As Valeria di Bartolomeo di Pavia was settling in to the routines at S. Maria del Baraccano, Ruggiero di Lorenzo da Castelfocognano was mounting the steps of Florence's Ospedale degli Poveri Abbandonati. Barely more than 7 years old, he had been down busy Via S. Gallo many times before in the company of his mother Rosa. Shortly after he was born, his father Lorenzo had abandoned the family for the life of a soldier. No one had heard a word from him since then, and Rosa had no idea where he was, who he was fighting for, or even if he was still alive. For seven years Rosa had struggled to find enough for the two of them to eat, but she was evasive on the details of how she had managed. In her efforts to find a better home for Ruggiero, she had gone up and down the streets of Florence from one monastery to the next trying to have the boy accepted as an oblate or even a servant, but the doors were always shut. Ruggiero was a bright boy, but too young, or at least so she was told. Finally, at the end of 1575, Rosa managed to find work as the servant of a Florentine citizen, Girolamo Honesti. The pair moved into Honesti's house, where Ruggiero and Rosa swept, hauled water, and kept the fire fed through the winter months in return for a bed under the eaves and a place at the kitchen table. This was a common enough fostering arrange-
ment, but within months Honesti was penning a *fede* to the magistrates of the Bigallo, asking that they take Ruggiero in.

Had Girolamo Honesti found that Ruggiero was just too much trouble? Had he agreed with Rosa to shelter the boy only through the winter months? It is impossible to say. Girolamo praised the boy as smart and quick-witted (*bello ingegnino*), but claimed that he simply didn’t have the means to sustain both mother and son. He wrote that he had no idea how Rosa had managed to feed Ruggiero through those years—clearly there had been little if any help coming from Lorenzo’s father Bernardo or his kin, and there was no mention of any of Rosa’s own relatives. He also described her unsuccessful efforts to make a friar out of him. Girolamo felt that this was still the best option, and speculated that with a bit of formal education, sharp little Ruggiero would easily pass through the monastery doors. He was even willing to put money on it, in the form of alms for the Abbandonati if the magistrates would take the boy in.

They did. Ruggiero was hardly the most needy child around, but if the records are to be believed, he was one of only three children admitted into the Abbandonati on the basis of *fede* during 1576–77. Honesti may have had better connections than most, or perhaps he was just lucky that his timing fit the home’s cyclical recruitment. The Abbandonati was still absorbing twenty-six children it had enrolled through the previous year. It had been a difficult winter and the door remained shut to many more desperate cases, like the widow with four children under 9 years old, or the boy whose father had died seven years before and who had just been rejected by his new stepfather. Even well-connected sponsors were having trouble: Pandolfo de Medici had requested entry for a 2-year-old abandoned boy so that the woman caring for him could nurse his newborn son instead. The magistrates discussed his request, but didn’t record their decision.¹

When we try to sketch Ruggiero’s circumstances and determine who his companions might have been, we come up against a problem common to all the orphanages studied here: they kept few records. Conservatories in both cities filled large registers with careful entries on each of their girls, recording their backgrounds and sometimes even the vote tallies when they had been accepted, listing their resources, sometimes describing their personality, and explaining the circumstances of their departure. Orphanages were extraordinarily lax in recording anything about the boys in their care. None of the homes kept the kinds of registers found in conservatories, even though their statutes ordered the officials to do so. From time to time a more conscientious *segretario* would enter the names of boys into the minute books of the confraternities that ran these homes,
but at the end of his term he would inevitably be replaced by someone who took a more lax view of things and the record would peter out.

S. Onofrio recorded the names of the boys it investigated and accepted, but nothing further. S. Bartolomeo sometimes noted which master artisans its wards apprenticed with, and occasionally even noted their salaries, but this too was uneven. It required officials to inventory the chests, clothes, and other items that boys brought in and to credit a boy’s account if these were sold, but nothing this individual has survived. Some record was kept at the time. A few S. Bartolomeo boys who had brought in the tools of a craft received them back when leaving, and a few confratelli were appointed to oversee the house another boy inherited until he too was ready to leave.2 Florence’s Abbandonati was worst of all: the bundles of fede petitioning for boys’ admission tell the backgrounds of some, and occasionally record whether one or another made it into the home. Yet as we saw in an earlier chapter, other boys found the door opening after a parent had left them under the portico, and were never recorded anywhere. As for boys finding their way out, the Abbandonati records are silent.

