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Excerpt

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Introduction

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Confraternities – religious organizations that encouraged devotion and promoted charity among the laity – represented one of the most fundamental and dynamic forms of piety during the late Middle Ages and Renaissance.¹ Large cities, small towns, and even poor villages supported confraternities for men, women, and children, many crossing boundaries of class and gender within a single brotherhood. Hundreds of confraternities were founded in the wake of the religious fervor of 1260, when processions of lay penitents, inspired by the charismatic preaching of Fra Raniero Fasani in Perugia, thronged Italian towns, flagellating themselves to expiate the sins of mankind.² Encouraged by the mendicant orders but lay directed and administratively autonomous,³ confraternities served as alternatives to parish and monastery, empowering members with greater control over their salvation.

Within a century of their foundation, the popularity of sodalities increased dramatically. By 1350, Florence counted around thirty-three; a century later the number had tripled, incorporating virtually every adult male. By the fifteenth century, all male citizens in the Tuscan town of Borgo Sansepolcro belonged to a flagellant confraternity. In sixteenth-century Rome, there were approximately 112 confraternities, many with over 500 members. And by 1575 in Venice, the six *scuole grandi* tallied almost 6,000 brothers – about 10 percent of the adult male population – while another 120 lesser *scuole* served guilds, national groups, and women.⁴ Although the strength of confraternal bonds differed widely, the circle of *confratelli* (male members) and *consorelle* (female members) created a haven in which the antagonistic worlds of family, politics, economics, and religion could ideally be reconciled.⁵

At the time of their foundation, confraternities took two main forms: *laudesi*, who sang vernacular songs of praise to Mary and other saintly patrons;⁶ and *bat-tuti* or *disciplinati*, who whipped themselves in penitential imitation of Christ's flagellation. The confraternal practice of flagellation, whether in private spaces or

public processions, was the exclusive province of men.⁷ Women's roles and activities, which only recently have begun to be studied, were essential to the orderly functioning of many sodalities. *Consorelle* served as wealthy benefactors, distributors of alms, custodians of sacred and miracle-working images, and caretakers of the sick and indigent. As confraternities evolved, the sharp distinctions between the *laudesi* and *disciplinati* blurred. Testamentary bequests of money and property forced the flagellants to become more involved in the business of philanthropy; aggregations with the *battuti* offered the *laudesi* the spiritual benefits of their brothers' self-mortification.

Both *laudesi* and flagellant sodalities were highly organized, meeting at least weekly for pious devotions and frequently for special feasts. They maintained altars, sponsored masses, commissioned sacred plays and music, and hired preachers for Lenten and Holy Week sermons.⁸ Many potent rituals surrounding death that formerly were reserved for the clergy were assumed by confraternities. These included recitation of the Office of the Dead, honorable burial in *sacco* (confraternal sackcloth habit), celebration of anniversary requiem masses, and administration of bequests of money and property.⁹ *Confratelli* developed their devotional life with considerable autonomy and creativity, encouraging service to God without leaving the secular life. Through public processions, theatrical performances, and special masses on feast days, members cultivated special bonds of obligation with their heavenly advocates on behalf of themselves and the populace at large.

Following the prescriptions of the Seven Acts of Mercy, confraternities administered charity of several kinds. Distribution of charity became a chief characteristic of confraternal piety, a true display of *amor Dei* (love of God) and *amor proximi* (love of neighbor).¹⁰ New systems of philanthropy, financed and organized by confraternities, became fundamental components of public welfare in the early modern period. Ultimately, confraternities were linked to the development of charitable, educational, and, in later centuries, even correctional institutions. Hospitals, shelters, and orphanages, constructed by confraternities to provide services for women, children, and the indigent, also significantly affected the urban fabric. The strategies of salvation developed by the sodalities were not solely restricted to their own membership, but reflected a strong sense of civic loyalty. Confraternities functioned as trustees of public welfare.

