CONFRATERNITIES AND RURAL DEVOTION IN THE VENETO
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In May of 1686, Cardinal Bishop Gregorio Barbarigo of Padua set out on his third and final full visitation of his diocese. He would travel off and on for the next eleven years, completing his visitation on 11 June 1697, a week before his death. In those eleven years, he was traveling for about 25 months; the rest of the time was spent in Padua, Venice, and Rome, fulfilling the other duties of cardinals and bishops. Among the information he collected during this peregrination through the Veneto were reports of about one thousand confraternities spread over more than three hundred parishes. The vast majority of them were dedicated to the Holy Sacrament, the Rosary, and a variety of Marian devotions, though there were 135 other devotions represented. Based on clerical and lay reports, most of these confraternities seemed to be in good shape, and when they were not, rural residents were typically quite willing to explain the problem to the visiting bishop.[2] Compared to the records of the immediate post-Tridentine period, which note only 245 confraternities dedicated to fewer than sixty devotions, a significant shift in rural lay devotions is clear.[3] In the century that had passed since the Council of Trent, rural laity in the diocese of Padua had significantly increased their participation in confraternities, at a rate that cannot simply be explained by demographic changes. Instead, the information collected by Gregorio Barbarigo across his three pastoral visitations clearly demonstrates the vitality of lay confraternities in the rural Veneto and the success of reform efforts designed to shape and increase lay devotion.[4]

Typically, the most detailed (and sometimes sole) documents about early modern rural communities are those created in urban centres, from the viewpoint of an often disapproving or uninterested authority figure examining the less desirable locales he was charged with overseeing. If local communities even kept detailed records, they frequently have been lost or damaged, leaving historians with little to go on beyond cursory reports by uncurious urban officials. This source dilemma poses particular obstacles to charting the progress of Catholic Reform in rural parishes—we often see average parishioners only through the lens of a bishop, visitor, or other official, who spent somewhere between a few hours and a few days in their presence. These limited and unbalanced snapshots of rural communities make it difficult to

[2] The records of this and Barbarigo's other visitations are preserved in the Archivio della Curia Vescovile di Padova (henceforth ACVP), *Visitationes,* bb. 30–66. The third visit records are found in ACVP, *Visitationes*, bb. 53–66.

[3] This is the period of the episcopacy of Nicolò Ormaneto, bishop from 1570–1577, whose visitations are in ACVP, *Visitationes*, bb. 7–8.

[4] ACVP, *Visitationes ,*bb. 30–66.

gauge how laypeople reacted to the arrival of these officials and, more importantly, to the changes they sought to implement. But if we can find details about the quotidian practices of rural laity, such as why they chose to join devotional groups like confraternities, we can see their own spiritual and social priorities and preferences.

Although such sources are not always available, they are far more prevalent than detailed local parochial records in most places. Many bishops and vicars at least noted the confraternities they encountered on visitation; some provided more detail. After the papal bull *Quaecumque* of 1604, confraternities were required to submit updated statutes to their bishop; where preserved, these records provide a more detailed explanation of a confraternity's activities, finances, and membership.[5] Thus, even in the absence of local records and with only central diocesan archives, it becomes possible to see rural confraternities in greater detail.

Frequently, historians have viewed the attempts of ecclesiastical authorities to bring confraternities under greater parochial control as detrimental to confraternal piety.[6] At least in the rural Veneto, however, confraternities flourished in the seventeenth century, the laity was deeply invested in their success, and parishioners also chose to support the creation of confraternities dedicated to particular devotions promoted by the Catholic Church as part of the broader reform program. Rather than turning laity off from confraternities, the reforms of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in the diocese of Padua revitalized lay religiosity, and the rise of these confraternities demonstrates the laity's engagement in, acceptance of, and in many cases enthusiasm for certain elements of reform. Contrary to the view that bishops and rural communities were at odds for much of the process of reform, my research demonstrates that they managed to form alliances on certain issues, forging a mutually beneficial compromise between the Church's ideal and the communities' needs.

Elsewhere in Europe, many historians of early modern Catholic Reform have argued for this process as a negotiation between the bishop and parochial communities, rather than as a top-down institutional program.[7] Though many bishops across Catholic Europe were seemingly unaware of the extent of local clerical and lay autonomy, or at least unwilling to acknowledge it, that power existed nonetheless. The bishop could send pastoral letters, edicts, and decrees, appear on visitation, send visitors or vicars to rural parishes, and generally attempt to exert control over his diocese, but rarely if ever was a bishop capable of forcing complete compliance. Towns might ignore the bishop entirely, adopt the elements of reform they found appealing but shirk others, or simply put on a show of compliance while the bishop or his agents visited before returning to the status quo a day or two after the central authority figure had departed. These patterns of local resistance that scholars have identified elsewhere in Europe are harder to detect in rural parishes, since most bishops kept fairly perfunctory visitation records and rural communities generated a relatively small number of records, many now lost or destroyed. But the diocese of Padua, particularly under the episcopacy of Gregorio Barbarigo, bishop from

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[5] Bosch, "Confraternities: The Sociability of Lay People," 279.

[6] See for example the work of John Henderson, Nicholas Terpstra, Christopher Black, Konrad Eisenbichler, Angelo Torre, Maureen Flynn, Ronald Weissman, Brian Pullan, Richard Mackenney, and Danilo Zardin, and many other talented scholars who have devoted significant effort to the study of confraternities.

[7] Forster, *Catholic Revival in the Age of the Baroque*; Luria, *Territories of Grace*; Poska, *Regulating the People*. Ditchfield, "'In Search of Local Knowledge';" McNamara, "Conceptualizing the Priest."

1664–1697, provides an abundance of records about these villages that clearly demonstrate the agency of rural parishes and their success in negotiating between the bishop's hopes and demands and their own spiritual priorities.

