OFFICIVM BEATAE
MARIAE VIRGINIS,
Quod Dominicis, alisque diebus festis a Societatis decantari solet,
QUINIS VOCIBVS CONCINENDVM,
Nunc primum ita musicè dispositum, & in lucem editum.
AB ANTONIO COMA COLLEGIATAE ECCLESIAE
Santii Basili Terræ Ceniæ Musices Magistro.

Venetis, Apud Riccardum Amadiunum. M.DC.VI. N
Piis enim pia conveniunt: Music for the Società della Santa Croce in Cento (1606)

LINDA MARIA KOLDAU

Officium Beatae Mariae Virginis, quod Dominicis aliisque diebus festis a Societaibus decantari solet, quinibus vocibus concinendum, nunc primum ita musice dispositum et in lucem editum. Ab Antonio Coma Collegiatae Ecclesiae Sancti Blasij Terra Centi Musices Magistro. Venetijs, Apud Ricciardum Amadinum. MDCVI.

It is not the wording of this title that strikes the scholar of seventeenth-century music as extraordinary—according to this title, the publication of Antonio Coma, chapel master of the collegiate church of Cento, a small town near Bologna, might just as well be one of the countless seventeenth-century prints containing musical settings of the Vesper psalms for Marian feasts. However, this first impression is deceptive: except for a setting of the Magnificat, Coma’s Officium Beatae Mariae Virginis does not contain a single Vespers item. Instead, the composer offers a complete polyphonic setting of Matins and Lauds and includes only fragments of the Mass, Vespers, and Compline. In the repertory of Seicento liturgical music, such a combination is unique: Italian prints of that period comprise settings of the Mass Ordinary, the psalms for Vespers and Compline, the Magnificat, hymns, antiphons, and litanies; but Matins and Lauds were in general not sung in polyphony.¹

Antonio Coma’s extraordinary setting of these Offices raises questions that lead to the broader issue of religious life and liturgical practice in a small Italian town at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Most interestingly, however, the Officium Beatae Mariae Virginis serves as a unique testimony to the religious practices of a particular confraternity, whose existence and devotional activities would be—but for Coma’s print—almost completely forgotten today: the Officium Beatae Mariae Virginis is dedicated to the Società della Santa Croce in the town of Cento, near Bologna. Since there are no other documents extant that regard religious lay institutions in Cento at the beginning of the seventeenth century,²

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¹ The only other exceptions in Seicento repertoire I am aware of are two collections with psalms for Terce: Lodovico Viadana, Falsi bordoni con li salmi che si cantano a Terza, et il Te Deum laudamus. A 5 voci (Venice: Vincenti, 1602) and Stefano Levi, Salmi di Terza a 8 voci (Milan: G. Rolla, 1647). I am very grateful to Prof. Jeffrey Kurtzman (St. Louis) for his generous permission to study in his comprehensive archive of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century sacred music and to use his materials for my research.

² The Archivio di Stato of nearby Bologna preserves only early eighteenth-century documents on the Società della Santa Croce. Oscar Mischiati reproduces the records of payments to organists at the church of Santa Croce, with which the confraternity was associated (Oscar
this music print has become the only documentation of this confraternity’s existence at this time. And indeed, it offers more substantial evidence than might be expected at first sight: the title page, Coma’s preface, and the music itself allow a hypothetical reconstruction of the liturgical framework used by this confraternity for its regular devotions, of the way in which these devotions were performed, and of the role that polyphonic music played in their religious exercises. Furthermore, Coma’s collection of polyphonic Office music may shed some light on the social standing and musical activities of the confraternity’s members in the society of Cento around 1600.


Although the dedicatee is not explicitly mentioned on the title page of Antonio Coma’s Officium Beatae Mariae Virginis, the link to the Società della Santa Croce is already indicated by the thorny cross that the Venetian printer Ricciardo Amadino chose to include on the frontispiece in place of his own device, an organ. Since a thorny cross is not found again on any title page of the contemporary Italian repertoire, this device must be associated with the Società della Santa Croce. In this light, the wording of the title, ‘Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which is sung on Sundays and other feast days by the confraternities,’ gains considerable weight.³ Coma’s dedicatory preface eventually confirms that this collection has been compiled specifically for the ‘noble and pious confratres of the Società della Santa Croce of Cento.’ Having been elected into the confraternity,⁴ the chapel master expresses his gratitude and affection for his religious brothers by publishing polyphonic settings of the liturgical items that the members of the confraternity would need for their religious celebrations:

Noble, and pious gentlemen: Nicias, the excellent painter, used to say that he had been granted the great gift of the art of painting to portray worthy objects that would be deemed seemly by the critical eyes of the spectators. I therefore long to contribute something in memory of our Temple, so that I will not be considered

Mischiati, ‘La cappella musicale della Collegiata e gli organi delle chiese. Appunti per una storia,’ Storia di Cento, vol. 2 Dal XVI al XX secolo (Cento: Centro Studi Girolamo Baruffaldi, 1994), p. 848. I am grateful to Dr. Mischiati for sharing his research material with me.

