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**Accountability for a place in heaven: a stakeholders' portrait in Verona's  
confraternities**

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## **Accountability for a place in heaven: a stakeholders' portrait in Verona's confraternities**

### **Abstract**

This article describes the accountability features of confraternities in 1682, the year in which the citizens of Verona, in light of the Appraisal, were asked to declare their incomes. In the Long Seventeenth Century, confraternities played a pivotal role in a period of great depression, helping local community to follow a common and deep Christian spirit. Using the stakeholder theory lens to analyse the archival documents of 49 confraternities, this article highlights a complex network of relationships between these organisations and their primary stakeholders. The accounts related to their operations display precision and analytical detail, through which we identify a portrait of Verona's confraternities and their activities as strictly bound by a religious spirit. We conclude that accountability draws a unique picture of a historical context, underlining the pivotal role of confraternities in supporting poor people of local community and encouraging the salvation of the dead and their souls by paying a fee for a place in heaven.

**Keywords:** Italy; seventeenth century; nonprofit; voluntary reporting; religious organisations; brotherhoods

## **Introduction**

Accounting could be considered a social and institutional practice that is influenced by and impacts on an organisation (Gomes et al., 2011). Consequently, accounting historians that embrace this view extend beyond a mere analysis of the financial and annual reports structure and call for further studies on institutional and social aspects that are still fairly undeveloped (Hopwood, 2000).

Few historical studies on accountability focus on the relationship between accountability, related structures and aims, and stakeholder influence, in particular regarding nonprofit organisations (NPOs) (Bisman, 2012). The nonprofit sector comprises several kinds of organisations, including religious, charitable and voluntary institutions, and other private nonprofits (Salamon and Anheier, 1998). Using the gap in the literature on this topic as a starting point, this article identifies several insights regarding the relationship between stakeholders and the accountability system in lack of specific disposals from the local or religious authorities in terms of bookkeeping features.

As at present, in the absence of a legislative provisions or accounting standards provided by non-governmental institutions, NPOs develop spontaneous forms of accountability, aiming to be legitimate in their context of action, set up an internal measurement of their actions (Swanson and Gardner, 1988) or be accountable to the donors (Ebrahim, 2003a).

As noted by Quattrone (2004), the research on accountability in religious organisations can be divided into two main groups. A first group of studies focused on the role of accounting in religious nonprofit institutions in comparison with for-profit organisations. As found by Swanson and Gardner (1988), accounting practices in religious institutions support management processes and sustain the pursuit of the organisation's goals. A second group of studies underlined the dichotomy between the sacred and the profane. While some authors claimed the need to maintain a separation between accounting and religious functions (e.g. Booth, 1993; Laughlin, 1988), other studies illustrated how accounting inhabits both the secular and the profane (e.g. Bigoni et al., 2013; Cordery, 2006; Jacobs, 2005; Jacobs and Walker, 2004).

However, as underlined by Mc Phail et al. (2005), in the introduction of a special issue of the *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, this divide is not well marked. In fact, as noted by Jacobs (2005: 206), it is probably connected to individual experiences and jurisdictional conflict, underlining that “the categories of sacred and profane are challenged as a binary dualism and it is suggested that they represent more a continuum of experience.”

Even though several studies exist on religious organisations, little is known about NPOs with religious aims but no ecclesiastic members, such as confraternities. In light of a lack in literature on this organisational perspective, this article aims to study, through the voluntary accountability systems of confraternities, the complex network of relationships between these organisations and their stakeholders, taking into consideration their nonprofit aim and related religious vocation.

These institutions consist mainly of lay people with a deep Christian spirituality, and a desire to improve the quality of life within the local community. This purpose is achieved by providing assistance and comfort to the poor and the mutual aid among confraternity members.

The driving reasons that arise from these forms of congregations were to balance spiritual and economic aims. On the one hand, these NPOs were an important landmark for lay people with a strong religious attitude; on the other hand, the religious aims permitted fundraising actions in the name of God through worldly earnings (Booth, 1993; Laughlin, 1988; Carmona and Ezzamel, 2006).

This research is focused on 1682, when organisations and citizens of Verona were subjected to the Appraisal on their incomes. First, we identify the confraternities that in this year declared incomes (49 organisations). Second, collecting the accounting books available at the State Archives of Verona, we rebuild their accountability system structures and their main features. In light of the economic importance of confraternities within the local context, through the information disclosed in bookkeeping and other documents (e.g. statutes), we provide a deep analysis of the complex matrix of interactions built on religious and economic aspects, underlining the nature of them, the main features and problems, related to

the relationship between confraternities and stakeholders. With the aim of integrating studies on accountability in NPOs with religious aims, we also contribute by enriching the literature, given the few studies adopting the stakeholder view (Manjón, 2012; Bisman, 2012), and we provide several insights regarding accountability for God (Quattrone, 2004).

The paper is structured as follows. The next section summarises stakeholder theory, the theoretical framework identified as a lens for understanding the accountability in the former social system of complex relationships. This approach allows the authors to understand the voluntary reporting and the drivers that triggered the features of accountability. The subsequent section then provides insights on the confraternities' origins and the description of the local context studied in the present research. In order to better understand the organisational dynamic and the function of accountability, we also summarise the organisation structure and several economic aspects in light of bookkeeping. The section on the stakeholder analysis describes, for each group, the features of the relationship and related consequences on accountability. The article concludes with a summary of the results and the main implications of accountability that eases the reservation of place in heaven.

