

Sacred Territory, Sacred Brotherhood: Confraternities in the Bolognese Contado

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Summary: This article focuses on the activities of confraternities in San Giovanni in Persiceto—a small town in the contado of Bologna—in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It considers their role in the spiritual lives of the brothers and their place in local religious culture. It examines relations between the confraternity and the larger church. Its argument is that the confraternities played an integrative role in what was an often divided community, but that this role was made possible by relations with “lords superior” outside the community—lords superior who intervened to enforce devotional unity.

The procession made its way slowly through the town—through narrow streets, through piazzas, to the church. The marching men wore distinctive habits, some carried torches and one a standard. At the center of the procession, surrounded by the light and the smoke of the burning torches, a statue of the Virgin Mary slowly advanced.

The pilgrims began gather in the evening, tired and dusty from their journey, and stood waiting at the door of the hostel. They knew they would find a bed to sleep in and a fire to warm them before they set out the next day.

Working by tallow candle, the bookkeeper made his final calculations, carefully balancing income and expenditure. He recorded spending on charitable gifts (dowries and flour), on anniversary masses, on salaries for a guardian and a chaplain, on wax and oil, on communion wafers. These were paid for using income from farms, from rents, and from loans.¹

These stories bring to mind the religious ritual, the charitable service, and the wealth of the great urban confraternities of Early Modern Italy. Such confraternities have been the object of much intensive study over the last three decades, study which has pointed out their religious significance, their role in mediating between the laity and the clergy, and their links to political and economic power.²

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- 1 Archivio di Stato di Bologna (henceforth ASB), Fondo Demaniale, 2, 7788, d. 2, *Dall'Anno 1702 fino al 1739 incluse*, 31.08.1721 *et passim* and ASB, Fondo Demaniale, 2, 7788, d. 3, *Atti della Ven Confraternita di S. Maria delle Laudi*, 18.9.1757 *et passim* (two of many meetings planning the procession of the Beata Vergine del Carmine), ASB, Fondo Demaniale, 9, 7779, *Entrata e Spesa dell'Anno 1792 al 1797*, d. 5, *Libro delle Congregazioni 1633–1700*, 2.02.1665 (a description of the hospital managed by Santa Maria della Scoppa) and ASB, Fondo Demaniale, 5, 7775, *Miscellanea*, d.2, *Calcolo delle annue rendite de luoghi, ed altri stabili* (a summary of accounts for Santa Maria della Scoppa).
 - 2 Black, *Italian Confraternities*, Terpstra, *Lay Confraternities*, and Fanti, *Confraternite e città*.

The stories, however, are in fact based on the activities of confraternities in a small town in the plains north of Bologna. The *contado* (countryside) contained a world of confraternities and sodalities, of hospitals and hospices, of dowry funds and orphanages. The pious institutions of the subject towns were far smaller and far poorer than those of the metropolis, but they should not be overlooked as objects of study. Indeed, historians such as Cecilia Hewlett and Angelo Torre have shown that these confraternities lend themselves well to study which explores the intersection of religious history and political history.³ First, it is possible to explore the way they reflected their socio-economic and political environments, to see how they *fit into* their communities and what they *meant to* their communities. Second, sensitivity not only to the “rootedness” of these institutions in their local contexts, but also to their interactions with civil and ecclesiastical power in the dominant city casts light on the larger dynamic of centre and periphery.⁴

The Context

This article focuses on a medium sized town to the northwest of Bologna: San Giovanni in Persiceto.⁵ In the centuries we are considering the commune consisted of an urban core and four *quartieri* (quarters). San Giovanni in Persiceto lay in the midst of a fertile region and agriculture was the foundation of its prosperity—reflected in its thriving market. A particularly important agricultural resource was the extensive communal property the town held through concessions by the Bishop of Bologna and the Abbot of Nonantola. These lands, originally used for hunting, fishing, and gathering, became more important in the fifteenth century when the drainage projects of the Bolognese *signore* Giovanni II Bentivoglio opened them to cultivation. By the late fifteenth century part of this land was leased to wealthy investors—*persicetani* and *bolognesi*—who had the resources to improve it while part was leased to smallholders.⁶

San Giovanni in Persiceto had always been politically conditioned by its larger neighbour—its position and its castle made it an essential element in the control of the plain, and those who contested power in Bologna also did so in San Giovanni in Persiceto. Although a strong tradition of local autonomy provoked rebellions over the course of the Middle Ages, the town was brought to heel in the late fifteenth cen-

3 Hewlett, *Rural Communities* and Torre, *Il consumo di devozioni*.

4 An overarching treatment of confraternities in the *contado* of Bologna is Giacomelli, “Le confraternite in ambiente rurale.” A close treatment of the confraternities of Budrio is in Rimondini, “Le confraternite in una comunità d’antico regime: il caso di Budrio.”

5 The history of San Giovanni in Persiceto is traced by Forni, *Persiceto e San Giovanni in Persiceto—Dalle origini a tutto il secolo XIX*. Bolognese politics in the early modern period are traced in De Benedictis, *Repubblica per contratto* and De Benedictis, ed., *Diritti in memoria, carità di patria*. Bologna’s control over its *contado* is treated in De Benedictis, *Patrizi e comunità*.

6 Ariotti, “Proprietà collettiva e riparto periodico in una comunità della pianura bolognese—San Giovanni in Persiceto,” 706–709.

tury—suffering the destruction of its *borghi* and the filling of its moats. The early sixteenth century, characterized by conflict between supporters of the Bentivoglio *signore* and supporters of the Papal *signore*, and by devastating passages of troops, saw a decisive intervention in the town's internal affairs by Bologna. In 1519, apparently inspired by the example of Bologna, San Giovanni in Persiceto's council affected a *chiusura* (closure)—henceforth it would consist of forty-two men who would serve for life and whose positions would be inherited by their sons. This move was approved by the rulers of Bologna, but seems to have provoked significant local opposition—opposition centering on perceived injustices in the distribution of the tax burden and mismanagement of communal resources. It was to resolve this conflict that Vicelegate Goro de' Gori issued a decree in January 1527 that sanctioned the *chiusura* while granting various oversight roles to representatives of the *popolo* (residents who were not part of the council).⁷ The decree went on to transform the mode of access to the town's communal lands: only a limited number of householders were henceforth allowed to enjoy these lands—they were defined as *veri fumanti* (true householders) or *partecipanti* (participants). By the late sixteenth century, after a period of flux, a system of periodic distribution had emerged, whereby communal lands which had been improved through lease were granted out by lot, under the supervision of a representative of the Bolognese Senate, and in exchange for a fee, to those on a virtually unchanging list of *partecipanti*.⁸

