

Inside Brotherhood, between Society: An Introduction to the Role of the Technicians in Architecture around the Catholic Associations Since the Early Modern Period

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Abstract: Specific articles in the Code of Canon Law of the Latin Rite Catholic Church govern Catholic Confraternities, associations of lay people who, through common action, carry out works of charity and piety, hospitality, assistance and evangelical education. The Code itself establishes Confraternities must have a headquarters (Art. 304). Widespread in Europe since the Middle Ages, with a significant role in the early modern age, the Confraternities should be considered the set where Christian spirituality intertwines with the concrete actions of their brothers. In architecture, their churches, chapels and oratories reflect the results of a long processes of negotiations and agreement that, from within the associations to the outside, begins a broader dialogue between many powers. A significant topic, still largely unexplored in architecture, can be analysed considering the buildings and the technicians who work for the secular associations. Their engineers, their architects, their craftsmen play a significant role because of they are the figures who build the dialogue between the central authorities—the state or the court—and the local ones, sometimes the municipalities or other institutions. Outcome of the interchange is the area chosen to build the church or the assistance buildings, as well as the drawing of the buildings. Sometimes, the technicians are even members of the same associations. Hence, it derives not only the technical context, but the society too in which the technicians throughout the brotherhoods' buildings write the identity of a portion of a city. The article intentionally aims only to open and critically present a broad theme, drawing on selected references from the modern period Savoy Piedmont as a case study, introduce here only, to provide insights that may become an interpretative tool for further research.

Key words: Brotherhood, technicians, urban space, power, dialogue.

1. Introduction

In the broad dialogue between the Catholic Christian religion and the culture, in the progressively drawing of the urban space and its architecture as the result of an intertwining of powers, knowledge, devotion, piety and assistance, the brotherhoods play, over a long chronological span, a significant role in architecture, still largely unexplored. This article offers a critical introduction to

open new analyses about the Confraternities, their buildings and especially here their technical experts, applying them considering not only the Western Europe, in the long chronological span between the early modern period to the contemporary age. Writing about a topic to be studied, the short text wants to suggest a reading key, modify in interpretative one, to organize more than one unedited search path¹.

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¹ This contribution draws on a broad and detailed bibliography that includes texts on history, on history of religion, on history of Christianity and writings on the history of architecture and art. Since it is impossible to provide a complete list here, only the following references are cited: Christofer Black, *The Italian*

Confraternities in the Sixteenth Century, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1989 (I Italian ed.: 1992); Angelo Torre, *Il consumo delle devozioni: religione e comunità nelle campagne dell'Antien Régime*, Marsilio, Venezia, 1995; Konrad Eisenbichler, *Crossing the Boundaries: Christian Piety and the Arts in Italian Medieval and Renaissance Confraternities*, Medieval Institute Publications. Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo Mich. 1991; Marina Gazzini (Ed.), *Studi confraternali: orientamenti, problemi, testimonianze*, Firenze University Press, Firenze, 2009; Konrad Eisenbichler, *Confraternities and the Visual Arts in Renaissance Italy: Ritual, Spectacle, Image*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2011; Id. *A Companion to Medieval and Early Modern Confraternities*, Brill, Leiden, 2019.

2. About the Technicians' Role between Confraternity and Society

The word “confraternity” derives from the Latin “confraternitas” which combines “cum”, with, and “fraternitas”, that means brotherhood, synthetizing and getting stronger the concept of fraternity, brotherhood, friendship, identifying the bond between the members of the secular associations². In English, similarly, the word “brotherhood” derives from “brother”, followed by “-hood”, which indicate a state of being, identifying a group of people united by a common purpose³. In contemporary Europe, Confraternities take different forms, often operating through structured bonds that work for the good of the others, combing faith with action.

Within the Catholic Church, Confraternities are associations of the Christian faithful governed by the Code of Canon Law, which defines them as institutions that “distinct from institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life; in these associations the Christian faithful, whether clerics, lay persons, or clerics and lay persons together, strive in a common endeavour to foster a more perfect life, to promote public worship or Christian doctrine, or to exercise other works of the apostolate such as initiatives of evangelization, works of piety or charity, and those which animate the temporal order with a Christian spirit” (Can. 298)⁴. Recognized, therefore, by the ecclesiastical authority, they can “propose to hand on Christian doctrine in the name of the Church or to promote public worship”, only if erected by the same ecclesiastical authority (Can. 301). According to the same Canon Code, Confraternities must be regulated by a statute that established the precise purpose of the

association, internal social relations, the title or name the are called; furthermore, the members (so-called brothers) must have a defined habit and a specific insignia. In the Canon Code, Article 304 established that Confraternities have “its seat”, so its headquarters (Can. 304).