### **Theoretical framework and accountability**

Several theories are usually used to analyse the information provided by archival material. One of the most considered and helpful for the comprehension of data collected in terms of NPOs is Foucault's prospective of the relationship between power and accounting (Hoskin and Macve, 1986; Servalli, 2013). Nevertheless, this lens does not provide a clear reading of our data. In light of the complex relationships between confraternities and the local community, we consider the stakeholder approach as the better way to appreciate the aims and features of the accountability systems studied (Fowler, 2010).

Confraternities are NPOs with a spontaneous accountability system that is derived from several external and internal influences. As stated by Ebrahim (2003a), when NPOs do not have a standard to follow or a

specific disposal by law (in our case, local and religious authorities) on accountability, they develop a spontaneous form of reporting to manage and disclose accounting information. According to Deegan (2009), the relationship between an organisation and stakeholder is based on a social contract, operating in accordance with the social system that hosts an organisation.

Stakeholder theory moves from Freeman and Reed's (1983: 91) definition that are define as "any identifiable group or individual on which the organization is dependent for its continued survival (employees, customer segments, certain suppliers, key government agencies, shareowners, certain financial institutions, as well as others are all stakeholders in the narrow sense of the term.)". This definition corresponds with the Clarkson's (1995: 107) definition of a primary stakeholder. On the other hand, the Clarkson defined secondary stakeholders "as those who influence or affect, or are influenced or affected by, the corporation, but they are not engaged in transactions with the corporation and are not essential for its survival."

While stakeholder theory is applied particularly to the company context, because of the management implications Freeman (2010) underlined that it is going to be increasingly employed in the public sector and NPOs.

As noted by Bisman (2012), a small part of the historical literature considers the relationship between stakeholders and accountability. Camara et al. (2009) considered the stakeholder framework for studying the financial reporting of the Spanish tobacco monopoly between 1887 and 1986, noting that disclosure features changed over time following stakeholders' influence and social and economic circumstances. Similarly to Fowler's (2010) study on a New Zealand school, Manjón (2012) reviewed the dynamic relationship between stakeholders and accountability related to the source of funds, exploring the accountability system of the Osuna Ducal estate. Finally, Scott et al. (2003) shed light on two New South Wales hospitals, focusing their study on the use of cash and accrual accounting in light of contextual change and stakeholder influence.



Accounting could be consider “an element of the social and organizational context”(Napier, 1989: 244), subjected “to a wide array of social and political forces” (Scott et al., 2003: 107). Accountability is a complex concept that assumes different meanings depending on the time and the context. Following the definition of Gray (2003), accountability is “a duty—sometimes empirical (typically legal), sometimes moral—and it arises from the responsibility that individuals and organisations have to provide “accounts” of their activities. The accountable entity is typically subject to two responsibilities: the responsibility to act; and the responsibility to provide an account of those actions, (these may be synonymous)”. If accountability is used to reach specific standards of behaviour, it could be considered external accountability; when it has been driven by a feeling of responsibility to the organisation and its values, it could be considered internal accountability (Ebrahim, 2003a).

In this sense, NPOs are fostered to be accountable by several inducements, whether external, like legal requirements for disclosure or donor requests, or internal, driven by an awareness of valuing their activities (Ebrahim, 2003b). Both cases come from the direct or indirect influence of groups of stakeholders.

This study gives a unique insight regarding its attention to stakeholders in voluntary accountability. We present an analysis of the accountability provided by the confraternities in Verona before any dues of law on reporting, focusing our attention on the resources used, services provided and funds collected. Using the lens of stakeholder theory, we underline how the relationship between the confraternity and stakeholders can be disclosed in the bookkeeping accountability.

### **Verona and the confraternities' origin**

According to Carnegie and Napier (1996: 7) “accounting is to be understood in the context in which it operate, as a phenomenon local in both space and time”, therefore, we are going to investigate the confraternities' context, the focus of this study.

Verona was a province of the Republic of Venice from 1405 to the downfall of the Republic under Bonaparte's troops (1797). During the Venetian sway, Verona went through several economic and social changes. The historical age of analysis chosen, called the Long Seventeenth Century (from 1631 to 1745), is a downturn period that followed the pestilence of the 1630 and the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648). These years, considered by historians as one of the worst economic periods, motivated the rise of NPOs aiming to help citizens subjected to problems such as famine, long wars, climate change and residual breeding grounds of pestilence (Borelli, 2001). These organisations are the focus of our research, that in the context of analysis were represented by confraternities (or brotherhoods).

Following the definition provided by Schiferl (1989: 12) in confraternities "Internally, brothers and sisters performed good works by visiting sick members, subsidizing indigent families, and attending funerals. Externally, they engaged in charitable actions such as operating hospitals and feeding the poor. Such communal piety and charity created a corporate treasury of merit to benefit members in afterlife". A confraternity is a religious association composed mostly of lay people and some religious people. The members joined the organisation motivated by a deep Christian spirituality, and practiced strict discipline and carrying out of charitable and assistance activities. In this sense, confraternities helped the poor, orphans, the ill, prisoners, and indigent young people (Martini, 2005). These actions were made possible through the management of resources and funds collected by donations and income from services provided (e.g. masses). For example, in one of the statutes found, it is declared that the spirit of the members would be driven by:

*"costanti buoni propositi, di osservanza della Cristiana Disciplina e amatore della Santa Pace".*  
and *"trattabili ed intelligenti, timorati di Dio, solleciti nelle opere di carità, desiderosi e ben disposti"*.