The fact that Coma uses the plural form societatibus may point to the organization of confraternal life in Cento, which will be discussed at a later point in this article.

In fact, Coma’s expression of gratitude for the honour and support he received through his election into the society may be taken at face value: for a musician at this time, membership in a confraternity granted a certain social insurance and in some instances even a boost in his social ranking: see Elena Quaranta, Oltre San Marco. Organizzazione e prassi della musica nelle chiese di Venezia nel Rinascimento. Studi di Musica Veneta 26 (Florence: Olschki, 1998), pp. 136f. However, Coma’s biography and the social structure of seventeenth-century Cento imply that the chapel master must have belonged to the more distinguished circles of his home town in any case (see his biography below).
tacitly to lead an idle life: the less I trusted in the weakness of my spirit, the more I have considered it apt to imitate the example of such a great man. Therefore I chose with a certain deliberation the Office of the Most Holy Queen of Heavens, Mother of God Almighty, which I intended to adorn for the most part with musical notes, so that my nightly endeavours would be accepted, if not through my giftedness or labour, at least through Her truly purest splendour. When this was done, it did not take me long to consider to whose patronage I would offer them. They are due you: for pious things are due to pious people. They are due for your piety, through which you all gather so frequently for these holiest prayers and songs of praise. They are due for your singular kindness, through which you elected me—not because of my merits, but only through the urging of your generous nature—into your society, and supported and honoured me henceforth. So do not refuse to accept with a cheerful countenance this little gift of my intellect, this monument and cheerful pledge of my gratitude, my affection and my esteem. Thus the Lord Almighty may keep you ever happy, ever pious, and may He accept you after this long course of life among the heavenly singers, where you will sing unanimously the eternal praise of His majesty. Farewell.

With this dedication to the Società della Santa Croce of Cento, Coma puts his music into a more definite context than usually found with Seicento collections of polyphonic church music. While his preface implies that this confraternity met regularly and with great zeal, not only for communal prayer, but also for the singing of praise, the contents of his Officium Beatae Mariae Virginis reflects how this confraternity would celebrate its religious services on Sundays and other feast days. However, Coma’s selection of liturgical items has implications that go beyond the ‘Dominicus aliisque diebus festis’ mentioned in the title. Both the exact wording of the preface and the liturgical items that Coma chose to set and to include in his collection allow us quite a detailed reconstruction of the course and contents of the confraternity’s devotions.

First of all, a closer look at the preface helps to establish a link between Coma’s settings and the probable form of communal prayer and worship practised

5 ‘Nicias olim pictor excellentissimus dicere consueverat (viri nobiles, viri pii) non mediocrem artis pingendi partem in eo esse positam, ut argumentum pingi dignum, & ad retinentos spectantium oculos aptum eligeretur. Quamobrem ego, cum in memoriae Templo aliquid appendere expoptarem, ne more pecudum vitam silento traducere videre: quo minus ingenii mei imbecillitate confidebam, eo diligentius tanti viri exemplum imitantum mihi esse existimavi. Hinc Sacratissimae Coelorum Reginae, omnipotens Dei Genitricis officium, quod pro virili ingeni, aut labore meo, ab illo sane purissimo auro lucrabtiones meae pondus accipere. Quo facto; non fui mihi diu deliberandum, cium patrocinio illas offerrem. Vobis debebantur: Piis enim pia conveniunt: Debebantur pietat vestrae, qua vos omnes ad has sanctissimas preces, & laudes concinandas tam frequenter conventivis: Debebantur singulari vestrae benignitati, qua me non meis quidem meritis at solo beneficiora naturae vementis meae munusculum, gratitudinis, affectus, & observantiae monumentum; & pignus laeto, atque hilari vultu accipere ne gravemini: ita Deus Opt. Max. vos his semper felices, semper pios conservet, & post longum huius vitae curriculum inter immortales Coelorum cantores Maiestati suae sempiternas laudes una voce aeternum cantaturum admittat. Valete.’ Coma’s preface to the Officium Beatae Mariae Virginis, undated.
by the Società della Santa Croce. Coma’s phrase ‘qua vos omnes ad has sanctissimas preces, & laudes concinendas tam frequenter convenitis’ proves to be the key to identifying this form of worship, although a certain degree of ambivalence remains, since the phrase ‘ad has sanctissimas preces, & laudes concinendas’ can be read in two ways.

On the one hand, with ‘preces, & laudes’ Coma might be referring in general terms to the regular prayer and worship of the confratres. In this case, he leaves the question of what kind of music was sung at the confraternity’s meetings open. However, it is likely that laudes could be taken literally as a musical term: from the mid-thirteenth century the lauda was the most important form of non-liturgical religious song in Italy. These monophonic (and in Coma’s time also polyphonic) vernacular songs were the main vehicle for musical worship, especially in lay circles and in confraternities.6

On the other hand, the demonstrative pronoun has (these) may be of key significance: if Coma deliberately used this pronoun to form a link between the confraternity’s ‘preces, & laudes’ and his collection of sacred music (‘these’ referring both to the music and to the worship), the settings compiled in this print reflect the procedure of the confraternity’s worship. Since Coma offers a complete setting of the morning Office Lauds (Latin Laudes), his term laudes—though not printed with a capital letter7—could in fact be taken at face value and refer to the liturgical service in particular rather than to songs of praise in general.

