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Confraternities in Southern Italy:  
Art, Politics, and Religion  
(1100–1800)

*Edited by*

DAVID D'ANDREA AND SALVATORE MARINO



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# SACRED IMAGERY, CONFRATERNITIES, AND URBAN SPACE IN MEDIEVAL NAPLES

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STEFANO D'OVIDIO

## 1. Introduction

Sacred imagery was crucial in the life and devotional practices of confraternal movements.<sup>1</sup> In front of an image, late medieval confraternities used to gather for their rituals, prayers, chants, and acts of penance. The image was often an altarpiece displayed above the altar they owned inside the church, in those areas that were commonly reserved to the laypeople: the lower nave, side aisles, and the atrium. The imagery often consisted of a large painted panel showing an enthroned Madonna and Child, triptychs and wooden statues with the confraternity's titular saints, as well as crucifixes, either on panel or in relief. Visual interaction was essential to the religious experience. It expressed the divine presence, increased devotion and contrition, and encouraged expiation. The veneration for a specific image was also a unifying factor, the expression of a collective identity. Production and use of images were not limited to ordinary worship.<sup>2</sup> Carved and painted symbols marked the space reserved to the confraternity inside the church; its titular saints and devotional images were also reproduced on liturgical furnishings, common habits, and processional banners. Self-representation, both as a group and as individuals, in narrative cycles, tombstones, and confraternity books stressed the confraternal brothers' sense of belonging and made them recognizable within the community.

In recent years, scholarly research has shown an increasing interest in confraternal imagery, although this work has mainly concentrated on single case studies.<sup>3</sup> More comprehensive overviews have been attempted for limited areas, such as Central and Northern Italy, during specific periods of time.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bacci, *Pro remedio animae*, 129–136; Sebregondi, “Arte confraternale.”

<sup>2</sup> Sebregondi, “Arte confraternale,” 342–357.

<sup>3</sup> Wisch, *Confraternities*; Murovec, Oter Gorenčič, and Wisch, eds., *Illuminating the Soul*.

<sup>4</sup> Levin, *The Allegory of Mercy*; Castaldi, *La Madonna della Misericordia*; Guerzi, “Effetti speciali”; Chen, *Flagellant Confraternities*. See also works cited in note 1.

Medieval Naples, like Southern Italy in general, has received no attention, although historical studies during the last few decades have offered a clearer picture of confraternal movements and other forms of lay associations that were active in the city since the early Middle Ages.<sup>5</sup> While far from filling the gap, this article adopts an art-historical methodology to explore the visual culture, rituality, and social composition of confraternities and other lay associations in medieval Naples.

My survey will focus on three types of sacred images. Firstly, I will discuss the monumental wooden crucifixes that were on display in the main churches of the city. An essential feature in the visual layout of the church, the crucifixes also benefited from donations of lands and properties from laypeople, a practice originally reserved in Naples for images of private devotion. Utilizing textual and material evidence, I will examine their relationship with the most common kind of secular associations in the churches of Naples during the medieval and early modern periods: the “staurite,” from the Greek word for cross (*stauròs*). They were made up of laymen who lived in the vicinity of the church and were devoted to charitable activities for the sick and poor of the district.

Secondly, I will focus on sacred imagery in late medieval confraternities and other forms of lay religious associations by analyzing three case studies: the *Disciplina della Croce*, one of the oldest and longest-living confraternities in Naples, originally formed by flagellants; the *Annunziata*, founded by a consortium of laymen and laywomen in the fourteenth century as a church and hospital; and two fifteenth-century confraternities linked to the Dominican convents of San Domenico Maggiore and San Pietro Martire, whose members came from the aristocracy and the middle class respectively.

Lastly, I will present two ancient images that originally belonged to local confraternities but gained a wider reputation after they proved miraculous in the sixteenth century: a panel with St. Antony of Padua in San Lorenzo Maggiore (fig. 1.24), and the icon of the Madonna Bruna in Santa Maria del Carmine (fig. 1.25). The narrative will ideally follow a historic itinerary in the medieval city: from the earlier places of worship in the old Greek and Roman

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<sup>5</sup> Apart from the seminal works by Monti, *Le confraternite medievali*, and Fonseca, “Congregaciones,” see more recently: Vitolo, “Esperienze religiose,” 3–13; Vitolo, “Culto della croce”; Di Meglio, “La Disciplina di S. Marta,” 147–209; Vitolo, “L’ospedale di S. Eligio,” 39–122; Vitolo, “Confraternite,” 61–70; Di Meglio, *Ordini mendicanti*, 28–30, 151–172; Marino, *Ospedali e città*. For discussion of Southern Italian cases: Houben, “Le confraternite.”



centre, to the late medieval expansion towards the Market Square and the great church of the Carmelites (fig. 1.1).

## 2. *Public Devotion, Confraternal Association, and Ritual Practice*

### 2.1 *Sacred Imagery and the Laity: The Monumental Wooden Crucifix*

In 1063 a woman named Maria donated a piece of land to the church of St. Severus Radia Solis that stood near the cathedral (fig. 1.1).<sup>6</sup> As stated in her deed of gift, the land was granted to the prior and custodian of the church, the venerable Giovanni Spatharo, who received it on behalf of a crucifix that the donor herself owned in the same church.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the crucifix became legal owner of the land, while the prior and his successors would enjoy its benefits for ever (“in perpetuum”), as long as they prayed for the soul of Maria’s brother, Giovanni. Giving real properties to sacred images was not uncommon in medieval Europe, but Maria’s offering differed from similar donations for the salvation of the soul (“pro remedio animae”) in the distinctive status of the image. In fact, the crucifix did not belong to the church where it was on display, but it was in the full possession of the donor, a laywoman.

Many private images of this kind existed in Naples between the tenth and the twelfth centuries.<sup>8</sup> They belonged to individuals and families, mainly the city’s landowners (*domini*), who donated lands and properties to them.<sup>9</sup> A

<sup>6</sup> The church was named after the lane, *vicus Radia Solis*, where it stood, which partly followed the course of the modern Via Duomo (opened in the nineteenth century). It belonged to the suburban monastery of Santi Sergio e Bacco and was in the care of a custodian, named for life by the abbot of the monastery (*Regii Neapolitani archivi monumenta*, 5:53-55). It was demolished in the sixteenth century to make room for the great house of the Order of Saint Jerome (“Girolamini”). I will discuss the history of this church in a further article.

<sup>7</sup> “Offero [...] tibi domino Johanne [...] et per te in illum Crucifixum quem habeo intus memorata ecclesia Sancti Seberi, idest una petiola de terra mea [...] a presenti die et deinceps a me tibi per te in memoratum Crucifixum meum sit offertum et traditum ad abendum et possidendum illud ibidem usque in sempiternum. Et semper omni tempore tu et posteris tuis abeatis in vestris orationibus quondam domini [sic] Iohanne, uterino germano meo.” *Regii Neapolitani archivi monumenta*, 5:24.

<sup>8</sup> Martin, “Quelques remarques,” 223–243; D’Ovidio, *Scultura lignea*, 146–147. I am currently working on a larger study on this topic.

<sup>9</sup> In Naples, the title lord (“dominus”) usually indicated small landowners who came from the working-class and re-invested their incomes in acquiring lands; Feniello, *Napoli*, 78–84, 135–157.

practice that pertained to the higher nobility, the possession of images ennobled the donors' condition and increased their social reputation. Donations had economic implications, too. On the one hand, they increased the patrimony of ecclesiastical institutions and guaranteed livelihoods to the clergy who were their custodians; on the other hand, they can be seen as a way to preserve the property within the family, because its legal ownership was attached to an image (or an altar) whose patronage belonged to the donors and their successors. What clearly emerges from this practice, however, is the role of images as intermediaries between the laity and the sacred. They guaranteed perpetual intercession and perpetrated the memory of the donors or their ancestors; at the same time, they stressed the privileged link of the family with the church and the clergy that received them in custody.

Judging from extant documentation, during the tenth and eleventh centuries private images mainly existed in monastic and family churches,<sup>10</sup> but later in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries donations of properties from the laity were also given to public images displayed in the major churches of Naples. This was the case for two properties that belonged to the crucifixes of Sant'Aniello Maggiore (fig. 1.2) and San Giorgio Maggiore (fig. 1.3).<sup>11</sup> The former church (fig. 1.1) was the burial site of a sixth-century saint strongly venerated in the region and had been a pilgrimage destination since the tenth century.<sup>12</sup> It stood on the highest peak inside the city walls, hence its name Caponapoli ("the Head of Naples"). A confraternity of priests and laymen governed by a rector called *primicerius* was in charge of a monastery attached to the church, which was more like a hospice than a proper community of monks.<sup>13</sup> In 1165, the *primicerius* of Sant'Aniello Giovanni bought a property bordering land that belonged to the most holy crucifix that was inside the same church.<sup>14</sup> An equivalent expression is used in the last will of a certain lord ("dominus"), Pandolfo Sicenolfo. In 1230, he left part of his legacy to buy land on behalf of the crucifix that was inside the church of San Giorgio Maggiore.<sup>15</sup> The church (fig. 1.1) was the second-oldest Christian basilica of

<sup>10</sup> Martin, "Quelques remarques," 232–233.

<sup>11</sup> D'Ovidio, *Scultura lignea*, 67, 70, 130–131, 146–147.

<sup>12</sup> Vuolo, *Una testimonianza agiografica*.

<sup>13</sup> Vuolo, *Una testimonianza agiografica*, 59–66.

<sup>14</sup> "Terram Sanctissimi Crucifixi Sancti Anelli Maioris qui est intus ipsam ecclesiam"; D'Ovidio, *Scultura lignea*, 130–131.

<sup>15</sup> "Dispono ut ipsis meis distributoribus a meo obitu de uncie | decem de aurum exinde comparare debeant terram vel fundu in nomine de illu Sanctu Crucifixu q(ui) es ab

Naples, founded at the end of the fourth century by Bishop Severus.<sup>16</sup> His relics had been moved here from the suburban catacombs by the ninth century. A stational church for the bishops of Naples, not far from the episcopal complex, as well as the seat of a hospital and clerical and secular confraternities, it was run by a priestly congregation headed by a member of the cathedral chapter.