[constant good intentions in a Christian life and in support of Peace] and [kind and smart, God-fearing, charitable, wishful and well-disposed]

(State Archive of Verona, Compagnie Ecclesiastiche, San Giacomo di Galizia nella Chiesa di San Paolo – Discipline – Processi, Busta 54, carte non numerate)

Another important activity undertaken by confraternities was the concession of the indulgence. The Canon law defines the indulgence as the pardoning in front of God of the suffering for the sins done. The devoted could obtain the indulgence from bishops and the Pope, and from authorised confraternities. Indulgences were allowed to members and their dead, but never to other subjects. Indulgence could be reached after the confession of sins, by praying and attending specific religious ceremonies, all according to the rules fixed by the Pope.

Historians traced the confraternities' origins to the beginning of the age of Christianity, when the strongest believers in Christ decided to join under the common religious spirit to reach salvation by prayer and charity. The first document that stated the existence of confraternities is the testament of Giovanni Bishop of Pavia, in 922, where the earliest Italian confraternity is named: “*Schola dei sacerdoti della santa chiesa Veronese*” (Mantineo, 2008).

A moment of great importance for the phenomena was noted by historians in the twelfth century, when two of the most known confraternities were born. In 1244, the *Laudesi* were founded in Florence, as an organisation devoted to the Virgin Mary and spontaneously created by the aggregation of believers reuniting in front of sacred paintings on the pillars of *Loggia del Grano* (Artusi et al., 1996). After some decades (1260), in Perugia, the hermit Ranieri Fasani founded the *Disciplinati*, a confraternity strongly against evil that was committed to public flagellation, sometimes reaching fanaticism (Morghen, 1962). The development of confraternities during this time induced the Church to formally recognise these institutions by the Council of Trent (1542), giving to them the capability to act on social and economic levels.

Confraternities were very heterogeneous organisations because of the numbers of members, vocations, and locations. Despite this, it is possible to acknowledge some common features described in their statutes, such as: devotion to a specific Saint, Jesus or the Virgin Mary (Espejo et al., 2006); the aim of the institution; a specific hooded robe to wear; and a local branch for reunion and prayer. A confraternity is a type of community within the community that could be identified also by a visual distinction, every day and during processions (Angelozzi, 1978). Each member of the confraternity would wear a hooded robe of the same colour (Schiferl, 1989). Some confraternities admitted both male and female members and the hooded robes also promoted gender equality.

### **Organisational structure**

Each confraternity, at its establishment, drew up their own statute. This formal document defined the organisational structure, composition and functions. By reading the confraternities statutes available at the State Archive of Verona, we found several roles under two main functions (religious and administrative) that characterised the confraternities' organisation.

The Prior (*Priore*) was in charge of the organisation, guaranteeing peace and brotherly love, and enforcing the common rules. Each brother/sister had to demonstrate obedience to the confraternity Prior.

The Vice-Prior (*Sottopriore*) helped and stood in for the Prior in case of his absence.

Regarding the religion functions carried out by confraternities, a pivotal role was undertaken by the Master of Novices (*Maestro dei Novizi*). He introduced new members, teaching them the Role of the confraternity and the correct behaviour to follow.

The Liturgical Regulator (*Regolatore dell'Officio*) had the task of organising the liturgical celebrations, like masses or prayers, controlling the presence of members by a register, a wooden tablet hanging in the place of ceremony.

The Sacristan (*Sacrestano*) cared for the altar and the place of the liturgical celebrations. He was in charge of the inventory of sacred objects used during the liturgy, under the control of the Prior.

Regarding the administrative functions in the confraternities, we found that there were a few people, experts on accounting, that were responsible for the management of the organisation's resources. In light of the expertise required, in some cases these subjects came from outside the organisation.

The Chancellor (*Cancelliere*) was responsible for the bookkeeping, carried out elections, and listed brothers/sisters and related variations. He could also be appointed to write the confraternity history and update it over time. The Chancellor, in the case of huge endowments, could be helped by the Treasurer (*Massaro*). This person received all the revenue of the confraternity and was responsible for recording each entry and the expenses of the confraternity, and safeguarding the common goods, such as real estate, and lands. At the end of his yearly office, the Treasurer was called to be accountable to the board for the bookkeeping carried out.

The Procurator (*Procuratore*) was in charge of the administrative and legal representation of the confraternity, solving possible critical situations. He had autonomy regarding his assignments, after the approval of the Prior.

All the people enrolled in the confraternities' management described above were part of the Chapter (*Capitolo*), a type of democratic board, with the aim of deciding on the important economic and religious aspects of the confraternity life. Each subject of this board was designated by election and later defined their role in the management of the organisation. The pivotal decisions took by the Chapter were communicated to the other members through periodical assemblies, as evidenced by the minutes drafted by the Chancellor.

Finally, there were several members employed in a confraternity with operational functions, such as nurses, helpers to handouts and custodians.

### **Confraternities in Verona in 1682: economic and financial aspects**

Following the insightful recommendations of Previts et al. (1990b; 1990a), this study embraces both narrative and interpretational history. It could be considered a narrative in light of the descriptions provided of the accountability features, while it is interpretational in its analysis of the relationships between confraternities and stakeholders through bookkeeping and other documents collected. In light of the suggestion of Gomes (2011) regarding engagement in historians' research, this study is the result of the shared knowledge of an historian and researchers on social accounting and religious accountability (Tosh, 2010), which permitted a deep explanation of the data collected (Parker, 1997).