Compounding the problem, neither the Abbandonati nor S. Bartolomeo ever got beyond writing drafts of statutes, and any that S. Giacomo may have adopted on opening in 1591 are no longer extant. Only Bologna’s S. Onofrio published and later revised the procedures governing its home.3 Compared to the tightly regulated conservatories, the orphanages seem to have been run on ambition tempered by large doses of ad hoc improvisation. Confratelli could turn to the advice books that clerical authors like Erasmus, Andrea Ghetti, and Silvio Antoniano were writing around this time. It is tempting to use a book like Antoniano’s Dell’educazione cristiana e politica de’figliuoli (1584) to fill in the gaps in these sometimes fragmentary statute drafts and administrative records, particularly since there was no part of childrearing that the childless Antoniano considered outside his ken or competence. Running to 281 topical chapters, Antoniano’s tome was frequently reprinted into the twentieth century. While we can turn to it to find early modern concepts of child psychology, the limits of corporal punishment, and the ways of keeping boys chaste, it is a far greater jump to assuming that early modern fathers and orphanage guardians did the same. Or whether, when these men read their Antoniano, they found practical ideas to help with the day-to-day challenges of running an orphanage. They may have had copies of such texts around, and may even have made them required reading for the teachers, chaplains, and guardians that they hired to look after the boys. Yet the argument from silence—unwritten registers, incomplete inventories, and unfin-
ished draft statutes—suggests that in the end they relied more on their instincts, experience, and connections than on the advice of a celibate clergyman.\(^4\)

Given these gaps in the records, we cannot tell with certainty who may have joined Ruggiero di Lorenzo di Castelfocognano at the junior end of the Abbandonati’s dining table or the back of its chapel. We know, from those periods when records were more precise, that Florence’s main orphanage more often enrolled individuals or small groups of two, three, or five children. And in spite of their fragmentary state, the surviving records allow us to see something of the life that boys led, and to see how different it was from that of girls like Valeria di Bartolomeo di Pavia. Differences began with the children’s ages, and were ampli-
fied by social mores. Most conservatory girls were over 12; most orphanage boys were under 10 like the solemn boy in an Abbandonati uniform whose portrait an anonymous artist sketched on the back of a fede in 1582—a boy whom Ruggiero, then only 14, likely knew (Figure 4.1). Younger at their entry into the home, the boys were more sheltered in their first years, but quickly gained some of the freedoms that their peers outside the walls enjoyed. Though their domestic chores were minimal, they worked in order to keep the home afloat. Since it was not necessary to protect the boys’ honor with strict enclosure, none of the homes operated workshops like those found in conservatories. Many boys worked outside of the home during the day and returned only for meals and sleep. Bolognese orphanages went further and developed a profitable business in attending at funerals, which put their boys on the street many times a week.

In short, girls lived their lives almost entirely within the conservatory walls and were subject to its strict discipline until they could be returned to their families or passed on to the authority of a husband, employer, or convent. Boys never lost their contact with the culture of the streets, but through the years gained more and more tools for making a life there. Girls created a community, while boys shared a residence. While it is possible to work out daily and periodic rhythms for a girl like Valeria, a boy like Ruggiero had his life structured more by his age and by the progressive steps by which the Abbandonati reintegrated him into Florentine life. In the end, all these diverging practices underscore a more basic difference: while conservatories aimed to protect girls for a later life whose details would be arranged by family or institutional guardians, orphanages aimed to shape boys with education, self-discipline, and self-reliance to the point where they could step out on the street as independent agents by late adolescence.

Daily Rhythms

On entering the Ospedale degli Abbandonati, Ruggiero had gone through a formal ceremony of becoming part of the family. He put on the rough brown woolen smock uniform and stood while an official prayed over him and blessed him in a rough parallel to the vesting ceremony that awaited him if he fulfilled his mother’s dreams and entered a monastery. Orphanages had none of the problems that conservatories wrestled with when it came to clothing, though this was due more to the boys’ younger age and poverty than to any lack of vanity; the adolescent Renaissance male was certainly as fashion-conscious as his female
counterpart. Most homes kept a generous supply of clothes on hand in the event that a boy entering had nothing decent to wear. In 1562, when S. Onofrio had no more than about two dozen boys resident, its guardiano recorded 112 new and old shirts in stock. Boys entering the newly opened Abbandonati twenty years before had received shoes, shirts, vests, and russet-colored smocks. Orphanages did not build spiritual lessons around physical dress, but Bolognese homes did insist that boys wear clothes appropriate to their class. S. Onofrio outfitted its boys with the handkerchiefs, caps, and shirts in wool and silk worn by the well-mannered sons of middling guildsmen, and it paid for the clothes of those of its boys who lived with guild masters, no doubt in part to ensure that they were up to standard.