In fact, this interpretation is not at all unlikely. The characteristic design of a confraternity’s religious activities, the specific liturgical practice in the town of Cento, and finally the contents of Coma’s print confirm that the worship of the


7 Despite the general orthographic nonchalance in seventeenth-century prints, specific names and religious terms were quite consistently printed with capital letters (eg: Templo, Sacratissimae Coelorum Regina, Dei Genitricis, and Deus Opt. Max. in Coma’s preface). However, the term officium also lacks the capital, so that laudes might just as well denote the liturgical Office.
Music for the Società della Santa Croce in Cento

Società della Santa Croce may well have been an a truly liturgical, almost monastic one: Coma’s setting of the *Officium Beatae Mariae Virginis* implies that the confraternity assembled to sing Matins and Lauds in five-part polyphony on Sundays and feast days, and perhaps parts of the Mass, Vespers, and Compline as well (Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Contents and Liturgical Function</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Piece</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Domine labia mea aperies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deus in adiutorium</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ave Maria</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quem terra pontus ethera</td>
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<td>Domine Dominus (Primi Toni)</td>
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<td>Coeli ennarant (Octavi Toni)</td>
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<td>Domini est terra (Quarti Toni)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Te Deum laudamus</td>
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<td>Dominus regnavit (Primi Toni)</td>
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<td>Jubilate Deo (Secundi Toni)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deus, Deus meus (Quarti Toni)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Benedicite (Sexti Toni)</td>
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<td>Laudate Dominum de coelis (Octavi Toni)</td>
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<tr>
<td>O gloriosa Domina</td>
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<tr>
<td>Benedictus (Octavi Toni)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Credo in unum Deum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qui habitat (Octavi Toni)</td>
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The first section of the text contains a complete setting of Matins: the Ingress *Domine labia mea aperies* with the response *Deus in adiutorium*, the Invitatory to Psalm 94, *Ave Maria gratia plena*, the Hymn *Quem terra pontus ethera*, the three Psalms of the first Nocturn, and the Hymn *Te Deum laudamus*. After that, Coma includes the entire Office of Sunday Lauds on Marian feasts, with its series of three Psalms, the Old Testament Canticle *Benedicite*, the collated Psalm 148–150, the Hymn *O gloriosa Domina*, and the New Testament Canticle *Benedictus*. Finally, he adds fragments of the most common liturgies: the Credo

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8 The exact order of these Hours is found in *Antiphonarium Romanum Ad Ritum Breviarij, Ex Decreto Sancrosancti Concilij Tridentini restituiti. Pii Quinti Pontificis Maximi iussu editi, & Clementis Octavi auctoritate recogniti. Ea omnia continens, quae tum ad Divinum
of the Mass Ordinary, the Magnificat, which concludes the Vespers service, and the Compline Psalm *Qui habitat* (Ps 90).9

Compared to the standard prints of Seicento church music that consist almost exclusively of settings for these last three services, Coma’s setting of Matins and Lauds appears highly unusual. However, the *Officium Beatae Mariae Virginis* is not just a standard collection designed for the average needs of any church *cappella*: it reflects the ‘Officium ... quod Dominici aliiisque diebus festis a Societatibus decantari solet’ and therefore perfectly fits the communal devotions of the confraternity for which it was composed and compiled.

Although there is no extant documentation of the religious practices of the confraternities in Cento at the beginning of the seventeenth century, our general knowledge of confraternities and their religious purposes, and of the centuries-old Roman liturgical traditions still valid today, may help us to put Coma’s *Officium Beatae Mariae Virginis* into its proper context.

From the very beginning, the main objectives of lay confraternities were charity and devotion.10 While the majority of Italian confraternities—according to the extant statutes—placed the primary emphasis in their devotional activities on the recitation of the most popular prayers (such as the Paternoster and the Ave Maria), on the regular celebration of Mass, and on processions,11 there is also

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9 The complete Mass Ordinary consists of Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus/Benedictus, and Agnus Dei. The exact order of Vespers and Compline on Sundays is found in the *Antiphonarium Romanum*, fol. 117v-124r (Matins and Lauds on Sundays) 138v-143r (Matins and Lauds on Marian Feasts). For the omission of the second and the third Nocturn at Matins and the inclusion of the Te Deum see below.


11 The well-documented practices of Venetian confraternities confirm this emphasis and at the same time illustrate the importance of such public—and often ostentatious—devotions. On the feast day of their patron saint, these confraternities would celebrate
ample evidence that the communal recitation of the so-called *Officium parvum* was a religious exercise specifically performed by the lay confraternities.\(^\text{12}\) This 'Little Office' usually consisted of excerpts or paraphrases of the Roman Liturgy, and it contained several or all of the seven daily Hours—Lauds, Prime, Terce, Sext, None, Vespers, and Compline. On Sundays and feast days these considerably reduced Office Hours were performed in a more elaborate way and extended to form a coherent service.\(^\text{13}\)

It is these very elements that we find in Coma's print. The contents and organization of the *Officium Beatae Mariae Virginis* imply that the Società della Santa Croce was one of the confraternities that dedicated their religious zeal to the extensive observance of such liturgically founded exercises. Not only do Matins and Lauds form part of the daily Hours, but their individual character also lends itself to performance by a committed laity.