The *Lodo* (decree) of Goro de' Gori was aimed at stabilizing the political order and at protecting economic resources, but it laid the seeds for future conflict. The closure of the council created a division between the *consiglio* and the *popolo* while the closure of access to communal lands created a division between participants and non-participants. Subsequent centuries saw the frequent outbreak of conflict along these fault lines. The *consiglio* (council) and the *massari* (communal official) were the objects of frequent protest for their perceived mismanagement of the commune's resources. Particularly dramatic was the opposition to the council's decision to undertake a series of *permute* (land exchanges) with the Bolognese Senator Ciro Marescotti. In June 1634 a certain Pietro Baranzoni, whose hands were already stained by the murder of one of the councillors, gathered a crowd and attempted to invade the council's meeting hall—expelled, he vented his anger in a tirade against the council. In October of that year a memorial was nailed to the door of the town hall that accused the councillors, in the name of the “*popolo*” (the people) and the “*poverà*” (the poor) of the town, of mismanagement. The conflict was stilled by the delay of the contracts, but broke out again when negotiations were restarted in 1644. Indeed, this second wave of conflict resulted in the imprisonment of thirty-five *popolani* and the sending of a strongly worded memorial to the Cardinal Legate.⁹

7 Forni, *Persiceto e San Giovanni in Persiceto—Dalle origini a tutto il secolo XIX*, 293–303.

8 Ariotti, “Proprietà collettiva e riparto periodico in una comunità della pianura bolognese—San Giovanni in Persiceto,” 709–710.

9 Forni, *Persiceto e San Giovanni in Persiceto—Dalle origini a tutto il secolo XIX*, 361

Elisabetta Ariotti has traced the serious conflict which developed, over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, between the *comunisti* (participants belonging to the council oligarchy) and the *poveri partecipanti* (participants excluded from the council oligarchy). The main complaints of the latter, expressed initially through memorials of protest, and later through representatives present at council meetings, were the mismanagement of communal goods in favour of the wealthy and the misuse of the fees charged to enter into possession of these communal goods.¹⁰

San Giovanni in Persiceto, then, was a town reduced to subjection and to dependence, but it was not an easy town to govern—its political life was characterized by serious and long-lasting divisions.¹¹

The Confraternities

San Giovanni in Persiceto had many religious institutions for a town of its size: parish churches, a Benedictine abbey, a Franciscan convent, a Capuchin house, two confraternities which managed hospitals, two large devotional confraternities, a *monte di pietà* (charitable pawnbroker), and a number of minor devotional societies. Abundant documentary material survives for three of these institutions: the confraternities of Santa Maria della Scoppa, Santa Maria delle Laudi, and Corpo di Cristo. These three societies represent common types of early modern confraternity: Santa Maria della Scoppa was a large society whose principal task was the management of a pilgrim's hospice; Santa Maria delle Laudi was a confraternity dedicated to the singing of hymns to the Virgin Mary; the Corpo di Cristo was an old flagellant confraternity re-dedicated to the Eucharist at the behest of the reforming Bolognese Archbishop Gabriele Paleotti.¹²

Brotherhood

In a world full of temptation, in a world full of division, *confratelli* (brothers) were to strive for perfect devotion and perfect union. Since perfection was impossible—confraternities were human institutions and *confratelli* were human beings—the three societies drew up statutes intended to inspire and to discipline their members.¹³

and 365–366.

10 Ariotti, "Proprietà collettiva e riparto periodico in una comunità della pianura bolognese—San Giovanni in Persiceto," 717–729.

11 I have chosen to emphasize divisions over access to political power, and over the management of communal lands, but, of course, these were not the only matters which would have caused concern to its governors in Bologna. San Giovanni in Persiceto was involved in legal conflicts with the Abbots of Nonantola (over the terms of its leases), with nearby communities (over the management of water), and with tax authorities (over privileges of exemption).

12 The histories of each of these confraternities are briefly traced in Forni, *Persiceto e San Giovanni in Persiceto—Storia monografica*.

13 Statutes crystallized the values of each confraternity in rules, but these rules were not

A 1773 copy of the Statutes of Santa Maria delle Laudi shows how the work of establishing “peace” and “concord” began with the selection and the preparation of worthy men.¹⁴ When a man wished to join the minor company, he was required to make his request in writing to the *padre ordinario* (the chief spiritual official), listing his name, his surname, and his profession. After a preliminary meeting with the other spiritual officials, the *padre ordinario* proposed the candidate’s name to all the brothers so that “they [might] inquire into the life, the condition, and the quality” of the applicant. If these various reports were positive, the candidate’s name was placed to a vote of the brotherhood for final approval.¹⁵ A ritual welcomed the approved candidate to his novitiate. He was introduced to the master of novices and made to kneel before the altar and say three Our Fathers and three Hail Marys. After saluting the brothers, he stood between the *padre ordinario* and the master of novices while an office was celebrated. Finally the *padre ordinario* asked him whether “he was content to choose that [oratory] [for his prayers], and [for doing] penance for his sins, [whether] he is capable of persevering and striving to learn those things which those who come to our oratory are required to know ... and above all [whether] he will confess at least once every two months.” During his novitiate the candidate learned the ways of the oratory and was subject to correction. He was to sit in the place reserved for novices and was to leave the oratory when the business of the company was discussed. When the novice completed his novitiate he became

unchanging—they had to be constantly renewed. The 1734 Statutes of Santa Maria della Scoppa recognize this in their prologue: although “the zeal, and the piety of our ancestors suggested to them all the necessary paths to lead this, our very ancient company, to greater advancement and to the glory of God” it was nonetheless true that “[things] which [were] considered suitable in the beginning, and in the past, cannot today be [considered] adequate for the future”—rules were therefore necessary to provide order for the confraternity and to “establish ... peace and concord more lastingly in it.” ASB, Fondo Demaniale, 4, 7790, *Costituzioni della Antichissima, e Veneranda Confraternita di Santa Maria della Scoppa Anticamente della de Battuti Eretta nella Terra di S Giovanni in Persiceto*, 1788 copy of 1734 statutes (henceforth Statutes—SMS), fol. 1r–v and fols. 21v–22r.

