



News

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At the April 2021 annual conference of the Renaissance Society of America, which this year was held virtually because of the pandemic, the Society for Confraternity Studies sponsored a session on **“Exploring the Nexus Between Confraternity, Pandemic, and European Renaissance Society.”** The session was organized by Samantha Hughes-Johnson and monitored by Diana Bullen Presciutti. The four papers presented were:

1) Alison Barker (University of Essex) “Death, Drama and the Colour Red: The Guild of Saint George in Norwich”

The Guild of Saint George played a key part in the life and death of the inhabitants of Norwich between 1389 and its dissolution in 1547, especially during times of plague, which afflicted the city on a regular basis. The dramatic procession of its patron saint, performed on his feast day, was vividly imprinted on the minds of its participants and audience through the strategic use of the colour red and the death of its dragon anti-hero. This spectacle, combined with the daily masses for dead members, the participation of the Guild in members’ funerals, and the relics of Saint George—his bloodstained clothes—owned by the Guild, illustrate the centrality of death—both quotidian and plague-related—in its activities. This paper investigates the oscillation between drama, death and the importance of red—colour of sacrifice, blood and martyrdom—in the every-day experience of death in Early Modern Norwich.

2) Marianne Cailloux (Université de Lille) “Riding with the Vices: How Moral Images Prepared for a Good Death in Mountain Communities”

During the Late Middle Ages, confraternities flourished in the Occidental Alps as plague pandemics, armed groups, Waldensians and the lack of reachable parishes brought communities to deal with religion and social solidarity. Accordingly, a new iconography began to spread under this new commission configuration: *The Cavalcade of the Vices* (XVth–XVIth centuries). This can be analysed through the complex local contexts, the question of the holy sacraments, and the rise of communitarian and confraternal commissions. Contemplating those images induces one’s moralisation and memory activation. To confront what needs to be done to have a “good” passing, wall paintings use cognitive narrative techniques and identificatory methods involving the senses and emotional catharsis.

3) Betsy Bennett Purvis (Independent Scholar) “The Compagnia del Santissimo Sacramento in Borgo Ognissanti in Florence and the Plague of 1630”

When the recently reformed confraternity of the Santissimo Sacramento moved into their new oratory in Borgo Ognissanti in 1570 they were but one of many Sacrament confraternities that existed in Grand Ducal Florence. The plague of 1630 provided this sodality an opportunity to decisively rise above the crowd when, with the permission of the Grand Duke and Duchess, they arranged to take a beloved crucifix they brought back from a pilgrimage to the Holy House of Loreto in 1579 on a five-hour-long procession through the city, stopping at major churches, the Cathedral, and selected convents to be greeted by clergy and Medici family members and courtiers. With this display, and a notarized document chronicling their procession, the confraternity sought to publicly leverage the Grand Duchess’s patronage and support and launch a campaign to transform their pilgrimage souvenir into a recognized and venerated star in the constellation of Florentine miracle-working images.

4) Samantha Hughes-Johnson (Independent Scholar) “‘O Death Rock Me to Sleep’: Plague, Confraternity, Piety and Charity in Tudor England”

The legislative actions of successive Tudor monarchs, Henry VIII and Edward VI, left many English confraternities, guilds and social fellowships destroyed or in tatters. And while outbreaks of plague and other contagions repeatedly ravaged the country, ordinary people, faced with the prospect of imminent death, struggled to remain united for shared purposes and mutual benefit. Accordingly, this paper investigates the hierarchical position of fellowships in the Tudor psyche prior to the Henrician Reformation and how, despite being subjected to sustained religious upheaval and constant outbreaks of contagion, this shared psychology evolved into the Elizabethan era.

Other confraternity papers presented at that conference were:

5) Christine Zappella (University of Chicago) “The Intellectual Culture of Florence’s Confraternity of John the Baptist: Andrea del Sarto’s Dante Portrait”

In the first quarter of the Cinquecento, the cloister of the Florentine Confraternity of St. John the Baptist was decorated with a monochrome fresco cycle depicting the life of the confraternity’s patron saint. The cycle was executed by confraternity brother Andrea del Sarto (1486–1530), one of the many prominent artists—such as the Lippi, Sangallo, and Buglioni family workshop members—who constituted a great portion of the brotherhood’s membership. This paper argues that Andrea inserted a portrait of

Dante in the crowd listening to the words of St. John the Baptist preaching to the multitude, basing his portrait on a print by Albrecht Dürer. This paper examines Dante's presence, arguing that Andrea was making claims not only about the dissemination of religious truths in the early Cinquecento, but also artistic ones; it furthermore situates these religious and artistic ideas in the intellectual culture of early-Cinquecento Florence.

6) Alexandra Bamji (University of Leeds) "Confraternity Buildings and Urban Religion in Early Modern Venice"

This paper examines how the spatiality and materiality of the oratories and chapels of devotional confraternities shaped religious experiences in early modern Venice. In the wake of the Council of Trent, these spaces became an increasingly prominent part of the urban landscape. This paper will assess the spiritual aims and significance of the location, scale, exterior features and interior decoration of these spaces. Paying close attention to how space was obtained, questions of boundaries and enclosure, architectural relationships with adjacent spaces, the spiritual resonance of materials used, and visibility, I aim to highlight how these structures responded to and shaped lay piety and to interrogate what they reveal about the nature of post-Tridentine urban religion. In exploring how specific devotional activities extended the spiritual reach of these structures beyond their walls, I shall argue that these spaces intensified the sacrality of the cityscape.