Orphanages built identity around their uniforms just as conservatories did, since their boys also walked up and down the streets gathering alms or in procession. Some provided robes for their administrators, priests, teachers, and older boys, though of a finer cloth and cut than what the boys wore. Ruggiero might eventually wear one of the processional robes of Lombard cloth that the Abbandonati purchased when it opened, though he likely began with only the rougher russet-colored smock. In procession the two uniforms set up a before-and-after moralizing lesson. The bulk of younger boys tumbled along without much order or pace, their woolen smocks advertising the mendicant humility and simplicity of their current state. The smaller cadre of older and better-disciplined boys processed with more dignity, their better-quality robes announcing their future status to be something closer to the guildsmen and confratelli who marched ahead and behind them. Dress robes could be quite extravagant. S. Bartolomeo di Reno clothed its boys in red gowns and white shoes, “so that they will be recognized,” on feast days, for alms collection, and when they walked in procession with the patrician confratelli who ran the home. Had the boys worn these robes when going out as apprentices to the shops of tailors or shoemakers, they would have been targets for the stones and mud that Bologna's young toughs liked to throw at those they hated, envied, or just were annoyed at.

No one had entered the Abbandonati on the same day as Ruggiero, but most of the two dozen who had come in the previous twelve months were under age 7 as he was. Many of his experiences through the first few years would be shared with this larger group of young boys. The boys were too young to benefit from a master of novices guiding them through the hallways and customs of their new home, as happened in conservatories. Older boys seldom stepped in as the mentors of younger ones, or as staff running the kitchens, the infirmary, the laundry,
or any other part of the home. Ruggiero would not rise through the ranks, as Valeria might, because there really were no ranks to rise through. Orphanages in both cities hired cooks, teachers, laundresses, and sacristans, who ate and slept in the home and became a supportive community that in smaller homes was modeled more closely on the nuclear family. Larger homes certainly had a more institutional feel. The men who drafted the Abbandonati’s first statutes planned on a major institution much like Florence’s main hospital of S. Maria Nuova, with a specialized staff of at least fifteen, including cooks, medics, cleaners, teachers, and ministri who were jacks of all trades. They hoped for a cerimoniero who, like a master of novices, would teach the boys the customs of the house and the manners they were expected to adopt, and who would take particular care of the little ones, waking them in the morning, putting them to bed at night, and helping them with their shoes. Yet high costs curbed many of the founders’ ambitions by the time Ruggiero came in the Abbandonati’s door. An undated list of the sixteenth century notes only twelve resident staff for 187 boys, so it’s most likely that the resident teachers or chaplain took on the cerimoniero’s duties, if they were taken on at all. By contrast, a century later S. Onofrio’s sixteen boys were under the care of a married couple (the guardiano and guardiana) and a priest who were themselves assisted by a male and a female servant.9

Though he may not have had a master of novices or cerimoniero to take him by the hand, Ruggiero would have to find his way around the halls and rooms of his new home. At the time, the Abbandonati still occupied the old Broccardi ospedale on Via S. Gallo. We do not know what it looked like inside, though Ruggiero probably slept in one of the large open dormitories that was typical of old hostels. Descriptions available for two Bolognese homes give us some idea of the sharp contrasts between larger institutional complexes like the Abbandonati and smaller homes. S. Bartolomeo di Reno began as a compact pilgrims’ hostel in 1530, but the confraternity quickly embarked on an ambitious building program that extended it on all sides and upward, and by the time the work finished in the 1580s, it could shelter about a hundred boys. Local architect Alessandro Fontana began the renovation not with dormitories but with a church.