- 14 For Bologna see Terpstra, *Lay Confraternities*, 84–93 (novitiate and induction) and 134–144 (community).
- 15 ASB, Fondo Demaniale, 4, 7790, *Prohemio e memoria dell’Oratorio, Altar, e del tempo che fu principiata questa compagnia di Madonna Santa Maria delle Laudi*, 1773 (henceforth Statutes—SML), fols. 7r–8r. This is a 1773 copy of an “original authentic copy” from the archives of the confraternity. A paragraph at the end of the first statute notes that while “it does not seem that it is currently [possible to discover] the origins of this company” it has been possible to recreate its history from a certain book which contains statutes and a membership list. The brief history discusses several reforms: in 1527, in 1574, and in 1577. It may be that the last reform produced these statutes. A paragraph at the end of the document describes a review of the statutes by four deputies and by Bonaventura Zappi—a representative of the archbishop and a preacher hired by the government of San Giovanni in Persiceto—on 1.04.1585. Indeed at the head of the document appear two dates: 10.05.1577 and 1.04.1585. Statutes—SML, fols. 1v–2r and fol. 12v. See also Statutes—SMS, fols. 8v–10r.

a professed member of the brotherhood. He was asked to make confession and take communion one time more than required by papal brief, fortifying himself spiritually for membership in the brotherhood. He was asked to choose a feast day for his profession. He was to provide himself with a robe, blessed by the town's archpriest, and one or more pounds of candles to be distributed to the brothers. Indeed "he is permitted to decorate our oratory as he sees fit, spending what he wishes" in doing so. During the ceremony itself, he was placed "near" the *padre ordinario*, a last moment of attention on the novice as an individual before his name was entered alongside his brothers in the company's *matricola* (matriculation book).¹⁶

Confraternities insisted that members continue to follow the rigorous moral standards established during their novitiate. The undated statutes of the Company of the Corpo di Cristo bar those of "evil life and reputation"¹⁷ while the statutes of Santa Maria delle Laudi warn brothers against bad habits: they are to avoid dishonest speech, especially swearing; they are to keep away from gaming with dice or cards or any other amusement "where money [is] won or lost"; they are to avoid loitering about in churches, in streets, in taverns, or in "any improper place [with] any evil company"; the unmarried are to observe chastity.¹⁸ The moral purity of the brothers was reinforced by prayer and meditation which aimed at sacralizing daily life in the world.¹⁹ Santa Maria delle Laudi required that upon waking in the morning its brothers say the Our Father, the Hail Mary, and the Credo and make a confession "so that if [they were to die] that day [they] would not die without confession"—following this they are to say seven Our Fathers and seven Hail Marys in remembrance of the Seven Joys of the Virgin. When they eat they are to bless their meals with an Our Father and an Ave Maria. Passing by a "sacred place" they are to say prayers for the souls of those buried therein—an Our Father or an Ave Maria. When they go to bed they are to make their confessions, recite the Credo, an Our Father, three Hail Marys, and the Salve Regina and each is to "thank God, who protected him, and defended him against so many dangers [during] that day" and "in the morning ... thank Him for the night" and "pray to Him for the future."²⁰

The aim of this individual devotion was to prepare the brothers for collective worship.²¹ Each of the confraternities had a freestanding oratory for its devotions and these oratories were regarded as sacred spaces—statutes enforce their

16 Statutes—SML, fols. 7r–8r.

17 AAB, *Raccolta degli Statuti*, Cart. IV, No.71, *Compagnia del Corpo di Cristo in S. Giovanni in Persiceto*, dated in index to seventeenth century (henceforth Statutes–CC), fol. 1r.

18 Statutes—SML, fol. 9r–v.

19 For private devotions in the confraternities of Bologna, see Terpstra, *Lay Confraternities*, 65–68.

20 Statutes—SML, fol. 10r–v.

21 For collective devotions in the confraternities of Bologna, see Terpstra, *Lay Confraternities*, 49–65.

separateness from the world.²² Santa Maria delle Laudi declared that its oratory was reserved for the brotherhood, whose members, “no matter their rank, condition, and estate” were forbidden from bringing any “outsider” without express permission. It was to be a place of quiet, the opposite of the confusing babble of the outside world which occasions sin—the statutes declare that “one often sins when one speaks [too] much.” There was to be no eating, drinking, sleeping, or reading of profane things and no “meetings of men” for any reason “even if it might occasionally appear permissible to some.”²³ Santa Maria della Scoppa demanded that its brothers enter the oratory with “modesty, respect, and humility,” that they take holy water and “worship” the Lord, getting on their knees and kissing the crucifix, that they take their places according to a hierarchy. This was no worldly hierarchy, but a hierarchy of piety which effaced social and economic difference: clergymen sat in the places of honour, officials sat on a dais above the brothers, and brothers sat according to the date of their matriculation.²⁴

Offices and orations were to be sung with all possible devotion, slowly, with choruses in their proper places. It was necessary to perform these functions “religiously” lest the brothers give scandal to the people and give offence to God—indeed the statutes declare cursed “the man who negligently does the work of God.”²⁵ Administration was also the “work of God,” and brothers were expected to approach their periodic meetings as though they were religious services.²⁶ When they came together to discuss confraternal business, brothers were to focus on the advantage of the company, forgetting “aims that are indirect, shadowy, and hidden” and all their “particular passions”—they were to do this out of “the fear of God.” When the officials introduced a matter for discussion, each brother would be afforded a chance to speak his mind but had to do so without confusion—each would be “sought by rank and by order as they are seated in their places.” Opinions had to be expressed with respect and with modesty and could not be interrupted by any “murmuring.” None might dare “raise [their] voice [nor] pound their hands on the benches”—signs of contempt. If any brother had anything more to say he had to ask permission from the archpriest or from the officials. All brothers were

22 Rimondini notes how the churches of *budresi* confraternities were also “[signals], [symbols], and [tangible proofs] of the power that [the confraternities] had achieved in the community.” Rimondini, “Le confraternite in una comunità d’antico regime: il caso di Budrio,” 397.

23 Statutes—SML, fols. 6v–7r. The company is to station a porter at the door to turn away those who are not members of the company and who have no permission to enter. Particularly worrisome are women, who are to be allowed in the oratory only on the Feast of the Virgin, lest their presence provoke “devilish lust.” Statutes—SML, fol. 2v and fol. 3v and fol. 10r–v.

24 Statutes—SMS, fols. 2r–3r. For Budrio see Rita Rimondini, “Le confraternite in una comunità d’antico regime: il caso di Budrio,” 384.