For the analysis of the economic condition of confraternities in Verona at the end of the seventeenth century, we considered the data available in 1682, when the organisation and citizens of Verona were subjected to control from local authority through the Appraisal. These organisation had to declare the evaluation of their income by the assets used. Investigating a register called the Policy of Appraisal (*polizza di estimo*), we were able to analyse the figures that each confraternity presented as a summary of all the outcome regarding 1682. Confraternities communicated their outcomes for inclusion in the Policy of Appraisal, whose frequency was fixed by the local authority.

The figures did not explain the value of the organisations' properties, but only the results of the management of assets and the going concern of the organisation. For example, the appraisal on the incomes from agriculture production was derived from the rent of the land or from the sale of products, and did not represent the value of the land itself.

The analysis of the Policy of Appraisal has allowed us to determine the economic influence of Verona's confraternities. From these results, that include only the institutions able to earn a positive income, we proceeded with the research. Consequently, we analysed the financial and economic data presented by bookkeeping and then focused the attention on information related to stakeholders in the accountability

system and the related peculiarities. In addition to the primary sources, we considered the few studies focused on Italian confraternities and historical studies on religious organisations in Verona. General results provided by the Policy of Appraisal in 1682 underlined the economic weight of the confraternities in Verona, compared to other religious organisations. As presented in Table 1, despite the nature of confraternities, they were more numerous (49) than churches (47). Although both confraternities and churches played an important role in the economic and social local context, the most powerful religious institutes were monasteries.

**Table 1: Economic importance of religious organisations in Verona in 1682 (data in ducats)**

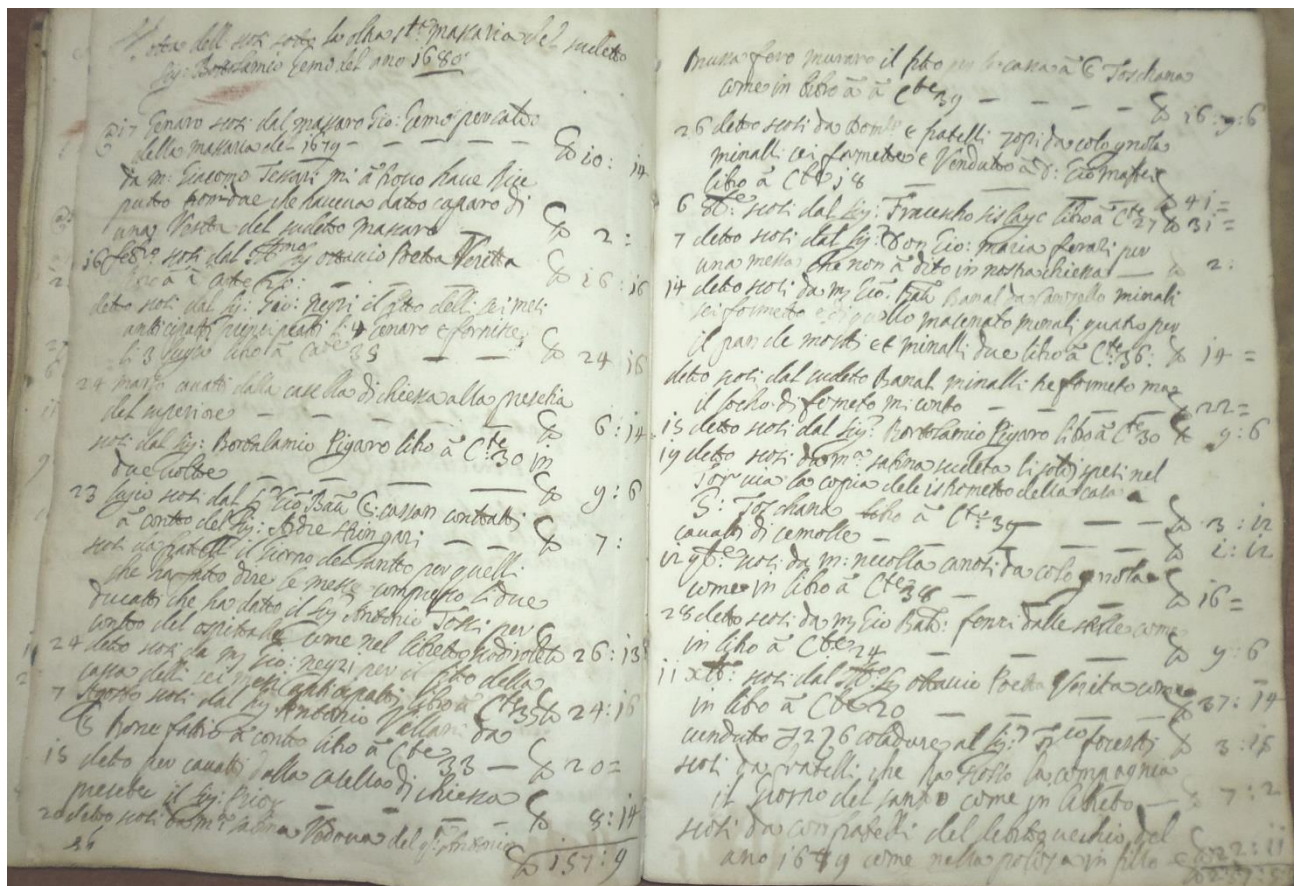
Type of institute	N. of institutes	Average income	Total income
		declared	declared
Churches <sup>a</sup>	47	133.17	6,259
Confraternities <sup>b</sup>	49	126.59	6,202
Monasteries <sup>c</sup>	35	1,418.50	49,647