Oriented to but also set back from Via Imperiale, the church gave S. Bartolomeo new architectural prominence and the appearance of a spacious front courtyard on a street where real estate was at a premium. More to the point, it also gave the orphanage a place to offer public religious services and collect alms. Boys entered around the side and to the rear of this church, coming through the doorway that was situated under the portico that ran adjacent to the Reno canal
immediately south of the building. Through the door boys and visitors entered
an inner courtyard ringed with a loggia from which one could reach the public
church and sacristy to the right, or the refectory, kitchen, and pantry. A second
courtyard connected to this first one, and here there was a stable and rooms for
staff, servants, and officials. Taking a stairway down, one entered an underground
laundry room outfitted with reservoirs to store the water that was piped in
directly from the Reno canal. Taking another stairway up brought the boys to
the second-floor loggia that ringed the courtyard. The boys slept here in two
dormitories, one facing south over the Reno canal and the other north over an
adjoining street. Putting their dormitories on the second floor meant windows
could be opened during the day to catch the breezes and air the buildings out.
The teachers gathered the boys in a couple of classrooms on this level, and any
tools or valuables that they had brought in to S. Bartolomeo could be stored in
a locked room where the records were also kept. From this second-floor loggia,
the priest or music teacher could also shepherd the boys into two small choir
rooms that looked down into the public church. The boys practiced music here,
and by the eighteenth century could even provide music for Masses without ever
leaving the orphanage; convents had similar grated rooms once enclosure be-
came more tight, but in the case of S. Bartolomeo boys these rooms were more
likely for convenience than for security. Back on the second-floor loggia, one
could find another stairway that led up to a third and top floor, where there was
a granary, a sun porch (solana) that looked over the city, and the private rooms
and oratory of the confraternity of S. Bartolomeo di Reno.10

Following the path of the Reno canal eastward for five or six blocks brought
one to the corner of Via Mascarella, where Senator Ercole Bentivoglio was build-
ing an imposing palace within sight of the ruins of an even more massive palace
that Giovanni II Bentivoglio had built a century before. Bolognese mobs had
torn that would-be signore’s palace down in 1508, and the debris-ridden site
would remain barren for another two hundred years until, appropriately, an
opera theater rose on the site. The ruins sheltered many of Bologna’s homeless,
including some of the boys who later made their way over to Via Mascarella and
into the orphanage of S. Onofrio, which was in view of Ercole Bentivoglio’s
palace and certainly under the protective care of his family. S. Onofrio was far
smaller than S. Bartolomeo, housing a famiglia of less than two dozen. In 1568,
the confratelli who had started it bought a house and began renovations to accom-
modate its staff and boys. Entering from under the portico on Via Mascarella, a
boy came not into a loggia-ringed courtyard, but directly into a large room that
served as a public space and kitchen outfitted with pots and pans. From here he could enter a small chapel or the refectory, where he ate at one of three tables. He likely could not enter the so-called massaro’s (overseer’s) room where the confraternity stored various goods and where there was a bed for the guardiano and his wife. Beyond these rooms and out a back door there was a yard of sorts with a small pergola, a stable, and a room in which to store firewood and kindling. Underneath the kitchen was a cantina for the flasks of oil and wine and many other kinds of tubs, barrels, and bushel measures used to collect and store food. The boys all slept on the second floor. In keeping with Bologna’s architectural vernacular, there was a small dormitory over the portico; the city’s characteristic porticos had first developed in the twelfth century when a flood of university students hit the city and were lodged in second-floor rooms built out over the street. A larger dormitory beside this held most of the home’s sixteen beds. Both of these rooms had locks fitted into the doors. Leading off of that and directly above the kitchen was a smaller room with a bed: more private and certainly warmer in winter, this was most likely where the chaplain slept.  

Whether large or small, most homes aimed to blunt the abstractions of institutional staff with the fictions of family life. The confratelli who ran the homes as rectors, visitors, and accountants often wanted the “father” title for themselves. So, for instance, S. Bartolomeo di Reno initially drafted statutes that described the confratelli as the boys’ parents and obligated them to visit frequently. But in practical terms, the father and mother of Ruggiero’s very extended surrogate family were the guardiano and guardiana, usually a married couple who lived in the Abbandonati home. Since most boys had grown up in situations where one parent (perhaps both) was dead, in prison, at war, or absent, this was an unfamiliar domestic arrangement. Orphanages struggled between ideal and reality on this point, believing that a resident couple could provide a model for the boys, but equally concerned that they might defraud the place by inviting their own family and friends to the orphanage table, and perhaps suspecting that the kind of couples who would take on such demanding work might not make the best fathers and mothers. Some couples confirmed this low estimate by remaining only a few months before leaving or being sacked, and in any event, few remained for more than a few years.

