

L'Oratorio dell'Annunziata di Ferrara. Arte, storia, devozione e restauri, ed. Marinella Mazzei Traina. Ferrara: Ferrariae Decus/ Liberty House, 2002. 301 pp.

This gorgeous volume, one of four in the Ferrariae Decus series intended to promote the art and religious history of the churches of Ferrara, is a collection of essays focused around the oratory and its confraternity, Santa Maria Annunziata—for which there have also been several studies. Founded in the fourteenth century, the confraternity of Santa Maria Annunziata concerned itself with the spiritual and physical well being of those condemned to death. It is perhaps not surprising that the confraternity was also referred to as the “Buona Morte” and the street on which it stands (known today as Via Borgo di Sotto) was similarly called “della Morte”.

Confraternitas readers will be especially interested in the introduction provided by Andrea Alberti and the contributions of Laura Graziani Secchieri and Ludovica Sebreghondi, which discuss the history of Ferrara as it is infused with the history of the confraternity and vice versa. Graziani's grand contribution, consisting of eighty-six pages, is divided into four parts: *le origini tardo medioevali: l'Oratorio annesso all'ospedale dei Battuti Neri*, *le trasformazioni del '400: La Sala della Confraternita dei Battuti Neri*, *I rinnovamenti tardo rinascimentali e manieristi: luci ed ombre sull'Oratorio della Morte*, and *l'assetto barocco: la Chiesa della Morte*. They describe the various phases of the confraternity and the oratory, including architectural and pictorial developments, and the contributing factors to both. Graziani relays the complicated and occasionally misconstrued history of the *Compagnia dei Battuti Neri* and its association to the *hospitale di Santa Maria Bianca*, *alias della Morte*, as well as surrounding churches. Ferrara, which had banned the practice of flagellation in 1287 in the city statute, had in 1313 a society of *Battuti*—the confraternity of Santa Maria di Valverde. Furthermore, according to the 1366 statutes, public flagellation was permitted but only in cases of capital punishment. This complements Sebreghondi's discussion of the change of some *laudesi* confraternities into flagellant organizations in cases of contact with violence, such as those condemned to death, or resulting from extreme conditions, such as plague. It also may explain the change from the white to the black tunic. Graziani takes up such historical elements as the influence of the Ghibellines, the disciplinati, and the d'Este family, as well as the problematic cases of witches. She also uses various testamental bequests to define further the relationship of the confraternity with the community.

Sebreghondi further explores the relationship between confraternity and community in her stimulating article on the comforting rituals of confraternities. The members of the confraternity involved themselves in several ways, fulfilling practical needs, such as burying the dead, as well as spiritual needs. But it was not just the convicted these men were called upon to assist. Indeed, the members who heard confessions, carried placards, and provided the final contact with those

about to be executed also served their city. Condemned souls were of great concern to medieval communities, leading to legislation that burials and even executions take place at great distances from the city walls. Placating a soul wrongfully condemned to death, as a telling figure shows, with the image of the crucified Christ or other martyrs, assured the condemned of a place in heaven. Similarly, the sufferings of true Christians would add to the torment of the wrongdoers who still had hope of redemption. Sebregondi also discusses popular beliefs touching on the use of parts of the dead (fingers, fat, and blood) as cures for dog bites and hernias, as well as necessary elements in necromancy.

Other articles include an examination of the *Libro dei Giustiziati*, tables of reconstruction, the festivals and music of the confraternity, an inventory from the early eighteenth century, and discussions of various efforts to restore the oratory and its frescoes. The volume is enriched with many vivid colour photographs of everything from the tunics worn by the members to photographs of the building as it stands today.

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Sant'Anna dei Fiorentini. Storia, fede, arte, tradizione, ed. Anita Valentini. Firenze: Edizioni Polistampa, 2003. 212 pp., illustrations ISBN 88-8304-553-X

When the short-lived government of Walter of Brienne, Duke of Athens, came to a sudden end on 26 July 1343, the city of Florence was quick to give thanks and to celebrate its 'liberation' from the 'tyranny' of its invited foreign ruler. That celebration quickly became an elaborate annual feast held in honour of that day's patron saint, Anne the mother of the Virgin Mary, and turned into an emblematic display of Florentine republican ideals. Not surprisingly, two hundred years later, when Florence and its territory were conquered by Emperor Charles V and turned into a hereditary duchy for the Medici family, the feast commemorating the city's liberation from a tyrant duke was soon suppressed. Then, in 2000, nearly five hundred years after that suppression, the civic government of Florence re-instituted that distant celebration, complete with fanfares and speeches, Renaissance costumes and flags, religious ceremonies, processions with the saint's relics, and, fortunately for us, a commemorative volume. Such, then, is the genesis of the beautifully produced and richly illustrated book under examination. The volume is part of the series sponsored by the Florence section of the Knights of Jerusalem, to whom we owe a number of other fine works on Florentine religious culture in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

The articles in this volume are organized into four groups: history, faith, art, and tradition. The first group ('History') contains a detailed narrative by Franco Cardini of the fateful events of 1342–1343 that saw first the election of Walter of Brienne as tyrant and then, only eleven months later, his expulsion from the city