*Notes:* Because the Appraisal of organisations controlled by the Church and other organisations took place over different years, we explain the different sources of the data presented in the table: <sup>a</sup>State Archive of Verona, Antichi Estimi Provvisori, Polizze Chiese 1680, Register 329; <sup>b</sup> State Archive of Verona, Antichi Estimi Provvisori, Polizze luoghi pii 1682, Register 65; <sup>c</sup>State Archive of Verona, Antichi Estimi Provvisori, Polizze Monasteri 1680, Register 334.

Considering the financial resources collected and received by confraternities, we found that they had two main sources of support: money as donations and charity or payments in kind. They received funds from several donors but not from religious or local authorities, underlining the great autonomy of these organisations.

To better summarise the strong attention on stakeholders in confraternities' accountability, we present an example of bookkeeping that discloses income, revenue and funds collected.

**Figure 1: Bookkeeping of the San Giacomo di Galizia Confraternity. Source: State Archive of Verona, Compagnie ecclesiastiche, San Giacomo di Galizia nella Chiesa di San Paolo, Register 4, no chart number.**



Since, for these NPOs, there was no proscribed law on accountability, different methods could be used for drawing the bookkeeping. The archival documents analysis provided evidence that the main method used



was a yearly bookkeeping with two sections. The Treasurer recorded on the first part of the book incomes received and, in the following part, the note of the expenses paid. All the documents analysed showed common characteristics such as: order, completeness, and transparency.

As several ways were considered for increasing funds and assets, it was necessary to record the use of the resources acquired and disclose the activities performed in light of the money received. The main sources of income derived from rents of properties, interest on credits, inheritance, and donations, while the expenses were for religious activities at parishes (e.g. masses, wine for the communion, incense, handouts), everyday needs (e.g. purchase of coal), and administrative matters (e.g. litigation).

In the bookkeeping system, great attention was paid to elements such as the date of the entry, the reason for the money received or expended, the amount of income and expenses, and the name of the person involved in the operation.

After the end of each year, the incoming treasurer recorded on the final line of the book the result, being the difference between annual entries and annual expenses. This operation was undertaken in the presence of the previous Treasurer and audited by the Prior of the confraternity.

Centuries later, the precision, diligence and analytical detail of the records allowed retracing of the complex set of relationships between the confraternities and their stakeholders, by identifying who, why, and when they were engaged within the organisation.

In the following section, we consider how several aspects of voluntary accountability were developed in the year of analysis where the only need for confraternities was to provide information on income and the local authorities did not provide any framework regarding bookkeeping and accountability in general. This insight allows us to understand how voluntary reporting could be driven by the needs of accountability in managing relationships with the several stakeholders belonging to the community in which the confraternities founded prolific fields for improvement.

Accordingly, analysing the several sources of funds, the relationship between the confraternity and donors and the influence that this bond had on the accountability system, we present in the following section an in-depth explanation of the relationship between confraternities and their primary stakeholders.

### **Stakeholders' importance in confraternities**

Regarding the accountability system and related documents available, we found that usually all confraternities had bookkeeping and a journal where the treasurer updated each operation undertaken. In addition, we collected and analysed books of tenants, books of the handouts, several formal decrees and calls for present documents published by the local and religious authorities.

The analysis of the archival documents highlights a network of relationships between the confraternity and its stakeholders. For the description of these relationships, we consider only the primary stakeholders, who, as we explained before, could directly influence the organisation and shape the accountability system.

We recognise eight groups of stakeholder (members, tenants, freed tenants, heirs, the poor, parishes, ecclesiastic authority and local authorities), distinguished by features, roles and influence on the confraternities. For each group, we explain the evidence provided by the study and link quotations that justify our considerations.

#### ***Members***

Members were brothers and sisters associated under a common religious spirit and dedicated to a strong social commitment to the poor. To become a member, they paid a fee for entrance and, in several cases, a yearly fee. The amount of the fee and the periodicity of it varied depending on the confraternity.

The statutes defined rules regarding mutual relationships among members such as: spiritual and physical aid, behaviour control and reciprocal help in case of illness and death. Regarding the latter point,

members assisted the dead brother by funeral, burial, praying and providing economic support to widows and orphans (Gagliardi, 1966).

Members had the freedom to enter and quit the confraternity any time. Expulsion could be due to illegal behaviours or not conforming to the confraternity aims (Natalini, 2009).

From the list of the confraternity members, we do not have any evidence regarding the profession and the social status of these subjects, in complete agreement with the non-discriminatory principle of the Catholic religion.

Despite this, through the accountability documents analysis and secondary sources, we noted the presence of nobles, merchants and hand-crafters. Because of the presence of merchants as members, the accountability system usually could be considered more developed than in other contexts, especially regarding NPOs.

### ***Tenants (Livellari perpetui)***

Confraternities, being owners of several lands, used to rent them to be cultivated by other subjects (tenants). The relation was established and regulated by a contract that defined the rent (*livello*) paid to the confraternity every year for the field use and the duration of the contract, which was at least for 29 years. Tenants had the freedom to decide on the cultivation grown.