Places of Catholic spirituality, Confraternities find in their churches, chapels, oratories and altars an expression of the ritual spaces and of the buildings for the meeting of the members of the associations. The hospices for the pilgrims, the hospitals, the shelters, the assistance centres also represent the areas of the real work of the brothers as the outcome of the concrete actions of them. It comes, thus, the comparison between the theoretical context and the practical one, in the dualism between spirituality and concreteness that has characterized the brotherhoods since the Medieval period, well known during the early modern age especially when, during the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, the Catholic Church underlines the role of the associations of the Christian faithful. Sustained by seculars, linked with the parishes or close the religious orders, after the Trento’s Council in sixteenth century, the Milanese Archbishop Carlo Borromeo decides to attribute to the Confraternities more importance, asking them to teach religious matters⁵. It’s a long historical process with an outcome in architecture.

In the study of the Confraternity buildings, alongside the historical analysis of the project and the construction site within the urban or the territorial context in which they are located—a topic that certainly cannot be summarized here, it’s possible to recognize the role of the technicians who works for the associations. In the categorization of the professions

² “Confraternita”, *ad vocem*, in *Vocabolario Treccani. Vocabolario online*, <https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario>, available on 20 December 2025.

³ “Brotherhood”, *ad vocem*, in *Cambridge Dictionary*, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org>, 20 December 2025.

⁴ Codex Iuris Canonici. Constitutio Apostolica Ioannis Pauli PP. II. “Sacrae disciplinae leges”, 25 Januari 1983 aggiornato con Constitutio Apostolica Francisci PP. I “Pascite gregem Dei”, 1 June 2021 (en. version: Code of canon law, https://www.vatican.va/archive/cod-iuris-canonici/cic_index_en.html, 20 December 2025).

⁵ About St. Carlo Borromeo, it’s interesting to remember the fundamental Carlo Bescapè, *De vita et rebus gestis Caroli S. Rom. Ecclesiae Cardinalis tit. S. Praxedis*, Inglostadt, 1592, Giovanni Pietro Giussani, *Vita di S. Carlo Borromeo prete cardinale del titolo di Santa Prassede Arcivescovo di Milano*, Tipografia Arcivescovile, Napoli, 1855 and, in English, only the followed references is cited: Angelo Torre, *Politics Cloaked in Worship: State, Church and Local Power in Piedmont (1570-1770)*, in “Past & Present”, n. 134 (1992), pp. 42-92.

surroundings the Confraternities, technicians play a significant role, recognized both within and outside of the associations, often members of them and with a role in the society; sometimes, this one it's attributed to them because of they belong to the Confraternities itself. Emblematic figures, they contribute to shaping and defining relationships with the society, assuming a multifaceted role, differentiated over the long chronological span, especially in the early modern period, across different geographical areas.

The theoretical/practical dichotomy that characterizes the brotherhood is synthetized in the technician man, especially considering, on one side, the identity of the engineers, of the architects, of the craftsmen⁶—studying their biography, their education, their different knowledge, their functions in the relationship between the Confraternity and the society—and, on the other side, their workings and their operations between the architectural project and the construction site. The technicians create the professional networks, and thus social networks, useful to support the associations themselves. They decide and, overall, they shape the participation in a ritual⁷. Participating to a religious ritual because of brothers, the technicians become members of the society. The organisation of the religious event, considering the adopted architectural structures or the urban space chosen for the ceremony, is the real and the concrete outcome of technical choices presented as public expression of the

Confraternity's identity. At the same time, the presence of the association of the Christian faithful in specific civic events clarifies the role of the Confraternity itself in the society (the sequence of associations and the sequence of religious and civil men in a religious procession is a well-known example of this analysis).

In the synthesis of his identity and his work, in bringing together theory and practice, the technical professional can often participate in many open dialogues, working as a negotiator, sometimes a mediator, between the parties. They work in the relationship between central power and local authority, State and church, State and municipality, State and ducal or royal court, between courts, between professional figures with different knowledge and skill. The designers, thus, become the representative figures of the concrete result of the process of negotiation or mediation throughout their drawings for sacred architectures or for the buildings useful for the associative purpose. Many times, they discuss with more than one power, in public and private seats, at multiple levels and in multiple contexts, even beyond the institutions⁸.

