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Lirosi, Alessia. La confraternita di Sant'Anna. La Compagnia di Sant'Anna nella chiesa di S. Pantaleo tra XVIIe XVIII secolo

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Lirosi, Alessia.

La confraternita di Sant'Anna. La Compagnia di Sant'Anna nella chiesa di S. Pantaleo tra XVII e XVIII secolo.

Preface by Blythe Alice Raviola. Biblioteca di storia sociale 41. Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2019. Pp. xvi, 258 + 8 ill. ISBN 978-8-8935-9275-8 (paperback) €20.

Were there, during the *ancien régime*, institutions composed exclusively of women that had power to discuss and decide independently from male control? This is the question that first inspired Alessia Lirosi's research and now opens her book (xi). Clearly, as Lirosi quickly points out, there were women in religious institutions that enjoyed, to some degree, such freedoms, but what about lay women? To find them, Lirosi turns her attention to an institution that is both lay and religious, the confraternity. More specifically, she looks at the women's confraternity of St. Anne that met in the church of San Pantaleo in Rome. Established in 1640 by the Spanish priest José de Calasanz (1557–1648), founder of the Piarists or Scolopi, the women's "Compagnia di Sant'Anna in San Pantaleo" survived to at least the 1920s, when it disappears from the records.

As Lirosi points out, the Compagnia di Sant'Anna was not the only confraternity in Rome, or for that matter in Italy, consisting exclusively of women; one finds such sodalities also in Florence, Perugia, Naples, and Palermo, to mention just a few places (20). But Sant'Anna is important for the sort of women it gathered (primarily Roman aristocracy) and the charitable work it did on behalf of women's education and in assisting women in need or at risk.

The first chapter surveys the development of confraternities in Europe (1–10), relying for the most part on Italian scholarship on the subject; it then briefly explains the particular confraternal situation in Rome (10–15), and finishes with some considerations on mixed confraternities in Rome that welcomed both men and women (though only men held leadership and administrative positions in them) and confraternities consisting exclusively of women (16–26). In this last section Lirosi lists a possible six confraternities of women in Rome: aside from the Congregazione di Sant'Anna in San Pantaleo that is the focus of the current book, she mentions the Compagnia di Santa Monaca that met in the church of Sant'Agostino and was later absorbed into the men's Arciconfraternita della Cintura; the Compagnia della Santissima Assunta, founded in 1614, that met first in the church of Santi Simone e Giuda

and then in the church of Santa Maria Maddalena dei Camilliani; she also mentions a “possible” other *Compagnia di Sant’Anna*, this one in the church of San Francesco di Paola; and yet another, also dedicated to St. Anne, in the church of Santi Faustino e Giovita; and lastly, a women’s *Congregazione dell’Umiltà* in the church of San Carlo ai Cattinari.

The second chapter presents a brief history of Sant’Anna in Pantaleo starting with a look at the confraternity’s founder, José de Calasanz, and his focus on the education of young men and women, the confraternity’s founding, the group’s life in the seventeenth century, and ends with a closer look at one of its leading figures, the singer Leonora Baroni, whose friendship with the future Pope Clement IX Rospigliosi favoured Sant’Anna and greatly advanced its prestige (27–53). The third chapter is a close reading of the confraternity’s three sets of statutes (1700, 1702, 1722) that not only looks at the regulations that governed the confraternity’s life but also at what might have been the reasons for two sets of revisions so soon after the original version (55–82). Chapter 4 examines the various roles and positions in the group, from “simple sisters” to prioress, from “eternal counsellors” to assistants, and so on (83–107). The fifth looks at the group’s devotional practices, including the cult of St. Anne, relics, and feasts; it finishes with a subsection on “devout women and restless women,” a charming way to describe two individuals who gravitated around San Pantaleo and the confraternity of Sant’Anna, the devout Neapolitan Lucia Saliga and the false saint Angela “the Prophetess” (109–65). The sixth and last chapter looks at the charitable work carried out by the women of Sant’Anna both for members and non-members who were deemed to be at risk, such as widows, prostitutes, women in precarious situations, and recent converts from Judaism (167–200). Some brief comments on the confraternity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries form the conclusion (201–3) and two appendices (one consisting of two parallel columns comparing the various redactions of the statutes, the other a list of burials of lay persons in the church of San Pantaleo from 1718 to 1815) bring the book to a close.

One wishes this fine study had included a bibliography of cited manuscripts and printed works to help readers gain a better perspective on sources consulted and available; it seems strange to this reader that such an essential aspect of a scholarly work was not included.

This fascinating book-length study of a confraternity of women in Rome should lead the way to more in-depth studies of similar organizations not only

in the Eternal City but also elsewhere in Italy and Europe. One hopes that it will inspire both other monographs on single confraternities of women and a more comprehensive study that looks at all of these sodalities as a whole and compares/contrasts them with their male counterparts. For example, one would be very interested in knowing more about how the charitable assistance women's confraternities provided to women in need differed from what men's confraternities offered them or, more generally, if women's confraternities approached and supported women in a way that was different from what men's confraternities did. In short, Liroso's excellent work points the way to some very interesting questions and lots of good research for future consideration.

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