25 Statutes—SMS, fol. 6r–v.

26 On the importance of internal peace and unity in the confraternities of Bologna see Terpstra, *Lay Confraternities*, 134–144.

especially enjoined never to “lose sight of . . . the due respect for the lord officials, or for any of the other brothers (even the lowliest) nor utter offensive words nor offend anyone even to the slightest degree” lest they be expelled from the confraternity with no chance at readmission save at the pleasure of the officials. When it was time to vote on a proposition it was the duty of the officials to “paternally exhort [those present] . . . to act correctly and conscientiously [reminding them] to fear God and to fear for their souls.” Brothers were especially warned against “spoiling” or “breaking” these measures—those who did so neglected the fear of God, the respect of the company, and their own reputations. If, God forbid, such a thing were to happen, and if the guilty party was discovered “he who has acted with such temerity and such audacity” was to be cancelled from the matriculation books.²⁷

Indeed, the statutes of the confraternities contain a variety of mechanisms for enforcing the rules—warnings, condemnations, temporary or permanent expulsions. Santa Maria delle Laudi maintained order group ritually, through the ceremonial confession of sins. Every week each brother was required to “confess his faults” while kneeling before the ordinary. Public errors included such sins against the company as “not being solicitous of the company and . . . not being observers of our statutes” and such sins against brothers as giving scandal “to any of the brothers in our oratory or outside our oratory.” As penalties the ordinary assigns neither prayers nor fasts but public rituals of contrition that single out the sinner and exclude him temporarily from the brotherhood: he is to stand “outside the oratory, on his knees, or on his feet, or in the position of the cross for as long as [seems proper] . . . or [he is to] kiss the ground, or [perform] some other act of humility.”²⁸

The statutes were rules for living piously, through individual devotion and collective devotion, and all members were to observe them faithfully. Lest anyone claim ignorance, on every feast day after the mass the ordinary or, in his absence, another official, was to read one of the chapters to the assembled membership of Santa Maria della Scoppa “so that they might benefit spiritually and corporally” from these rules.²⁹

Community

The confraternities’ goal was the salvation of individual members through the creation of brotherhoods whose meditations and whose rites—and above all whose rules—protected the sinner from the evils of the world. If, however, these brotherhoods were to achieve their goal this inward piety had to be accompanied by outward engagement with the community.

The confraternal feast day was one form of engagement. Each confraternity was associated with a particular feast—Santa Maria della Scoppa with Pentecost, Santa Maria delle Laudi with the Nativity of the Virgin, and Corpo di Cristo with

27 Statutes—SMS, fols. 16r–19v and fols. 19v–20v.

28 Statutes—SML, fol. 9v.

29 Statutes—SMS, fol. 21v.

Corpus Christi. On these special days the confraternities decorated their oratories; they distributed ritual gifts of food, sonnets, and silk flowers; they sponsored the celebration of sung masses and the playing of *trombetti* (trumpets); they funded the celebratory firing of *mortaretti* (fireworks). Such celebrations opened the confraternities to invited guests—clergy and representatives of spiritual companies from San Giovanni in Persiceto and from Bologna.³⁰ A more public form of engagement was the procession. Confraternal records contain no detailed descriptions of processions, but they were undoubtedly similar to those carried out by confraternities elsewhere: confraternities marched as groups with the confraternal banner leading brothers who went clothed in their *cappe* (robes). The message of such rituals was clear—here were men who had subsumed their worldly identities into pious brotherhoods, who arranged themselves according to religious, rather than worldly values; they marched in groups which were essential components of the town's religious life.³¹ The central role of the confraternities in the religious life of San Giovanni in Persiceto is indicated by their presence, along with the archpriest, the canons, the clergy, the friars, and the councillors, at the dedication of the new Church of San Giovanni Battista—the religious center of the *castello*—in 1698.³²

30 Descriptions of feasts can be found in ASB, Fondo Demaniale, 8, 7778, d.1, *Atti di Congregazione dall'anno 1700 al 1736*, 1.05.1701 *et passim* and ASB, Fondo Demaniale, 4, 7803, d. 2, *Congregazioni della Compagnia dell'Anno 1681 all'Anno 1709 li 18 Agosto*, 5.06.1707 *et passim*. For Budrio see Rimondini, "Le confraternite in una comunità d'antico regime: il caso di Budrio," 409–410.

31 Rimondini notes how processions also served to affirm the position of the societies within a town's religious life and the status of those who were members of the brotherhoods. Rimondini, "Le confraternite in una comunità d'antico regime: il caso di Budrio," 408.

32 The old church had been demolished. Services were for a time held in the nearby Church of Santa Maria delle Laudi. Forni, *Persiceto e San Giovanni in Persiceto—Dalle origini a tutto il secolo XIX*, 374–375 and 386–387. The confraternities were also responsible for the enrichment of the town's religious life by the introduction of new cults. In 1580 Santa Maria della Scoppa agreed to donate a church and a parcel of land to Alessandro Pezzani that he might found a community of Capuchins since "there is no city or castle, however poor it may be, that does not seek, and desire, to have near to it a monastery of these reverend Capuchins." ASB, Fondo Demaniale, 1, 7771, *Istrumenti dal Anno 1500 al 1599*, d. 91, 9.05.1580. In 1630, we learn, many brothers of Corpo di Cristo were moved to donate toward the construction of a Madonna del Santissimo Rosario "and at the same time to [have made] a painting and its ornament." ASB, Fondo Demaniale, 4, 7803, d.1, *Congregazioni della Compagnia dall'Anno 1605 a tutto il primo Giugno 1681*, 4.08.1630. By 1664 Santa Maria delle Laudi had introduced the Company of the Beata Vergine della Carmine to its oratory. See Giovanni Forni, *Persiceto e San Giovanni in Persiceto—Storia monografica*, 215. In the 1730s Santa Maria della Scoppa worked to introduce the Cult of the Mater Dolorosa. The confraternity raised the money for the creation and the decoration of the image, won the right to place it in a position of honour in its church, organized a public procession of the image through the streets of the town, and drew up a set of rules for adherents. ASB, Fondo Demaniale, 8, 7778, *Atti di Congregazione dall'anno 1700 al 1736*, 26.03.1731, 15.07.1731, *et passim*. The rules are ASB, Fondo Demaniale, 3, 7773, *Istromenti, Regole e capitoli della compagnia della*

The ritual display of confraternal values would have been meaningless if those values had not been put into practice—the confraternities had to be charitable as well as devotional brotherhoods. Much charity likely went to members: confraternities provided material aid for sick members; they organized funerals, funeral processions, and burials; they offered communal prayers for dead members.³³ The confraternities also provided charity for other pious institutions. Between 1626 and 1638 the Abbess of San Michele sent appeals for aid to the officials of Santa Maria della Scoppa. On 7 September 1626 she describes the “extreme need in which this poor and exhausted college finds itself, deprived of all the substances necessary for human life” and begs “the charity or the alms [of] a basket of grapes,” declaring that she and her nuns “will never tire of praying Our Lord, as we continually do for your lordships, that He make you long prosperous and happy.”³⁴ In 1628 she again writes an appeal for aid for “my poor sisters and daughters” since their miserable state is “known to the whole world.”³⁵ The nuns promised to pray for the “houses and families” of the confraternity’s members (1628) and for the “republic” (1628) and “land” (1638) of San Giovanni in Persiceto. The material wealth of the confraternity was offered in exchange for the grace of the nuns’ prayers, a process which linked the two institutions together in an alliance which had as its object the protection of the town.³⁶ Indeed, offering assistance to the town, and to its poor, was part of the mission of the confraternities. Santa Maria della Scoppa managed a hospital³⁷

santissima vergine addolorata eretta canonicamente nella chiesa di santa maria della scoppa della terra di s giovanni in persiceto, d. 44, 1738. See Giovanni Forni, *Persiceto e San Giovanni in Persiceto—Storia monografica*, 279–280.