*Si scode di livello sopra una pezza di terra in Villafranca posseduta dagli heredi del quondam  
Ventura Mazarol di Villafranca* *L 27*

[We collect the rent (27 lire) for the land cultivated in Villafranca by the heirs of the expired  
Ventura Mazarol from Villafranca]

(State Archive of Verona, Antichi Estimi Provvisori, Register 65, Compagnia dei ciechi, Carta  
47)

The account above states that the confraternity received the rent payment in the form of money. Another way could be in kind, such as grain, grapes or olives derived from the land's cultivation. Confraternities also owned real estate that could be rented under an annual contract, which established the rent to pay, as the following example illustrates:

*Una casa con bottega su la Via Nova nella contrà di San Quirico ora affittata al signor  
Bartolomio Pesenti campanar che paga all'anno ducati 55* *D55*

[We rent the house and additional small shop on Via Nova in the city quarter of San Quirico to  
Mr Bartolomio Pesenti, bell ringer, for 55 ducats per year]  
(State Archive of Verona, Antichi Estimi Provvisori, Register 65, Compagnia della Beata Vergine  
in Santa Maria della Scala, Carta 10)

or through a gratuity contract:

*Una casa contigua alla chiesa di Santa Maria della Valverde quale si concede in godimento  
gratis al custode dei detta chiesa insieme con l'orticello à quella annesso*

[The house close to Santa Maria Church della Valverde and the little vegetable garden will be  
used for free by the keeper of that church]  
(State Archive of Verona, Antichi Estimi Provvisori, Register 65, Compagnia laicale di Santa  
Maria della Valverde, Carta 78)

### ***Freed tenants (Livellari affrancabili)***

Confraternities, despite prohibition from the ecclesiastic authorities and Catholic principles, loaned money to subjects of the local community. They applied a lower rate of interest (from 4 per cent to 6 per cent) than that applied by banks (up to 10 per cent) (Borelli, 2001). They camouflaged the loan by

producing a lease agreement on a fake house, which was sold to the confraternity but still used by the subject receiving the loan. The fake tenants (and real borrowers) paid a yearly rent to the confraternity instead of interest on the loan. The borrowers could give back the capital borrowed, repaying the real estate value to the confraternity.

*Il nobile signor Lodovico Morando et il signor Francesco Liorsi pagano unitamente come entrati nelle ragioni in locazione 16 novembre 1577 atti di Donato de Pietro Paoli di livello affrancabile con ducati duecento lire ottanta soldi dodici* *L.80:12*

[Noble Lodovico Morando and Mr Francesco Liorsi pay together as tenants a contract beginning on 16 November 1577 (notary act of Donato Petro Paoli) a total of 200 ducats, a rent (freed) of 80 lire and 12 coins]

(State Archive of Verona, Antichi Estimi Provvisori, Register 65, Compagnia della Beata Vergine in Santa Maria della Scala, Carta 10)

The strength of this relationship rested on the low interest rate and the ability of the ‘tenants’ to return the loan over a long period, which in some cases was more than 100 years, as demonstrated by the example above, which was found in bookkeeping from 1682 and referred to a loan established in 1577.

Confraternities used the same elaborate methods for loans. We found evidence from 1682 that they paid interest on debts contracted with monasteries and others confraternities, as explained in the following quotation:

*Al monastero di San Fermo Maggiore troni sei marchetti tredici denari sei di livello affrancabile* *L.6:13:6*

[We are paying 6 lire, 13 coins and 6 dinars for a debt (livello affrancabile) to the Monastery of San Fermo Maggiore]

(State Archive of Verona, Antichi Estimi Provvisori, Registrer 65, Confraternita di San Siro e Libera, Carta 136)

### ***Heirs (Legatari)***

This group of stakeholders is represented by the heirs of the deceased established in his or her testament, and are heirs of periodical donations (usually every year) in return for a fixed number of religious ceremonies (*offici*) and charitable actions. One *officio* corresponded with a set of masses, prayers and rosaries:

*Si fa celebrar ogni anno quatro offici de messe trentadue, una per officio compreso la messa cantata per la quondam signora Cassandra Bugnia con due torce sopra la sepoltura in tanti spende troni duecento vinti nove marchetti 8* *L.229:8*

[The confraternity celebrates 4 *offici* every year in the name of the deceased Cassandra Bugnia, for a total of 32 masses, where at each an *officio* must be sung and two lights placed on the tomb, for 229 Llire and 8 coins]

(State Archive of Verona, Antichi Estimi Provvisori, Register 65, Compagnia della Beata Vergine in Santa Maria della Scala, Carta 10)

For Christians, death represents part of the path to heaven. Masses and other religious ceremonies aimed to limit time in purgatory. The donations received after death from the donors were a fee for reaching salvation quicker. Therefore, it was important to be accountable for each donation and mass, making specific reference to the donor that paid for the service. In this context, charities were seen as one of the easiest ways to redeem sins in preparation for the afterlife: “*Sicut enim aqua extinguit igem, ita elemosina extinguit peccatum*” (As water extinguishes fire, so donations extinguish sin) (Visceglia, 1988).