Gregorio Barbarigo was an unusually diligent reforming bishop who was eventually canonized in recognition of his commitment to (and to the Church's mind, success in) reforming his diocese. He governed a diocese of approximately three hundred extra-urban parishes and about thirty urban Paduan parishes for just over three decades and spent much of his time on the road performing pastoral visitations in person. Whereas even his reform-minded predecessors over the past century tended to send episcopal vicars, at least to the smaller towns, Barbarigo visited them all personally.[8] Moreover, he spent several days in each town (in comparison to his predecessors' usual visits of a few hours), taking the time not only to speak to all of the parish clergy but also to hold an open audience to allow laypeople to share their opinions with him. Fortunately for historians, all of these interactions were recorded by diligent episcopal scribes: they amount to over twenty thousand folios of visitation documents. Even though in many cases the priest or laity were eager to share, these documents only give us a glimpse of the parishes in the bishop's presence, leaving open the question of what things were like when he was gone. Because the process of negotiating reform between parochial communities and bishops was far from open, it is difficult to discern which (if any) reforms were eagerly accepted, which were grudgingly and perfunctorily adopted, and which were rejected or soon abandoned. But we get a snapshot of the parish's devotional preferences through documents Barbarigo required of each parish when he visited, which provided him with a detailed census of the parish, its residents, and their actions, called *relazioni*.[9] By combining these official reports with confraternity statutes and anecdotal evidence of laypeople's interest in their confraternities when they spoke to the bishop themselves, it becomes clear that the devotional landscape of the diocese in the late seventeenth century was robust.

Although it seems that rural Paduans were reasonably accepting of the reform of their confraternities, this was not the case in all dioceses. The Decrees of Trent gave bishops explicit power over confraternities, perceiving in these often independent organizations a potential threat to ecclesiastical power.[10] Confraternities had to accept at least some oversight from the parish priest, thereby bringing the groups under the parochial umbrella. Before Trent, many had been independent of the parish, operating out of private chapels and with limited input from clergymen they hired.[11] Bishops were suspicious of any confraternities attempting to maintain their independence, though most reformers did recognize the potential for confraternities to help reform the laity. If the confraternities themselves were well directed, then the members could

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[8] The visitation records of all of these bishops are found in ACVP, *Visitationes*. *Buste* 5–29 cover the bishops after Trent but before Barbarigo, while Barbarigo's own visitations are found in bb. 30–66. The records of Barbarigo's episcopal inquisitions, conducted while on visitation, are *Inquisitiones*, bb. 84–88.

[9] The formula for this document is published in Billanovich, "Per uno studio," 65–66.

[10] *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, 159. For more on the perceived threat of independent confraternities, see Black, "Confraternities Under Suspicion."

[11] For more on confraternities independent of the parish before reform, see Terpstra, *Lay Confraternities and Civic Religion*; Weissman, *Ritual Brotherhood*; and Henderson, *Piety and Charity*. For an example of confraternities that resisted parochial control, see Torre, "Politics Cloaked in Worship."

become leaders and examples for the community. Bishops like Carlo Borromeo wanted their confraternities to be more open and public, accepting of parochial supervision, and focused on devotions rather than theology; in this way, they would be a force for reform in the community.[12] Episcopal control over confraternities was strengthened in 1604 by Clement VIII in the bull *Quaecumque* that required confraternities to submit official statutes to the bishop for approval and limited communities to one confraternity dedicated to a particular saint or devotion.[13] The bull was intended to make it easier for bishops to effectively oversee the groups.

It is easy to see why these reforms were helpful to bishops attempting to assert their control over their dioceses and reform the laity, as cooperative confraternities could make excellent allies in their reform programs. Historians differ, however, on the effect these reforms had on the confraternities themselves. Some, like Maureen Flynn, demonstrate that confraternities were at least as popular after reform as they had been before it, and that communities seem not to have resisted greatly the shifting from local traditional saints to the "officially recommended devotions."[14] Likewise, Henry Kamen sees the Council of Trent as an "unquestionable" stimulus for confraternities.[15] Others, like Christopher Black, find mixed results, seeing the flourishing of confraternities and increased membership, but at the same time a growing exclusivity that pushed out women and those of low or middling economic status.[16] Finally, some historians see negative effects in the regions they study. Nicholas Terpstra cites declining memberships and an increase in disputes as confraternities were brought into the parishes in the early stages of reform, while Ronald Weissman sees a growing elitism and a lack of enthusiasm on the part of the laity for baroque confraternities, which he characterizes as lacking much of the festivity of pre-Tridentine groups.[17] The lack of participation by average Florentines, Weissman argues, is "a sign of the resistance among urban artisans and the rural peoples of the Mediterranean to the Catholic Reformation ethos."[18] Danilo Zardin sees the reformed confraternities of Milan as not overwhelmingly popular or successful, while Josep Alavedra Bosch has a deeply pessimistic view of Trent's influence in spite of evidence that parochial confraternities flourished, which he argues happened "despite, rather than because of, the Council of Trent."[19]

Studies that stress the negative reactions have typically focused on urban centres in the first few decades of reform, when we might expect groups to resent any efforts to change their long-standing practices. Perhaps initial resistance or wariness were overcome with the passing of generations. Hostile reactions may also have been more pronounced in urban areas, on which most studies focus. Urban confraternities contained many local elites who may have resisted reform for political or social, rather than spiritual reasons. While this can in some senses also be said of rural confraternities, the influence of the political was much weaker in rural Padua, as

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[12] Black, "Confraternities Under Suspicion," 171–173.

[13] Bosch, "Confraternities: The Sociability of Lay People," 279.

[14] Flynn, *Sacred Charity,* 124, 139–141.

[15] Kamen, *The Phoenix and the Flame,* 166.

[16] Black, "Early Modern Italian Confraternities," 78.

[17] Terpstra, *Lay Confraternities and Civic Religion,* 223. Weissman, "Cults and Contexts," 213–215.

[18] Weissman, "Cults and Contexts," 215.

[19] Zardin, *Confraternite e vita di pieta,* 144–145. Bosch, "Confraternities: The Sociability of Lay People," 292.

explained below. These studies also typically focus on moments of dramatic dissent, which appear clearly in records and are valuable to our understanding of urban, often elite reactions to reform, but are not the whole picture.