Even nonmembership did not signify exclusion from confraternal life. The poor received alms and loaves of bread stamped with confraternal emblems. In the city, tenants of all classes, from cardinals to modest shopkeepers, paid rent for buildings owned by confraternities; in the country, peasants worked confraternal vineyards and fields. The populace acquired rich indulgences by participating in splendid processions led by *confratelli* dressed in characteristic sackcloth habits and pointed hoods. Architects, artists, and artisans, many *confratelli* themselves, were employed by sodalities to build churches, oratories, and hospitals; to manufacture vast scenographic constructions for sacred drama and processions; to paint frescoes, altarpieces, and funeral drapery; to carve sculpture or the insignia for real estate holdings. Visual evidence of confraternities was everywhere, a pervasive influence on the quality, character, and economy of Renaissance life.¹¹

Confraternities also became enmeshed in civic conflicts and competition. Political complications ensued as powerful families involved themselves in the

affairs of the sodalities to enhance their social stature and political influence. For example, the Medici appropriated the Compagnia de' Magi and its communal festivities as their own when they came to power; they were also deeply invested in Florentine youth confraternities.¹² The ruling Bentivoglio and other elite families in Bologna manipulated confraternities to strengthen their position in the new political order taking shape under papal rule.¹³ So powerful and numerous were confraternities that at times they were feared, regulated, and suppressed.¹⁴ In 1562, the Council of Trent reduced the independence of confraternities by requiring episcopal visitation and approval of "all pious places." Clement VIII's bull *Quaecumque* of 1604 further extended the church's firm control over their affairs.¹⁵ Yet confraternities continued to evolve as the foremost sponsors of charitable institutions, custodians of cultic sites, and teachers of Christian doctrine, even as they lost autonomy and their genuinely lay character.¹⁶ In 1890, the Italian government officially disbanded them, citing "continuous and severe disturbances of the moral, political, and social order" because it was claimed that confraternal devotions had deteriorated into a mere "spectacle of religious ceremonies" inculcating "fanaticism and ignorance." Although a few have been reinstated in the twentieth century, the influence they once exerted is now difficult to imagine.¹⁷

From the beginning, confraternities were great patrons of art and architecture. Some became wealthy enough to construct private oratories and churches of their own or enlisted the sponsorship of a powerful patron;¹⁸ most commissioned the decoration of chapels within churches. *Confratelli* commissioned altarpieces, extensive narrative cycles, statuary, processional banners, and liturgical and cult objects to honor their patron saints and protectors, to glorify their rituals, and to publicize their good works. They directed the building and decoration of their residence halls as well as the hospitals and shelters they administered. The privilege of artistic patronage was extended to countless members who on their own never could have afforded such costly undertakings. The upper classes, in turn, avoided the omnipresent suspicion of personal vainglory by group commissions,¹⁹ although the generosity of individual benefactors was often critical to the realization of the collective projects. Through testamentary bequests, even the dead contributed to confraternal artistic life. The unique devotional, ritual, and philanthropic activities of confraternities inspired new images whose contexts only now are beginning to be studied.

Confraternities were patrons of magnificent ephemera designed for ritual celebrations and public processions. These temporary festive constructions, made to honor celestial advocates as well as to impress the civic audience, were given high priority among confraternal expenditures. A *festaiuolo* (master of festivities) was an elected official mandated by many confraternal statutes. *Confratelli* wrote or commissioned *sacre rappresentazioni* (sacred plays) that they themselves performed, encouraging the development of early Italian religious drama. The spectacular multimedia plays included music composed for the performances and complex stage machinery to create the special effects so admired by the Renaissance audience.

Through their multiple religious, philanthropic, social, and festive functions, confraternities actively participated in the economy of salvation, the civic order,

and the fashioning of Renaissance visual culture. All the same, the contextual study of confraternities is relatively new. Through nearly the first half of this century, confraternities for the most part were romanticized as relics of a vanished age of faith. In 1960, commemorating the great penitential devotion of 1260, a major international conference was held in Perugia to study the flagellants. Another conference in 1969 reviewed the results, advocating further avenues of research.²⁰ European scholars increasingly recognized the pervasive role of confraternities in early modern society, and began to reinvestigate their history from new cross-disciplinary perspectives. Since the 1970s, English-speaking social historians, joining their European counterparts, have produced important studies in this field.²¹ At the same time, perhaps inspired by the great public spectacles of social protest and antiwar demonstrations of the 1960s and 1970s, many historians developed new critical approaches to the study of Renaissance political order, group identities, ritual practices, and festal behavior.