33 There is little documentary evidence of this intra-mural charity for the confraternities of San Giovanni in Persiceto, but it was such a common function of confraternities that it can hardly have been absent. For Budrio see Rimondini, “Le confraternite in una comunità d’antico regime: il caso di Budrio,” 401.

34 ASB, Fondo Demaniale, 7, 7777, d. 2, *Memoriali e suoi Rescritti*, letter 15, 7.09.1626.

35 ASB, Fondo Demaniale, 7, 7777, d. 2, *Memoriali e suoi Rescritti*, letter 13, 19.04.1628.

36 ASB, Fondo Demaniale, 7, 7777, d. 2, *Memoriali e suoi Rescritti*, letter 13, 19.04.1628 and ASB, Fondo Demaniale, 7, 7777, d. 2, *Memoriali e suoi Rescritti*, letter 4, 20.05.1638.

37 It is not clear what form of assistance was offered in this structure, or indeed whether assistance continued to be offered over the entire period under consideration. A 1617 pastoral visit called for an inscription reading “hospital for lodging the poor and [the pilgrim]” “especially because in the future [the hospital] must only exercise this charity of [providing] lodging.” A 1654 pastoral visitor orders that firewood be made ready for the “service of the poor in wintertime.” In a 1665 entry from the confraternity’s *libro delle congregazioni* we find a detailed picture of the hospital and a description of a room for warming and for feeding “all the pilgrims who will come to [the hospital].” In a 1684 entry, by contrast, we see the brothers rejecting the archbishop’s assertion that they are obliged to lodge pilgrims. Indeed, later pastoral visits do not refer to a confraternal hospital, referring instead to several other institutions, and an early eighteenth century balance sheet mentions no expenses directly described as being for the hospital (although it does mention the salary of the guardian, who may have been expected to meet these expenses). Tantalizingly, however, there is an entry in an eighteenth century *libro delle congregazioni* which describes a scandal in the “lodging” or the “hospital.” The woman

and Corpo di Cristo was required to bury the parish poor “who [were members] of no other company.”³⁸ The confraternities also served as channels through which inhabitants of the town distributed charity to their community. Young unmarried women were the favoured recipients.³⁹ The Company of Corpo di Cristo distributed dowries of 15 *lire* per year to poor girls of “honourable lives” in fulfillment of a bequest made by Alessandro Dansi⁴⁰ and Santa Maria della Scoppa awarded annual dowries as per the stipulations of the *eredità* Macenghi, Borsari, and Comini.⁴¹ Finally, all three confraternities provided aid to the town during periods of exceptional crisis. In 1529, a year of penury, Santa Maria della Scoppa gave 112 *lire* and Santa Maria delle Laudi gave 102 *lire* to the town council to aid the poor who lacked grain for bread while in 1630 Santa Maria della Scoppa responded to the town council’s request that it offer assistance to quarantined women and children.⁴²

These last episodes suggest a relationship between the town council and the three confraternities. The town council had a role in choosing, and paying, the *man-sionarie* (chaplains) who served the confraternities.⁴³ The town council and the confraternities were economic collaborators—in 1542 the town council gave 300

involved in the scandal is described as being lodged in the structure and is described as sick. Archivio della Collegiata di San Giovanni Battista (henceforth ACSGP), *Sacra Visita*, n. 50, fol. 96v, 19.06.1654 and ACSGP, *Sacra Visita*, n. 50, fol. 18v, 13.10.1617 and ASB, Fondo Demaniale, 9, 7779, *Entrata e Spesa dell’Anno 1792 al 1797*, d. 5, *Libro delle Congregazioni 1633–1700*, 2.02.1665 and ASB, Fondo Demaniale, 9, 7779, *Entrata e Spesa dell’Anno 1792 al 1797*, d. 5, *Libro delle Congregazioni 1633–1700*, 16.01.1684 and ASB, 5, 7775, *Miscellanea*, d. 2, fol. 13v, 1731. For Budrio see Rita Rimondini, “Le confraternite in una comunità d’antico regime: il caso di Budrio,” 405–406.

38 ASB, Fondo Demaniale, 1, 7771, *Istrumenti dal Anno 1500 al 1599*, d. 2, 29.07.1660. See Giovanni Forni, *Persiceto e San Giovanni in Persiceto—Storia monografica*, 266.

39 A recent treatment of the dowry funds administered by the Bolognese Monte di Pietà is I. Chabot, “Per ‘togliere dal pericolo prossimo l’onestà delle donzelle povere’—Aspetti della beneficenza dotale in età moderna.” For Budrio see Rimondini, “Le confraternite in una comunità d’antico regime: il caso di Budrio,” 403–404.

40 See Forni, *Persiceto e San Giovanni in Persiceto—Storia monografica*, 276.

41 See ASB, Fondo Demaniale, 6, 7776, *Depositi delle doti Macenghi, Borsari, e Comini—1787*.

42 See a Forni, *Persiceto e San Giovanni in Persiceto—Storia monografica*, 275, 214, and 277. See also Santa Maria della Scoppa’s decision to distribute 200 *lire* to the Abbey of San Michele and the “shamefaced and sick poor” in the worst months of the “penurious year” of 1654. ASB, Fondo Demaniale, 9, 7779, *Entrata e Spesa dell’Anno 1792 al 1797*, d. 5, *Libro delle Congregazioni 1633–1700*, 8.02.1654.