In order to have a more comprehensive understanding of lay reactions to reform, I argue that it is necessary to go beyond the city walls and to look not only at the sixteenth but also the seventeenth century, when the potential resentment of the first generation of confraternity members subjected to these changes had subsided and the novelty of change had worn off. Joseph Bergin has argued for a generational jump in the adoption of catechism classes, another important reform for the laity, demonstrating that parents who had attended the classes themselves were far more likely to think it was important to send their own children.[20] Confraternity reforms may well have followed a similar pattern. Expanding our inquiry to non-elite, non-urban laity beyond the first generation after Trent provides a much needed balance to earlier studies focusing on hostility to reform, giving us a more nuanced picture of how the Church was reformed in the early modern period.

Furthermore, the dramatic increase in the number of confraternities after Trent suggests that many people who had not been members before the reform found the idea an appealing one after it; perhaps parochial confraternities suited them better than the previous, more independent groups. By looking at confraternities over a century after Trent, we can gauge the longer reaction rather than the initial shock and resistance. Likewise, by looking outside the city, we can separate out the political and social reasons for resistance or acceptance from the spiritual, to some extent. Rural areas were unlikely to count many nobles or economic elite among their numbers. At least in the diocese of Padua, the rural confraternities were open to all, attracted various levels of artisans and agricultural workers, and in many cases expected that even some of the leaders might not be literate; they were clearly not attracting only the rural elite. Nor do they seem to have provided particular families the opportunity to gain or maintain power and influence; simultaneous leadership of multiple confraternities by members of the same family was uncommon, and an individual simultaneously serving as a leader of more than one was exceedingly rare. Although leadership may have rotated between a few families, the allowances for illiterate members, annual or biennial elections of leaders, and the variety of names in the records suggests that this was not a particularly effective way for local notables to assert their dominance.[21]

By the time Gregorio Barbarigo began visiting his rural parishes in 1664, the diocese of Padua had already undergone some significant reforms over the past century – he was not starting with a blank slate. Although the number of confraternities, particularly those devoted to reform-relevant saints or devotions, continued to increase, his initial census of the diocese demonstrated that these confraternities were already ubiquitous. To see the change, it is necessary to examine what the diocese was like before reforms had taken hold; for this, the best records available are those of bishop Nicolò Ormaneto, Padua's first consistent post-Tridentine

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[20] Bergin, *Church, Society and Religious Change,* 303.

[21] During the first visit, 103 villages provided the names of the leaders of their confraternities. In nine towns, the same surname shows up in more than one confraternity, and in only one town did two confraternities have the same man (unless there were two men with the same name, which is not impossible) serving as leader in the same year. ACVP, *Visitationes,* b. 31, fols. 424ʳ–425ʳ, 467ᵛ; b. 33, fol. 501ʳ; b. 34, fols. 163ʳ–164ʳ; b. 35, fols. 444ᵛ, 465ʳ; b. 38, fol. 17ʳ⁻ᵛ; b. 39, fols. 66ʳ, 93ʳ; and b. 40, fol. 87ʳ.

reformer who served from 1570–1577.[22] Although a dedicated reformer, Ormaneto was starting at the beginning; his records show essentially a pre-Tridentine diocese. When the spread of confraternities noted in Ormaneto's visitations of 1571–1572 is compared with those in 1664–1697, the evidence of the vitality of reform is clear.

Particularly for rural areas, the establishment of confraternities under particular devotions reveals the interests of the local laity. Requests to establish a new confraternity were usually made by groups of parishioners; very rarely did any of these rural confraternities have noble foundations or funding, unlike those in urban contexts. The nobles with country estates in the diocese did not frequently join these organizations. They preferred to maintain private chapels in their country homes for their own devotional use; most likely, they joined more elite confraternities in the city of Padua. The rural confraternities established by average laypeople were also large and relatively inexpensive to join. Most were explicitly open to all Catholics in good standing, regardless of gender or social status (and when one was exclusive, it was almost always gender-based).[23] Because many confraternities required fairly full membership rolls to provide crucial services, it would not have made sense to found a confraternity without widespread support in the community.

While some urban confraternities were becoming more elite and exclusive, rural Paduan groups appeared to remain broadly accessible by keeping costs low.[24] Across the diocese, priests noted nearly 1150 confraternities, but only provided information about costs and membership for about one quarter of these groups.[25] Although it is not possible to be certain that this quarter is representative of the whole, it is a significant enough sample to glean some useful information. In these confraternities, the yearly cost ranged from 2 to 20 *soldi*, with an average of only 9 *soldi*. Venetian laborers in the first quarter of the seventeenth century were paid an average of 45 *soldi* per day; even if rural laborers still made less than this fifty years later, this was not a difficult price for most to pay.[26] In lieu of annual fees, some confraternities charged members a fee when another member died to help pay for the funeral and masses for the deceased. These were generally around 4 *soldi* per death, though they could range from 1 *soldo* to 70 *soldi*, a high price that may have discouraged poorer members. In other words, all but the poorest rural parishioners should have been able to afford membership in most confraternities if they felt so inclined.

Likewise, the vast majority of confraternities that provided information about membership were open to men and women, in contrast with the general picture of the exclusion of women from these groups.[27] It is important to remember, however, that "female presence does not guarantee meaningful participation," and that in most confraternities, women were excluded

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[22] Ormaneto performed one round of visitations from 1571–1572, found in ACVP, *Visitationes*, bb. 7–8.

[23] Most of this information comes from the seventeenth-century confraternity statutes, collected in ACVP, *Confraternitatum*, bb. 10–11. In some cases, statutes or descriptions of the foundations and rules of confraternities were also included in the *relazioni* collected by Barbarigo, found among his visitation records in ACVP, *Visitationes*, bb. 30–66.

[24] Black, "Early Modern Italian Confraternities." Weissman, "Cults and Contexts," 213.

[25] These documents are found in ACVP, *Visitationes*, bb. 31–41 and 53–66.

[26] Pullan, "Wage-Earners and the Venetian Economy," 174.

[27] Female exclusion is typically discussed for urban confraternities, but this exclusion is generally assumed to be both an urban and rural phenomenon.

from leadership positions.[28] They could hold administrative roles in female-only confraternities and in Christian Doctrine confraternities (as there were usually parallel administrations for the boys' and girls' schools), but in any confraternity that was legitimately mixed gender, the men ran the show. Nevertheless, women were invited to join and participate in the confraternity's rituals: priests noted that 264 confraternities welcomed men and women, while only eight were solely female and only fourteen were exclusively male.