The expressions used in both documents to indicate the location of the crucifix inside the church suggest that there were no other crucifixes in the building. Hence, they must have been visually predominant and clearly identifiable within the sacred space. Otherwise, doubts could arise on the legal ownership of the properties involved. This quality perfectly matches a group of seven monumental wooden crucifixes from the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries surviving in Naples, including Sant'Aniello's (fig. 1.2) and San Giorgio's (fig. 1.3), which can be dated to roughly the same period as the above-mentioned documents.<sup>17</sup>

Despite typological and iconographical differences, these examples testify to the importance of the crucifix in the visual layout of Neapolitan churches. Usually displayed on wooden trusses that crossed the triumphal arch or the central nave, they symbolized the sacrifice of Christ commemorated in the Eucharist, a rite often hidden to the lay congregation during the Middle Ages. Their appropriate location was above an altar, the high altar or that of the Cross, which existed in any medieval church in the middle of the nave ("in medio ecclesiae"), where rituals for the laity were performed, including masses for the dead. This explains why Pandolfo left part of his legacy to the crucifix of San Giorgio in exchange for a weekly mass to be sung at the altar standing below it.<sup>18</sup>

Pandolfo's last will sheds light on the social environment of the donor and clarifies the reason for his offering. He was from the Platea Palmarum in the district of Forcella, thus he lived not far from the church of San Giorgio (fig. 1.1).<sup>19</sup> His vast patrimony consisted of houses with porticoes, stores, baths, lands, mills, even monasteries and churches with their own benefices

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intus ipsa ecclesia Sancti Georgii Maioris"; Vetere, *Le pergamene*, 164.

<sup>16</sup> D'Ovidio, "Alla ricerca," 58–59.

<sup>17</sup> D'Ovidio, *Scultura lignea*, 63–76.

<sup>18</sup> "Tamen ipso domno Simeoni presbitero [Sancti Georgii Maioris] tenue fia pro exinde per omne endomeda [can]lere debeat pro anima mea in illo santo altare q(uod) est subtus ipsu Grucifixu, id est una mixa"; Vetere, *Le pergamene*, 164.

<sup>19</sup> Vetere, *Le pergamene*, 162–166.

in and outside Naples. Everything was left to his cousin and nephew, who were named his executors together with his confessor, the rector of San Giorgio Maggiore, Simone Pistita. Most of the document deals with a piece of land at San Pietro a Patierno in the fertile plain north of the city that was valued at twenty golden ounces. The executors had to sell it and use half of the income, that is, ten golden ounces, to buy another piece of land on behalf of the crucifix inside the church. Like the private images mentioned above, the crucifix became the legal owner of the land, which remained under the full disposition of the rector for the rest of his life. After his death, the executors or their heirs would give the land to another priest from the same church. In exchange, the receiver would sing a weekly mass for Pandolfo's soul at the altar that stood below the crucifix.<sup>20</sup> Every year, he would also commemorate the day of the donor's burial with an anniversary mass for the dead that presumably had to be celebrated in the same district ("per districta") where his heirs lived.<sup>21</sup> The possession of the land not only guaranteed perpetual intercession for the donor, but also preserved the memory of his legacy in the family.

From the list of institutions and individuals who were given the rest of the income from the selling of the land, it is clear that Pandolfo's preference for the crucifix of San Giorgio (fig. 1.3) depended on his connections with the church. Except for his servant Maiurana, who received two golden ounces and the right to live in modest rooms within Pandolfo's premises, the two most valuable portions of gold (half of an ounce respectively) were given to the rector of the church, who had to sing weekly masses for the soul of the donor in the first year after his death, and to the hospital of San Giorgio, to buy beds for the poor ("sacconi pro illi pauperibus").<sup>22</sup> Considerable donations were also made to the priestly congregation in charge of the church (one third of a golden ounce) and to a clerical confraternity called Sancta Feria that was installed there (two and half golden *tari*). Amongst his personal objects, an

<sup>20</sup> See above, note 18.

<sup>21</sup> "Iteru ipso domno Simeoni presbitero pro exinde per omni annuo vite sue, in die positionis mee facere debea [sic], id est unu aniversariu de tari quatuor de Amalfi, simul asque [omni] | pigritia. Et ipse misse et aniversariu, ipso domno Simeoni presbitero et primicerio [Sancti Georii Maioris] canere et facere debea [sic] per districta de ipso domno Bartholomeo de domno Sicenolfo et de iandicto domno Sergio nepotibus meis et de illorum heredibus"; Vetere, *Le pergamene*, 164. The expression "per districta" seems to refer to the district in the enclosed city where the family clan was established, a distinctive feature in medieval Naples: Santangelo, "Preminenza aristocratica." A systematic examination of this expression in contemporary charters might clarify its exact meaning.

<sup>22</sup> Vetere, *Le pergamene*, 163.

unspecified item was also offered to the *staurita* of the church (“*staurita plevis laicorum*”).<sup>23</sup>

## 2.2 *The Staurite and their Public Rituals*

The institutional configuration evoked in Pandolfo’s last will reflected that of other major basilicas in Naples, where permanent priestly congregations headed by the rector of the church (“*primicerius*”) also presided over a clerical confraternity, or minor clerical body.<sup>24</sup> The one in San Giorgio existed already in 1003, when it was mentioned as the Congregation of the Sexta Feria (“*Congregatio carthulae Sextae Feriae*”).<sup>25</sup> Its title possibly referred to the celebration of specific rites on Friday (*sexta feria* in Latin), that is, on the day that commemorated the Passion of Christ. Participation in such clerical bodies later became a way to pursue ecclesiastical careers, as their members aimed to enter one of the major clerical congregations and receive a permanent benefice.<sup>26</sup>

Staurite existed in several types of Neapolitan churches from at least the tenth century. Usually formed by laypeople, both aristocrats and middle class (“*Popolo*”), who lived in the same district as the church, they were headed by the rector (“*primicerius*”) of the church where they were installed.<sup>27</sup> The staurite can be considered as one of the most distinctive and longest-living religious associations in the history of the city, operating in many churches in Naples throughout the Middle Ages and early modern period. Strictly related to the “*Seggi*” system that characterized the political and topographical organization of the city,<sup>28</sup> they were devoted to various charitable activities for the poor and sick from the district and were in charge of funerals and commemoration rituals for their members.

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<sup>23</sup> Vetere, *Le pergamene*, 165. The Latin word “*pleves*” or “*plebes*” refers to major parish churches. Naples had four, and they were called “*Major Catholic Churches*” (“*Ecclesiae Catholicae Maiores*”): San Giorgio Maggiore, San Giovanni Maggiore, Santa Maria Maggiore, and Santi Apostoli (fig. 1.1), the latter replaced in time by San Paolo Maggiore and Santa Maria Portanova; D’Ovidio, “*Napoli medievale*.”

<sup>24</sup> Fonseca, “*Congregationes*”; Vitolo, “*Esperienze religiose*,” 8–9; Vitolo, “*Culto della croce*,” 133–135.

<sup>25</sup> Fonseca, “*Congregationes*,” 106–107; Vitolo, “*Culto della croce*,” 133–134.

<sup>26</sup> Vitolo, “*Esperienze religiose*,” 8–9.

<sup>27</sup> Vitolo, “*Esperienze religiose*,” 9–13; Vitolo, “*Culto della croce*.”

<sup>28</sup> Kelly, *The Cronaca*, 37–41; Lenzo, *Memoria*, 21–49; Santangelo, “*Preminenza aristocratica*.”

According to the seventeenth-century writer Camillo Tutini, the etymology of the name *staurita* from the Greek word *stauros*, meaning the Cross, clarified the origin of the institution, which he connected to a procession held in the parishes of Naples on Palm Sunday, when a cross was lifted above altars placed at different street-corners within the boundaries of the parish.<sup>29</sup> Tutini wrote that the money collected at each altar was used to assist the poor of the district, explaining why those in charge of such activities were called *stauritari*. Subsequently, altars were transformed into chapels, which became their permanent seat. Tutini's opinion is commonly accepted in modern scholarship,<sup>30</sup> but no evidence supports his theory, which was probably influenced by later ceremonies attested in the sixteenth century,<sup>31</sup> when only a few traces of medieval rituals had survived. The name *staurita* might refer instead to the processional cross that represented the church in public ceremonies.<sup>32</sup> Since one cross identified one church, the name *staurita* could indicate a congregation of laymen who lived in the district, took part in the administration of that church, and had the right to carry the cross in procession on special occasions during the liturgical year.

Processions are described in a cathedral consuetudinary written in 1337 on the order of Archbishop Giovanni Orsini, who intended to collect (and likely update) the sacred rites that had been performed in the city for centuries.<sup>33</sup> On Palm Sunday, all the *staurite* of Naples carrying their crosses joined the archbishop, his chapter, and the clerics in a procession from the cathedral (fig. 1.1), where they received the blessed palms, to the nearby basilica of San Giorgio Maggiore (fig. 1.1).<sup>34</sup> The *staurite* gathered with their crosses in the *Platea dei Cimbri*, a small square halfway between the two churches,<sup>35</sup> where the cross-bearers of two *staurite* took part in a running race with their own crosses. The winner received a prize from the inhabitants of the *Platea*. The game, which recalls athletic contests from antiquity, marked the middle of the procession, which continued into the courtyard of the church, where the archbishop sat on lion-headed throne ("in *faldistorio*") surrounded by his

<sup>29</sup> Tutini, *Dell'origine*, 159–162.

<sup>30</sup> Vitolo, "Culto della croce", 124–125; Feniello, *Napoli 1343*, 55–58.

<sup>31</sup> Illibato, *Il Liber visitationis*, 31–33.

<sup>32</sup> Ambrasi, "La vita religiosa," 536.

<sup>33</sup> Mallardo, "La Pasqua," 26–27; D'Ovidio, *Scultura lignea*, 74–75.

<sup>34</sup> Mallardo, "La Pasqua," 31; Vitolo, "Culto della croce," 123–124; D'Ovidio, *Scultura lignea*, 74.