By contrast, confraternal patronage of the visual arts has remained little examined compared to the other areas of patronage studies in the history of art. The focus has been predominantly on individual works of art or the patronage of a single confraternity.²² In 1993, we organized the first session on Italian confraternities and the visual arts ever held at the College Art Association of America. Since then, we have chaired several others at the Sixteenth Century Studies Conference. From these sessions, we have selected contributions for this volume. Until now, there has been no collection of essays – in any language – focusing entirely on Italian confraternal patronage of the arts. The book is inspired by our conviction that the art commissioned by Renaissance sodalities represents a significant phenomenon within the vast arena of corporate patronage. As the subtitle of the volume – *Ritual, Spectacle, Image* – suggests, confraternal patronage must be studied by reintegrating works of art into the rich cultural and social contexts from which they emerged, using ritual and spectacle as crucial interpretative strategies.

This volume of essays provides a forum for innovative research in this area by scholars in Renaissance history, religious studies, theater, and the history of art. The eleven essays are organized chronologically, geographically, and thematically; eight are complementary, paired to allow scholars from different disciplines to analyze confraternal rituals and patronage from the Trecento through the early Seicento. They explore small towns as well as major urban centers – Florence, Bologna, and Rome.²³ The essays offer paradigmatic studies of the broad range of philanthropic and devotional activities of the sodalities and the ways in which their art and architectural commissions directly related to these functions: penitential flagellant processions undertaken on behalf of plague-stricken communities with *confratelli* marching behind their *gonfaloni* (banners); the construction and decoration of oratories for adolescent boys; the establishment of large hospitals and orphanages; the production and performance of multimedia sacred spectacles; and the building of shelters in which *zitelle* (poor, respectable maidens) and daughters of prostitutes could be educated away from poverty or sin. The works of art and architecture – visual and dramatic – are integrated into the vibrant tableau of sacred and civic life in Renaissance Italy. They identify critical loci where boundaries between sacred and secular dissolved.

INTRODUCTION

5

Confraternal response to disease and death is the subject of the first essay. Louise Marshall analyzes a range of images – processional banners, small devotional panels, monumental altarpieces – from Genoa, Perugia, and Arezzo. These works were commissioned by confraternities in the Trecento and Quattrocento in response to the plague or in anticipation of its advent. Marshall proposes a new interpretation of Black Death art, countering Millard Meiss and complementing the more recent studies of Henk van Os and Joseph Polzer. She argues that an understanding of the expectations attached to such images and the ways in which they were believed to operate is crucial to their interpretation. In setting up hierarchical relationships of mutual obligation between worshippers, saints, and image, those who commissioned these works did not think of themselves as helpless, as Meiss suggested, but were taking positive and, in their eyes, effective ways to secure deliverance from plague. Occasionally, such images promoted confraternities as the exclusive recipients of saintly protection, but most eschewed such selective privileging. Instead, confraternities acted to secure protection for the entire civic body, even as unbrotherly rivalry between brotherhoods and the clergy encouraged the production of ever-larger altarpieces and processional banners. Their petitions and accumulated credit with their saintly patrons were mobilized to effect the town's deliverance. By such means, the confraternity garnered status and honor for its role in securing the city's defense. The concept of a healthy civic body is demonstrated literally in such confraternal strategies of salvation, reflecting a strong sense of communal identity and loyalty.