Membership costs and rules about accepting men and women demonstrate that most rural Paduans were eligible for confraternity membership, but it is also necessary to know how large the groups were, to see whether there were sufficient openings in any given community. At least in rural Padua, there were almost as many spaces in confraternities as there were adult parishioners, and in many towns the confraternities could take in more members than the community had. The average membership size of a confraternity was 175 people, though they ranged from 40–800, and the average adult population of a village per confraternity hovered around 200. Most towns of a decent size had between two and four confraternities, meaning that any interested adult should have been able to find a confraternity and in larger villages, even have had a choice in the devotion, rules, and/or cost of membership. Complete data is only available for seven villages, but the average of those seven was a ratio of about 13 spots for every 10 adults. In most cases, these confraternities were not all filled to capacity, but in some instances, as Nicholas Terpstra has shown, people did join multiple groups to cover all of their spiritual and social bases.[29] The ubiquity of confraternities demonstrates the parochial communities' enthusiasm for the devotions promoted by them. As John Henderson has argued, the popularity of confraternities suggests that they were "satisfying a very real religious and social need."[30] In the Paduan laity's preference for some devotions (and lack of interest in others), I argue that we can gauge some sense of their own voluntary engagement with Catholic Reform.

As part of its effort to support reformed lay spirituality, the Catholic Church promoted a variety of saints and devotions in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, prompting priests to steer their parishioners in certain directions and offering generous indulgences for confraternities and other devotions to these particular saints. Many of these devotions pre-dated the Council of Trent, but for a variety of reasons these and several new devotions were deemed most suitable for reform. The Church was particularly supportive of saints and devotions connected to Christ, those that emphasized church authority, and those for new saints relevant to reform efforts. The first group included Marian devotions, cults devoted to Christ, the Apostles, St. Joseph, St. John the Baptist, St. Anne, and most importantly, the Eucharist. In the post-Tridentine period, as other historians have showed, such groups flourished across Europe.[31] Within the panoply of devotions to these saints and the Eucharist, there were specific ecclesiastical preferences, meant to reinforce the authority of the Church. Among the Marian cults, for example, those dedicated to the Nativity, Rosary, Holy Belt, Lady of Mount Carmel, Madonna of Loreto, and Immaculate Conception were preferred to the dozens of other Marian cults, many of which had enjoyed great

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[28] Giovanna Casagrande, quoted in Strocchia, "Sisters in Spirit," 743.

[29] Terpstra, *Lay Confraternities*, 74–82.

[30] Henderson, "Confraternities and the Church," 71.

[31] Luria, *Territories of Grace,* 127–132; Flynn, *Sacred Charity,* 122–124; Hoffman, *Church and Community,* 105–106, 118.

popularity during the Middle Ages.[32] These emphasized Mary's connection to Christ, her purity, or her connections to religious orders. In many places, including Padua, there was also a preference for Holy Sacrament over Corpus Christi; while ostensibly the same thing, the change in names (which accompanied a change in activities) seems to have been significant.[33] Other devotions, in particular those dedicated to the Name of God, Name of Jesus, and Christian Doctrine, not only promoted Christocentric devotion and the Church's power, but also served as exemplars of lay orthodoxy, the promotion of catechism, and moral policing, emphasizing the Church's new priorities and power to assert them. Finally, the third group of saints were the new, reforming cohort of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, including Carlo Borromeo, Francis de Sales, Filippo Neri, Ignatius of Loyola, Theresa of Avila, Gaetano Thiene, Francis da Paola, and others. As major reformers and founders of new religious orders, these saints promoted the preferred mode of Catholicism, at least in theory; it is of course much more difficult to know what they meant to the parish communities who adopted them.

During Nicolò Ormaneto's visitations in 1571–1572, there was almost no trace of any of these devotions. (Fig. 1) The Blessed Virgin Mary (with no particular Marian devotion specified) and the Corpus Christi were overwhelmingly popular, but evidence of any reform was thin. Holy Spirit and Holy Sacrament confraternities, both of which would soon be strongly promoted by the Church, were few in number, as were any of the saints named above. Out of 245 confraternities noted by Ormaneto in 258 parishes, fewer than 15 were devoted to other reform-relevant cults. In other words, the rural devotions of the diocese of Padua were still heavily traditional, not yet having received any of the reforms of the mid-sixteenth century.

A century later, the situation looked quite different. At the start of Barbarigo's episcopacy, many of these devotions flourished, particularly the Rosary and the Holy Sacrament. (Fig. 2) The data comes from 281 parishes, in which Barbarigo found over 750 confraternities during his first visitation from 1664–1671.[34] In numbers alone, confraternal devotion had clearly exploded. The most popular group by far was the Holy Sacrament: about 92% of all parishes in the diocese had one. Those devoted to the Rosary and the Madonna of the Rosary, along with those dedicated to nearly twenty other Marian devotions were also prevalent. The others relevant to reform, including the Name of Jesus, Name of God, Christian Doctrine, and St. Filippo Neri were present, but not yet in significant numbers. The laity had eagerly adopted Rosary and Holy Sacrament confraternities, as was common across Europe, and were slowly and selectively accepting some of the others promoted by the Church.

During Barbarigo's third visitation from 1686–1697, he found that these devotions had continued to grow, perhaps as part of the process begun by his predecessors, though it seems likely that his own reform efforts deserve some of the credit as well.[35] (Fig. 3) The numbers of the reform-relevant confraternities grew across the board, with the Rosary, Christian Doctrine, Name of God, and Name of Jesus experiencing the most significant increases (though they were

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[32] Luria, *Territories of Grace*, 127–129.

[33] Luria, *Territories of Grace*, 127–129. In Milan, in contrast, the switch went the other way: before Borromeo, there were many Holy Sacrament confraternities, and he promoted Corpus Christi. What was at issue seems to have been the activities of the confraternity; the name change seems to have only been important as a symbol of that change. Zardin, "Relaunching Confraternities," 203.

[34] ACVP, *Visitationes*, bb. 31–41.

[35] ACVP, *Visitationes*, bb. 53–66.

still few in number with the exception of the Rosary). Holy Sacrament confraternities also spread—by the end of his episcopacy, 98.5% of all parishes had a confraternity dedicated to the Holy Sacrament, while nearly 80% had one dedicated to the Rosary.