<sup>35</sup> D'Ovidio, "Una chiesa medievale," 183–188.

chapter. Here, a sacred play took place: an image of God was raised up while the choir sang the hymn “Gloria, laus et honor,” specifically referring to the entrance of Christ into Jerusalem and thus appropriate to Palm Sunday.<sup>36</sup>

On Easter Sunday, a longer procession went from the cathedral (fig. 1.1), where the archbishop, his chapter, and the clerics started to sing vespers, to the basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore (fig. 1.1), where they finished their chant.<sup>37</sup> On this occasion the procession crossed the entire city centre along its major street (“decumanus maximus”). The consuetudinary prescribed that the *primicerii* from the staurite of the four major basilicas dress in their liturgical copes and carry a silver processional cross. Those from all the other staurite had to carry an iron cross, as was customary in other processions (“pro ut est consuetum in aliis processionibus”),<sup>38</sup> a phrase that confirms their participation in more processions throughout the year. During these processions the entire Christian community of the city was made visible through its symbols according to a strict hierarchical order, which was emphasized by the use of different materials: first the archbishop with the clerical bodies of the cathedral, represented by a golden cross, then the major basilicas with their silver crosses, and finally the rest of the community with iron crosses.

No evidence supports a direct link between the staurite and the medieval wooden crucifixes existing in Naples, although it is very likely that the latter were venerated as special devotional images by those institutions operating in the churches where they were on display. In some cases, like that of San Giorgio Maggiore (fig. 1.3), the altars where these crucifixes were relocated during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries belonged to the staurite.<sup>39</sup> The vast and early employ of monumental wooden crucifixes, the creation of clerical and secular congregations devoted to the Passion of Christ or named after the Cross, as well as the rituality connected to the Cross, testify to the centrality of the Cross in the liturgical and institutional structure of the Neapolitan churches, where lay confraternities and civic religion played an essential role from the early Middle Ages.

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<sup>36</sup> D’Ovidio, *Scultura lignea*, 74.

<sup>37</sup> Mallardo, “La Pasqua,” 35–36; Vitolo, “Culto della croce,” 124; D’Ovidio, *Scultura lignea*, 74–75.

<sup>38</sup> Mallardo, “La Pasqua,” 36; D’Ovidio, *Scultura lignea*, 75.

<sup>39</sup> D’Ovidio, *Scultura lignea*, 148.

### 3. Late Medieval Confraternities and their Imagery

#### 3.1 New Actors

Territoriality and social cohesion were distinctive features of the staurite, but new confraternal associations, whose members did not belong to the same urban district nor share the same social status, appeared in Naples during the twelfth century. This was the case of the Congregation and Brotherhood of St. Bartholomew (“Congregatio et Fraternitas Sancti Bartholomei”), formed by priests and laity, both men and women, headed by two *primicerii*, one for the clerics and one for the secular members.<sup>40</sup> The confraternity was under the jurisdiction of the monastery of San Salvatore in Insula Maris (today Castel dell’Ovo), whose abbot had the right to appoint both the clerical and the secular *primicerii*. In 1179, the seat of the confraternity was moved inside the city walls to the chapel of St. Bartholomew, which stood near the basilica of San Giovanni Maggiore (fig. 1.1), at that time the second-largest church of Naples after the cathedral.<sup>41</sup> The move can be seen as an attempt to operate within the urban district and gain better visibility. The priests belonging to the confraternity congregated there every week to sing six masses for the salvation of the living and the dead, and distributed goods to the poor twice a week together with their lay brothers and sisters.<sup>42</sup> When someone from the confraternity died, long and complex funeral ceremonies took place and all the members were obliged to participate “without laziness” (*sine pigritia*).<sup>43</sup>

The social and urban transformation of Naples during the late Middle Ages favoured the creation of new confraternities that met the needs of an increasingly populated city. In this period, Naples became the seat of a royal court and the administrative hub of the Kingdom. Its political predominance and geographical location in the middle of the Mediterranean made it an influential centre, at the crossroads of international economic and financial interests. National congregations provided spiritual and physical assistance to the foreign mercantile colonies established in Naples, such as that of the French, who built the church and hospital of Sant’Eligio (fig. 1.1) on the western edge of the Market Square.<sup>44</sup> The latter, relocated in the vast plain

<sup>40</sup> Vitolo, “Esperienze religiose,” 4–7.

<sup>41</sup> Ebanista, “Nuovi dati”; D’Ovidio, “Napoli medievale.”

<sup>42</sup> Vitolo, “Esperienze religiose,” 29–30.

<sup>43</sup> Vitolo, “Esperienze religiose,” 30.

<sup>44</sup> Vitolo, “L’ospedale di S. Eligio,” 39–52, 64–71; Bruzelius, *The Stones of Naples*, 13–23; Lucherini “Un papa francese,” 184–188.



outside the eastern border of the city-walls in the late twelfth century, became the pole of attraction for large religious complexes, welfare institutions, and manufacturing activities.<sup>45</sup>

Mendicant orders played an essential role in reshaping the urban space.<sup>46</sup> Their convents were built both in the outskirts and the central areas of Naples. With their tall, massive structures, they marked the skyline of the medieval city. Recent studies suggest, however, that the mendicants' promotion of confraternal movements was less significant in Naples than elsewhere in Europe until the fifteenth century.<sup>47</sup> This was likely due to the long-established tradition of the staurite, their strict relationship with the city's social and urban structure, as well as their privileged connection to the secular clergy. The staurite were still the most common form of lay congregation in Naples during the fourteenth century, even when territoriality was no longer a key factor, as in the case of those staurite formed by professional corporations, such as the bakers and the gardeners.<sup>48</sup> At the same time, the Seggi system had a great impact on the new mendicant foundations,<sup>49</sup> which became privileged burial sites for families living in the same Seggio and were usually administered by one of its members. The few confraternities connected to mendicant orders in Naples maintained a high degree of autonomy and were sometimes entrusted to the care of local priests, as happened with that of St. Mary Magdalen, which formally belonged to a Dominican convent.<sup>50</sup>

### 3.2 *Flagellation and Processions: The Disciplina della Croce*

One of the oldest and longest-living confraternities from a mendicant convent in Naples is the so-called *Disciplina della Croce*, attached to the grand Augustinian church and university (*Studium*) of Sant'Agostino Maggiore

<sup>45</sup> Vitolo, "L'ospedale di S. Eligio," 52–63.

<sup>46</sup> Bruzelius, *The Stones of Naples*, 6–8, 47–106, 140–153; Di Meglio, "Ordini mendicanti e città," 15–26.

<sup>47</sup> Di Meglio, *Ordini mendicanti*, 151–152.

<sup>48</sup> Monti, *Le confraternite medievali*, 126–127.

<sup>49</sup> Di Meglio, "Ordini mendicanti e città," 15–26; Vitolo "Ordini mendicanti e nobiltà," 10–14; Di Meglio, *Ordini mendicanti*, 126–131.

<sup>50</sup> Di Meglio, *Ordini mendicanti*, 152–155. The confraternity was created in the early fourteenth century and was devoted to the assistance of repented prostitutes. Like similar institutions, it operated near a bridge, where prostitution was common. Its members came from the working class and practiced flagellation in 1413–17.

(fig. 1.1) in the eastern part of Naples within the boundaries of the Seggio di Portanova.<sup>51</sup> The exact foundation date of the confraternity, which is still active today, is unknown, but it existed before 1321. According to a later tradition, special indulgences were granted by Pope Nicholas III in 1277.<sup>52</sup> Its members belonged to both the aristocracy and the merchant classes, from different areas of the city,<sup>53</sup> although a predominance of nobles from the Seggio di Portanova is attested in later sources.<sup>54</sup> The lack of documentation from the earlier period makes it difficult to determine the role of the Augustinians in the formation of the confraternity. In 1358, the General of the Order Gregorio from Rimini appointed two friars as the confraternity's chaplain and spiritual director.<sup>55</sup> He allowed its members to choose any of the friars from the convent to assist them in these duties, thus granting them some degree of independence. Their autonomy from the Order is illustrated by the fact that no direct access existed between their oratory and the Augustinian complex until 1469.<sup>56</sup>

As the title of the confraternity indicates, its members practiced flagellation (*disciplina*). This practice is also confirmed by the gravestone of Bartolomeo Sasso (fig. 1.4), a merchant from Scala near Amalfi who died in 1357.<sup>57</sup> He is portrayed with the white hooded habit of the confraternity while holding a flagellum in his hand. Any connection to the Disciplinati or flagellant movement that spread from Central Italy in the second half of the thirteenth century seems unlikely. By the fifteenth century, the main activity of the confraternity was to bury the poor and especially those who died in prison. Apart from attending mass in their chapel every Sunday, the members' devotional practices consisted of special celebrations on the feasts of the

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<sup>51</sup> Vitolo, "Confraternite," 61–70; Di Meglio, *Ordini mendicanti*, 160–163. On the history and art patrimony of the confraternity, see: *Compagnia della Santa Croce*. On the Augustinian complex: Russo, *Sant'Agostino Maggiore*. On the church of the confraternity, see more recently: Russo "Spazi della storia," 193–199.

<sup>52</sup> Russo "Spazi della storia," 193; Vitolo, "Confraternite," 66; Di Meglio, *Ordini mendicanti*, 160–161.

<sup>53</sup> Di Meglio, *Ordini mendicanti*, 161–162.

<sup>54</sup> De Stefano, *Descrittione*, 77.

<sup>55</sup> Di Meglio, *Ordini mendicanti*, 161.

<sup>56</sup> Russo, *Sant'Agostino Maggiore*, 43; Di Meglio, *Ordini mendicanti*, 163.

<sup>57</sup> Maietta, "Le testimonianze artistiche," 91; Russo "Spazi della storia," 194. In the sixteenth century, the tombstone was located in front of the altar (ASDN, *Sante Visite, Annibale di Capua*, VII, 1593, fol. 637<sup>r</sup>. See: Amirante, "Architettura," 87). Later, it was relocated in the middle of the new floor made in 1724; Russo, "Sulla conservazione," 192.