### **Poor**

This group of stakeholders directly relates to the confraternities' aims. The social function of these nonprofits was to distribute handouts to the poor, which mainly constituted of bread. The poor in this historical period included both free people from the local community and prisoners. The costs of handouts were shown in several ways, including:

*Il pane che ogni anno si è obbligati a dispensar alli poveri della stessa contrà da ducati quindecì*

*D 15*

[The bread that yearly we provide to the poor people of the local quarter for 15 ducats]

(State Archive of Verona, Antichi Estimi Provvisori, Register 65, Compagnia del Santissimo Sacramento in San Silvestro, Carta 98)

or:

*Si fa elemosina una volta al mese a pregioni si spende ducati cinque cadauna volta L 372*

[We handout one a month to the prisoners at 5 ducats a time]

(State Archive of Verona, Antichi Estimi Provvisori, Register 65, Compagnia della Beata Vergine in Santa Maria della Scala, Carta 10)

The handout function was also carried out by the constitution of a dowry for poor young girls, aiming to facilitate marriage or an ecclesiastic life as nuns. Evidence of this activity is also contained in the confraternities' lists of the girls of the territory considered indigent:

*Per le tre gratie a tre donzelle descritte nella compagnia che si cavano ogni anno di ducati sei*

*l'una quali se li pagano al tempo del loro maritare o monacare*

*D 18*

[For the grace to three young girls described in the confraternity list, every year the organisation paid 6 ducats each for their marriage or taking of the veil]

(State Archive of Verona, Antichi Estimi Provvisori, Register 65, Compagnia del santissimo Sacramento in San Silvestro, Carta 98)

In some cases, confraternities were founded for this last specific reason. The purpose of this action was to guarantee a future for poor subjects of the local community who would otherwise assume inappropriate behaviours contrary to Catholic principles.

### **Parishes**

A statute established the area in which a confraternity was to conduct religious ceremonies and congregations, which was usually the parish of the local area. The archival documents indicate that a parish sometimes hosted more than one confraternity. The confraternity paid rent to the parish and was responsible for the overhead costs, such as candles and torches:

*Per vinti candelotti che si dispensano il giorno della cereale alli confratelli della compagnia troni*  
40 L. 40

[Paid 40 lire for 20 big candles, for the Festival of Wax, to distribute to the brotherhoods]

(State Archive of Verona, Antichi Estimi Provvisori, Register 65, Compagnia di San Pietro Martire, Carta 112)

and the costs for the masses provided:

*Per il mantenimento dell'Altar della Beata Vergine et per la processione generale come del  
Corpus Domini e parimenti per le processioni si fanno ogni prima domenica del mese; offici et  
altro in tutto fano troni 400* L.400



[For the maintenance of the Virgin Mary Altar for the general procession of the Corpus Domini and the procession on every first Sunday of the month, *offici* and other services, the confraternity paid 400 lire]

(State Archive of Verona, Antichi Estimi Provvisori, Register 65, Compagnia San Rocco in San Silvestro, Carta 102)

The relationship between parishes and confraternities was sometimes troubled because parishes often did not respect the contract—for example, they did not celebrate masses and requested a higher payment than what was established. Moreover, tensions could arise over handouts given by the members to their confraternities rather than to the parish.

### ***Ecclesiastic authority***

For the confraternities in Verona, the ecclesiastic authority was the Bishop of Verona. As the archival documents note, he audited the licenses (*patenti autentiche*) to afford indulgences. This control was exclusively religious and focused on the spiritual functions of these NPOs. The Bishop also periodically visited confraternities to discover their economic conditions and, if the confraternity was in financial hardship, he would call on citizens to donate to the confraternity.

### ***Local authorities***

The documents indicate that the local authorities audited the confraternities' accountability. The Venetian Republic (directly or through the Captain of Verona and the Podestà of Verona) periodically asked charities to handover their bookkeeping and every document that provided information on the use of money and real estate sales for scrutiny. The aim of these requests was to control the going concern of the confraternity and their aims as a NPO, particularly their aim to use money to help the poor. The local

authorities focused on testamentary arrangements, both donations and religious celebrations established by the testament (Filippi, 2014). To these documents was attached a declaration from the confraternity Procurator on their truthfulness.

**Figure 2: Calls for presentation of the bookkeeping by Potestà of Verona (on the left) and the Republic of Venice (Serenissimo Principe). Source: State Archive of Verona, Compagnie ecclesiastiche (San Pietro Martire, Processi, Busta 204, no card number, and San Giacomo di Galizia nella Chiesa di San Paolo, Busta 49)**



## Discussion and conclusions

As underlined by Bisman (2012), several historical studies have focused on accountability and religion. Despite this, the results in some areas are still scarce and at an embryonic stage, driving a call for more frequent and specific research.

With the aim of contributing, even if in a minimal way, to this common effort, this study investigated and detailed the accountability aspects and practices developed by 49 confraternities in Verona in 1682. The research suggested several insights regarding how the accountability could be a mirror of the complex relationship system of a NPO. Our analysis also gave a measure of the economic system of confraternities and of this important spontaneous social phenomena that characterised the gloomy Long Seventeenth Century. In this context, confraternities' survival depended on several entities, some related to donations from stakeholders, some as a consequence of services provided. In this sense, the strong religious spirit of confraternities strictly defines the boundaries of the organisations' activities in light of the aim to support poor people of the local community and encourage the salvation of the dead and their souls.

The study confirms that in the case that there was a lack of law decrees, NPOs with a complex network of relationships developed spontaneous accountability systems that reflect the importance of these relationships in that they specify the name and surname of the believer meant be accountable to God in light of their retention. This meticulous accountability was a guarantee for the souls of the dead, aimed to reserve for them a place in heaven.