To a degree that distinguished it from other Italian Renaissance cities, Florence was concerned with the pastoral care and education of its male youths.²⁴ This phenomenon is explored in three essays focusing on two major youth confraternities in the city, the Compagnia della Purificazione e di San Zanobi and the Compagnia dell'Arcangelo Raffaello. Youth confraternities, a little studied but important manifestation of lay piety, were promoted by civic as well as ecclesiastical authorities to regulate the behavior of youths, substituting prayer, song, and theatrical performance for sinful boyish pursuits. Although the statutes of the approved Florentine youth confraternities were similar in many respects, the contributors have interpreted the officially regulated practices and the actual functioning of these brotherhoods somewhat differently; the youths' autonomy in relationship to adult supervision required by statute is one issue on which there is disagreement. Like their adult counterparts, the youths were patrons of a variety of works of art as well as performers of elaborate processions and plays. The relationship between art, architecture, and ritual in these youth confraternities as well as their association with the Medici at different stages of their development are explored in these essays.

Diane Cole Ahl focuses on the *Altarpiece of the Purificazione*, commissioned from Benozzo Gozzoli in 1461 by the Compagnia della Purificazione e di San Zanobi, one of the earliest Florentine sodalities founded and officially sanctioned for the spiritual edification of male youths. Through its religious instruction of adolescent boys, processions on church feasts, and performance of *sacre rappresentazioni*, the Purificazione assumed an important and highly visible role in civic and sacred life. Its prominence was enhanced by the support of the Medici. The *Altarpiece of the Purificazione* was intended as a counterpart to the youths' pious

activities, and, as demonstrated by the unusually explicit contract, it was conceived with extraordinary care. Although the contract has been published and the work's style analyzed, the altarpiece has never been considered within its unique historic context, nor has its character as a confraternal image been elucidated. Ahl's essay proposes to redress these lacunae by relating the altarpiece to the youths' rituals, reconstructed here for the first time, through the *Purificazione's* unpublished statutes, plays, processions, and the works listed in its inventories. Confraternal rituals described in the statutes demonstrate the centrality of altar and altarpiece in virtually every facet of the confraternity's devotions. Commissioned only months after the *comune* had suppressed all confraternities to control their increased power, the *Altarpiece of the Purificazione* reasserted the sodality's association with the monastery of San Marco and the Medici as well as its unique identity within the variegated fabric of Florentine spiritual life.

The essay by Ann Matchette complements Ahl's by reconstructing the actual oratory of the *Purificazione* in the cloister of San Marco. By analyzing unpublished sources – the monastery's chronicle and an inventory begun in 1501 – she proposes the first complete reconstruction of a youth confraternity's residence and lists the objects found within it. In tandem with the major renovations made to the church and friary of San Marco (ca. 1436–50), building of the *Purificazione's* residence was subsidized by Cosimo de' Medici. Unlike other youth companies in Florence, which shared their space with adult confraternities, the *Purificazione* had sole possession of its meeting place. It was occupied exclusively by the *confratelli* until the expansion of San Marco forced them to vacate their quarters in 1506. Matchette's discussion not only elucidates some of the sodality's pedagogical aims, but demonstrates that the multiroom complex was an important and formative element in the devotional practices of the youths who worshipped there. The residence formed a significant part of the brotherhood's corporate identity. In addition, Matchette's study examines the sodality's relationship with the Medici, demonstrating that the residence was a powerful means not only to create confraternal solidarity, but to display Medici power. In an appendix, Matchette publishes for the first time the inventory of 1501–2, which records more than two hundred items, including sacred books, reliquaries, and crucifixes, that reveal the variety of objects used in the rituals. Based largely on unpublished sources, the essays of Ahl and Matchette provide the most comprehensive account of the artistic patronage of this important youth confraternity and elucidate its relationship with the Medici.