Invention and Exaltation of the Cross.<sup>58</sup> For the latter, they held a great procession through the city that was accompanied by no less than twelve friars from the Augustinian convent.<sup>59</sup> As with any other clerical and secular institution in the city, they also took part in the procession of the Corpus Domini, when they set up a sort of *tableaux vivant* (called *ingegno* by the Neapolitan writer Carlo de Lellis in the seventeenth century),<sup>60</sup> which represented the Emperor Constantine the Great and his mother Elena on a triumphal chariot, with a clear reference to the veneration of the Cross and the Christian feasts they celebrated annually. Images of Saint Constantine and Saint Elena were also painted on the inside facade of the church of the confraternity, and this led to the tradition that the building replaced a pre-existing chapel dedicated to the imperial saints.<sup>61</sup>

It would be tempting to connect the procession held on the Exaltation of the Cross with a fourteenth-century painted cross belonging to the confraternity (fig. 1.5), previously stored in the National Museum of Capodimonte, but returned to the church while this article was in preparation. The cross is convincingly attributed to the Giottesque painter from Florence Niccolò di Tommaso, who was in Naples between 1373 and 1375.<sup>62</sup> A processional use of this image is suggested by the painted back, as well as by the unusual shape.<sup>63</sup> The entire figure of Christ is cut along the edges, instead of being painted on rectangular panels, as was more typical for the period. This feature would allow spectators to see his silhouette on either side and would make it easier to carry. Similar crosses became popular at a later period and their creation is commonly attributed to the Tuscan painter Lorenzo Monaco,<sup>64</sup> although

<sup>58</sup> Di Meglio, *Ordini mendicanti*, 162.

<sup>59</sup> Di Meglio, *Ordini mendicanti*, 162.

<sup>60</sup> De Lellis, *Aggiunta*, fol. 58<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>61</sup> Russo, *Sant'Agostino Maggiore*, 37–38; Vitolo, “Confraternite,” 66; Russo “Spazi della storia,” 193.

<sup>62</sup> Skaug, “St. Bridget’s Vision,” 197–201. The author clarifies the chronology of Niccolò’s stay in Naples, based on a careful study of his technique. He concludes that the Crucifix was painted in Naples, because the *pastiglia* work in the halo is made freehand with no use of the punches he commonly employed in his Florentine workshop. On the attribution to Niccolò, see Leone de Castris, “Niccolò di Tommaso,” 96. The figure can be easily compared to a Man of Sorrow, now at the Metropolitan Museum (New York), and to the panel with Saint James at the Yale University Art Gallery.

<sup>63</sup> Leone de Castris, “Niccolò di Tommaso,” 96.

<sup>64</sup> Leone de Castris, “Niccolò di Tommaso,” 96. An early example is the Cross by Pietro Lorenzetti (c. 1315–1320) from the church of S. Marco in Cortona, now in the local

more examples exist not far from Naples, in Montecassino, Nola, and Sessa Aurunca.<sup>65</sup> No written evidence, however, confirms a processional use of the cross. Moreover, no images seem to have appeared on the back, as one would expect in a processional cross;<sup>66</sup> only fragments of a uniform greenish colour survive today. This might also indicate an original location on a wooden truss, where painted crosses like wooden crucifixes were usually displayed in late medieval churches.

Whatever its function was, the cross must have been an object of devotion for the confraternity, with its moderate but intense representation of the dead Christ (fig. 1.5). The painter did not indulge in brutal details, as was the case with the so-called “Expressionist Crucifixes,” where Christ is soaked with blood and his face distorted in pain and sorrow. The artist only used a livid colour for the flesh, so as to evoke the impression of a dead body. The sense of death is stressed by the full nudity of Jesus, emphasized by his transparent loin cloth, a popular element of iconography since Cimabue’s cross for Santa Croce in Florence (ca. 1280), rendered here by Niccolò with strong illusionism. In Naples, painted crosses were less common than monumental wooden crucifixes.<sup>67</sup> Its adoption in the church of the confraternity might be seen as an intentional sign of distinction from local tradition.

According to the records of a pastoral visitation conducted by Archbishop Annibale di Capua in 1593, the cross was displayed at that time behind the high altar, above another altar, in a chamber (*aula*) that connected the church with the oratory,<sup>68</sup> and was also accessible from a garden that the members of the confraternity acquired from the Augustinians in 1469 (fig. 1.6).<sup>69</sup> This configuration means that the brothers passed by the cross when they moved through the space. The *aula* corresponded to the antechamber of the oratory, as was customary in confraternal architecture of the fourteenth and fifteenth

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Museo Diocesano.

<sup>65</sup> Zappasodi, “Per Napoli tardogotica,” 12–14.

<sup>66</sup> See for instance the repertoire of processional crosses in Pierini, ed., *Francesco e la croce dipinta*, 114–119, 140–151.

<sup>67</sup> D’Ovidio, *Scultura lignea*, 63, 76, 117.

<sup>68</sup> ASDN, *Sante Visite, Annibale di Capua*, VII, 1593, fols. 637<sup>v</sup>–638<sup>r</sup>. See Amirante, “Architettura,” 87–88.

<sup>69</sup> Di Meglio, *Ordini mendicanti*, 162; Russo “Spazi della storia,” 194–195. On the alleged use of this garden during the *Congiura dei Baroni*, a conspiracy of the nobility against King Ferrante of Aragon in 1485, see Vitolo, “Confraternite,” 67.

centuries.<sup>70</sup> Later transformed into the choir of the present church (fig. 1.6), it was surely used for the congregation in the sixteenth century because it was equipped with wooden stalls like the oratory.<sup>71</sup> The location of the painted cross in this room confirms its centrality in the visual experience of the members of the confraternity.

The *Disciplina* also owns a public image that was recently relocated above the high altar of the church. The altarpiece with the Deposition of Jesus from the Cross (fig. 1.7) was made by the local painter Pietro Buono around 1475.<sup>72</sup> The subject refers to what had now become the confraternity's main activity of burying dead prisoners. This charitable work is also recalled in the rare episode of the Anointing of Jesus in the House of Lazarus painted in the *predella* (fig. 1.8), a prefiguration of the Entombment of Christ.

Despite the visual predominance of the altarpiece, jealously preserved in its original format throughout the centuries and later emphasized by its baroque layout, the simpler image of the crucified Christ persisted as the confraternity's iconic symbol during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The imagery appears on the frontispiece of a richly ornamented manuscript (1449–1451) (fig. 1.9), where the names of former members are registered in alphabetical order along with the year when they entered the confraternity.<sup>73</sup> At the bottom of the crucifix, two groups of hooded flagellants with a cross sewed on their shoulders kneel in prayer. Some of them hold a flagellum in their hands; some use it to beat themselves; some show their bare backs through an opening in their habit. They are towered over by the portraits of two eminent members of the confraternity, cardinals Rainaldo Brancaccio and Astorgio Agnesi, praying on either side of the crucifix while angels collect in a chalice the blood flowing from the wounds of Christ, a detail also emphasized in Niccolò di Tommaso's cross (fig. 1.5). The blood from the wounded

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<sup>70</sup> Sebregondi, "Arte confraternale," 343, 347. The old church of the *Disciplina* as described in the pastoral visitation of 1593 (above, note 67) shared many elements with its Tuscan counterparts discussed by Sebregondi. The antechamber or *vestibulum* housed an altar, while the oratory had a simple rectangular plan with an altar at the bottom. It is likely that the former served as a dressing room (*spogliatoio*) in the later period, whereas members originally wore their common habits inside the oratory.

<sup>71</sup> ASDN, *Sante Visite, Annibale di Capua*, VII, 1593, fol. 638<sup>v</sup>. See Amirante, "Architettura", 88.

<sup>72</sup> Zezza, "Il retablo quattrocentesco."

<sup>73</sup> Zezza, "La Crocifissione," 351–364; Vitolo, "Confraternite," 66; Gazzara, "L'Augustissima Compagnia," 133.

feet of Jesus stains the cross and wets the rocky land where the flagellants kneel, thus identifying their penitential acts with the sacrifice of Christ.

A simplified version of the same iconography features in the statutes of the confraternity (fig. 1.10) written in 1586.<sup>74</sup> Three members, still dressed in their white hooded habit with a cross on their shoulder (fig. 1.11), kneel in prayer on either side of the cross, but there is no reference to flagellation nor to the salvific role of Christ's blood. In place of the cardinals, the figures of Constantine and Helen are painted in a classically styled frame. A view of Naples seen from east, that is, where the Augustinian church stands, lies in the background. By the sixteenth century, flagellation had been discontinued and association with the confraternity had become a symbol of civic prestige, sharing the supposed Constantinian connections with the grandest and oldest Christian basilicas of Naples.<sup>75</sup>

Wearing a common habit was a distinctive feature of many late medieval confraternities, especially flagellants.<sup>76</sup> This custom had several implications. It likened its members to a monastic order and put all on the same level despite their social status. It ensured anonymity and the effectiveness of penitential acts, which must be kept secret.<sup>77</sup> It guaranteed continuity with the past, thus breaking temporal boundaries. It made the confraternity recognizable as a group and reinforced the sense of affiliation in individual members. In Naples, as elsewhere in Europe, it also distinguished them from earlier forms of confraternal associations, such as the staurite, which never adopted official garments. Therefore, confraternities are frequently portrayed as groups of individuals wearing the same robes while they pray in front of an image of their titular saint, Christ, or the Virgin.

During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the most popular confraternal image was a Virgin of Mercy ("Madonna della Misericordia"), where a standing figure of Mary opens her arms to shelter groups of faithful under her cloak, thus stressing the protective role of the Virgin and her intermediation between God and mankind.<sup>78</sup> The symbol of her act of mercy was

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<sup>74</sup> Musella, "Dimensione sociale," 349–438; Gazzara, "Istituzioni pie," 190–203; Gazzara, "L'Augustissima Compagnia," 135.

<sup>75</sup> During the late medieval and early modern periods, the foundation of up to eleven early-Christian basilicas and medieval churches in Naples was attributed to Constantine the Great, see D'Ovidio, "Napoli medievale."

<sup>76</sup> Vauchez, *The Laity*, 113; Sebregondi, "Arte confraternale," 345–354.

<sup>77</sup> Sebregondi, "Arte confraternale," 347.

<sup>78</sup> Castaldi, *La Madonna della Misericordia*, 43–63.

in the cloak itself, endowed with thaumaturgic power. The origin of this iconography is still debated. Possibly inspired by Greek theological writings, it was especially promoted by mendicant orders. Early examples include the so-called Franciscans' Madonna (*Madonna dei Francescani*) by the Sienese painter Duccio di Buonisegna (fig. 1.12), usually dated to 1280–1285, and an altarpiece at Nicosia with the Virgin and three Carmelites (fig. 1.13), painted after 1287.<sup>79</sup> In the two panels, Mary receives the friars under her cloak, but she is portrayed while sitting on the throne with baby Jesus in her arms — the latter still in a rigid hieratic pose, the former more dynamic and lively. Their iconography can be considered as transitional towards the proper *Madonna della Misericordia* type, with the standing figure of Mary usually portrayed alone. Both versions can be found in Naples (figs. 14, 19) in connection with an important late medieval charitable organization, the Annunziata.