At least some of these Holy Sacrament confraternities were likely converted Corpus Christi confraternities, which had been present in about a third of the parishes visited by Ormaneto. In addition to the new name, perhaps signifying their reformed status, there were other differences. Whereas Corpus Christi confraternities centred around the feast day of the same name, Holy Sacrament groups maintained Corpus Christi devotions but generally added more frequent communication and confession, monthly Eucharistic processions, a stronger obligation to maintain the main altar and its lamps, and often the requirement that at least some brothers and sisters assist the priest when he brought the sacrament to ill parishioners.[36] Barbarigo's personal attempts to promote these reforms by directly encouraging their establishment and by providing indulgences seem to have had some effect.

At the same time, it is important to recognize the continued variety of devotional practice in the diocese; although clearly the laity were willing to accept many of the newly preferred or created devotions, they were also deeply invested in those relevant to their own history. At the same time that the saints promoted by the church flourished, so did St. Anthony of Padua and St. Anthony the Great, the first an obvious choice for the diocese, the second perhaps important in rural areas as a patron saint of several types of rural laborers, various domestic animals and livestock, and those afflicted with a variety of skin diseases, including ergotism or Saint Anthony's Fire. The diocese also continued in its longstanding devotion to Saints Roche and Sebastian, popular across Europe as intercessors during plagues, which had continued to strike the Veneto in the seventeenth century.[37] They also exhibited a significant interest in St. Lucia, presumably as a result of her relics' location in Venice. And finally, individual parishes were devoted to a wide variety of saints important only to them or to a small group of villages—over one hundred saints had only one confraternity dedication or very few. Without membership rolls, it is impossible to find patterns for who joined which groups, but given the large number of spaces available in confraternities in many towns, it is plausible that some people chose to maintain memberships in both a traditional and a new confraternity.

On paper, these changes appear quite striking, but the names and frequency of certain devotions only tell us so much about lay religiosity. Clearly the laity of Padua were interested in these devotions, or they would not have started and joined confraternities dedicated to them and invested their time and money, both meager resources for rural Italians. But what did these new groups provide them? Like most of these groups, seventeenth-century rural Paduan confraternities provided their members with extra devotional activities, security in both life and death, a social outlet beyond their family and trade, and the opportunity either to perform charitable works or to benefit from them in times of need.[38] In contrast to urban confraternities,

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[36] See for example the confraternity statutes for Holy Sacrament groups in ACVP, *Confraternitatum*, b. 10, fols. 15ʳ–17ʳ, 243ʳ⁻ᵛ, 480ʳ–482ʳ; b. 11, fols. 74ᵛ–75ʳ, 86ᵛ–88ʳ, 100ʳ, 111ʳ–112ʳ.

[37] The plague returned in 1630. In Venice alone, 40,000 people died (about one-third of the population, including Barbarigo's mother). Weiner, "The Demographic Effects of the Venetian Plagues," 42.

[38] The activities of early modern confraternities are explored in great detail in many excellent studies. Cfr. Black, *Italian Confraternities;* Flynn, *Sacred Charity*; Pastore, Prosperi,

these rural groups did not, as a rule, practice large-scale corporate charity. Only a handful performed activities common in urban organizations, like running hospitals, providing dowries, or handing out food and money to the worthy poor. Most likely this reflects a lack of this sort of charitable institution in small villages, rather than a lack of interest in helping the needy. Instead of these larger programs, most rural confraternities in the diocese of Padua turned inwards with their charity. They accepted members of all socio-economic statuses, meaning there were nearly always some very poor members among them. Like occupational guilds, they provided temporary assistance for those who had fallen ill or been injured and gave as needed to the families of deceased members left destitute by a breadwinner's death.[39] They might also help a member who had fallen behind in his or her dues if the debt was caused by legitimate hardship.[40] In this way, the confraternities became even more like insurance for their members: not only were they assured of prayers and a funeral when they died, but also knew that in times of dire need, their brothers and sisters would be there to help them and their families. And although few helped those who were outside the confraternal bonds, it seems that it would be a rare person who had no ties to a confraternity, either personally or through an immediate family member, given the ubiquity of the groups. These confraternities, in other words, were providing the sort of charity undertaken by their urban counterparts but on a local scale, allowing members to combine the spiritual benefits of performing charity with the personal economic benefits of receiving much-needed assistance in times of troubles.

After the bull *Quaecumque*, seventeenth-century confraternities were required to submit their statutes to the bishop for approval, whether the groups were new or long-standing. When Barbarigo made his visitations, he found many groups that had not fulfilled this obligation, but a collection of these statutes is still extant in the diocesan archive. There are two volumes covering

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and Terpstra, eds., *Brotherhood and Boundaries/Fraternità e Barriere*; Terpstra, *Lay Confraternities*; Weissman, *Ritual Brotherhood*; Terpstra, *The Politics of Ritual Kinship;* Pullan, *Rich and Poor*. See also Eisenbichler, "Italian Scholarship" for a more thorough bibliography of Italian studies.

[39] For examples, see ACVP, *Confraternitatum,* b. 10, fols. 68r, 72v. Many more confraternities noted an obligation for the leaders and some members to visit sick members; it is not clear if these visits also brought non-spiritual assistance. See ACVP, *Confraternitatum*, b. 10, fols. 44^v, 47^v, 68^{r-v}, 69^r, 277^r; b. 11, fol. 53^r, 295^v.