Konrad Eisenbichler studies the *Compagnia dell'Arcangelo Raffaello*, the oldest youth confraternity in Florence, which existed from 1411 until its suppression in 1785. Although forced to move into the convent adjoining the church of Santa Maria Novella during the siege of Florence in 1527, where the confraternity's oratory and rooms then remained, the *Arcangelo Raffaello* was again prosperous and active by mid-century. In the 1570s and 1580s, the youths were once more performing musical-devotional plays, some commissioned from major Florentine dramatists. They were also avid patrons and recipients of art, as Eisenbichler demonstrates by analyzing four inventories (1583–1784). In addition to stage sets, paintings by several artists – Domenico del Ghirlandaio, Piero di Cosimo, Lorenzo Lippi, and Orazio Fidani, among others – are identified, sug-

gesting an awareness of quality and authorship that is rarely found in earlier inventories. Eisenbichler further describes the important phenomenon of donations between confraternities, necessitated by the disbanding of smaller sodalities due to government suppression or internal factors such as lack of participation. This study of patterns of patronage traces the confraternity's changing self-definition over two centuries.

The book's locale then moves to Bologna, where flagellant sodalities appeared within a year of the penitential fervor of 1260 – a phenomenon very different from Florence, where flagellation did not become crucial to confraternal devotion until the Trecento.²⁵ By the mid-Quattrocento, Bologna was stirred by reform movements that influenced the character of confraternal devotion and its activities. Except for restricted groups, flagellation was no longer central to all sodalities, and piety began to be expressed through charitable institutions serving the urban community.²⁶ Political changes in sixteenth-century Bologna again transformed the relationship of pious practices and philanthropy. In each case, confraternal patronage of art and architecture actively reflected and, in turn, reified these developments.

Two complementary essays consider Bolognese confraternities and the hospitals they founded and administered. Nicholas Terpstra explores this subject in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Based on unpublished sources, his essay demonstrates the increasing specialization of treatment within these institutions as well as the appropriation of charity by aristocratic *confratelli* to elevate their social status. He argues that confraternal building programs had multiple purposes, serving the architectural demands of the city, the practical requirements of the inmates, and above all, the recruitment and propagandistic needs of their sponsors. Terpstra focuses on five confraternal hospitals that housed orphans, the sick, pilgrims, and condemned criminals. He proposes that these confraternal programs were part of a campaign to reconfigure the architectural face of Bologna, a campaign that also saw the construction of numerous palaces, shrines, and public buildings. Terpstra addresses the tense balance between philanthropy and civic beautification, identifying the institutions' role in civic charity, the impact that construction programs had on the confraternities' operations, and the place of these programs in the effort to reshape the city itself. His essay also elucidates the role of confraternal competition and familial rivalry in promoting ever more grandiose structures, motivations that tempered their altruism.

Randi Klebanoff focuses her study on the Bolognese hospital confraternity of Santa Maria della Vita, a flagellant sodality not discussed by Terpstra. The confraternity commissioned the famous, life-size, terracotta group of the *Lamentation over the Dead Christ* from Niccolò dell'Arca, installing the work in its hospital church in 1463. The confraternity recently had suffered a divisive crisis over its spiritual goals, especially the role of flagellation. This fact has led scholars to associate the commission with a small group of reformers and to interpret the work's dramatic pathos in terms of its program for spiritual renewal. As Klebanoff demonstrates, confraternal documents indicate that this was not, in fact, the case. Klebanoff is the first to identify the hospital's organization and healing activities as a precise context for the *Lamentation*. She then reconstructs the original setting and placement of the individual figures of the terracotta group. As Klebanoff

proposes, the confraternity responded to changing attitudes about the relationship of penitential practices to works of mercy by commissioning the sculpture to inspire compassion and also to address women, a constituency traditionally excluded from flagellant rituals. Gendered alternatives of grieving are depicted; diverse devotional modes are given dramatic reality. Reconstruction of the work's original appearance and setting, the relationship she proposes between the sculpture and the sodality's caretaking activities, and her delineation of the role of women are significant contributions to our understanding of the confraternity and the sculptor himself.

