides of the Atlantic and even across the Pacific who produced significant studies on confraternities, too many even to begin to list them . . . the “Publications Received” section in *Confraternitas* is a testament not only to their number and to their productivity, but also to their strong belief in the fundamental interdisciplinarity and internationalism of the field.

With these thoughts in mind, it was a delight and an honour for me to be able to ask three of my colleagues to present their thoughts on the state and the future of confraternity studies as seen from their own disciplines. I asked Nerida Newbigin for the perspective from theatre history and drama, Nicholas Terpstra for the perspective from social history, and Barbara Wisch for the perspective from art history. The session was very well attended, with about five hundred people in the hall. The presentations were insightful and stimulating. They will all, eventually, be rewritten as formal articles to appear in other venues. In the meantime, however, two of these presentations are making a first appearance in our journal as a foretaste of things to come.

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