### 3.3 Assisting the Poor: The Annunziata

Founded before 1318, the Annunziata (fig. 1.1), or Santa Casa, was not linked to any religious orders, but served as a church and hospital administered by a group of citizens, like similar institutions in southern Italy during the same period.<sup>80</sup> Members belonged to the aristocracy from the Seggio di Capuana, where the building stood, as well as to merchant and professional classes of the Popolo,<sup>81</sup> whose main civic institutions existed in the area.<sup>82</sup> In 1343, they gave their seat to Queen Sancia (or Sancha) of Majorca (ca. 1281–1345), wife of King Robert the Wise, who wanted to expand a hospice for repented prostitutes, Santa Maria Maddalena, which she had established nearby in 1323.<sup>83</sup> In exchange, she donated a property in the same district, where she built at her own expense a new church and hospital, the first nucleus of the present complex. The area extended east of Sant'Agostino and was not far from the northern limit of the Market Square. One of the poorest and most densely populated neighbourhoods of late medieval Naples, it was known in the Middle Ages as Bad Walk (*Malpasso*), with reference to the crime and violence

<sup>79</sup> Gastaldi, *La Madonna della Misericordia*, 72–75. On these paintings see also: Schmidt, “La Madonna dei Francescani,” 30–44; Eliades, “Enthroned Virgin Mary,” 53–80.

<sup>80</sup> Marino, *Ospedali e città*.

<sup>81</sup> Marino, *Ospedali e città*, 14–15. Queen Sancia also sponsored a similar institution in the same district, Santa Maria Egiziaca.

<sup>82</sup> Di Meglio, *Ordini mendicanti*, 127–128, 174–175.

<sup>83</sup> Marino, *Ospedali e città*, 12.

that were common. The Annunziata became the largest hospital in Naples and specialized in the care of abandoned infants (*esposti*). The Annunziata, Maddalena, and similar institutions testify to the role of dominant classes in promoting urban charitable initiatives on a city-wide scale. Such foundations were surely inspired by religious motivations, but also aimed at gaining political control and social reputation.

The wooden statue of an enthroned Madonna and Child (fig. 1.14) that is now on display in a side chapel of the church is believed to be a reference to the early confraternity that promoted the foundation of the Annunziata.<sup>84</sup> Four male figures are sheltered under Mary's cloak (fig. 1.15), like in the earlier versions of the Madonna della Misericordia iconography.<sup>85</sup> They are not hooded, but wear the same habit and embrace a cross on which they lean their heads with expressions of affection and penance. The statue is often referred to as Madonna of the Repentant Sinners ("Madonna dei Repentiti"). According to Giovanni Battista D'Addosio, the first modern historian of the Annunziata, a confraternity with this name contributed to its foundation.<sup>86</sup> The lack of a hood and flagellum makes it clear that they were not flagellants, or, at least, they were not portrayed as such. Since the Madonna can be dated to the beginning of the fifteenth century,<sup>87</sup> when the Repentiti might have no longer existed, one can speculate that their representation in the statue was retrospective, an allusion to an institution that persisted in local memory but was no longer active and recognizable. A more plausible explanation is that the four figures, which are slightly differentiated by their progressively growing beard and hair (fig. 1.13), symbolized the four ages of man, and thus all of humanity if not the poor and the orphans assisted at the Annunziata since their infancy.

What can be said for certain is that the statue represents the titular saint of the institution. The image of Jesus sitting on Mary's lap visually expresses

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<sup>84</sup> D'Ovidio, *Scultura lignea*, 85–87; Marino, *Ospedali e città*, 13. The statue and the three panels of the throne are, unusually, carved out of the same large trunk of wood, which is not concave inside.

<sup>85</sup> An icon similar to the Madonna of the Carmelites in Nicosia (fig. 1.13) might have existed in the church of the same order in the Market Square of Naples, not far from the Annunziata (fig. 1.1), and have provided the model for the wooden statue (fig. 1.14); D'Ovidio, "The Making of an Icon."

<sup>86</sup> D'Addosio, *Origini*, 17–18.

<sup>87</sup> D'Ovidio, "La Madonna di Piedigrotta," 63–64. The tube-like drapery and the figures' monumentality can find a parallel in the statuary and painting of Burgundy during the first half of the fifteenth century.



the Incarnation of Christ and qualifies the Virgin as the Seat of Wisdom (*Sedes Sapientiae*).<sup>88</sup> This archaic iconography, the oldest in Marian imagery and usually referred to as Mother of God (*Theotokos*), was still current in Naples during the fourteenth century. It is evident in a mosaic (fig. 1.16) known as St. Mary of the Beginning (“S. Maria del Principio”), made in 1313 in the basilica of Santa Restituta. The basilica is inside the episcopal complex, and the mosaic is located in a chapel that was believed to be the very site where the first bishop of Naples, consecrated personally by St. Peter, used to live.<sup>89</sup> A contemporary source describes the mosaic as the image of the incarnated Virgin giving birth to Jesus (“incarnata fuit imago Beatae Mariae Virginis in puerperio”) and presents it as the first depiction of Mary in the city, if not in the whole of Italy.<sup>90</sup> Hence, the title “Principio” referred to the beginning of both Christianity and the Church of Naples at the same time.

An almost identical iconography, and a model for that at the Annunziata, appears in the wooden statue of the Madonna of Piedigrotta (fig. 1.17), made around 1335, possibly in the workshop of the Sienese sculptor Tino di Camaino.<sup>91</sup> The suburban church of Piedigrotta was an important coastal sanctuary outside of Naples. It stood on the westernmost limit of the bay and marked the border between the diocese of Naples and that of Pozzuoli. In this church, the Feast of the Annunciation on 25 March (the day when the Church commemorates the Incarnation of Christ) was celebrated with special emphasis in the fourteenth century, before the Nativity of Mary on 8 September became predominant in the fifteenth century.<sup>92</sup> A reference to the Incarnation of Christ in the iconography of these late medieval Madonnas might explain why that of the Annunziata was known in the past as Pregnant Madonna (“Madonna Chiatta”).

The original position of the Madonna dei Repentiti (fig. 1.14) in the church is uncertain, but the statue corresponds to a typology that was most frequently displayed near or above the high altar, a suitable location for a figure that portrayed the titular saint of the church. An updated version of the Madonna della Misericordia appeared instead in the hospital’s marble portal (fig. 1.18), made around 1500 by the Lombard sculptor Tommaso Malvito.<sup>93</sup>

<sup>88</sup> D’Ovidio, *Scultura lignea*, 85–87, 195–196.

<sup>89</sup> Lucherini, “1313–1320,” 185–213; Lucherini, *La cattedrale*, 187–195.

<sup>90</sup> Lucherini, *La cattedrale*, 350.

<sup>91</sup> D’Ovidio, *Scultura lignea*, 85–87, 190–202.

<sup>92</sup> D’Ovidio, *Scultura lignea*, 196.

<sup>93</sup> Maietta and Vanacore, *L’Annunziata*, 35; Maietta and Tenerelli, *Il restauro*. It is believed that the portal was originally intended for the church and was adapted for the

In the lunette, two groups of laymen and women kneel at the feet of a standing figure of Mary, who embraces them under her cloak (fig. 1.19). This was a clear reference to the benefactors of the Annunziata and recalled the image of the Mother of God that was venerated in the church. The parallel between the two images is stressed by the figures of Mary, both seen in a rigid frontal position with faces that resemble one another.

A depiction of brothers kneeling in prayer features instead in the sixteenth-century tombstone of the *Disciplinati* from San Giovanni a Mare (fig. 1.20), a church and hospital run by the Knights of Malta near Sant’Eligio and the Market square.<sup>94</sup> The bad state of preservation makes it impossible to say whether they all wear everyday lay clothing; some are partly hooded, like the two in the middle, who also seem to hold a flagellum in their hands. The confraternity was under the control of secular clergy and practiced flagellation to the shedding of blood (“*effusio sanguinis*”) during public rituals, such as at the funeral of King Ferrante of Aragon in 1494, when ten confraternities of flagellants (“*confratrie de battiente*”) followed the funerary parade.<sup>95</sup>

### 3.4 *Doctrine and Social Cohesion: Two Dominican Confraternities*

A confraternity devoted to the Crucifix was established in San Domenico Maggiore (fig. 1.1), the main Dominican convent of Naples, before 1427, when its members were granted the privilege of enjoying the same spiritual benefits as the friars.<sup>96</sup> It was formed by aristocrats from the *Seggio* of Nido, where the church stood, but it seems that it recruited members from the middle class, too.<sup>97</sup> Their seat was located in a large chapel dedicated to the Crucifix, later known as *Cappellone del Crocifisso*. Its title derived from a thirteenth-century panel with the Crucifixion (fig. 1.21), which was moved

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hospital a few years later. However, the iconography of the Virgin of Mercy does not seem appropriate for an entrance to the church, where an Annunciation of the Virgin would be expected in the central position, like in any of the other churches of the Annunziata in southern Italy. In Naples, the subject is relegated instead to the figures of Mary and the Archangel Gabriel standing on side pinnacles. I am grateful to Fernando Loffredo for sharing this opinion with me.

<sup>94</sup> Casiello, ed., *San Giovanni a Mare*.

<sup>95</sup> Di Meglio, “La Disciplina di S. Marta,” 192–196; Vitolo, “Confraternite,” 67–68.

<sup>96</sup> Di Meglio, *Ordini mendicanti*, 156.

<sup>97</sup> Di Meglio, *Ordini mendicanti*, 157.

here from another chapel in 1437.<sup>98</sup> In fact, the crucifix portrayed in the panel was interpreted at this time as the one that spoke to St. Thomas Aquinas. According to a story told in the canonization process, the saint heard Jesus saying “Thou hast written well concerning me, Thomas” (“Bene scripsisti de me, Thome”) while he stayed in the convent and worked on his *Summa*. The episode was credited to a narrative topos employed in hagiography, but did not refer to any specific image. Both the Dominicans and the aristocrats from the recently founded confraternity, such as the Carafas, might have been interested in promoting the veneration for an ancient image that could be linked to the saint. The antiquity of the image and its location in the church could easily favour such an interpretation.