[40] This was not a given; some confraternities were quite strict about payment and those who could not pay lost their spots quickly. For example, members of the confraternity of 300 in Legnaro had only 15 days after the death of a member to pay for a mass, while the confraternity of the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Sebastian for souls in purgatory in Arzergrande gave members only one month to pay, after which their spot was given to another. ACVP, *Confraternitatum*, b. 11, fols. 13^v, 46^r. But others were more lenient. The confraternity of St. Anthony and S. Athanasius in Urbana gave members two years to pay before they would be expelled. ACVP, *Confraternitatum*, b. 11, fol. 37^r. In Camponogara, all the confraternities shared a policy towards debtors: they had thirteen months to pay, and if they could not their family could either pay for them or provide surety; if no one would do so, the debtor was removed until he or she could pay and then reinstated. ACVP, *Confraternitatum*, b. 11, fol. 166^v. The confraternity of the Madonna del Carmine in the village of Roncon specified that anyone who died with a debt more than fifteen months old would not get the three masses promised to all members, unless the debt was caused by poverty. ACVP, *Confraternitatum*, b. 11, fol. 129^v.

the second half of the seventeenth century, from 1648–1698, which contain the statutes of or other information about 135 confraternities in Padua and the rural parishes. This is a relatively small sample when compared with the reports of roughly 1150 rural confraternities Barbarigo received, but it still provides some information about the priorities and interests of these groups.[41] In addition, Barbarigo received some information about confraternal rules and activities from the priests making their *relazioni*; some information about obligations and practices was provided in nearly half of the over 1700 descriptions of individual confraternities.[42]

Most of the confraternities in Barbarigo's territory shared some basic similarities. They all elected a few men as leaders (with the exception of female-only confraternities) for terms lasting from a few months to a year. Many also explicitly noted the parish priest's supervisory role in their statutes, in contrast with pre-reform confraternities that maintained independence from the clergy. They celebrated masses for their dead members, with 3 masses being the most common number offered for each and 12 masses as an average across 354 reports of this particular activity.[43] They also helped prepare bodies of members for funerals, conducted funeral processions, and attended burials. Some also celebrated extra masses for living members or various feast days, while one rural confraternity detailed in its statutes that they would celebrate two extra annual masses, one for the Church, the extirpation of heresy, and concord among Christian princes; and the other for the preservation and happiness of the Venetian Republic.[44] Many prescribed a specific formula of prayers that members were to say at regular intervals and/or upon the death of members, usually a combination of the Pater Noster and the Ave Maria. Those expecting a more literate membership sometimes specified two different options to pray for the dead: literate members were to say the Vespers of the Dead, while the illiterate could substitute the rosary or the Corona of the Blessed Virgin, prayers that everyone was expected to know. Most groups took responsibility for maintaining their own altars and in some churches also maintained another unsponsored altar. Some provided wax and oil not only for their own altar but also for the whole church, ensuring that the community could keep the altar lamps lit and have sufficient candles. Finally, most of them held monthly processions, meaning that a town with multiple confraternities might have a procession every Sunday. Although this may not have been anything like the festivities of pre-reform confraternities, this is certainly not the inactive picture given of the Florentine baroque confraternities that lost the interest of the laity.[45]

Beyond these generalities, confraternities dedicated to certain devotions had some significant differences that might have influenced the group individuals decided to join. This was particularly true of those dedicated to the Holy Sacrament, souls in Purgatory, the Rosary, and Christian Doctrine.[46] These groups had specific devotional purposes built in. Holy Sacrament confraternities were focused on the Eucharist and Eucharistic festivals, and one of their frequent

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[41] These statutes are preserved in ACVP, *Confraternitatum*, bb. 10–11.

[42] Barbarigo received over 1700 reports about 1150 individual confraternities, as many priests wrote about the same groups in the 1660s and the 1680s–90s.

[43] 112 of the 354 reports were for three masses per dead member, but the possibilities ranged from one mass to three hundred.

[44] ACVP, *Confraternitatum*, b. 11, fol. 295^r.

[45] Weissman, "Cults and Contexts," 215.

[46] The confraternities dedicated to souls in Purgatory are designated by a variety of names, including Suffragio dei morti, Anime del Purgatorio, Morte, and Agonizzanti. They could also be referred to by the number of members (usually 100 or 300), as in the "fraglia di 300."

roles was to assist the priest in taking the sacrament to the sick. They were also more likely to be encouraged to confess and communicate more regularly than the required once per year, though other confraternities made similar demands. Finally, they were not likely to provide a large number of masses at the death of a member. Like Eucharistic confraternities, Christian Doctrine and Rosary confraternities were less focused on the fate of members' souls. Christian Doctrine confraternities focused almost exclusively on teaching catechism, while Rosary confraternities mandated that their members recite the rosary regularly, often both privately and corporately. Neither was likely to offer many masses for the dead. They remained more focused on the worship and education of the parish community than the afterlife.

Confraternities dedicated to souls in Purgatory, on the other hand, were almost exclusively focused on their members after death. They were likely to provide high numbers of masses for the dead—anywhere between thirty and three hundred masses, often achieved by requiring every member of the confraternity to have a mass said for the dead person's soul. They also spent time praying for the souls of non-members, tending to the dead of the community more broadly, and one even declared that they were releasing one soul from Purgatory per week.[47] These groups were generally large, with more than a hundred members, ensuring that each member would be well cared for after his or her death. In looking for a confraternity with a targeted devotion, those who wanted to help the community might choose the Holy Sacrament or the Christian Doctrine, those who wanted quiet private devotions in the vernacular might choose the Rosary, and those most concerned about their soul's fate might prefer a confraternity dedicated to the dead. Some, if they had both sufficient funds and time, may have chosen to join more than one; a combination of the Souls in Purgatory with the Holy Sacrament, for example, would cover one's needs both immediate and eternal.

For all the confraternities, there were also a handful of other requirements for membership or other devotional activities in which the founders might decide their members would participate. A small number decided to dictate specific behavior beyond the standard demand that all members be of good reputation and morals, banning their members from gambling, card playing, or attending Carnival balls.[48] One even declared that members found breaking these rules would be immediately expelled.[49] Others chose various devotional or communal activities to promote, including visiting sick or injured members, meeting for extra masses dressed in a particular way (usually with an identifying hood), or teaching catechism (an extra activity for non-Christian Doctrine confraternities).[50] Finally, a small handful adopted charitable activities that went beyond their membership rolls, helping out at the hospital, distributing bread, wheat, and/or money to the poor, sick, and pregnant women, or providing poor girls with dowries.[51] These activities were likely much more common in Padua; most of the statutes preserved for this period were from rural confraternities, but a few Paduan groups submitted reports and stated that they were performing more typical charitable works like

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[47] ACVP, *Visitationes*, b. 64, fol. 180ᵛ. This claim was also made by a Christian Doctrine Confraternity. ACVP, *Visitationes*, b. 63, fol. 51ᵛ.

