

*The Network of Cassinese Arts in Mediterranean Renaissance Italy*

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The Cassinese arts include an impressive corpus of works of art and architecture, including Raphael's *Sistine Madonna*, Andrea Riccio's *Moses/Zeus Ammon*, Andrea Palladio's church of San Giorgio Maggiore, the superbly crafted choirstalls of San Severino and Sossio, but also poorly executed votive images from Cesena's Santa Maria del Monte, among others. They vary in subject matters, aesthetics, media, and scale, but form a coherent group. These works were commissioned from and/or are found in communities affiliated with the Cassinese Benedictine Congregation, an order of spiritual reform founded by Abbot Ludovico Barbo in 1419. The Cassinese monks' engagement with the arts was significant, supporting the production of architectural and artistic works that were often experimental in nature. Scholarship has presented the monks as learned patrons of refined Renaissance artworks, which have been, however, studied in isolation. The newness of my approach is to investigate the Cassinese artistic and monumental corpus that connected the Congregation's web of communities that spread across the Italian peninsula, offering renewed understanding of the works, their meanings, and their various kinds of links. The best suited approach for this investigation is a network framework. Applying a network framework to the Congregation's infrastructure of monasteries will make clear that sophisticated Renaissance sacred images and innovative architecture constituted only a segment of the monks' investment in the arts. Monks also served as custodians and stewards of an antique monumental heritage and poorly made votive images in popular shrines. Not only did these lesser known pursuits assure the survival of ancient buildings and artifacts of limited aesthetic value, but they supplied opportunities for early modern masters active for the Cassinese Congregation to confront an array of artworks for the reinvention of reformed Christian art and architecture. Another advantage of a network framework is to offer us fresh clues for contributing to current art historical narratives that are sensitive to the redefinition of the arts in a multi-centered Italian peninsula and to their relations to ecclesiastical and civic institutions.