The Cappellone stands in the area once occupied by the former church of San Michele Arcangelo a Morfisia, where Dominicans first settled in Naples in 1231.<sup>99</sup> St. Thomas might have actually lived there. By choosing this site as its headquarters, the confraternity stressed continuity with the history of the order and the convent itself. The chapel became a privileged burial site for the Carafas and other members of the local nobility.<sup>100</sup> A “church within the church,” it gained urban visibility when a staircase was built at the back of the apse as a direct access from the Piazza San Domenico,<sup>101</sup> thus linking the building to the lower *decumanus*, an important axis in the old city centre, known today as “Spaccanapoli.”

A confraternity named after the Coronation of the Virgin is attested in the second-most-important Dominican convent in the city, San Pietro Martire (fig. 1.1).<sup>102</sup> Formed by professionals from those administrative districts of the middle class (“Ottine”) that stood in proximity to the church, the confraternity was devoted to various charitable activities in favour of the poor. Its members celebrated an annual feast on 16 August, the day after the Assumption of Mary, an event connected to the Coronation of the Virgin that was portrayed in the altarpiece of the chapel they owned in the church.<sup>103</sup> In 1498, the administrators of the confraternity were granted use of a wall inside the church, near

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<sup>98</sup> De Divitiis, *Architettura*, 144–145. The icon is now kept in the attached convent and is replaced by a copy in the original location.

<sup>99</sup> De Divitiis, *Architettura*, 138.

<sup>100</sup> De Divitiis, *Architettura*, 146–158.

<sup>101</sup> De Divitiis, *Architettura*, 141–142.

<sup>102</sup> Di Meglio, *Ordini mendicanti*, 157–160.

<sup>103</sup> Di Meglio, *Ordini mendicanti*, 157.

the main door, where they could collect money.<sup>104</sup> This was clearly a strategic location. Not only was it on the way for anyone who entered the church, but it also established a visual continuity with the images that stood on either side of the door. To the left was a marble relief made in 1361 as a votive offering (*ex voto*) by the merchant Franceschino da Brigale (fig. 1.22) after he survived two shipwrecks.<sup>105</sup> The donor is portrayed while he spills out money from his bag to pay a personification of Death (fig. 1.23), represented as a double-crowned skeleton standing over a mass of dead bodies, including royals, prelates, and commoners. The two figures are in a dialogue and their words are engraved on scrolls rolling out of their mouths. Franceschino declares his intention to give all his money in exchange for life, but Death replies that no one can escape from it. He should remember its horrifying image and think about the salvation of his soul. The relief was therefore intended as both a votive offering in thanks for a narrow escape and a reminder of the inevitability of death (*Memento Mori*). In local tradition it soon became a symbol of wealth and prodigality, while the act of donation so vividly portrayed therein might have encouraged donations to the confraternity.<sup>106</sup>

Franceschino's *ex voto* has been celebrated in local antiquarianism since it was described for the first time by the sixteenth-century Neapolitan historian Giovanni Antonio Summonte,<sup>107</sup> who lived near San Pietro Martire and was a member of the confraternity.<sup>108</sup> The relief should be seen in unison with the image of St. Christopher, painted on the outer side of the same wall where the confraternity collected money, that is, to the right of the main door. The saint's depiction near the door was not uncommon for the period (see, for instance, the surviving example in San Biagio at Altamura).<sup>109</sup> The Greek name "Christóforos" actually means the one who carries Christ, and it inspired the story of a giant saint who carried the infant Jesus across a river on his shoulders. Saint Christopher thus became a symbol of Salvation, fulfilled by the Incarnation of Christ and his sacrifice, a connotation that

<sup>104</sup> Di Meglio, *Ordini mendicanti*, 156

<sup>105</sup> Middione, *Le raccolte di scultura*, 50–51; Bacci, *Pro remedio animae*, 218–219; Di Meglio, *Ordini mendicanti*, 160.

<sup>106</sup> Di Meglio, *Ordini mendicanti*, 160.

<sup>107</sup> Summonte, *Historia*, 2:443–444.

<sup>108</sup> Di Franco, *Alla ricerca di un'identità politica*, 67–165; Di Meglio, *Ordini mendicanti*, 160.

<sup>109</sup> Berloco and Lorusso Bolettieri, *La chiesa di San Biagio*. The saint's image was reproduced near the door in private houses too; Bacci, *Pro remedio animae*, 137.

perfectly matched the entrance to the church. Because of his iconography, he also became the patron saint of travellers. People believed that those who looked on the image of St. Christopher would not die that day. The story of Franceschino, a traveller who escaped death twice, reinforced the image's apotropaic function.

After having seen these two images, the faithful entering the church approached the stall for donations to their right and then saw the chapel of the confraternity, the first on the right aisle. Their visual itinerary culminated in the view of the Crowned Virgin portrayed in the altarpiece, which must have been reserved to the members of the confraternity except on the confraternity's annual feast, when it was likely unveiled to the entire congregation.

### 3.5 Ancient Confraternal Images for the City

The veneration of ancient images was a distinctive feature in religious practice during the early modern period, and confraternities were no exception. Like St. Thomas's crucifix, their antiquity was seen as material evidence of the history and fame of the institution that had preserved them for centuries. Their arcane aspect encouraged devotion and reverence, while interaction in prayer favoured their perception as miraculous. The attribution of supernatural powers legitimated their authority and proved the validity of the cult of images in response to the iconoclasm of the Reformation.<sup>110</sup>

An archaic figure of St. Anthony (fig. 1.24) was venerated in Naples by a confraternity named after the saint in the Franciscan church of San Lorenzo Maggiore (fig. 1.1).<sup>111</sup> It existed before 1482 and its administrators (*magistri*) had the right to sit on a bench in front of the image, which stood above an altar built against a pillar on the left side of the transept.<sup>112</sup> In 1508, the painting was brought in procession to Loreto, a famous Marian sanctuary in the Marche region of central Italy, by more than sixty people on foot.<sup>113</sup> This sort of pilgrimage undertaken by sacred images and their devotees to the major sanctuaries of the Italian peninsula was a common practice in the period.<sup>114</sup> A

<sup>110</sup>See D'Ovidio, "Statue lignee," 118–119, for further bibliographical references.

<sup>111</sup> Aceto, "Spazio ecclesiale," 5–10. Additional confraternities, including flagellants, operated in the church from the late Trecento; Di Meglio, *Ordini mendicanti*, 169–170.

<sup>112</sup> Aceto, "Spazio ecclesiale," 8.

<sup>113</sup> Passaro, *Historie*, 153; Aceto, "Spazio ecclesiale," 8.

<sup>114</sup> D'Ovidio, "The Making of an Icon," 238. In this article I expressed a different opinion on the possibility that images were carried in procession outside the city at such

mean of expiation of sins for the participants, it increased the image's reputation and wealth. Another procession to Loreto in 1508 carried the Madonna Bruna (fig. 1.25) from the Carmelite church of Naples to the mendicant shrines of Assisi (San Francesco), Tolentino (San Nicola), L'Aquila (San Bernardino), Montefalco (Beata Chiara). The donations at these stops resulted in bringing back jewellery and precious items that were valued more than 800 ducats.<sup>115</sup>

The popularity of St. Anthony's image (fig. 1.24) increased the importance of the confraternity. By the early seventeenth century, but likely from the very beginning, the latter was governed by the guardian of the convent, assisted by a nobleman from the Seggio of Montagna, where the church stood, and four members from the Popolo, one for each Ottina in the district.<sup>116</sup> The miraculous power of the image attested by all Neapolitan sources from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century was emphasized by verses painted in the open book held by the saint in the panel. The quotation came from the thirteenth-century responsory "If You Look for Miracles" ("Si queris miracula"). The veneration of the icon attracted large crowds at the altar of the confraternity every day. Apart from the annual Feast of St. Anthony, its members celebrated a weekly office on Tuesdays that was performed with music by the best singers in the city.<sup>117</sup> When the church was renovated, the image was relocated to the focal point of a new, larger chapel, which was extended to the whole left transept. Works were commissioned from the Lombard architect Cosimo Fanzago, who designed the chapel with abundant marble and precious stones, a clear sign of the wealth generated by the icon that was now considered Custodian of the Neapolitans ("Rifugio di napoletani").<sup>118</sup>

A similar story occurs with the above-mentioned Madonna del Carmine (fig. 1.25), one of the most popular cult images in Naples even today.<sup>119</sup> Its title "Bruna," dating back to the sixteenth century, refers to the darkish tint of the painting, a quality that derived from its antiquity and Byzantine style.<sup>120</sup> It is debated whether the icon belonged to the Carmelite church (fig. 1.1) or to a confraternity of tanners, which brought it in procession to Rome for the

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an early date.

<sup>115</sup> Passaro, *Historie*, 153–154.

<sup>116</sup> Aceto, "Spazio ecclesiale," 8.

<sup>117</sup> Aceto, "Spazio ecclesiale," 9.

<sup>118</sup> Capaccio, *Il Forastiero*, 907; Aceto, "Spazio ecclesiale," 8–9.

<sup>119</sup> D'Ovidio, "The Making of an Icon."

<sup>120</sup> D'Ovidio, "The Making of an Icon," 238. On the recent attribution of the icon to a workshop from Crete, see Bacci, "On the Prehistory," 21–22.

Holy Year in 1500, as stated in the earliest account on the image, a journal by the Neapolitan notary Giacomo Della Morte, written around 1511.<sup>121</sup> Linked to a powerful guild of artisans, the confraternity owned the oratory of Santa Caterina in Foro Magno, a small building attached to the Carmelite convent in the Market Square (fig. 1.1). Throughout the late medieval and early modern periods, the area became a privileged location for religious confraternities affiliated to professional corporations. The butchers (*lanii*), blacksmiths (*ferrai*), and tailors (*sartori*) owned chapels in Sant'Eligio Maggiore (fig. 1.1), where the French hospice built under the Angevins had become one of the largest hospitals in town,<sup>122</sup> run by a consortium of laymen. On the opposite side of the square, the large Carmelite church (fig. 1.1) housed the altars of silk, wool, and even vermicelli manufacturers.<sup>123</sup>

Later sources make no reference to the tanners. They present the icon as an original work by St. Luke, brought by the Carmelites from the Holy Land when they settled in Naples. It revealed its miraculous powers in 1500, when it was carried in procession to Rome for the first time by the people of the city. The story proved the legendary origins of the Order and reflected the new civic prestige of the image, whose healing properties became renowned throughout the Kingdom.<sup>124</sup> Its immense reputation and devotional status depended on the social and urban context of the church. Built at the easternmost limit of the medieval city, the complex (fig. 1.1) was included in the walls and attached to a fortress (the Castellone del Carmine) at the end of fifteenth century.<sup>125</sup> Its location in the Market Square, the largest open space within the urban perimeter, made it a privileged site for public rituals and official events. With its imposing structure and tower built in the seventeenth century, the tallest in Naples, it provided physical and spiritual protection for the city. In this way, an ancient image venerated by the tanners became the mother of all Neapolitans ("Mamma del Carmine"), as the icon is known today.