Matins, also called Vigil, is the nightly prayer preceding the morning praise. This extensive Hour with its numerous psalms and readings from Holy Scriptures has a meditative character: it serves to instruct the participant in the foundations of Christian faith, a prime objective of any confraternity.\(^\text{14}\) Lauds are the first of

Mass in their associated church, go in procession to their hall, celebrate another Mass there and then proceed back to the church. For these services, as well as for the solemn public announcement of their *festa* on the eve of the day, professional musicians would be hired and polyphonic music performed, see Quaranta, pp. 143ff. Early in the seventeenth century, the musical activities became more lavish in some confraternities: in 1604 the Scuola della Beata Vergine Assunta began to provide a 'musical Compline' in its associated church San Geremia, for which singers and instrumentalists were hired, obviously with long-term contracts and annual salaries: Jonathan Glixon, *Far il buon concerto*: Music at the Venetian Scuole Piccole in the Seventeenth Century *Journal of Seventeenth-Century Music* 1 (1995), unpaginated online document, paragraph 2.5. In 1626 there are still records that the 'musical Compline' was celebrated regularly. The payrolls indicate that some of the *scuole piccole* could afford the best Venetian singers and instrumentalists to add splendour to their religious feasts (*ibid.*, *passim*). The musical practice in the Venetian *scuole grandi* are discussed in the following essays by Jonathan Glixon: *A Musicians’ Union in Sixteenth-Century Venice* *J.A.M.S.* 36 (1983), pp. 392–421; *id.*, *Music at the scuole in the Age of Andrea Gabrieli* in *Andrea Gabrieli e il suo tempo: Atti del Convegno Internazionale (Venezia 16–18 settembre 1985)*, ed. by Francesco Degreda (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1987), pp. 59–74; *id.*, *Far una bella procession: Music and Public Ceremony at the Venetian scuole grandi* in *Allo Polo, Essays on Italian Music in the Cinquecento*, ed. by Richard Charteris (Sydney: University of Sydney, 1990), pp. 190–220.

\(^{12}\) See Theodor Schnitzler, *Was das Stundengebet bedeutet* (Freiburg: Herder, 1980), p. 93: 'Die Förderer der Kleinen Offizien waren hauptsächlich die Bruderschaften. Die Mitglieder einer Bruderschaft versplichteten sich zur täglichen Verrichtung des Kleinen Offiziums, das dem Titel der Bruderschaften entsprach.' (italics as in the original). However, there may be decisive local differences in the design of the confraternities’ devotions: Schnitzler refers to German confraternities, while the Italian documents put their emphasis on the Mass and on processions (see Angelozzi, p. 61).

\(^{13}\) Schnitzler, p. 94.

\(^{14}\) See the general introduction to the Office Hours in monastic circles, paragraphs 51 and
the seven daily Hours; as 'first stirring of soul and spirit,' and in remembrance of the resurrection of Christ, this Hour is celebrated at sunrise.\textsuperscript{15} Like the 'educational' Matins, the celebration of Lauds seems to be especially suitable for a confraternity: the universal morning praise is regarded as a prayer apt for the entire Christian community, it receives a specifically 'popular' character through the inclusion of two Canticles,\textsuperscript{16} and it is recommended especially to those who lead a communal life according to Christian statutes.\textsuperscript{17}

Matins and Lauds are not only linked by their shared suitability for a confraternity's devotional needs, but also by the way in which these two services are celebrated. The time when Matins are sung is not fixed: as the separate nightly prayer, it lasts from 11:30 p.m. to 1:00 a.m. in monastic circles, while in all other cases it is combined with Lauds to form the first Hour at daybreak.\textsuperscript{18} Since Coma provided elaborate settings for every individual item both in Matins and Lauds, it is quite possible that the Società della Santa Croce imitated monastic practice by celebrating


The quotation in this introduction is from Ambrosius, \textit{De officiis ministrorum} I 20,88: PL 16,50. This contemporary characterization of Matins is therefore based on authorities who were equally recognized in Coma's time.

\textsuperscript{15} 'Die Laudes sind zur Heiligung der Morgenstunde bestimmt. Aus vielen ihrer Teile geht das deutlich hervor. Von der Besonderheit des Morgengebetes sagt der heilige Basilius: "Die Morgenhore soll mit den ersten Regungen unserer Seele und unseres Geistes Gott geweiht sein. Wir sollen nichts unternehmen, ehe wir im Gedanken an Gott froh geworden sind" [...] Diese Gebetsstunde im Licht des anbrechenden Tages ist außerdem Gedächtnis der Auferstehung des Herrn Jesus.' \textit{Die Feier des Stundengebetes}, p. 47. The exact times at which these offices are sung differ in the various orders. In addition, Lauds and Compline depend on sunrise and nightfall; the time of their celebration is therefore subject to the change of the seasons.