The archival findings have been analysed through the stakeholder theory lens, that has permitted better understanding of the importance of several subjects to this ancient NPO and how also in the past voluntary reporting drew on the accountability needs of the organisation, prompted by an internal accountability request from the Chapter and, according to Swanson and Garner (1988), an external audit on the total income request by the Republic of Venice.

Although Leardini and Rossi (2013), in a study related to the *Santa Maria della Scala* monastery, in the same context of research as this study, recognised a strong relationship between religion and power, we did not find any evidence that support their results. This underlined that despite the common religious aim of these organisations in the same context (but in different ages and having different natures of organisation) the accountability system covered different aspects and played different role. In 1682, the

Church was not still imposing a strong audit on confraternities and the power imposed by the local authorities was not enough to provide a definitive framework of accounting and reporting.

Potential further developments of this research could be to understand how accountability could change across time in relation to the stakeholder influence. In fact, according to the origin of stakeholder theory, we may discover how the social, political and economic changes of the system have driven requests for more specific disclosure (Deegan, 2009) from subjects like donors and local authorities.

With the aim to enrich historical studies on NPOs' accountability, this paper provided several insights regarding the features of accountability systems in entities with a religious aim, in a downward economic period where they played a pivotal role helping the local community. Using the stakeholder lens, we deeply analysed relationships between stakeholders and confraternities, underlining how accountability could mirror economic bonds and spiritual aims.

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**Appendix 1** – List of the confraternities disclose in the Appraisal Book of 1682 (Archive State of Verona)

N.	Confraternity name	Income declared in ducats
1	Campagna della Annunziata dei Santi Roccho e Sebastiano in San Procolo	21,6
2	Confraternita di S. Apollonia	21,6
3	Compagnia della Beata Vergine detta la Madonnina in Santa Eufemia	33,6
4	Compagnia della Beata Vergine nella Chiesa della Santissima Trinità	8,4
5	Compagnia della Beata Vergine in Santa Maria della Scala	603,6
6	Compagnia della Beata Vergine e Santi Roccho e Sabastiano in San Bernardino	204
7	Compagnia delle dismesse di Cittadella	936
8	Compagnia delle Zitelle di Santa Croce di Cittadella	693,6
9	Compagnia della Concetione nella Parocchiale di san Michel in Campagna	25,2
10	Compagnia delle Convertite nella Santissima Trinità	171,6
11	Compagnia de Ciechi in Santa Agnese	12
12	Compagnia del Crocefisso nella Chiesa del Crhisto in contrà di San Giorgio	19,2
13	Compagnia della Santissima carità	54
14	Compagnia del Corpus Domini nella Parocchiale di San Michel in Campagna	7,2
15	Compagnia del Corpus Domini in San Tomio	214,8
16	Compagnia di Santa Croce nella chiesa di Santa Maria dell'Arcarotta	50,4
17	Compagnia della Concetione della Beata Vergine nella Chiesa di San Paolo	25,2

18	Compagnia del Corpo di Christo nella Chiesa di San Stefano	48
19	Compagnia di San Gregorio nella chiesa di San Stefano	39,6
20	Compagnia di Santa Croce del Tagliaferro in Avesa	588
21	Compagnia dei Padri Camaldolesi della rocca sopra Garda	88,8
22	Compagnia della Beata Vergine eretta nella Parocchiale di Quinzan	63,6
23	Compagnia del Santissimo nella Parocchiale di Quinzan	8,4
24	Compagnia di Santa Maria della Valverde	150
25	Compagnia del Santissimo Sacramento eretta nella Chiesa di Ognisanti	26,4
26	Compagnia del monte della Morte nella Cattedrale	105,6
27	Compagnia della Santissima maestà sopra la muletta in Santa Maria in Organo	27,6
28	Compagnia di San Giacomo di Galizia nella Chiesa di San Paolo	49,2
29	Compagnia del Santissimo nome di Gesù in San Procolo	50,4
30	Compagnia del Santissimo in San Procolo	416,4
31	Compagnia del Santissimo Sacramento Chiesa di San Silvestro	153,6
32	Compagnia di San Rocho in San Silvestro	74,4
33	Compagnia del Santissimo Sacramento nella Chiesa della Santissima Trinità	75,6
34	Compagnia della Santissima Passione in San Lorenzo	4,8
35	Compagnia del Santissimo Rosario in Santa Anastasia	128,4
36	Compagnia di San Pietro Martire	226,8
37	Compagnia del Santissimo Rosario in S. Antonio dal Chievo	9,6
38	Compagnia del Santissimo Sacramento in San Salvar Corte Regia	30
39	Compagnia della Santissima Concetione in S. Fermo Maggiore	62,4
40	Compagnia del Santissimo nella Chiesa di Santa Felicetta	2,4
41	Compagnia della Beata Vergine della pueritia in San Stefano	63,6



42	Compagnia del Santissimo Sacramento in San Giovanni in Val	14,4
43	Compagnia di Santa Toscana	28,8
44	Compagnia della Beata Vergine in San Martino di Avesa	64,8
45	Compagnia della Beata Vergine del Soccorso nella Chiesa di San Fermo e Rustico	18
46	Compagnia delle Vergini del Redentore presso San Faustino	112,8
47	Confraternita dei santi Siro e Libera	207,6
48	Confraternita delle Sacre Stimate	93,6
49	Confraternita di Santa Maria della Colombini	67,2
<hr/> Total		6202,8
<hr/>		