



THE BROTHERHOODS: A LOCAL TRADITION FROM THE XIII CENTURY

A brotherhood is a "religious association made up of lay clergymen dedicated to religious practice or charitable work, often under the leadership of the clergy or its spiritual assistance." This definition, from a dictionary dating to the Italian renaissance, is mentioned in "La Monographie de Bonifacio" (page 178), in an article signed by Béatrice Di Meglio. The information in the present flyer comes mainly from these works.

The brotherhoods of Bonifacio began around the XIIIth century, at the same time as the apparition of trades and guilds. Today, eight centuries later, the churches of the City of Cliffs have 5 brotherhoods, being the largest number in Corsica.

The two oldest brotherhoods, dating back to the XIIIth century, are Sainte-Croix and Saint-Jean-Baptiste, both descendants of Genoa's "disiplinati". The most recent is Saint-Erasme, created in 1893. Their different functions seem to evolve from the Gospel of Saint Mathew (Mat. 25, 31-46): feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, clothe the naked, visit the sick, welcome strangers and added later, bury the dead.

Today, more than a religion in the strict sense of the term, it is the construction of a human relations network that dominates, the brotherhoods have become the symbol of conviviality. Each is identified by an alb (long ample white liturgical garment) and a camail (cloth worn over the shoulders) of different colors.

All year long, the five brotherhoods have processions each with their dedicated reliquaries to honor their saints, being Saint Erasme (2nd June), Saint-Croix (3rd May), Saint Jean-Baptiste (29th August), Saint Marie-Madeleine (22st July) and Saint Bathélemy (24th August).

However, it is during Holy Week that all the brotherhoods pass through the town, with the ardent following of the Bonifaciens, accompanied by great curiosity of the numerous visitors from all over the world.

MAUNDY THURSDAY PROGRAM

3.30 p.m.: Maundy Thursday Tenebrae* - Saint-Marie-Majeure Church.

19.00 p.m.: Procession of small reliquaries – 4 brotherhoods

The brotherhoods join their respective churches and then start their procession to Saint-Marie-Majeure Church, continuing to the Saint-Dominique Church. Respective procession departure times: 9.00 p.m. Sainte-Croix, 9.20 p.m. Saint-Jean-Baptiste, 9.40 p.m. Saint-Barthélemy, and 10.00 p.m. Sainte-Marie-Madeleine.

*Cultural note: the Tenebrae are celebrations without Blessed Sacraments which, in the past, took place before sunrise, the last three days of Holy Week. Today in Bonifacio, these Tenebrae take place at 4.00 p.m. at the Sainte-Marie-Majeure Church on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. During these services, comes a tumultuous moment always surprising young and old: the brothers, armed with palm-tree branches, hit the floor with deafening noise, thus reproducing the earthquake that took place at the death of Christ.

GOOD FRIDAY PROGRAM

8.00 a.m.: Processions – 5 brotherhoods
Departures from the respective Church of each brotherhood.

Visit of the sepulchres of the different Churches. Departure of the Sainte-Croix brotherhood at 8.00 p.m. followed by a departure every 30 minutes of the other brotherhoods. Departure order: Sainte-Croix, Saint-Jean-Baptiste, Saint-Barthélemy, Sainte-Marie-Madeleine and then Saint-Erasme. The procession routes start from each brotherhood respectively to the Saint-François convent (cemetery), and follow with visits to Saint-Dominique, Saint-Jean-Baptiste and Saint-Erasme.

4.00 p.m.: Good Friday Tenebrae - Saint-Marie-Majeure Church

9.00 p.m.: Procession of large reliquaries – 4 brotherhoods
The same brotherhoods, as Maundy Thursday evening, pass in the same order and at the same times as the previous day. The large reliquaries, at arrival, are placed in line in Sainte-Marie-Majeure Church. After a two hour ceremony, the brotherhoods return to their church for the traditional light meal "spuntini".



BONIFACIO

Holy Week
A sacredly important
gathering

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SAINT-BARTHÉLEMY BROTHERHOOD

White alb, red camail: the Saint Barthélemy brotherhood gathers masons, stone cutters and other builders. It is in the Saint-Dominique Church that the baroque reliquary of "San Bartolu" can be seen, witnessing the painful episode of the flaying of Saint Barthélemy. This sculpted group of several figures and animals, weighs about 800 kilos, requiring three or four groups of six carriers.



SAINT-CROIX BROTHERHOOD

White alb, black camail with red cross lattice pattern: this very old brotherhood welcomes and treats the sick. It is the only one that does not honour a patron saint as it worships the cross of Christ's martyr, symbol of all the saints and martyrs of the Christian religion. Derived from the Saint-Esprit brotherhood, it contains a fragment of the Cross, preserved in a reliquary visible during certain ceremonies.



SAINTERASME BROTHERHOOD

White alb, mauve camail: this brotherhood is a group of fishermen and seamen. Its holy See is situated on the port, at the foot of the Montée Rastellu. For those who ask themselves why this Saint, let us remember that Erasme, Bishop of Antioche, was battered with a catline tearing out his innards.



SAINT-JEAN-BAPTISTE BROTHERHOOD

Black alb, black camail: this brotherhood is a group of carpenters and other craftsmen. Also called the Brotherhood of the Merciful, their mission was to help the poor by giving material assistance to the needy and guaranteeing dignified funerals for all. It is thus a sign of profound humility that the brotherhood chose black for their alb and camail.

SAINT-MARIE-MADELEINE BROTHERHOOD

Green alb, blue camail: this brotherhood is a group of farmers, vintners, and others who work the land. Their reliquary called "Saintes-Femmes" represents the agony of the four Marys of the Calvary. To be precise, several Saint Marie Madeleines are identified, however in the present case, it is Marie de Magdala (1st century), disciple of Jesus.



SMALLER AND BIGGER RELIQUARIES

During their processions, the brotherhoods pass through the town with their reliquary, which is an inadequate description. In this instance, the common term defines a wooden sculpture. Depending on the days and ceremonies, it is either the smaller or bigger reliquaries that are carried depending on the size of depicted subjects. For example, the large Saint-Croix reliquary is of carved polychromatic wood, with canopy and relic taken out for the Good Friday procession. On Maundy Thursday, this same reliquary is presented without the canopy and relic thus qualified as a small reliquary.