\textsuperscript{16} 'Diese volksnahen Gesänge, die seit alters in der römischen Kirchze ihren festen Platz haben, drücken Lob und Dank für die Erlösung aus.' \textit{(ibid.)}, p. 50. Lauds contain two Canticles, the Old Testament Canticle \textit{Benedicite} and the New Testament Canticle \textit{Benedictus}. Both were set polyphonically by Coma.

\textsuperscript{17} 'Den Laudes und der Vesper gebührt hohe Wertschätzung als Gebet der christlichen Gemeinde. Ihre öffentliche und gemeinsame Feier soll daher besonders von denen gepflegt werden, die ein gemeinsames Leben führen' \textit{(ibid.)}, p. 48.

\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 52ff.
both Hours as elaborate, individual services. They might, in fact, have advanced the nightly Hour of Matins and celebrated the service as a vigil on the eve of the following feast day, reuniting again in the morning to open the day with Lauds.

However, the ‘nightly endeavours’ Coma mentions in his dedication might equally be taken at face value: on important occasions—for which these polyphonic settings are doubtlessly conceived—the pious confratres might just as well have started the feast day with a Matins at 3 or 4 a.m., to be followed immediately by Lauds as the solemn opening of the day. In fact, there are several details in Coma’s Officium Beatae Mariae Virginis that might support the hypothesis that the latter combination of Matins and Lauds was practised by the Società della Santa Croce. According to the Antiphonale Romanum, Matins on Sundays and feast days of high rank have three Nocturns with three psalms each,\(^{19}\) while on ferial days and feasts of simplex rank only the first Nocturn is prayed. Despite the designation ‘Dominicis alliisque diebus festis’ in his title, Coma includes only the first Nocturn of Matins among his polyphonic settings: the omission of the latter two Nocturns might be a measure to keep the combined services of Matin and Lauds at a tolerable length. This suggestion is supported by the fact that Coma does include a setting of the Te Deum: according to the Antiphonale Romanum this hymn is added to the third Nocturn only. Therefore, the Officium Beatae Mariae Virginis does offer the items for a solemn Matins to be celebrated on Sundays and feasts of high rank, but it reduces the polyphonic settings of the Nocturns to the first only.\(^{20}\)

Another indication that Matins and Lauds might have been combined in the devotional practice of the Società della Santa Croce is the omission of only the Invitatory to Lauds in Coma’s collection. The Officium Beatae Mariae Virginis opens with the Invitatory Domine, labia mea aperies, which is prescribed for the opening of Sunday Matins in the case that this Hour immediately precedes Lauds.\(^{21}\) Since a corresponding Invitatory for the following Lauds is not included, this order might reflect the liturgical practice of leading from Matins straight into Lauds, omitting the latter’s usual Invitatory.\(^{22}\)

Finally, the linguistic usage in the prayer books of sixteenth-century confraternities might also add to our hypothetical reconstruction of a combined Matins and Lauds service as ‘sanctissimas preces, & laudes’ celebrated regularly by the Società della Santa Croce: the term ‘Matins’ found in confraternities’ prayer books with the Officium parvum (see above) does not refer to the nightly

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19 First Nocturn: Ps 8, Ps 18, Ps 23; Second Nocturn: Ps 44, Ps 45, Ps 47; Third Nocturn: Ps 95–97; see Josef Pascher, Das Stundengebet der römischen Kirche (Munich: Zink, 1954), p. 192.

20 Nevertheless, it may well be that the confraternity did recite the psalms of the other two Nocturns, either in plainchant or simply read out.

21 If Matins is celebrated individually, though, it opens with some other versicle, but not with this Invitatory; see Die Feier des Stundengebetes, p. 53.

22 Ibid., pp. 62 and 53.
prayer, but denotes the morning Office Lauds.23 Thus, both terms seem to have been intimately linked in the religious practice of confraternities in Coma’s time.

In conclusion, Antonio Coma’s print indeed seems to reflect a specific service that was performed regularly by the Società della Santa Croce. The confratres probably met early in the morning to celebrate a combined service of Matins and Lauds, whose contents are especially suitable for the devotional needs of the laity.

The remainder of Coma’s collection, fragments of the Mass and of Vespers and Compline, suggests that confraternity’s liturgical activities did not end with the celebration of Lauds. However, the fragmentary state of these services in Coma’s collection implies that the liturgical celebration must have been carried out in combination with other groups. In this case, the person of the composer and the context of musical life in Cento may offer some answers.