#### 4. Conclusions

Sacred imagery permeated the religious experience of laypeople in medieval Naples. From the tenth century, the possession of images in a church was a

<sup>121</sup> Della Morte, *Cronica*, 234; D'Ovidio, "The Making of an Icon," 238.

<sup>122</sup> Vitolo, "L'ospedale di S. Eligio," 64–71, 86–92, 97–102.

<sup>123</sup> Filangieri, *Documenti*, 333–334.

<sup>124</sup> D'Ovidio, "The Making of an Icon," 239–244.

<sup>125</sup> D'Ovidio, "The Making of an Icon," 237.

distinctive feature of local elites, a means to achieve public reputation and to build ties with the ecclesiastical institutions that operated in the districts where they lived. Donation of lands to private images guaranteed intercession for and memory of the dead. In this respect, images fulfilled the same task met by church burials. During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the most typical cult images to receive donations were monumental wooden crucifixes. Their visual predominance in the sacred space, as well as their frequent location above the altar used for the commemoration of the dead (Altar of the Cross), increased their devotional status among the laity. However, no direct link seems to have existed between these crucifixes and the earliest forms of confraternal associations attested in the city: the staurite. Their name referred to the church's processional cross ("stauròs" in Greek), which they had the right to carry in public rituals. The staurite were formed by citizens who lived near the church and managed charitable activities for the sick and the poor from the district. They cannot be considered as true confraternities of devotion, but were more similar to the urban guilds and professional corporations that appeared in Europe in the same period.<sup>126</sup> They were perfectly integrated into the ecclesiastical and civic structures of the city and acted under the control of the secular clergy.

Territoriality and social cohesion were also constant qualities in later confraternities, with few exceptions. Even those confraternities that originally recruited members from different neighbourhoods and social classes, such as the *Disciplina della Croce* in the main Augustinian complex of Naples, soon adopted a structure that reflected the social and administrative system of the city, characterized by subdivision into *Seggi* and *Ottine*, the urban districts pertaining to the nobility and the working class respectively. The *Disciplina* included aristocrats from the *Seggio di Portanova* in the eastern part of Naples, where the Augustinian church stands, as well as merchants and professionals from the local *Ottine*. The same can be said for the confraternity of St. Anthony in the Franciscan church of San Lorenzo, included within the boundaries of the *Seggio* of Montagna. A similar structure can be found at the *Annunziata*, not a proper confraternity but a charitable institution mainly run by laypeople, whose administrators came from both the local *Seggio* of Capuana and from the *Popolo*. Noble families from the *Seggio* of Nido were affiliated to the confraternity of the Crucifix in San Domenico Maggiore, while residents from the middle class joined the confraternity of

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<sup>126</sup> Vauchez, *The Laity*, 110.



the Coronation of the Virgin in San Pietro Martire, thus reflecting the main social components of the urban sectors where these two Dominican foundations operated. During the fifteenth century, many confraternities connected to professional orders owned chapels in the two largest churches flanking the Market Square, Sant'Eligio and the Carmine.

Compared to other areas of Italy, Naples has preserved few images that can be related with certainty to late medieval confraternities. Two that are known are the painted cross of the *Disciplina della Croce* (fig. 1.5) and the panel with St. Anthony in San Lorenzo Maggiore (fig. 1.24). We know very little about their original location and function. The former might have been on a wooden truss, above the altar of the oratory, or in its antechamber, where it was listed in the sixteenth century. A processional use of the image is suggested by material evidence, as it is painted on the back and shaped in a way that would make it easy to carry. One can speculate that the confraternity practiced flagellation in front of it, but no written sources confirm any of these theories. The panel with St. Anthony was displayed above an altar in the transept of the church, and it was always in view of the administrators of the confraternity because a bench in front of it was reserved for them. The wooden statue at the Annunziata (fig. 1.12) might have also been the main cult image in the church built for the institution, since its archaic iconography referred to the Incarnation of Christ and the Feast of the Annunciation. The ancient icon with the Crucifixion (fig. 1.21) venerated by the confraternity in San Domenico Maggiore came from another chapel in the church, whereas the altarpiece with the Coronation of the Virgin that belonged to the confraternity in San Pietro Martire is lost.

Sacred imagery was not limited to the representation of the confraternities' titular saints, but also referred to the confraternities' religious activities and social status. The altarpiece with the Deposition of Jesus from the Cross (fig. 1.7) in the church of the *Disciplina della Croce* pointed to the work of mercy practiced by its members, burying executed criminals, a sign of mortification that complemented flagellation and replaced it entirely at the end of the fifteenth century. The Virgin of Mercy ("Madonna della Misericordia") (fig. 1.19) in the marble portal of the hospital at the Annunziata (fig. 1.18) employed one of the most common confraternal iconographies, with clear reference to those who supported the institution. Less wealthy confraternities could take advantage of pre-existing images, as was the case with the famous *ex voto* by Franceschino da Brigale (fig. 1.22) and a figure of St. Christopher, on either side of the central door of San Pietro Martire. With their apotropaic

and moral meaning, they could encourage donations to the confraternity of the Coronation, which collected money right inside the church.

Written sources tell us about the confraternities' rituality and devotional practice, although they mainly refer to later periods. Funerals and rites of intercession were common throughout history, from the staurite to late medieval confraternities. Early sources stress the importance of attending these ceremonies, which represented the highest form of sodality amongst their members. First, they guaranteed the strict observance of funerary rituals for the dead, as well as constant prayer for the salvation of the soul. Second, they stressed the members' prestige and social status. Flagellation and other kinds of physical mortification were not as popular in Neapolitan confraternities as they were elsewhere during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. They increased in the fifteenth century, but were largely discontinued by the sixteenth. Annual feasts dedicated to titular saints were obviously celebrated with special emphasis, but weekly services could also involve complex ceremonies with chants and music, as happened in the seventeenth century with the confraternity of St. Anthony. Processions took place on the feast days specific to the confraternity and on those pertaining to the entire city, like the Corpus Domini procession. These public displays established the confraternities within the community and projected them into the urban sphere.

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Figure 1.1. Alessandro Baratta, *Fidelissimae Urbis Neapolitanae [...] Delineatio* (1629). Detail with location of the main churches mentioned in the text. Courtesy of Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris. (Public domain.)

*Legend:* (1) Cathedral; (2) San Giorgio Maggiore; (3) Santa Maria Maggiore; (4) San Giovanni Maggiore; (5) Sant’Aniello a Caponapoli; (6) Sant’Agostino Maggiore and Disciplina della Croce; (7) Annunziata; (8) San Domenico Maggiore; (9) San Lorenzo; (10) San Pietro Martire; (11) Sant’Eligio; (12) Carmine; (13) San Giovanni a Mare.



Figure 1.2. Wooden crucifix (c. 1150). Sant'Aniello a Caponapoli, Naples, Italy. (Photo Matteo Carnevali.)



Figure 1.3. Wooden crucifix (c. 1200). San Giorgio Maggiore, Naples, Italy. (Photo Matteo Carnevali.)



Figure 1.4. Tombstone of Bartolomeo Sasso (1357). Disciplina della Croce (formerly National Museum of Capodimonte), Naples, Italy. (Photo Stefano Fittipaldi.)



Figure 1.5. Niccolò di Tommaso, Painted Cross. Church of the Disciplina della Croce (formerly National Museum of Capodimonte), Naples, Italy. (Photo Marco and Luciano Pedicini.)

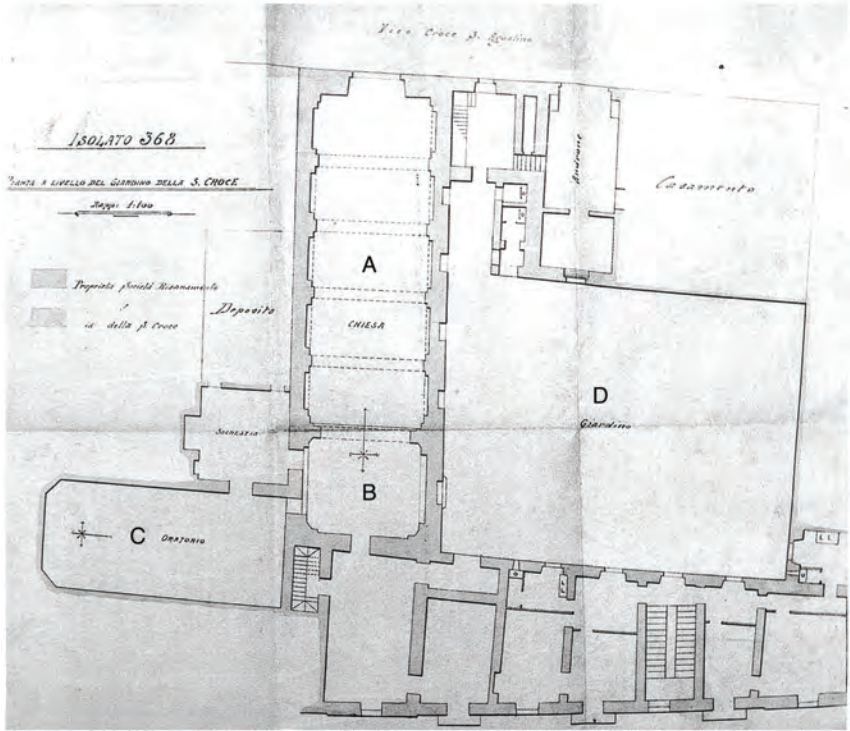


Figure 1.6. Plan of the Disciplina della Croce church and complex in the seventeenth century (A) Church; (B) Choir (former antechamber of the oratory); (C) Oratory; (D) Garden. (From Amirante, "Architettura," 86.)



