



Eisenbichler, Konrad (ed.). A Companion to Medieval and Early Modern Confraternities. Brill Companions to the Christian Tradition, 83. Leiden: Brill, 2019

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Reviews

Eisenbichler, Konrad (ed.). *A Companion to Medieval and Early Modern Confraternities*. Brill Companions to the Christian Tradition, 83. Leiden: Brill, 2019. Pp. xvi, 475 + 14 ill. ISBN 978-90-04-34366-5 (hard cover). US\$234.

In *A Companion to Medieval and Early Modern Confraternities* Konrad Eisenbichler has brought together an international team of scholars to examine the complexities of confraternity life and works in medieval and early modern Europe and the Americas. In so doing, he has helped to shed more light on an aspect of premodern society that, despite its long history and varied contributions, has, until the last few decades, been somewhat neglected by historians. This neglect is surprising because, after the State and the Church, confraternities were the most influential organization in premodern Europe, so much so that both the Church and the State regularly sought to bring them under their control.

The volume is divided into five parts, each dealing with different aspects of confraternities in Europe and the Americas. Part one focuses on the birth and development of confraternities in three different cultural areas that reflect three major linguistic and cultural groups of Europe: Germanic, Latin and Slavic. Part two concentrates on the spiritual and devotional life of confraternities. Eisenbichler points out that the primary reason for the popularity and quick spread of confraternities was due to people's desire not only to pray, but also to reform oneself so as to be a good Christian. The third part focuses on the charitable work carried out by confraternities as part of being a good Christian. Part four focuses on how confraternities negotiated the transcultural world, especially in the post-Tridentine period. The fifth and final section sheds light on confraternal contribution to arts and literature.

This reader was particularly drawn to the fourth part with its discussion of the emergence of confraternities in different regions of the world. The four articles in this section show how confraternities played a significant role in maintaining and establishing civic identity, which was an important aspect of medieval and early modern societies. Members were chosen based on their social standings and how they contributed to society. These articles also underline the challenges of forging and maintaining identities in a transcultural world. While Anna Esposito, highlights the need for a "national group" in an international city such as Rome, Dominika Burdzy focuses on the emergence of confraternities in Orthodox parts of Europe and Federica Francesconi does the same for Jewish communities in a Christian world.

The last section of the volume consists of five articles on the role of confraternities as patrons of the arts. Through music, theatre, literature, and art, confraternities showcased particular characteristics of the organization to its members and to the public. Both William R. Levin and Alyssa Abraham discuss how confraternities used various media to express their corporate identity and values. Both authors emphasize the lack of scholarship on this subject and suggest that the role of confraternities as patrons of arts requires a more thorough and exclusive examination.

In this volume Eisenbichler has brought together a team of scholars that details the development and strength of confraternity studies as well as showcases the lacunae in scholarship in certain aspects of confraternity studies. *A Companion to Medieval and Early Modern Confraternities* provides a guide to scholars interested in the study of the religious practices of the laity, the social assistance provided by confraternities, and the arts they sponsored. As a whole, it illustrates the richness and complexity of pre-modern confraternities and the many opportunities still open for further research. Scholars of medieval and early modern European culture will find this volume particularly useful for its detailed introduction to confraternity studies and its array of articles on various aspects of premodern lay religious associations.

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Murovec, Barbara, Mija Oter Gorenčič, and Barbara Wisch, eds. *Illuminating the Soul, Glorifying the Sacred. Religious Confraternities and the Visual Arts in Early Modern Europe*. Special issue of *Acta historiae artis slovenica*, 23.2 (2018), 297 pp. + 161 b/w ill.

This special issue of *Acta historiae artis slovenica* (AHAS) emerges from the May 2017 conference “The Role of Religious Confraternities in Medieval and Early Modern Art” held at the Research Centre for the Slovenian Academy of Arts and Science in Ljubljana.

The opening article by Barbara Wisch, “Archconfraternities and the Arts. Overarching New Themes” (15–21) looks at how Roman archconfraternities prioritized art and architecture as part of their devotional practices while reinforcing their special rank within the confraternal network, thereby strengthening Rome as the focal point of global Catholicism. Wisch points out that while their privileged position as archconfraternities is known, they as a group are yet to be the subject of monographic study. Wisch then provides a chronology of early archconfraternities in Rome and the crucial role of their cardinal protectors. She further suggests that