[48] For examples, see ACVP, *Confraternitatum*, b. 10, fol. 315ʳ, 401ᵛ, 420ᵛ.

[49] ACVP, *Confraternitatum*, b. 11, fol. 193ʳ.

[50] For an example of each see ACVP, *Confraternitatum*, b. 10, fols. 69ʳ, 243ʳ, and *Confraternitatum*, b.11, fol. 295ʳ.

[51] For an example of each see ACVP, *Visitationes*, b. 58, fol. 322ᵛ; b. 41, fol. 202ᵛ; and b. 35, fol. 417ʳ.

burying the poor and accompanying condemned criminals to their executions.[52] In rural areas, however, it seems that these services were either performed within the membership or not needed frequently enough to justify a particular confraternity taking responsibility for them.

When the devotional activities performed by confraternities are seen alongside the dedications, it becomes clear that this is an area in which the Church and the parochial communities had managed to compromise and both benefit. The laity were adopting the devotions that the Church was promoting and focusing on activities the Church preferred: saying masses, prayers, and the rosary; having quiet, sober, and public processions; helping to maintain their parish churches; acknowledging the parish priest's power in their administration; teaching catechism; and providing an example to the community with their high moral standards. But the laity were also getting what they wanted from the Church through their confraternities: a chance to participate more fully in devotional activities; a way to help themselves in the afterlife; security for themselves and their families in times of need; a well-attended funeral; and in many cases, social prestige. In many ways, the reform of confraternities seen from a century out was a terrific success, since the majority of early modern Paduans appeared quite content with the system they had when it functioned properly. When it did not function as expected, they did not hesitate to complain to Barbarigo, showing him the flaws in his diocese but also demonstrating how important these groups were to lay communities.

The statutes and census reports of confraternities reveal how things were meant to be, but in some villages Barbarigo encountered problems between the confraternities and their clergymen. Although we might expect these issues to be over control of the groups, complaints from priests about renegade confraternities were rare. Instead, the most common complaints were that the priests were failing to fulfill their roles. When Barbarigo interviewed laypeople about clerical behavior, he frequently chose to speak to leaders of the confraternities, deeming them to be reliable witnesses due to their close contact with the church and, at least in theory, high moral standing. Their conversations, along with the open audiences any layperson was welcome to attend, gave confraternity members the opportunity to explain their groups' problems to the bishop. Most frequently, they complained that priests were not upholding their end of the bargain with local confraternities. Laypeople alleged that priests were not fulfilling mass obligations (or at least that the confraternity was not convinced the masses were said); that they were demanding more money for services the priest had always performed; that there were conflicts over alms administration; or that there was general animosity between the priest and a particular confraternity for unclear reasons. While these complaints posed significant problems for the devotional activities of the confraternities, for Barbarigo they made the confraternities allies not only in lay reform but also in clerical reform, his top priority.

As noted above, many confraternities performed a prodigious amount of masses annually. Even beyond the regular masses for members and exceptional masses at the death of each member, confraternities might also have obligations from pious bequests. Confraternities could easily require hundreds of masses per year, and the Souls in Purgatory confraternities could quickly surpass a thousand masses if a few members died. In general, the priests were paid a fixed sum per mass. For death masses, the sum ranged from 4–10 *soldi*, while other masses for the members or from bequests might be paid at a slightly higher rate or a negotiated flat price for the year. These regular masses were funded by a combination of fees paid by members and alms provided by the community through both bequests and alms boxes. They represented a

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[52] ACVP, *Confraternitatum*, b. 10, fol. 329ʳ.

significant portion of the confraternity's annual budget, and were a major reason why people joined and/or donated to confraternities: masses would be said for their own or their loved ones' souls. So the failure of priests to perform the required masses was a major concern for the confraternities. This does not seem to have been a widespread problem, but at various times in Barbarigo's episcopacy, laypeople expressed concern that the priest might not have said all the masses for which he was paid. In one village in 1668, a lay leader of the Holy Sacrament confraternity told Barbarigo that in total the village confraternities gave the parish priest "more than five hundred masses per year to celebrate, but no one knows if they have been said or not, so we want him to tell us every time he says one."[53] Similarly, a layman in another village in 1680 told Barbarigo that each of the village confraternities promised ten masses for every dead brother, and "no one knows if they are said, because in the past, the parish priest used to say them in church… and now no one knows where or when or how they are celebrated."[54] Finally, in 1695 the laity of one village had a litany of complaints about their frequently intoxicated priest who kept a concubine, including that they were not sure if he said the masses for which they paid him. One layman reported that "last year I asked him how many masses he had celebrated, and he responded that if I did not know, then he did not know."[55]

Closely related to the offense of failing to say all the required masses (or at least failing to reassure or prove to the confraternities that they had been said) was demanding extra money for services rendered. In many cases, confraternity members complained that in spite of prior arrangements, the priest was demanding higher payments for his services. This often happened with a changing of the guard: when the old parish priest retired or died and was replaced by a younger man, sometimes he felt his predecessor had agreed to a bad deal. During his first visitation, Barbarigo heard complaints in one village that the new priest did not want to follow a tradition that dictated that masses for dead members were followed by nocturns and a procession through the cemetery, and that his reluctance "greatly disgusts the people."[56] This priest also refused the same ceremonies that traditionally followed one confraternity's monthly mass, for which the former priest had accepted payment of one *lira*. This priest demanded one *lira* ten *soldi*, a fifty percent increase in price, which again disgusted the people and made them want to go to other churches, threatening the integrity of the parish.[57] In another case, Barbarigo heard about a priest who demanded the high price of two *lire* for feast day masses for the confraternities and who was always busy gambling; in this case it is difficult to discern if the high fee was more indicative of greed (possibly gambling-related) or of his reluctance to serve.[58] But regardless of why priests attempted to raise their fees, most confraternities could not afford the increased rate. Like many sixteenth and seventeenth-century confraternities, the vast majority

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[53] "Più di 500 messe all'anno di celebrare non si sa le venghino detto o no, onde vogliamo che ci dii di mese in mese in volta." ACVP, *Inquisitiones*, b 85, fol. 233ᵛ.