43 For the conflict which attended the introduction of this system, and the pressure exerted on the confraternities by the Archbishop of Bologna, see ASB, Fondo Demaniale, 4, 7803, d. 1, *Congregazioni della Compagnia dall’Anno 1605 a tutto il primo Giugno 1681*, 20.07.1636, *et passim*. For the *capitulationes* see ASB, Fondo Demaniale, 2, 7801, *Istrumenti dall’anno 1401 al 1784*, d. 100, 1637. They establish the order of nomination, which shifted between the council and the confraternities, lay out the qualifications and the obligations of the nominees, and stipulate their payment. See also Giovanni Forni, *Persiceto e San Giovanni in Persiceto—Storia monografica*, 268.

lire to Santa Maria della Scoppa to facilitate its construction of a new hospital, while in 1633 the town council deposited 800 *lire* on the Monte di Pietà of Bologna “for the extinguished *census* it held with [the Company of Santa Maria delle Laudi].”⁴⁴ These ties reflect a deeper alliance between the three confraternities and the elite of San Giovanni in Persiceto. Election procedures varied a great deal, but offices were often passed around a narrow clique of members, some of whom seem to have been men of substantial wealth and influence. These were men who supported the confraternity financially—like Giovanni Battista Imbiani, who helped Santa Maria delle Laudi to pay for its new church in 1626 and was elected chief official in 1633 or like Carlo Antonio Bussolari, who purchased wood from a property owned by the same confraternity to help it pay for a new chapel in 1639 and was elected prior in 1640.⁴⁵ These were men whose personal economies were closely interwoven with those of the confraternity—like Rocco and Cristoforo Loccatelli, prominent members of Santa Maria delle Laudi, who borrowed 2050 *lire* from their confraternity, money which they paid back by ceding a credit against the town council worth 2200 *lire* (Rocco declared that he would forgo repayment of the difference “purely out of love,” but that he wanted to be repaid eventually).⁴⁶ These were men who rented their confraternities’ goods—like Girolamo Imbiani, who was recommended as chief official in 1642 since he “[enjoys] the goods [of] the company [and] is excellently informed as to their state.”⁴⁷ Although as we shall see some evidence survives suggesting that less prominent brothers may have resisted this alliance of social power with confraternal power, it remained a characteristic of the institutions over the entire period under examination.

The confraternities sought to bridge the gap between the perfect world of the oratory and the imperfect world of the town—they displayed their values in feasts, in processions, and in charity. Perhaps it was this ongoing performance of the town’s piety which made the confraternities attractive to an elite which, by joining them and by administering them, took spiritual responsibility for San Giovanni in Persiceto.⁴⁸

Superiors

In their public activities—feasts, processions, charitable distributions—the three confraternities and their administrators sought to manifest the special holiness of

44 ASB, Fondo Demaniale, 1, 7771, *Istrumenti dal Anno 1500 al 1599*, d. 22, 11.05.1542 and ASB, Fondo Demaniale, 2, 7788, d. 1, *Libro di congregazioni vecchie*, 27.12.1633.

45 See Giovanni Forni, *Persiceto e San Giovanni in Persiceto—Storia monografica*, 214 and ASB, Fondo Demaniale, 2, 7788, d. 1, *Libro di congregazioni vecchie*, 8.12.1639 and 16.09.1640.

46 ASB, Fondo Demaniale, 2, 7788, d. 1, *Libro di congregazioni vecchie*, 14.09.1653.

47 ASB, Fondo Demaniale, 2, 7788, d. 1, *Libro di congregazioni vecchie*, 8.09.1642.

48 For the increasingly elite character of confraternal administration in Bologna see Terpstra, *Lay Confraternities*, 144–151. For the *contado* of Bologna see Giacomelli, “Le confraternite in ambiente rurale,” 75–83.

San Giovanni in Persiceto. In carrying out this mission, however, they were conditioned by the world beyond their town—by a church hierarchy centered universally in Rome and locally in Bologna. Relations between confraternities and the *signori superiori* (lord superiors) were always complex, characterized by conflict and by cooperation, since, as Adriano Prosperi and Alfeo Giacomelli have noted, the trend in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was the progressive assertion of ecclesiastical control over formerly independent confraternities.⁴⁹

A pastoral visit to San Giovanni in Persiceto in 1613 gives us a glimpse of the ideal “chain-of-command.” The Archbishop of Bologna has sent Lodovico Beccadelli as his *visitor generalis* (general inspector), and Beccadelli, after visiting the Confraternity of Santa Maria della Scoppa, orders that at the beginning of their terms its officials are to swear an oath “in the hands” of the local archpriest to “faithfully govern the goods and the revenues” of their company. Every year, moreover, they are to “render an account” of their administration in the presence of the archpriest.⁵⁰

The ideal of obedience to a clearly constituted chain of authority should not blind us to the fact that real relations were often characterized by conflict. In 1660, for example, the archpriest commanded Corpo di Cristo to remove its collection boxes and forbade it from celebrating its mass before the parish mass since “the parish collection box is being deprived of the alms which sustain the poor, and maintain the candles for the dead.”⁵¹ The same anxiety was at work in the far more complex dispute which broke out between the archpriest and Santa Maria delle Laudi between 1666 and 1667. In October 1666, according to confraternal records, the archpriest demanded a double payment for his participation in the previous feast and procession. After sending representatives to Bologna to ask whether they were obliged to pay, the officers of the confraternity responded that they would “entirely satisfy his demand, [if] this [is] deliberated and decided by the lord superiors.” In November 1667, the archpriest asked the confraternity to modify one of its properties to make room for a building project. The confraternity refused, arguing that the modification would cause too much damage. Given this history, the prior was not terribly surprised when, in late November, he received a precept issued by the vicar general at the behest of the archpriest. The precept prohibited the confraternity from alms-gathering using “alms boxes” and forbade it from carrying out pro-

49 On relations between confraternities and the church see Prosperi “*Parrocchie e confraternite tra Cinquecento e Seicento*” and Giacomelli “*Le confraternite in ambiente rurale*.” See also Torre, *Il Consumo di Devozioni*.

50 ACSGP, *Sacra Visita*, n. 50, fol. 13r, 14.10.1613. The oversight exercised by the ecclesiastical authorities was quite extensive. The lord superiors involved themselves in the confraternities’ economic decisions; they concerned themselves with the confraternities’ legal difficulties; they enforced, and occasionally modified, the confraternities’ liturgical and charitable burdens; they corrected what they saw as abuses of practice.