Crossroads of professional figures, the Confraternity becomes the “place”⁹ of the first dialogue between the members of the Catholic associations, even of different origins and technical culture, opened outside of the Confraternity itself too, in the city. The brothers discuss the localisation of their churches, oratories, hospitals and assistance buildings in comparison with

⁶ In the historical research, the study about the biography of the technical figures is a significant tool to define the history and the identity of the society in which they live and work. About this method and its critical analysis, it should be interesting to consider, even if in Italian, Donatella Calabi, *Parigi anni Venti. Marcel Poëte e le origini della storia urbana*, Marsilio, Venezia, 1997.

⁷ The topic has been discussed during the AISU meeting Palermo 2025, with proceedings being printed, in the session Elena Gianasso, *Confraternite e figure professionali: crocevia di culture, crocevia di saperi tra età moderna e contemporanea (secoli XVIII-XX)*, Palermo, 2025 (with abstract in English).

⁸ Discussed during the AISU meeting Torino, 2022, and before in other research, the topic is in Elena Gianasso, *Il potere delle professioni tecniche a Palazzo di Città: risposte al “limite” a Torino nell' Ancien Régime*, in Rosa Tamborrino (ed.), *Adaptive cities? Città che si adattano?*, in Chiara Devoti, Pelin Bolca (Eds.), *Adattabilità in circostanze ordinarie. Ordinary*

Conditions Adaptability, Vol. II, “Insights”, Torino, AISU International, 2024, pp. 62-72 (with abstract in English); Elena Gianasso, Maria Vittoria Cattaneo, *Poteri e contrattazione: professioni tecniche tra Stato e Città nel Piemonte sabauda*, in Rosa Tamborrino (Ed.), *Adaptive cities? Città che si adattano?*, in Chiara Devoti, Pelin Bolca (Eds.), *Adattabilità in circostanze ordinarie. Ordinary Conditions Adaptability*, Vol. II, “Insights”, Torino, AISU International, 2024, pp. 288-299 (with abstract in English).

⁹ Please use the word “place” with a meaning useful to consider together the environment, the landscape, the area, the human experience; it should be interesting to cite Christian Norberg Schulz, *Genius Loci. Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*, Academy Edition, London, 1980. About the sacred architecture, referring to contemporary age, it should be interesting to remember Bert Daelemans, *Spiritus Loci. A Theological Method for Contemporary Church Architecture*, Brill, Lieden, 2015.

the city centre or the limit of the urban space or the fortification too. Each technician represents his brotherhood or, if he is not a member of it, the idea of his client. The resulting design of the urban tissue reflects the commitment and the knowledge of technicians who, in addition to improve their professional and social prestige, contribute to increasing the Confraternity's recognition within the city's social and cultural milieu. The comparative analysis between the multiple associations of an area or between all the technicians occupied by only one association creates an important network. The network itself becomes the main interlocutor of the public and private institutions: it discusses his role in the society, becoming—with an innovative outcome of the relationship between faith and action—the main actor of a process that led to the construction of many architectures and cities.

3. Case Studies: The Churches and Two Construction Sites in the Sabaudian Piedmont in the Early Modern Period

The Sabaudian Piedmont of the early modern age offers a significant case-study to analyse the role of the technical figures who work for the Confraternities and, at the same time, for the central or the local power. The main role, during the sixteenth and the seventeenth century, belongs to the engineers, a professional title obtained because of a specific act, the so-called “patente” (license) attributed by the duke, then the king, for a specific, known skills in military or civil architecture¹⁰. It's interesting to consider, before, the historical sources to study the role of the technicians between the State and the Municipality and, after, the relationship between the same technicians and the Confraternities.

The primary historical sources, in fact, clarify the role of these technicians who, while they are working

for the duke of Savoy, they work for the local authority. The acts of the statal council expert in architecture, the so-called Consiglio delle Fabbriche e fortificazioni, can be interlaced with the big books of the Ordinati, the volumes that collect the minutes of the Municipal Council. Sometimes, the historical documents declare or lead to believe the presence of the same technicians in the statal and municipal councils, where they are paid by both the authorities, the duke and the Municipality¹¹. It comes the long process of negotiation in which the engineers, expressing their points of view about the drawing of the urban space and of architecture, become mediators between the parties. It's the first step to know the importance of the technicians in the local debate and, thus, in the society.

The second step considers the same engineers, in the eighteenth century the architects too, who participate to the public debate, and, at the same time, they work for the Confraternities without being or being members of them. To be member of these associations means to have more social and job opportunities, to increase the social prestige, to live better. At the same time, for the associations, the presence of some important figures, technicians of not, aristocratic or not too, means to increase the social position of the associations itself, with the related effects. The technicians, in fact, become often brothers of at least one company: it starts a two-way process useful to permit to the technicians to be part of a network useful to increase his social position and for the Confraternities, with the presence, for example, of the First Engineer of the Duke between its members, to obtain a significant social recognition.