The volume concludes in Rome with five essays that span the late Quattrocento through the early Seicento, an age of dramatic change due to religious reform. The proximity of the pope – as well as the Curia, international royalty, foreign bureaucrats, and saintly leaders of the new orders – gave church reform and charitable undertakings increased visibility and resonance as exemplary activities. Confraternities were drawn into the process with increasing frequency in the second half of the sixteenth century. Papal bulls elevated numerous Roman confraternities to the new rank of archconfraternity, headed by a cardinal protector who was appointed by the pope or elected by the *confratelli*. New patronage strategies consequently were adopted. Protectorships provided a convenient route for churchmen to exert social, political, and religious influence and authority. Wealthy cardinal protectors often assumed the role of lavish benefactors, using the confraternity's status to enhance their own. Roman sodalities that were elevated as archconfraternities were then entitled to create a network of affiliated brotherhoods throughout Italy and Europe, extending their spiritual benefits and impressive indulgences. Roman brethren were sought for spiritual guidance and actively revised standards in administrative procedure and philanthropy.

Intensified flagellant devotion in the Eternal City – evidently rejected by the upper classes in contemporary Florence and Venice – distinguished Roman confraternal piety, due in large part, we believe, to the increasing veneration of the numinous relics of Christ's Passion (including the column of the Flagellation) located there and Tridentine decrees on the sacrament of penance.²⁷ But if flagellation was solely a male practice creating a kind of spiritual elite, Roman women played distinguished roles within the confraternal system of charitable and ceremonial life.²⁸ Significant innovations in poor relief initiated by the Jesuits and continued by confraternities²⁹ placed special emphasis on the spiritual salvation – and social discipline – of women and girls. The prostitutes of the Holy City, easily disparaged as the whores of Babylon by the celibate clergy, were real problems for reformers.³⁰ New hospitals and hospices were created to confine the female offspring of these women, thereby removing innocent girls from the endless cycle of poverty and prostitution. These institutions, like the Bolognese hospitals, were financed by *confratelli* and dramatically transformed the urban environment.

The first two essays in this section are complementary. They explore the history, flagellant rituals, and art of the confraternity of the Gonfalone, the oldest sodality in Rome, from its *sacre rappresentazioni*, for which it was most famous, to the monumental altarpiece painted for its oratory. Nerida Newbiggin analyzes the famous *Passion* and *Resurrection* plays as well as the *Lazarus* play that survives in a single printed and little known copy. These multimedia spectacles were per-

formed by the Gonfalone *confratelli* in the Colosseum during Holy Week from 1490 through 1539. Although the confraternal statutes of 1495 prescribed that the texts be closely guarded, the *Passion* play appeared in print almost immediately. It became among the best known of all Italian Passion plays. Newbigin is the first to explore the evolution of the plays, which represent an extraordinary amalgam of late medieval lay piety and humanist experiment in the rediscovered forms of classical theater. The magnificent setting of the Colosseum gave the *Passion* a uniquely Roman character, reinforcing the city's providential destiny as *caput mundi*. The unprecedented amount of choral singing was a dramatic departure from the traditional singing of *laude* in confraternal *sacre rappresentazioni*. Moreover, the classical choruses increasingly exhorted both the *confratelli* and the audience against the Jews. Indeed, it seems likely that a violent anti-Semitic riot in 1539 caused the sudden suppression of the plays by the pope. The many versions of this *Passion* cycle and the enormous expenditures on its production are evidence of the confraternity's commitment to a stirring, contemporary performance. These plays, the largest and most spectacular of all confraternal theatrical productions in Renaissance Rome, are crucial evidence of the devotional and the visual-dramatic culture of the city, which extended well beyond the members of the Gonfalone.

Barbara Wisch then focuses on the *Crucifixion Altarpiece* painted for the Gonfalone's oratory in 1556–7, almost two decades after the *Passion* plays were prohibited. The attribution to Pietro Roviale Spagnuolo and the date of the altarpiece are confirmed through new documentation, published here for the first time. The *Crucifixion*, a new pictorial theme for the confraternity, was commissioned during the very years when the Gonfalone's famous Holy Week rituals – most significantly, the Good Friday flagellant processions – were changing markedly due to papal intervention and in response to eucharist devotion promoted by the Council of Trent. In 1557, Paul IV initiated the Gonfalone's new Maundy Thursday flagellant procession, which, within two decades, became the dominant public expression of Roman penitential piety. Wisch demonstrates how the typically Roman interweaving of papal directive and confraternal tradition was expressed in the new *Crucifixion Altarpiece* through a dramatic reconfiguring of the Gonfalone's history. Not only was the altarpiece central to the Gonfalone's devotional practices, it also displayed the new public persona of the confraternity. By depicting a revised foundation story more than two decades before confraternal texts adopted it as fact, the altarpiece asserted the sodality's changing role within the ritual matrix of Rome. An appendix then analyzes the *Crucifixion* within Roviale Spagnuolo's oeuvre.