2. Antonio Coma and Musical Life in Cento

Although we lack information about the Società della Santa Croce, we have at least some biographical data about Antonio Coma, who, according to his dedication, was a member of this confraternity.24 Born in 1560 in Cento, in 1589 Coma became the first chapel master of the collegiate church San Biagio, where Mass and the Office Hours had been performed in chant daily since 1517.25 With the elevation in 1586 of the Chiesa di San Biagio to the collegiate church of Cento, the lay singers received the official status of a cappella.26 Upon his nomination, Coma was obliged to ‘celebrate in music with thirteen voices every feast decreed by the Mother Church, Holy Week, and the Mass and Vespers that are usually sung; and also to have sung for our Community the Messa del Burgnago.’27 The

23 Schnitzler, p. 94.
24 See Oscar Mischiati’s entry ‘Coma, Antonio’ in the Dizionario biografico degli Italiani (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana/Società Grafica Romana, 1984), vol. 21, pp. 510f; Cinque secoli di musica nella terra di Cento, ed. Adriano Orlandini (Cento: Cassa di Risparmio di Cento, 1989), vol. 2, La musica sacra e strumentale, pp. 3–5 and pp. 86–90; Linda Maria Koldau’s entry ‘Comi, Antonio’ in Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart. Zweite, neubearbeitete Auflage, ed. Ludwig Finscher (Kassel/Stuttgart: Bärenreiter and Metzler, forthcoming), vol. 3. Coma’s birth name is Comi, derived from Como, his father’s home town; however, his publications and the entries in various documents indicate that he was generally called Coma.
25 In 1517, the clergy began to sing the Divina Salmodia in San Biagio. Their initiative was recognized by the community of Cento in 1521 with an annual salary of 100 lire. In 1527 the post of a maestro di canto was established to teach the chant to the clergy and to direct the daily Offices; Orlandini, pp. 3ff.
27 ‘cantar musicalmente cò tredecì voci ogni festa comandata dalla S. Madre Chiesa, et la Settimana Santa et le Messe et Vespri soliti à cantarsi et far cantar per la Comunità et la Messa del Burgnago.’ (quoted in Orlandini, pp. 3ff). The Messa del Burgnago was a
fact that in c.1620 Coma added a permanent instrumental ensemble to the _cappella_ consisting of musically active citizens of Cento shows that there was a considerable desire in this town to embellish the liturgical services at the principal church. Coma also taught and directed the musical activities at the Accademia dell’Aurora, and his four extant collections of church music are dedicated to the chapter of San Biagio, to the Community of Cento, and to two Centese confraternities, the Confraternita di Santa Maria and the Società della Santa Croce. Coma was obviously the key man in the musical life of Cento. His eldest son Giovanni Antonio (baptized in 1593) succeeded Coma as _maestro di cappella_ upon his death in 1629, while the youngest, Stefano (baptized in 1601), served as organist in San Biagio from 1621 onwards.

With regard to Coma’s _Officium Beatae Mariae Virginis_ and its use by the Società della Santa Croce, the musical infrastructure of the collegiate church of San Biagio is of particular interest. The _cappella_ consisted of musically gifted, but not necessarily professional, citizens. Judging from Coma’s preface and from the astonishing amount of music that was evidently used in the services of the Società della Santa Croce, it is quite likely that some or perhaps even the majority of the _confratres_ also served as singers in the _cappella_ of San Biagio. In other Italian cities, too, there was a significant overlap of personnel between the established _cappelle_ of principal churches and confraternities who needed musicians for their festive services.

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Requiem Mass for Bartolomeo Uggeri, Bishop of Brugneto (or, in Centese dialect, Burgnago), celebrated in Cento until the middle of the nineteenth century.

28 On special occasions, Coma even engaged extra musicians from out of town to enhance the solemnity of the liturgical celebrations in San Biagio.

29 In fact, the instrumental ensemble that played in San Biagio belonged to the Accademia dell’Aurora; the musicians received their instruction from Coma in the academy.

30 The titles of the collections are _Officium Beatae Mariae Virginis, quod Dominicis aliisque diebus festis a Societatibus decantari solet_, 5 vols. (Venice: Amadino, 1606), dedicated to the Società della Santa Croce; _Missae quattuor, quinque et octo vocum, et una pro defunctis, in fine Litaniae Sacratissimae Coelorum Regina_ (Venice: Amadino, 1607), dedicated to the Confraternita di Santa Maria; _Psalmi omnes qui in Vesperis decantantur quinque vocibus cum tribus B. M. Canticis_, op. 3 (Venice: Amadino, 1609), dedicated to the Chapter of San Biagio; _Sacrae Cantiones_, op. 4 (Bologna: Eredi di Giovanni Rossi, 1614), dedicated to the community of Cento. While there is very little information on the Società della Santa Croce, the artistic activities of the Confraternita di Santa Maria are better documented: see Oscar Mischiati, ‘Tradizioni artistiche della Confraternita di Santa Maria dell’Ospedale di Cento’ in _L’Ospedale di Cento nei secoli_ (Cento: Cassa di Risparmio di Cento, 1975).

31 The middle son Giacomo (baptized in 1596) was obviously an active musician, too. Today, only three of his motets are known, included by his father Antonio in the _Sacrae Cantiones_ of 1614.