51 ASB, Fondo Demaniale, 4, 7803, d. 1, *Congregazioni della Compagnia dall’Anno 1605 a tutto il primo Giugno 1681*, 7.11.1660 *et passim*.

cessions or masses before those of the parish. The confraternity immediately sent representatives to hear his complaints and convince him “of the [strong] desire [of] all the brothers to [return] to good relations.” The matter was complex—clerical prerogatives, property matters, liturgical conflicts—but at the root was a question of power—the actions of the confraternity “disappointed” the archpriest and made him feel “little respected.” It seems that the negotiations were successful, however, as the records reveal no further conflict.⁵²

The confraternities, however, were sometimes involved in conflicts which made them welcome the intervention of the lord superiors. On 21 July 1692, for example, Santa Maria della Scoppa discovered that the Abbey of San Michele had blocked a drainage canal and caused the flooding of its properties. Since the vicar general happened to be in town investigating the matter, a meeting was called and a brother was deputed to join the lord superior at the site and appeal for him to defend the confraternity’s *ius* (right).⁵³ In 1730 Santa Maria della Scoppa was forced to draw up a memorial complaining about a tenant of Signore Calzolari, a lawyer, who had barred a road which accessed a property belonging to the company. The memorial was drawn up “at the instance of [the town council] and [was] undersigned by the other interested parties, [so that it might be] presented to the most eminent Legate of Bologna.”⁵⁴ The 1720s saw a far more serious dispute between Santa Maria della Scoppa and Santa Maria delle Laudi, on the one hand, and the town council, on the other hand, over the nomination of a new chaplain—the confraternities had dared to nominate a candidate who was not a participant in the town’s communal goods. The resulting lawsuit seems to have deeply divided the community. Giovanni Forni cites a letter from Giovanni Battista Beltrami to Francesco Ardizzoni, the procurator of the town council, which describes the “hundred thousand absurdities and falsities spread by Don Nicola Sarti, the prior of the confraternity, who went about proclaiming among the brothers, the nuns, and the people that the [town council] was entirely in the wrong and that he marvelled at its decision to undertake so unjust a lawsuit.” It took two decisions—first by the vicar general and then by the Sacra Rota—to decide the case in favour of the confraternities.⁵⁵

The superiors had much to do in adjudicating disputes between the confraternities and individuals and institutions, but their most important task was to ensure the peace and the unity of the brotherhoods.

Sometimes this meant intervening to reform potentially divisive administrative irregularities. On 7 September 1647, for example, the officials of Santa Maria

52 ASB, Fondo Demaniale, 2, 7788, d. 1, *Libro di congregazioni vecchie*, 3.10.1666, 4.11.1667, 27.11.1667, 30.11.1667, and 4.12.1667.

53 ASB, Fondo Demaniale, 9, 7779, *Entrata e Spesa dell'Anno 1792 al 1797*, d. 5, *Libro delle Congregazioni 1633–1700*, 21.07.1692.

54 ASB, Fondo Demaniale, 8, 7778, d. 1, *Atti dil Congregazione dall'anno 1700 al 1736*, 26.02.1730.

55 Giovanni Forni, *Persiceto e San Giovanni in Persiceto—Storia monografica*, 216–217. See also ASB, Fondo Demaniale, 1, 7787, *Liti*, 1720 and 1721.

delle Laudi, acting at the mandate of the superiors, ordered that the extraction of confraternal offices had to take place at the proper time, that all whose names were drawn were required to serve, that the names of those who were drawn for service and who refused to serve were to be returned to the pouches, and that no official was to meddle in the affairs of another official.⁵⁶ On 24 July 1695 the brothers of Santa Maria della Scoppa opened and read a letter from the Archbishop of Bologna. The Archbishop began by noting that he had heard that the confraternity was afflicted by certain discords “which are blameworthy for all faithful Christians.” Accordingly he commanded the chief official to render account of his administration and ordered all those officials who had been elected by voice vote to submit themselves to confirmation by secret ballot. In the future, he continued, no office was to be exercised by proxy, and all officials were to be elected, and all measures were to be passed, by secret vote. The assembled brothers agreed to submit to the demand of their lord superior.⁵⁷

Superiors were sometimes asked to resolve disputes which were too intractable or too delicate for the officials of the confraternities. On 22 May 1718, for example, we learn that the *confratelli* of Santa Maria della Scoppa had fallen into “discords” and “contrasts” over the rejection of two candidates for admission to the confraternity—two individuals who, interestingly, were not the sons of *confratelli*. The officials of the confraternity appealed to the archpriest, who declared, basing himself on “diverse authorities and precedents” that the two rejected candidates should be admitted as novices.⁵⁸ Nineteen years later Santa Maria delle Laudi met to plan its Feast of the Carmine. A certain Giovanni Baranzoni began to use “outrageous words” and to agitate the other brothers “as is his wont.” The officials left the oratory rather than be exposed to these “immodest words.” The next day remonstrance was made to the archpriest “that he might command [this man] to comport himself, during the congregations, in deeds and in words, with due modesty.” The archpriest intervened, and, moreover, threatened the man with expulsion—this to “remove the

56 ASB, Fondo Demaniale, 2, 7788, d. 1, *Libro di congregazioni vecchie*, 7.09.1647. This meeting seems to have been part of a larger dispute over the administration of the confraternity. Already in August the *superiori* had demanded that the confraternity send a copy of its statutes for review in Bologna. Sometime between 11 September and 24 September of the following year, the prior, summoned by the vicar general to Bologna, was imprisoned and accused of what seem to have been electoral and administrative irregularities. The most serious charge, however, was that he had been heard to say that “he did not at all recognize any superior—that is his eminence and his vicars.” The congregation which discussed this development swore the innocence of their prior before the archpriest and named four deputies to go to Bologna “to receive orders, and to swear on the [statutes].” ASB, Fondo Demaniale, 2, 7788, d. 1, *Libro di congregazioni vecchie*, 30.09.1647 and 24.09.1648.

57 ASB, Fondo Demaniale, 9, 7779, *Entrata e Spesa dell'Anno 1792 al 1797*, d. 5, *Libro delle Congregazioni 1633–1700*, 24.07.1695.

58 ASB, Fondo Demaniale, 8, 7778, d. 1, *Atti dil Congregazione dall'anno 1700 al 1736*, 22.05.1718.

spirit of division from the company.”⁵⁹ Sometimes the problems were more serious, and led to direct intervention in the internal affairs of the confraternity. Corpo di Cristo experienced this kind of intervention between 1638 and 1641. A complaint to the authorities in Bologna resulted in a letter being sent to the archpriest calling on him to “correct the problems of this company [and] name four deputies to care for everything with the assistance of the [company’s] rector ... until [such time as] His Eminence has been able to review the books of the said [company] and has confirmed its capitulations so that it might officiate without dispute to the honour of His Divine Majesty.”⁶⁰ The archpriest summoned the confraternity and declared that, having learned from reports and from observation that the sitting chief official was “hardly capable” of exercising his office, he was going to name deputies who would be in charge of “building [projects] and to oversee the goods and the interests of the company.”⁶¹ The confraternity’s problems seem to have made its brothers very reluctant to accept office: on one occasion too few people attended the meeting to conduct a legitimate election while on another occasion the confraternity was “unable to elect a rector, since no one wished to accept” the office. On this last occasion, brothers were sent to the archpriest, who ordered them to create four deputies to draw up a list of “good” candidates. He added that he would get an order from the superiors requiring these people to accept office “and if [an elected candidate] does not want to accept [an office] he will be forced [to do so] even unto expulsion from the company.” This order notwithstanding, the confraternity was not able to elect officials until 30 May 1641.

