

PREFACE

The present volume was born out of a desire to insert Italy more firmly into the Anglophone historiography of medieval religious history. Medieval Italy has a very distinct history compared to other parts of Europe. North Italy during the High Middle Ages comprised numerous self-governing communes rather than being under the rule of a royal or aristocratic dynasty. The political system of communes was fairly sophisticated, with different socioeconomic classes such as magnates, *popolo grasso*, or *popolo minuto* being represented by different governing bodies, all of them working in collaboration, though at times not without sharp conflicts. Therefore, it would not be wrong to say that the ordinary folk were much more directly involved with the affairs of the state than anywhere else in Europe, and that habit demonstrated itself also in matters of religion. Civic pride was paramount, and urban life was especially vivid. As the city communes expanded their jurisdiction over the surrounding countryside, the *contado*, the divide between the rural and urban population became less sharp. The economic upheaval of the towns gave rise to a robust middle class, which was devoted to and able to support religious causes. That fact coupled with a warmer Mediterranean climate allowed a variety of eremitic, monastic, and mendicant movements, which relied on lay support, to flourish. The seat of the papacy in this period was in Rome, that is, right in the middle of the Italian peninsula; hence the papacy exerted a greater influence on medieval religious and political life in Italy than it did elsewhere. These are only a few of the factors that set Italy apart from the rest of Europe in the High Middle Ages and that allowed a very rich religious culture with a high variety of devotional expressions to flourish.

The purpose of this book is twofold: first, to provide, as much as possible, an even overview of the Christian institutional, devotional, and social history of one of the most vibrant and interesting regions of

medieval Europe with marvelous archival riches; and second, to make the work of the prominent historians writing in Italian accessible to the English-speaking reader. The audience that the editors had especially in mind is graduate students and scholars who need a first introduction to the Christian culture and institutions in medieval Italy. Generally it has been assumed that the reader of this volume will have a basic familiarity with medieval religious history and its specific terminology. As editors, we made an effort to explain only those religious terms that are specific to Italy, but not others if a term signified a phenomenon found elsewhere in Europe.

Though it is customary in the edited volumes of collected articles to talk briefly about each and every chapter, here the topics are broadly conceived as essential aspects of Christian religious life. Therefore, the contents of the articles do not need an introduction; the short titles are meant to be self-explanatory. Instead, a brief outline of the editorial vision and choices might be pertinent and assist the reader in understanding the scope of this undertaking.

As editors, we bear the responsibility for fixing the list of subjects that made up the content of the chapters and inviting experts to write about them, but our choice was not without constraints. As a result, some of the topics that are prevalent in general Anglophone historiography of medieval religion, such as the Crusades, religious art, or materiality to give a few examples, have been left out. These constraints were the simple expedient of keeping the book within the length agreed with Cornell University Press, the current state of the Italian-language historiography that has had different priorities, interests, and focal points than its Anglophone counterpart, and the difficulty of securing an expert who would be able to deliver an article on a given topic within the given time frame. After all, the contributors did not have an easy task: they had to produce an essay giving an overview of their theme in a two-and-a-half-century period. We asked the contributors to produce fundamentally an introductory piece, presenting the essential historical knowledge in their assigned topic, not write an original research piece or develop a new theoretical perspective. We also requested that they focus more on the aspects of religious life that are distinctive to Italy.

The two case studies with their focus on a specific city, one from the north (Florence) and one from the south of Italy (Naples), stand out within the usual structure of this volume, where the other chapters are dedicated to a theme. This was a conscious choice from the beginning. There is a great deal of benefit in seeing how the various aspects

of medieval religious life discussed in the theme-based chapters play out in a particular city to convey the sense of how the specific religious institutions, movements, and actors interact with and shape one another. These case studies help us to envision the religious landscape as a whole, while at the same time exemplifying how the religious life took on different forms in two different localities with distinct political and social heritage.

We also asked the contributors to use footnotes as sparingly as possible so as not to prolong the essays, confining the listing of essential works on subtopics to the selected bibliography section at the end of the chapters. These sections are meant to serve as a guideline for any scholar who would like to pursue deeper research into that topic.

Finally, although we set the time parameter of the book as 1050–1300, in certain cases the authors chose to go beyond this period. They saw value in expanding the time frame whenever their subject had an arc of historical development that did not match the periodical parameter of the book, and the earlier or later historical picture uniquely illuminated the distinctive history of the Christian religious culture in Italy. Exemplary in this respect is Antonio Rigon's chapter, where in his final section he talks of how the strong bonds between clerical confraternities and the laity prevented the Protestant Reformation from taking hold in Italy.

A last word on the translations: Italian academic prose has its own conventions and, being heavily stylized, does not lend itself easily to translation into English. The translators in this volume were often faced with the difficult choice of remaining faithful to the word choice and forms of expressions of the authors writing in Italian or French or rendering the text into English as colloquially as possible. All translated chapters have gone through numerous checks and retranslations, but our aim has not been to present them in English as if written by a native speaker of English. We did not want to altogether dismantle the authorial voice that is unique to each scholar. Moreover, certain terms that are prevalent in the Italian academic literature such as "associanismo" (to give but one example), which is used heavily in the Italian confraternal historiography, do not have colloquial equivalents in English. By translating them into English as close as possible to the original word, our hope was to introduce into the Anglophone scholarship new terms and concepts that might better explain the historical phenomena.

We sincerely hope that this volume will serve as a starting point for future research on the various religious aspects of medieval Christian

culture and inspire more scholars to study the fascinating history of medieval Italy, as well as being a helpful reference resource not only for historians, but also historians of art, literary scholars, and scholars of religion. We also hope that such an undertaking will lead to comparative studies between Italy and other parts of Europe, in the spirit of Robert Brentano's work, which will allow us to understand why certain religious institutions or forms of worship took hold in certain parts of Europe and not in others. The ultimate judgment on whether the final product lived up to all these hopes we attached to it belongs no doubt to the reader.