

Il "teatro" del Corpo di Cristo (secc. XV–XVI), special issue of *Civiltà bresciana* 8:2 (June 1999), 132 pp. [Contains: Claudio Bernardi, "Presentazione" pp. 4–5; Claudio Bernardi "Devozioni e rappresentazioni del Corpo di Cristo nel tardo medioevo" pp. 6–17; Carla Bino "Passioni e laude devozionali in area bresciana tra XIV e XVI secolo" pp. 18–39; Ilaria Tameni "Il teatro della Pietà: il Cristo morto nell'arte bresciana (1450–1550)" pp. 40–72; Monica Poisa "La processione del Corpus Domini a Brescia nei secoli XV e XVI" pp. 73–105.)

This special issue of the journal *Civiltà bresciana* is a brief dossier consisting of four articles. All deal strictly with the body of Christ and how it was represented in devotional texts, paintings, sculptures, and religious dramas in Brescia and its surrounding areas during the XV and XVI centuries.

The first and shortest essay is "Devozioni e rappresentazioni di Cristo nel tardo medioevo" by Claudio Bernardi. The author provides a general overview on theatrical and paratheatrical representations of the body of Christ, where pity is the fundamental and innovative trait. Mercy is here defined as the emotion aroused by the suffering man. Through the representation of Jesus' scourged body, the theatre of pity intends to depict God's love for mankind. Two dramaturgies are essential: the first narrates the incarnation, passion, death and resurrection of Christ and is mainly played during the holy week; the second deals with the entire story from the creation of the world to the final judgment and is staged during the festivities for Corpus Domini. At the end, the author reiterates the central role of Christ in pity; a tortured body, that is dead and alive at one and the same time.

The second article is Carla Bino's "Passioni e laude devozionali in area bresciana tra XIV e XVI secolo." The author divides her research into two main parts: in the first, she analyses some passion texts from Brescia and its province, pointing out philological, historical, and critical problems. The texts can be traced back to confraternities or religious orders before 1575 and include: the "Passio Christi" from the instrumental codex of the Disciplinati Confraternity of San Cristoforo of Brescia; "La Passione di San Valentino" of Breno; the "Laudario Camuno" of Malonno; the small manuscript of Bovegno; and, finally, "La Passione di Cristo" of Brother Stefano Quinzani from Orzinuovi. The author is well aware of the caution required in approaching these manuscripts, since some are hard to date or to contextualize; moreover, some have not yet been examined linguistically or philologically. The second section is much more discursive and deals with the passion of Christ as described in parts of the first three works mentioned above. Here Bino identifies a fixed dramaturgical scheme which she describes in depth. At the end, the reader is reminded that reviving the passion of Jesus Christ was not a contemplative or individual act within the lay religious confraternities; it was, instead, a choral event that involved, first, group flagellation and then love, mercy, and forgiveness.

In her “Il teatro della Pietà. Il Cristo morto nell’arte bresciana”, Ilaria Tameni examines paintings and sculptures of the dead Christ, underlining especially their role within the Discipline and the community. The *imago pietatis*, the icon of the Christ rising from the Holy Sepulcher, is an essential image of medieval devotion; in fact, it invites the observer to converse with the Christ figure and encourages an empathetic experience. It can represent the body of Christ either alone or in conjunction with other grieving characters and the *Arma Christi*. Tameni then analyses fresco cycles and draws a relevant distinction between the frescos of the XVI century and those of previous ages. The pictorial cycles of the XVI century are characterized by much more complexity and were meant to inspire the “disciplino” in his personal itinerary towards salvation. Their greater unity was inspired partly by the Franciscans, whose paintings were generally a series of frescos depicting a complete and organic theological theme and were endowed with a strong didactic power. The last part of the article is dedicated to sculptural works, such as crucifixes with jointed arms, statues of the dead Christ, sepulchres and Holy Mounts. The author emphasizes the theatricality of these art works, as, for example, in the case of crucifixes with jointed arms, where the body of Christ could actually be removed from the cross and set down in the sepulchre, thus facilitating the staging for Good Friday.

In the final article “La processione del Corpus Domini a Brescia nei secoli XV–XVI”, Monica Poisa deals with the revival of the sacrament of the Eucharist, the establishment of the religious holiday of the *Corpus Domini* and, especially, with its procession in Brescia. The author describes the path covered by the parade, the devices employed to decorate the streets and the façades of buildings, the music performed, and even the disputes on who should carry the poles of the baldachin. Poisa repeatedly stresses the complex and variegated meaning of the *Corpus Domini* procession, which was a social, political, economic, and religious event meant to unify the entire city and to awake civil and religious awareness within the community. The rich artistic heritage of Brescia compensates for the lack of descriptions and data on the manifestations held for *Corpus Domini*. Some pictorial works from the church of Corpus Christi, better known as the church of San Cristo, and from the chapels of the Santissimo Sacramento are briefly discussed; here Poisa mentions the significant role of the confraternities of the Corpo di Cristo in fostering figurative art.

This collection of articles, though limited in scope and in quantity, does bring to our attention centuries-old popular devotions and how they functioned within the community of Brescia and its periphery. Scholars of premodern and early modern confraternities will find food for thought and, perhaps, future research on lay religious devotion in northern Italy.

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