In Torino, the Archconfraternity of Holy Trinity (Ss. Trinità)¹², linked with the history of the Holy Shroud, offers an interesting case-study because of since the end of the sixteenth century to the eighteenth century, the

¹⁰ About the “patente” and in general the license to become engineer, it should be interesting to remember the Salvatore D'Agostino, Francesca Romana d'Ambrosio, Elena Manzo (Eds.), *History of Engineering. Proceedings of the 5th International Conference*. Naples 22 May 16th-17th, Cuzzolin, Napoli, 2022.

¹¹ Archivio Storico della Città di Torino, *Ordinati*, Vol. 165 (1614) and following ones.

¹² The historical and the historical-architectural events about the church are now in Michele Ruffino (Ed.), *Una chiesa per il Ducato La Ss. Trinità di Torino*, CLUT, Torino, 2020.

main engineers of the dukedom, such as Ascanio Vitozzi, and the main architects of the kingdom, such as Filippo Juvarra's collaborators, are members of the association.

Founded in 1577 and soon annexed to the Roman Confraternity with the same name, the Turin archconfraternity of Holy Trinity, after an initial location in a not own church, acquires a church in questionable condition of conservation close to the central area of the city, near the seat of the court of Savoy and the cathedral, so the seat of the Church. From the end of the sixteenth century, the engineer Ascanio Vitozzi¹³ (1539-1615), descendant of a family originally of Bolsena, who comes to Torino for the competition for the ducal palace, works to the project for a new church; to the well-known engineer is traditionally attributed the drawing of the expansions of Torino, after the Piedmontese city is chosen as capital city of the Savoy's dukedom after Cateau Cambrèsis treaty (1559). The central plan thought for the Holy Trinity church, echoes of his training in central Italy, is a solution inspired by the models of Baldassarre Peruzzi church; here, Vitozzi works using the number three, because of the Holy Trinity, using an equilateral triangle, also exploring more than one century later by Francesco Borromini in his St. Ivo alla Sapienza church

in Rome. Vitozzi's closeness to the Confraternity, and his membership, is evidenced by his burial within the church.

The Archconfraternity of the Holy Trinity is strictly linked with the court and with the duke Carlo Emanuel 1st who helps the association; his brother cardinal Maurizio of Savoy, one of the main men of faith and science not only in Piedmont, is the prior of the association at the beginning of the seventeenth century. In the same years, after Vitozzi's death, his pupil Carlo di Castellamonte¹⁴ (1571-1641), the First Engineer of the Duke, belongs to one of the aristocratic families in Piedmont. Within the members, one century later, it's possible to find Giovan Pietro Baroni di Tavigliano (1701-1762) and Giovanni Battista Sacchetti were two pupils and collaborators of Filippo Juvarra¹⁵'s (1678-1736) atelier in Torino. Juvarra, a religious man who comes from Messina in Sicily, studies in Rome, where he becomes teacher in the very famous Accademia di San Luca. In Piedmont, First Architect of the King awarded the title by Vittorio Amedeo 2nd of Savoy in 1715, works for the Holy Trinity church since 1717. He follows the construction site of the decoration of the church between 1717 and 1728 and, after a short interruption of the building site, in 1734, for one year, before leaving Torino for Madrid¹⁶.

¹³ About Vitozzi it should be interesting to read Nino Carboneri, *Ascanio Vitozzi. Un architetto tra Manierismo e Barocco*, Officina, Roma, 1966 and, more recent, Micaela Viglino (Ed.), *Ascanio Vitozzi ingegnere militare, urbanista, architetto*, Quattroemme, Ponte San Giovanni, 2003.

¹⁴ Considering only the recent bibliography, it should be interesting to cite Andrea Merlotti, Costanza Roggero (Eds.), *Carlo e Amedeo di Castellamonte (1571-1683). Ingegneri alla corte di Savoia*, Campisano, Roma, 2013.