Figure 1.7. Pietro Buono, *Deposition from the Cross*. Disciplina della Croce (formerly National Museum of Capodimonte), Naples, Italy. (Photo Marco and Luciano Pedicini.)





Figure 1.8. Pietro Buono, *Anointing of Jesus in the House of Lazarus*. Detail of figure Figure 1.7. (Photo Marco and Luciano Pedicini.)



Figure 1.9. Master of Isabella of Chiaromonte, *Crucifixion*. Codice dei Confratelli (1449–51). Archivio della Disciplina della Croce, Naples, Italy. (Photo Stefano Fittipaldi.)

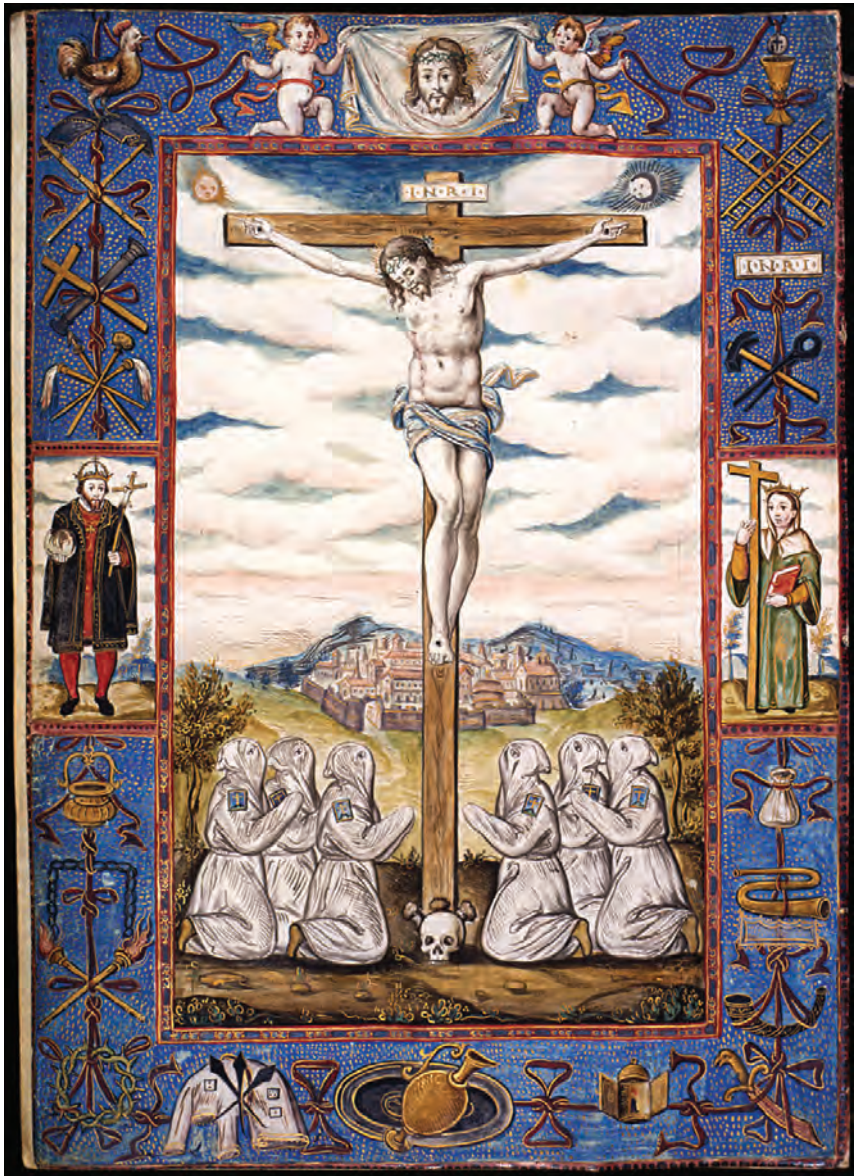


Figure 1.10. *Crucifixion*. Frontispiece of the *Capitoli della Disciplina della Croce* (1586). Archivio della Disciplina della Croce, Naples, Italy. (Photo Stefano Fittipaldi.)



Figure 1.11. Detail of figure Figure 1.10. (Photo Stefano Fittipaldi.)



Figure 1.12. Duccio di Buoninsegna, *Madonna dei francescani* (c. 1280). Pinacoteca Nazionale, Siena, Italy. (From Schmidt, “La Madonna,” 31, Fig. 2.)



Figure 1.13. *Virgin of Mercy of the Carmelites* (c. 1290). Byzantine Museum, Nicosia, Cyprus. (From Eliades, “Enthroned,” 56, Fig. 1.)



Figure 1.14. *Madonna dei Repentiti* (c. 1400). Annunziata, Naples, Italy. (Photo Marco and Luciano Pedicini.)



Figure 1.15. *Repentants* (or, *The four ages of mankind?*). Detail of Figure 1.14. (Photo Marco and Luciano Pedicini.)





Figure 1.16. Lello from Rome, *Madonna del Principio* (1313). Cathedral of Santa Restituta, Naples, Italy. (Photo Marco and Luciano Pedicini.)



Figure 1.17. Tino di Camaino (workshop), *Madonna di Piedigrotta* (c. 1335). Santa Maria di Piedigrotta, Naples, Italy. (Photo Marco and Luciano Pedicini.)



Figure 1.18. Tommaso Malvito, Marble Portal of the Hospital (c. 1500). Anunziata, Naples, Italy. (Photo Marco and Luciano Pedicini.)



Figure 1.19. Tommaso Malvito, *Madonna della Misericordia*. Detail of Figure 1.18. (Photo Marco and Luciano Pedicini.)



Figure 1.20. Tombstone of the Compagnia de' Disciplinati (c. 1500). San Giovanni a Mare, Naples, Italy. (Photo Gennaro Trinchillo.)



Figure 1.21. *Crucifixion* (c. 1270). Convent of San Domenico Maggiore, Naples, Italy. (Photo Marco and Luciano Pedicini.)

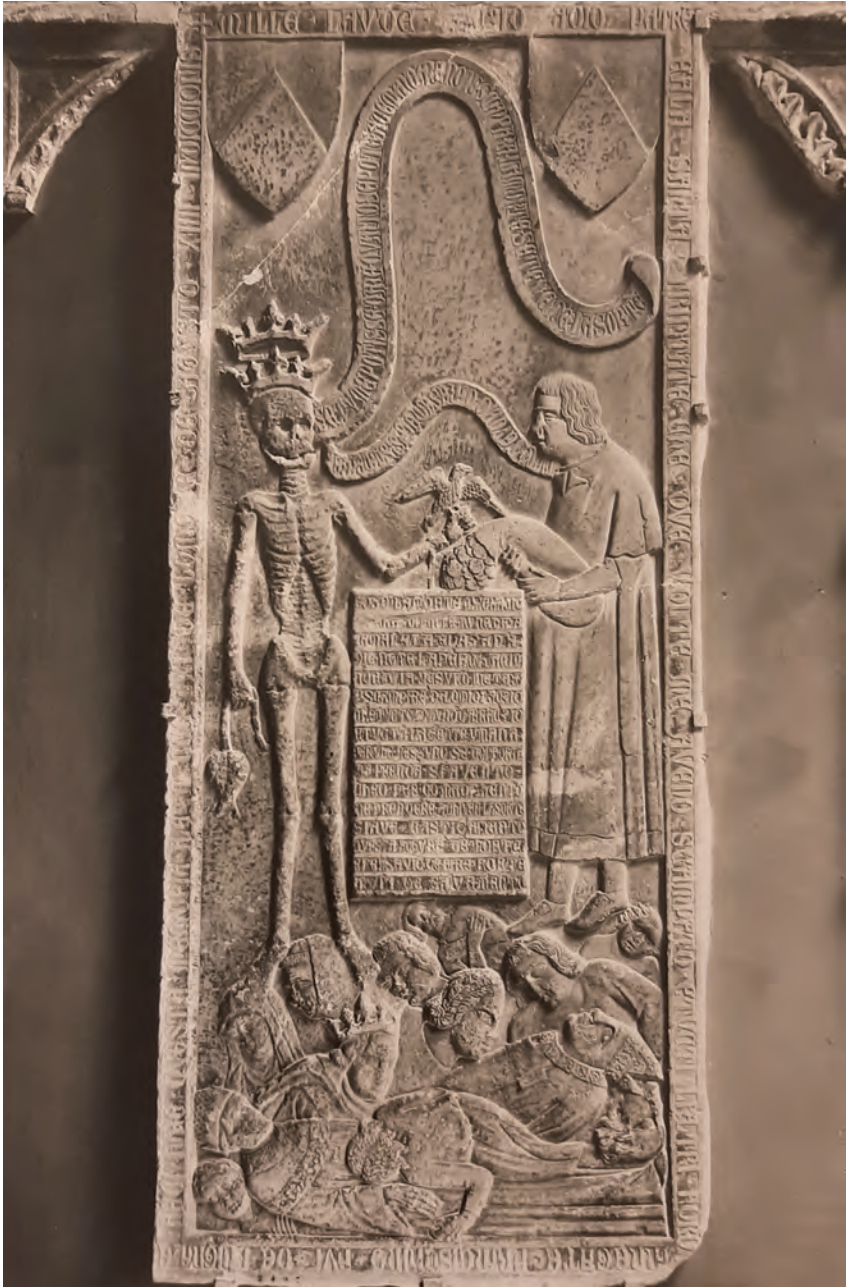


Figure 1.22. Franceschino da Brigale's *ex voto* (1361). Museo di San Martino (from the convent of San Pietro Martire), Naples, Italy. (Photo Alinari.)



Figure 1.23. Franceschino da Brigale's *ex voto* (1361). Detail of Figure 1.22. (Photo Alinari.)





Figure 1.24. Leonardo da Besozzo. *St. Antony of Padua* (c. 1438 with subsequent restorations). San Lorenzo Maggiore, Naples, Italy. (Photo Marco and Luciano Pedicini.)



Figure 1.25. Andrea Ferruccio. Marble Altar (c. 1510) with the icon of the Madonna Bruna (c. 1350). Santa Maria del Carmine, Naples, Italy. (Photo Marco and Luciano Pedicini.)