



Sebregondi, Ludovica, ed. La Congregazione dei Buonomini di San Martino

Konrad Eisenbichler

Volume 31, Number 2, Fall 2020

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1100126ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33137/confrat.v31i2.38076>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

1180-0682 (print)

2293-7579 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Eisenbichler, K. (2020). Review of [Sebregondi, Ludovica, ed. La Congregazione dei Buonomini di San Martino]. *Confraternitas*, 31(2), 139–141.

<https://doi.org/10.33137/confrat.v31i2.38076>

Taviani's edition of the three texts then follows: the *Regola dei Disciplini di Breno* (155–170), the *Privilegio del vescovo di Brescia* (171–176) and the *Ufficio della Quaresima* (177–199).

With its two chapters and the edition of these three texts, this volume provides scholars with an invaluable insight into the flagellant confraternity of Breno.

MATTEO LETA
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

Sebregondi, Ludovica, ed. *La Congregazione dei Buonomini di San Martino*. Florence: Edizioni Polistampa, 2018. Pp. 157 + 193 ill. ISBN 978-88-596-1908-6 (paperback) €35.

One of the most famous and important confraternities in Florence was, and continues to this day to be, the Congregazione dei Buonomini di San Martino, a select group of twelve men charged with assisting the so-called shame-faced poor (*poveri vergognosi*), that is those people who, “for some reason (disaster, illness, war, political events) find themselves suddenly in economic duress and, not being accustomed to needing help and asking for it, struggle to survive, ashamed to speak of their situation and ask for help” (p. 13, my translation here and following). The current volume, edited by Ludovica Sebregondi, brings together six articles by leading scholars of Florentine religious and artistic history to offer the most comprehensive and extensive modern analysis of this confraternity, its history, art, architecture, and archive.

After two brief prefaces (“Presentazioni”) by Umberto Tombari, president of the Fondazione CR Firenze, which has generously funded this beautifully produced and richly illustrated volume (11), and Giulio Caselli, one of Buonomini (13–14), the volume opens with an article by Timothy Verdon on charity in Florence (“Firenze e la carità. Identità cittadina e cura dei poveri”; 17–25). Starting with the claim by the goldsmith Marco di Bartolomeo Rustici (ca. 1392–1457) that “Florence is abundant in charity and infinite mercy” (17), Verdon points out that already in the fifteenth century Florentines drew a close correlation between Christian charity and civic identity thanks, in part, to the preaching campaigns of the Mendicant orders. In fact, it was Fra Antonino Pierozzi (as of 1523, St. Antoninus), the Dominican prior of the convent of San Marco and then archbishop of Florence, who, in 1442 invited twelve members of the flagellant confraternity known as the Buca di San Girolamo to establish a new confraternity to assist the city’s poor and find the means to do so. The new confraternity quickly became iconic of Florentine charitable endeavours,

so much so that it was able to avoid or survive the various suppressions that periodically struck and decimated its counterparts.

Giovanni Contini Bonacossi's article on the history of the Buonomini ("I sei secoli dei Buonomini di San Martino"; 27–45) starts with the observation that the provision of charity for the shamed-faced poor is ancient; Seneca himself already speaks of this, and is followed by the Church Fathers, in particular Augustine. Contini Bonacossi then surveys the various historical moments in the Buonomini's charitable work, from their earlier focus on assisting impoverished artisans, the writing of their first set of statutes, Vieri de' Medici's failed attempt in 1498 to gain control of the Buonomini, the sixteenth-century revision of the statutes, the decision not to own property, the crisis of the eighteenth century, and finally a brief summary of the history of the Buonomini from the French occupation to the present. An unsigned transcription of the confraternity's first set of statutes follows (47–49); it is not signed, but one assumes the transcription is by Contini Bonacossi.

Maria Raffaella de Gramatica's brief article on the archive of the Buonomini ("L'Archivio Storico della Congregazione dei Buonomini di San Martino"; 51–52) outlines its various collections and reveals the incredible resource that these documents, gathered without interruption over the course of five centuries, constitute for modern researchers.

In their jointly composed article on the confraternity's building ("La sede della congregazione"; 55–67) Paolo Giustiniani and Serena Sangaletti survey the history of the building and its various renovations, complete with detailed images of the different rooms (most of which are not accessible to the public).

Ludovica Sebregondi's article on the artworks in the confraternity ("La carità in figure: uomini e opere"; 69–123) is the most extensive contribution to this highly informative collection. She begins with a brief biography of St Antoninus and then proceeds to the founding of the confraternity, connecting the latter to a series of extant images of that event; the first is a predella painting (now in Vienna) attributed Bartolomeo di Giovanni that shows Antoninus giving the first set of statutes to the original group of Buonomini; another is a lunette in the convent of San Marco in Florence painted by Alessandro Allori in 1553–58 that shows Antoninus founding the confraternity; a third is a painting by Antonio Marini dated 1842 showing, once again, Antoninus founding the confraternity. She then continues weaving the history of the confraternity with extant images touching on that history or that confraternity. Drawing on archival sources, Sebregondi details various developments in the confraternity, including architectural work, such as the *pietra serena* portal from the late 1470s, and artworks such as the exterior painting by Lodovico Buti (1555–1611) showing St. Martin of Tours distributing alms. A substantial

part of Sebregondi's article is devoted to an analysis, with accompanying illustrations, of the splendid series of frescos in the confraternity oratory depicting St. Martin of Tours and then the seven works of charity as carried out by the Buonomini (78–98). She follows this with a discussion of the various objects in the oratory, including the late-fifteenth/early-sixteenth-century reliquary bust of St. Antoninus, and then, room by room, an array of other works such as two early sixteenth-century candle-holding angels, a glazed terracotta by Andrea Della Robbia, an eighteenth-century map of Florence by Giovan Battista Scarlatti Rondinelli. The variety of objects, artworks, and furniture in the building speaks to the plethora of objects, both sacred and secular, both practical and aesthetic, that one could find in an early modern Florentine confraternity, even when a confraternity claimed to adhere to poverty and use all donations it receives to assist the needy poor.

Laura Luciola's contribution to the volume is a short description of the restoration of the frescos in the oratory completed in June 2011 ("Il restauro del ciclo di affreschi dell'oratorio"; 125–147). She outlines the reasons for, and techniques used in the renovations and then follows this up with a series of 'before and after' photographs of the work.

This finely crafted volume brings together excellent archival scholarship and superior production standards to provide scholars, for decades to come, with a substantial historical and art historical analysis of the Buonomini, as well as high quality images of the confraternity's artworks, sacred objects, furnishing, and architecture.

KONRAD EISENBICHLER
VICTORIA COLLEGE
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

Serra, Alessandro. *La mosaïque des dévotions. Confréries, cultes et société à Rome (XVI^e–XVIII^e siècles)*. Louvain: UCL Presses universitaires de Louvain, 2016. Pp. 367 + 8 maps, 13 charts, 24 graph. ISBN 978-2-87558-495-3 (paperback); 978-2-87558-496-0 (pdf). € 27.50.

Alessandro Serra's book on Roman confraternities between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries offers countless insights not only into the varied world of confraternities but also into the history of piety in Rome. The book is divided into five chapters; the first four analyse the presence of the confraternities in the Eternal City, their names and places of worship, the role of sacred images in confraternal spaces, and the relics owned by these associations, and the fifth offers a single case study of the archconfraternity of the Sacre Stimate (the stigmata) of St Francis.