¹⁵ The main studies about Filippo Juvarra architect, since Augusto Telluccini's monography, *L'arte dell'architetto Filippo Juvarra in Piemonte*, Torino 1926, have been published in the sixties of the nineteenth century: Rudolf Wittkower, *Art and Architecture in Italy 1600-1750*, Penguin Books, Singapore, 1958; Richard Pommer, *Eighteenth-Century Architecture in Piedmont: The Open Structures of Juvarra, Alfieri, Vittone*, New York/London Univ. Press, New York/London, 1967; Henry Millon, *Filippo Juvarra. Drawings from the Roman Period*, Edizioni dell'Elefante, Roma, 1984; Henry Millon, *The Triumph of the Baroque. Architecture in Europe 1600-1750*, Rizzoli,

Milano, 1999; John Pinto, *Architecture and the Representation of Power: Filippo Juvarra in a European Perspective*, in *Filippo Juvarra 1678-1736, architetto in Europa*, edited by E. Kieven, C. Ruggiero, Campisano, Roma, 2014, pp. 289-303; Andrea Merlotti, *Filippo Juvarra: King's Architect, Court Architect*, in *Atas de ciclo do conferencias do Palacio national de Mafra [...]*, edited by I. Lopes, conference proceedings (Mafra, 2019), Rota Memorial do Convento, Mafra, 2019, pp. 384-391. About the Roman drawing, it should be interesting to add F. Porticelli, C. Roggero, C. Devoti, G. Mola di Nomaglio (Eds.), *Filippo Juvarra. Regista di corti e capitali dalla Sicilia al Piemonte all'Europa*, Centro Studi Piemontesi, Torino, 2020.

¹⁶ The historical sources about the church of the Arciconfraternita della Ss. Trinità in Torino and its technicians, with the technicians who are member of the association are in Archivio di Stato di Torino, *Ufficio di insinuazione, Ufficio di insinuazione di Torino*, 1664 and following ones; 1703 and following ones, 1717 and following ones. The topic is discussed in the, already mentioned, Michele Ruffino's book (Torino, 2020).



Fig. 1 Brotherhoods_EN_Torino_church_EG.JPG. Torino (Italy). Holy Trinity Church, the facade (ph. Elena Gianasso).



Fig. 2 Brotherhoods_EN_Rivoli_church_EG.jpeg. Rivoli (near Torino, Italy). Holy Cross Church (ph. Elena Gianasso).

The synthesis of the events of Holy Trinity church is an example to consider the dialogue between the technicians, the brothers and the member of the court, considering the Turin's example as a model repeating in other Confraternity buildings outside of the capital city. In Rivoli, not far from Torino where the Savoy's family belonged a castle, the Confraternity of the Holy Cross builds his church following the same method. After finding its seat in a chapel inside another church, during the seventeenth century the company builds a church signed by different designers and craftsmen, especially coming from the lake region, nowadays between Italy and Suisse. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the church was interested by another building site in which the engineer Michelangelo Garove¹⁷ (1648-1713) and, around the middle of the same century, Ignazio Amedeo Galletti¹⁸ were the main technicians, both famous outside of Rivoli too. The first engineer, Garove, works for the Savoy's family signs the drawings for Venaria Reggia and, between other projects, the seat of the University in Torino. Galletti, less famous, draws a map of Torino published in 1790 and, between many works, his main one is Oropa's sanctuary design. Garove is closed to Rivoli because of the project for the so-called

Stradone di Francia, the axis useful to link the first Castle of Savoy's family with the city centre; Galletti, in the same borough, works for villa Cane d'Ussol, then chosen as the town hall. In the construction site of Holy Cross church, close to the main technicians, the documents remember the presence of many workers and artists too: some of them come from the lake region and others are local figures, another confirmation of how the Confraternity is a crossroads of professional figures with their skills, their knowledge.

4. Results for New Studies

Following the historical sources, based on an historical and critical analysis able to link the traditional research method with the innovative one, it's possible to identify a repeated practise over time, even beyond the Piedmont. The relationship between the Catholic Confraternities, now approved by the Code of Canon Law, and the professional figures creates a process that still requires much study. However, supporting by yet unpublished primary sources, it allows to investigate the design of the urban space and the Confraternity architecture with a perspective that attributes to the brotherhoods a meaning and an importance often unrecognized.

¹⁷ About Michelangelo Garove it should be interesting to remember Cecilia Castiglioni, 1648-1713. *Michelangelo Garove. Ingegnere militare nella capitale sabauda*, Celid, Torino, 2010 and Paolo Cornaglia (ed.), *Michelangelo Garove (1648-1713). Un architetto per Vittorio Amedeo II*, Campisano, Roma, 2010.

¹⁸ Enrico Mattiello, *ad vocem, Ignazio Amedeo Galletti*, in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, Vol. 5, 1998, [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/ignazio-amedeo-galletti_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/ignazio-amedeo-galletti_(Dizionario-Biografico)/), disponibile il 30 dicembre 2025.