7) Bianca Lopez (Southern Methodist University) "A Detestable Nation: Slavic Confraternities Against Church and State in Late-Medieval Italy"

This paper demonstrates how Slavic and Albanian migrants living in fifteenth-century Italy resisted civic exclusion through forming confraternities. From the Republic of Venice to the Kingdom of Naples, governments passed anti-migrant legislation and edicts of expulsion targeting newly arrived Balkan peoples. Confraternities could help migrants better safeguard their interests. In particular, the legal charter officially recognizing urban lay brotherhoods could allow immigrants to safely engage in collective urban life and provide mutual aid for their members. The official approval of a confraternity charter also helped normalize the presence of migrants in peninsular communities. However, requesting approval for a new confraternity could be precarious. Successful recognition of a charter often required careful negotiations with episcopal and civic authorities. Both bishops and magistrates could reject migrants' proposed charters, leaving such communities more vulnerable than before. Rejection of migrant confraternities could also accompany disastrous administrative decisions, such as more community-wide expulsions.

8) Catherine Carver (University of Michigan) “Translation and Transformation: Veneration of the Virgin at Ss. Trinità dei Pellegrini”

On 11 July 1562, by authority of Pope Paul I, a miraculous image of the Virgin was processed with much fanfare from the exterior wall of the Palazzo Capranica to the medieval church of S. Benedetto in Arenula. Only four years earlier, Paul IV had conceded that church to the confraternity of Ss. Trinità dei Pellegrini e convescenti. The miraculous image did not remain in S. Benedetto in Arenula for long. In 1601, the medieval church was dismantled, the new church of Ss. Trinità dei Pellegrini was erected in its stead, and the miraculous image became the focal point of an altarpiece by Giovanni Batista Ricci depicting St. Benedict venerating the Virgin. This paper examines how the translation and transformation of this miraculous image served as an ideological lynchpin, tying the new confraternity to a specific Roman past, while firmly situating it with the new practices of contemporary Rome.

9) Christine S. Getz (University of Iowa) “A Tini Print for Santa Maria Segreta in Milan”

During the seven years they were in business together, Aurelia de Giudice Tini and Giovanna Bonibelli Tini printed at least two volumes of sacred music for Santa Maria Segreta in Milan. As D’Amico (1994) and Curatolo (1991) have shown, Santa Maria Segreta served one of the largest residential populations in the city and was home to two popular Marian confraternities. It further had been renovated to include a loft for sermons and concerts. This paper argues that the Tini widows, who worked and resided near Santa Maria Segreta, forged strong ties with its officials and prepared Gallo’s *Sacri operis musici* (1598) for use in its Marian confraternity of the SS. Sacramento e S. Annunciata. It further demonstrates that the *Sacri operis musici* ascribed ownership of certain individual compositions contained to performers from institutions throughout the city, a mode of mapping performance that was quickly adopted by the Tini’s competitors.

10) Stefan Neuner (University of the Arts Berlin) “Conversion and Transformation in Carpaccio’s Paintings for the Scuola di S. Giorgio degli Schiavoni”

Vittore Carpaccio’s decoration of the Scuola di S. Giorgio degli Schiavoni starts with the vis-à-vis of two of his most sophisticated paintings: St. George Fighting the Dragon and St. Augustin in His Study. The two pictures not only introduce two contrasting spheres of Christian activity, holy war and monasticism, they also highlight two cultural techniques essential for the maritime Republic: navigation and long-distance communication (by letters). The heterogeneous nature of the decoration’s subject matter stems from the variety of the confraternity’s members (refugees

from the Balkans summed up as “*schiavoni*” or “*dalmati*”). In integrating the narrative material into a meaningful whole Carpaccio draws on a unique device of his art manifesting a structural relation to ship design. Significant formal features of his canvases are conceived as morphological series. The method seems to derive from the issue of transformational geometry given both in hull design and perspectival projection (not at least of ships).

11) Maria Luisa Ricci (Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia, Madrid) “Redeemers and Redeemed: Images of the Redemption of Slaves in Early Modern Venice”

Privateering, piracy and captive trade are the three main phenomena that have characterized the history of the Mediterranean in the early modern age. Over the past twenty years, these three issues have been the subject of extraordinary historiographical interest. On a historical-artistic point of view, the question is different: the images commissioned by confraternities and religious orders in charge of redeeming the Christian slaves on the Berber coast and Levant are today a field of research still to be investigated. The present proposal intends to analyze the particular Venetian context, examining an artwork preserved in the church of Santa Maria Formosa, seat of the brotherhood which, flanked by a government magistracy controlled by the Senate, had the task of redeeming the Venetian slaves in the hands of the infidels. The canvas, created by the Venetian painter Baldassarre d’Anna, has not yet been thoroughly studied or framed in the artist’s artistic path and it presents, from the iconographic and historical-artistic point of view, interesting elements not yet analyzed.