The concluding three essays discuss important but little studied constituencies represented by Roman confraternities: *consorelle* and young girls. The role of women within confraternities is elusive to document and difficult to define. The multiplicity of possibilities within the confraternal system – from total exclusion among some *disciplinati* groups to consoriorities caring for powerful, miracle-working icons – cautions against overgeneralization. It has been suggested that the most significant feature of women in confraternities was their integration, not their separateness. Statutes, however, provide but few glimpses into the diverse contributions of women, either in life or in death.³¹ Paralleling growing interest

in female religious communities, recent scholarship has begun to document the significant participation of women in ritual celebrations and caregiving activities, as well as the reception of philanthropy.³² As wealthy testamentary benefactors, *consorelle* influenced sodalities' economic status and art patronage. This enriched picture of women's presence has led to a reevaluation of confraternal ritual and patronage. The final three essays of the volume examine these issues. They contribute to our understanding of confraternities as well as to the history of women in Cinquecento Rome.

Eunice D. Howe examines the multiple, shifting roles played by the *consorelle* in the operation of the hospital of Santo Spirito in Sassia, a prestigious hospital founded in the Middle Ages and endowed by popes throughout the Renaissance. During the Renaissance, these women formed the largest, most rapidly expanding segment of the resident population, caring for orphans, the female sick, and pregnant women seeking shelter. The successful operation of the hospital depended in large part on the gendered activities of the *consorelle*, detailed here for the first time, which in turn, were given physical definition by the buildings themselves. As a refuge for females, Santo Spirito in Sassia was among the earliest and most prominent shelters in Rome until the first Jesuit asylums were established in the 1540s. Howe's essay represents an important contribution to women's history as well as to the study of gender and architecture. She documents the pivotal role of gender in hospital planning, demonstrating how the architecture of the hospital served to reinforce "woman's place" in the social hierarchy.

The two concluding essays on Rome are complementary. They explore the Compagnia delle Vergini Miserabili di Santa Caterina della Rosa, a Jesuit-instituted confraternity and conservatory dedicated to rescuing "poor virgins" from poverty and its familiar companion, prostitution. Founded by Ignatius of Loyola in 1542–3 at the church of Santa Caterina della Rosa (known today as Santa Caterina dei Funari), the confraternity expanded quickly under the protection of the powerful Cardinal Federico Cesi, one of the earliest supporters of Ignatius's ministry to unfortunate women and children. Lance G. Lazar studies this confraternity to highlight its significance for early modern poor relief. Between 1560 and 1564, Cardinal Cesi had the medieval church demolished, and a spectacular new church was designed and constructed by Guidetto Guidetti. Over the course of a century, a conservatory for 150 girls and 20 nuns also was built. The *confratelli* sought out vulnerable poor girls in brothels and removed them "e faucibus daemionis" (from the jaws of the devil) into a strictly cloistered environment where they learned to read and write, were instructed in Christian doctrine, and were taught marketable skills, such as sewing and weaving. When they came of age, the girls were reintegrated into society through marriage, or they joined a convent. Santa Caterina was so successful that it served as a model for other conservatories founded by the Jesuits throughout Italy. Lazar's essay delineates the significance of the Jesuits as founders of confraternities and supporters of the order's mission through innovative programs of education and social welfare that developed a new system of redemption: active intervention, prolonged internment, and successful reintegration into a highly disciplined Christian society.

Louise Smith Bross provides a complementary essay on the earliest decoration of the confraternity's church of Santa Caterina della Rosa. The paintings for the