[54] "Ma non si sa mai quando siano dette, perche una volta si pratticava che il paroco lo diceva in chiesa, [...] et adesso non si sa cosi alcuna onde non si sa quando ne come anno celebrate." ACVP, *Inquisitiones*, b. 87, n.p. (Visitation of Ponte di Brenta).

[55] "L'anno passato lo dimandai quante messe haveva celebrato, rispose se non lo sapevo io che lui non lo sapeva." ACVP, *Visitationes*, b. 61, fol. 252ʳ⁻ᵛ.

[56] "Disgusta molto questo popolo." ACVP, *Inquisitiones*, b. 85, fol. 304ʳ.

[57] ACVP, *Inquisitiones*, b. 85, fol. 307ʳ.

[58] ACVP, *Visitationes*, b. 62, fol. 147ʳ.

of those in rural Padua had no steady income beyond membership dues.[59] Few confraternities owned property or possessed bequests that provided financial stability, and most only had enough funds in reserve to perhaps help out a sick or injured member in need. While the laity accepted that priests were entitled to compensation for their efforts, they were also supposed to be content with a life of poverty and behave charitably rather than demand raises.

Conflicts over money were common but did not always involve priest's fees; sometimes they also disagreed over the distribution or administration of alms. All churches had one or more alms boxes, locked containers in which the laity in the community could leave small donations. In some communities, there was only one box that was then divided up among various charitable enterprises, including confraternities, while in other towns each group had its own box, so that people could choose what they wanted to support. In towns with only one box, sometimes the community agreed that each group would get one week's contribution, while in others they were just each allotted a certain share of the total sum. These boxes were supposed to be locked with two or three keys, each of which was necessary to access the money, to ensure accountability. The parish priest received one key, a leader of the confraternity the second, and if there was a third it was usually held by the mayor or another secular official. In some towns, Barbarigo found the administration of the boxes was not up to standard and had to order the keys properly distributed, often after complaints from confraternities that they had no idea what the priest was doing with the money.[60] In one community, the laity complained that the priest declared himself the "*patrone* of the alms boxes," and that they did not trust his accounting because he did not open them in their presence.[61]

While such financial disputes were more mundane than spiritual, the problems they caused were not. When priests refused to say masses or demanded more money, the confraternity was not able to keep its promises to the community and its own members. Likewise, if priests mismanaged the confraternity's alms, they were unable to use that charity to better their parish and pray for the souls of their neighbors, as the community desired. The frequency of such complaints demonstrates that confraternity members were invested in their organizations. Just as the proliferation of large confraternities demonstrates that they were fulfilling a spiritual need or desire, so does the ardent defense of confraternal rights by impassioned members. Interestingly, although they resented priests' poor behavior or management, none of the confraternity leaders actively challenged their general authority over their organizations. The church's extension of control over confraternities was, at least in Padua, firmly entrenched: the laity accepted parochial control but demanded that the parish priests uphold their end of the bargain.

Between the late sixteenth and late seventeenth centuries, the Catholic Church and the majority of the laity in rural Padua had come to an agreement on confraternities, accepting an arrangement that was mutually beneficial. The laity adopted some of the new devotions quickly and others slowly, but did not actively reject any of them. They also were able to maintain many of their traditional devotions to local saints, like Saint Anthony of Padua and Saints Roche and Sebastian. The Church was able to promote a wide range of devotional practices that would help reform the laity and was wholly successful in bringing the diocese's confraternities under parochial control. The confraternities became agents of parochial reform, working closely with their parish clergy, teaching catechism, providing moral examples to their communities, visiting

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[59] Black, *Italian Confraternities*, 123.

[60] For examples, see ACVP, *Visitationes*, b. 37, fols. 233^r–234^r and b. 44, fol. 66^r.

[61] "Dise di essere lui patrone delle caselle." ACVP, *Visitationes*, b. 50, fol. 99^v.

the sick, processing, and performing pious acts of charity. Simultaneously, members fulfilled their own spiritual desires to become more involved in the Church and for active devotional experiences, in contrast to the Latin Mass and without the added obligations of joining a religious or tertiary order. They also benefited from the confraternities' social and economic elements, building a stronger parish community. To accomplish this renewal, the Church had to accept that not every reform would take, while the laity had to accept more supervision and control over their activities. Although many historians have pointed to the process of Catholic Reform as the success or failure of the Church to impose its will, or the triumph or defeat of the laity to assert theirs, in this case both Church and community found success through compromise, likely the only way that any of these reforms would have a chance of enduring.

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APPENDIX

Fig.1 - Rural Paduan Confraternities under Nicolò
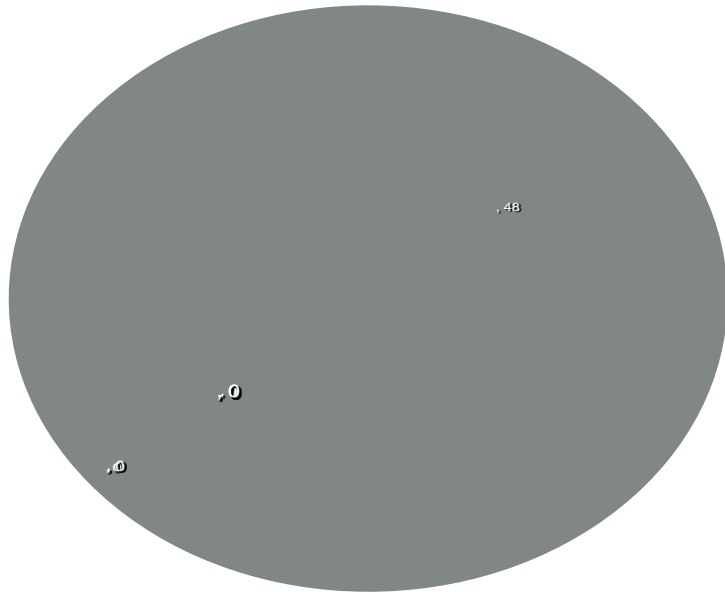Ormaneto, 1571-1572

Fig. 2 - Rural Paduan Confraternities under Gregorio Barbarigo, 1664-

Fig. 3 - Rural Paduan Confraternites Under Gregorio Barbarigo, 1685-1697