One source of division in the brotherhoods was their domination by small oligarchies. Sometimes the creation of a confraternal oligarchy was the consequence of a specific reform. In 1636, for example, Santa Maria della Scoppa debated how to reduce the “disorders” which occurred when all the professed members were called to meetings. The members decided to follow the example of “many other well-regulated companies” and reduce the number of brothers necessary for a valid vote. They passed a measure which nominated a number of individuals with the power to name sixteen “of the most able” brothers to govern the confraternity—all other brothers were excluded from this responsibility.⁶² Historians have noted that the trend toward the formation of such oligarchies ran contrary to the confraternal tradition of *governo largo* (broad government). Indeed, there are a few hints in the documentation that it occasionally provoked resistance. In 1611, for example, many brothers of Corpo di Cristo “complained that in the past the rectors and the treasur-

59 ASB, Fondo Demaniale, 2, 7788, d. 2, *Dall’Anno 1702 fino al 1739 incluse e parte del 1740. Libro delle congregazioni della compagnia di S Maria delle Laudi*, 13.09.1739.

60 ASB, Fondo Demaniale, 4, 7803, d. 1, *Congregazioni della Compagnia dall’Anno 1605 a tutto il primo Giugno 1681*, 14.12.1638 and 18.12.1638.

61 ASB, Fondo Demaniale, 4, 7803, d. 1, *Congregazioni della Compagnia dall’Anno 1605 a tutto il primo Giugno 1681*, 30.01.1639.

62 ASB, Fondo Demaniale, 9, 7779, *Entrata e Spesa dell’Anno 1792 al 1797*, d. 5, *Libro delle Congregazioni 1633–1700*, 6.04.1636.

ers [have been elected] by voice vote, at the pleasure of certain persons, so that the whole corporal was not satisfied” and proposed “that pouches be prepared with the names of all the professed members, so that everyone might be satisfied.”⁶³ We hear this sentiment again in June 1640 when a list of “good” candidates for office was read aloud and a number of brothers “who [do] not know how to read” protested the exclusion of their names saying “that they know how to govern their houses as well as those who know how to read.”⁶⁴

Intriguingly, there is evidence that on at least one occasion brothers made use of the superiors to open up the power structure of their confraternities. Our copy of Santa Maria della Scoppa’s statutes was drawn up in 1788 by brothers who were seeking to modify its provisions. They disapproved of the twelfth statute, which defined the methods of electing the chief official, and particularly of the fact that the electors were the six sitting officials together with six men of the congregation. They declared that since the 1748 election of *Reverendo Signore* Lorenzo Rossi no new election had been held, but that the sitting chief official had been confirmed by voice vote every year. They argued that “it wound[ed] their honour and distributive justice to entrust the election of the first official of the confraternity to twelve brothers alone, excluding all the others who, neither with their own voice directly, nor indirectly by a formal compromise, [could] in any way take part in this election.” They reported that some of the brothers had already raised this issue—on 30 May 1773 a congregation urged the derogation of the statute by the “ecclesiastical superior.” Nothing, however, had been done on that occasion or on other occasions “but every year this *Reverendo Signore* Lorenzo Rossi has been elected by [voice vote] as chief officer, and [since this man] has now become apoplectic, he is in no way able to exercise [his office].” Thus they appealed, with the approval of the archpriest, for a change in the statute “only in that part, which gives the right of election to only twelve brothers” and hence “enforce the right which every brother fundamentally has to participate in the election of their first official.” The vicar general, to whom this petition was addressed, acting to preserve the good government of the company, agreed to modify the statute. According to the new method, on the Sunday before the Feast of Corpus Christi the sitting chief official was to send announcements of the impending election to all the brothers; they were to gather together in the presence of the archpriest and invoke the aid of the Holy Spirit and every brother was to write the name of his candidate on a ballot “and in the case that anyone does not know how to write, this person will have his ballot written by the lord archpriest”; the ballots were to be brought to the officials and counted by the archpriest—the winner was to be the candidate with the most votes. The equality

63 ASB, Fondo Demaniale, 4, 7803, d. 1, *Congregazioni della Compagnia dall’Anno 1605 a tutto il primo Giugno 1681*, 23.05.1611.

64 ASB, Fondo Demaniale, 4, 7803, d. 1, *Congregazioni della Compagnia dall’Anno 1605 a tutto il primo Giugno 1681*, 17.06.1640.

and the unity of the brotherhood had been re-established—with the aid of external authority!⁶⁵

Conclusions

The town's three confraternities permitted brothers to cultivate their salvation through the sacralization of daily life and through participation in collectively organized devotion and charity.

The societies, however, had broader relevance for the community as a whole. Alfeo Giacomelli has noted how confraternities favoured the “disciplining” of the towns of the *contado* of Bologna—they introduced “evangelical ideals of peace, brotherhood, charity [and] a new interior morality.”⁶⁶ This is certainly true for the confraternities of San Giovanni in Persiceto, whose statutes sought to foster unity in a town whose history was often characterized by division. Cecilia Hewlett has discussed the role of confraternities in the *contado* of Florence in maintaining “a strong local identity in the face of increasing Florentine intervention.”⁶⁷ The confraternities of San Giovanni in Persiceto, with their magnificently decorated churches, with their elaborate ceremonials, with their processions, and with their distributions of charity, asserted the piety and the generosity—the value—of a town which had lost its independence in a larger state.

These functions, however, unfolded against the backdrop of relations, sometimes conflictual and sometimes cooperative, with church authority. Indeed, the confraternities' ability to foster concord and to represent the community often depended on the intervention of lord superiors whose authority was centered in Bologna. In this, the history of the confraternities mirrors the history of the *contado* of Bologna—a central power engaged in continual negotiation with its peripheral subjects.

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65 Statutes—SMS, fols. 22v–25v. The year, and the use of the term “*giustizia distributiva*” suggests that these brothers were influenced not only by the confraternity's celebration of equality and of unity, but also by contemporary political thought.

66 Alfeo Giacomelli “Le confraternite in ambiente rurale,” 82–83.

67 Cecilia Hewlett, *Rural Communities in Renaissance Tuscany*, 154–158.

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