32 Again, Venice may serve as ground for comparison: both the _scuole grandi_ and the _scuole piccole_ hired staff from the _cappella di San Marco_ or even employed them on a regular basis. Giovanni Gabrieli, the famous organist of San Marco, was hired as organist by the Scuola di San Rocco in 1585 and served there for the rest of his life: see Denis Arnold,
associated with a church of its own, the homonymous Chiesa di Santa Croce, it is quite probable that its members would also sing in the regular liturgical services at San Biagio and in other places in town, whenever there was a demand for singers. Given such a union of confraternity and cappella members, it is conceivable that the liturgy of an important feast day would be divided between the confraternity and its associated church and performed by the same musical personnel. Thus, the Società might have been responsible for an adequately solemn opening of the day with an elaborate celebration of Matins and Lauds, while the church of Santa Croce would pay the singers for the musical embellishment of the main services, Mass, Vespers, and Compline. Coma’s settings of parts of the latter services might in fact allude to such a division of responsibilities between the confraternity and its associate church.

It is in this hypothetical distribution of forces where the surprising plural form of the title might come into play: Coma states that the *Officium Beatae Mariae Virginis* is usually sung *a societatis*. Given his dedication of the text to a single confraternity, one would have expected the singular form *societas*.

Does Coma’s wording therefore imply that the other confraternities of Cento—or even beyond the confines of the small town—would all embellish their celebration of these two rather unusual Hours of the Office with musical settings in five-part polyphony? Given the limited musical resources in Cento, this could hardly have been the case. If Coma’s plural form is taken at face value, it is, rather, imaginable that for special festive occasions, the various lay societies would unite to celebrate the religious services together with an adequately solemn musical setting provided by the Società della Santa Croce. After all, this confraternity counted among its members Antonio Coma, the central musical personality of Cento, who emphatically praises the devotional musical activities of his *confratres* in his preface to the *Officium Beatae Mariae Virginis*. To other confraternities, on the other hand, the musical adornment of their services would hardly have been of primary interest, since the main concern of confraternities generally was charity and liturgical activities. Therefore, extending the hypothesis of divided responsibilities even further, it is also conceivable that on important Marian feasts and perhaps even regularly on Sundays, the Società della Santa Croce played the role of an umbrella organization for the various confraternities of Cento, offering the *societatibus* mentioned by Coma an adequate musical setting of the liturgical celebrations.

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Giovanni Gabrieli and the Music of the Venetian High Renaissance (London: Dent, 1979), pp. 199ff. This long-term service and his relatively low salary may indicate that the Gabrieli had actually been granted membership in this high-ranking confraternity. For the activities of other renowned musicians in the Venetian scuole see Eleanor Selfridge-Field, *Venetian Instrumental Music from Gabrieli to Vivaldi*, 3rd rev. ed. (New York: Dover Publications, 1994), pp. 34ff, and Jonathan Gli ox’s articles mentioned above.

33 He obviously does not mean the several members of the Società della Santa Croce, which would call for the ablative plural form of *socius*, that is, *sociis*. 
Such an outstanding status of the Società della Santa Croce among the citizens of Cento might also be confirmed simply by the existence of Coma's print. The *Officium Beatae Mariae Virginis* was by no means issued by some small local publisher, as might be expected with a collection of such unusual contents and scope. On the contrary, Coma's settings of Matins and Lauds were published by Ricciardo Amadino, at that time the most renowned firm in the printing industry of Venice. Since it is unlikely that a commercial publisher would have undertaken the publication of a collection that—according to the standard of collections with liturgical music of the early Seicento—would hardly have been of use to the *cappelle* in any other town, it was presumably the Società della Santa Croce itself who financed the printing of its own liturgical repertory.  

Antonio Coma's 'monument and cheerful pledge' might in fact have been the monument that a relatively wealthy and artistically interested confraternity created for itself in order to eternalize its singular devotional practices.

3. The Music in the *Officium Beatae Mariae Virginis*

Finally, some additional information about the Società della Santa Croce can be gathered from the music itself. If the members' singing of praise, referred to by Coma in his preface, is indeed reflected in his compositions, then the confraternity must have had a number of talented singers among its members: although the style of Coma's five-voice compositions is rather simple and basically chordal, the performance of these pieces does demand some musical training, since Coma adds musical sophistication by occasional imitations and the frequent variation of the voice groupings. While retaining a relative simplicity of style, Coma creates well-balanced musical settings whose homogeneous sonority reveals their roots in the traditions of 16th-century polyphony.

Coma's musical aims are entirely liturgical, serving the clear and brief declamation of the liturgical texts. Thus, every setting is opened by its prescribed intonation in Gregorian chant, and the voices mainly proceed in chordal declamation, which guarantees the comprehensibility of the liturgical text, a concern debated at the Council of Trent.  

Except for the Invitatories, every piece is set *alternatim*, which was common in this sort of simple musical setting of liturgical texts: polyphonic verses alternate with recitation in plainchant or *falsobordone*.  

Thus, lengthy texts like the conflated Lauds Psalm 148–150, *Laudate Dominum de coelis*, the *Te Deum*, or the *Credo* can be delivered relatively quickly. More-

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34 Again, this would explain the printing of the confraternity's device on the title page.


36 *Falsobordone* is the chordal recitation of the Gregorian chant in four-part harmony with embellished cadences.
over, Coma avoids text repetition; points of imitation serve only as a short relief in the otherwise chordal declamation (ex. 1).

Compared to the other items, the Magnificat appears to be more sophisticated, with longer points of imitation and more conspicuous changes in the texture. However, it is these very aspects that reveal Coma’s grounding in the conventions of sixteenth-century compositional practice: his Magnificat primi toni corresponds exactly to the ‘ideal’ described by Pietro Ponzio (Ragionamento di musica, Parma, 1588) and Pietro Cerone (Él Melopeo y maestro, Naples, 1613). In their recommendations regarding how the Psalms and the Magnificat should be set, both authors describe the practice of the previous few decades. Characteristically, Coma’s Magnificat reflects the requirement of brevity and clarity in the setting of psalm texts and of the Magnificat. However, as recommended by Ponzio, its polyphonic opening does indeed display a ‘più dotto stile’ in comparison to the Psalm settings in the Officium Beatae Mariae Virginis. As prescribed by Cerone, the verses ‘Et misericordia’ and ‘Deposuit potentes’ are written for reduced numbers, allowing for some textural and compositional variety, and the ‘Gloria Patri’ with its length of 22 bars seems to illustrate the suggestion that the final polyphonic verse should be composed in a more elaborate style. Although the Gregorian tone (cantus firmus) is not exposed as conspicuously in every verse as it is in the compositions cited by Ponzio and Cerone, its characteristic melodic outline gives shape to the soggetti in every verse (ex. 2a and 2b).

Nevertheless, Coma’s Magnificat remains modest in scope and thus fits ideally into his liturgical collection for the Società della Santa Croce. Although

37 On Ponzio’s and Cerone’s suggestions for the composition of Psalm and Magnificat settings see James Armstrong, ‘How to Compose a Psalm: Ponzio and Cerone Compared’ Studi Musicali 7 (1978), pp. 103–139. Apart from the aspects that are characteristic of Psalm and Magnificat composition, Coma’s Magnificat primi toni gives an example of a regular modal disposition (transposed first mode on G with final cadences on G and mediant cadences on D, B flat, and G) and imitative procedure (imitation at the interval of a fifth or an octave and regular spaces between the entries).

38 Ponzio cites composers whose prints were available by the middle of the sixteenth century; Cerone adds the generation flourishing in the 1570s to 1590s. Their conservative standpoint is also revealed in the focus on four-part polyphony (both ignore the fact that larger groupings became usual in the late sixteenth century), in their strict insistence on retaining the cantus firmus throughout every verse of the setting, and in the modal practice they describe: see Armstrong, pp. 106–109.

39 ‘Volendo far un Magnificat; ancora che sia veramente un Salmo; nondimeno è uno delli osservati, quale sempre si fà solenne, & percíò conviene esser fatto con più dotto stile; & osservare, che tutte le parti facciano la imitazione del canto Plano.’ Pietro Ponzio, Ragionamento di musica (Parma: E. Viotto, 1588; facsimile ed. by Suzanne Clercx, Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1959), p. 157. Coma does not go to the extremes granted by Ponzio and Cerone, who permit the voices to enter after a space of up to four breves (ibid., p. 109).

40 In the verse ‘Deposuit potentes de sede et exaltavit humiles,’ Coma reflects the textual contrast by opposing the imitative bicinium ‘Deposuit potentes de sede’ with a full, chordal entry on ‘et exaltavit.’
in general the complete polyphonic setting of Matins and Lauds seems to be surprisingly lavish for the religious practice of a confraternity in a small town, the style of Coma’s compositions could well be mastered by trained lay singers. Obviously, it is the liturgical function that is essential to this music, which serves as a sonorous adornment only.

Antonio Coma’s *Officium Beatae Maria Virginis* therefore offers an intriguing document of the religious practice of a confraternity whose activities in the early seventeenth century are otherwise unknown today. Through Coma’s preface, the contents, and the style of this music we know that the Società della Santa Croce met regularly for its religious services. We can presume that it celebrated with significant musical solemnity an elaborate combination of Matins and Lauds and that a considerable number of its members were involved in the musical embellishment of the religious services of their confraternity, and probably also of other religious institutions in Cento. Finally, the fact that this confraternity financed a text as unusual as the *Officium Beatae Maria Virginis* might imply that the Società as a whole as well as its individual members were of high social standing in the society of this little town. Coma’s ‘monument of gratitude’ therefore appears as a musical monument of this confraternity’s singular religious practice and of its leading role in the devout society of Cento.

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Ex. 1: Antonio Coma, Laud Psalms *Dominus regnavit orbem terrae* (1606)
Ex. 1 (cont’d)

Ex. 2a. Magnificat Tone 1

Tenor primus, Simplex.

1. Magnificat

2. Et exultavit

3. Quia respexit

Ex. 2b: Antonio Coma, *Magnificat* (1606)
Ex. 2b: (cont'd)

Music for the Società della Santa Croce in Cento
Ex. 2b: (cont'd)