We can read the suspicions of S. Bartolomeo’s confratelli in the many scratched-out deletions and emendations to their draft statutes. They initially thought that the ideal guardiano should be over 40 and so well-cooled (in Aristotelian terms) in his passions that the flesh could not tempt him—the first draft even prohib-
ited him from having a female companion. But some confratelli realized that a single male might raise suspicions in a home full of boys regardless of his age, so they scratched this out and allowed him a wife. But only a wife—the guardiana had to be beyond her childbearing years so that all her energies could be directed to the boys and so that S. Bartolomeo’s food wouldn’t end up going to her own children. The couple were to live in a separate apartment that had no access to the boys’ dormitory beyond a small internal window through which they passed food to the boys and staff on the other side. If the wife were ever caught alone in the dormitories—or indeed in any room on the orphanage side—both she and her husband were to be thrown out immediately.

These statutes were written before S. Bartolomeo built the new quarters described above, and in the event the confratelli seem to have thought better of these restrictions. They may have had a more realistic view of their own limitations as well. Taking on the father role for themselves required them to come to the home more frequently than was practicable for most merchants, professionals, and patricians. The confraternity wanted them there every day, but the repeated reminders of this obligation in minute books suggest that most visitors took a somewhat looser view of things. They remained careful in their choice of guardiano, however, and when the job came available they reviewed a number of applicants, requiring references, and subjected candidates to the same level of scrutiny that the boys themselves received. At one point when forty-seven of S. Bartolomeo’s confratelli gathered for a meeting couldn’t decide on the basis of reports which candidate of three they ought to hire, they called both the men and their wives in for interviews on the spot. And they were even flexible when it came to the relationship between the guardiano and guardiana. When the Abbandonati’s guardiano proved to be a little pazzo (mad) in 1550, the home’s administrators fired him and recruited a priest and his 60-year-old mother as replacements.

The couple divided their duties according to convention, with the guardiana and one or two assistants cooking, cleaning, laundering, and making the beds in the home’s dormitory. The couple nurtured the youngest boys who, for all they had seen and experienced, were no doubt still somewhat anxious and unsure of themselves in their new home. The Abbandonati wanted them to raise the boys with “that affection and love as though they were their dearest sons.” The women should seldom be out of the home during the day (and certainly never for more than a day at a time) and had to be available all night, when the boys would no doubt be the most lonely and upset. Each morning one or the other
went through the dormitories waking the boys where they slept, most often two
to a bed. They made sure that Ruggiero and his companions washed their faces
and put on their smocks and shoes, and then allowed the boys into the refectory,
where they could eat a little bread for breakfast. There at table Ruggiero would
meet some of the other staff. In homes with two to three dozen boys, like
S. Onofrio and S. Giacomo, the couple did much of the work themselves. The
seventy-five to one hundred boys at S. Bartomomeo di Reno and the 150 to 180
at the Abbandonati required more helpers and this blunted the couple’s role as
surrogate parents. Regardless of size, all homes had at least a priest and one or
more teachers. These adult males also moderated the parental authority of the
guardiano and guardiana, particularly since they were certainly more educated
than that couple and possibly of a higher social standing as well.\textsuperscript{16}

Despite these limitations on his authority, the guardiano had ultimate respon-
sibility for affairs in the home. At breakfast he told Ruggiero where he would be
spending the day. There weren’t a great many options: the youngest boys went
to classes in the orphanage, and the older ones went to work, either in work-
shops in the city or sometimes in the home itself.

After eating, Ruggiero and most of the two dozen boys who had entered in
the past year followed the teacher to the room appointed for classes. For the rest
of the day until dinner, Ruggiero and his companions would be in the teacher’s
care, learning from books and engaging in some recreation.\textsuperscript{17} Both Florence and
Bologna had well-established traditions of public education and in both cities
many children also learned through proprietorial schools or the charitable
Schools of Christian Doctrine. At the beginning of our period only about one-
third of Florentine or Venetian boys normally received a basic education, so on
this score entering the orphanage had improved Ruggiero’s chance to learn
reading, writing, and the commercial math skills of abaco. If he was adept, he
could go even further.\textsuperscript{18} The Abbandonati and S. Bartolomeo di Reno actually
had a number of teachers for the scores of boys in their care. The Abbandonati
statutes projected at least three, teaching progressively more advanced materi-
als to ever-smaller classes.

Ruggiero would begin with the first teacher, lettore primo, who taught the
basics of Christian Doctrine and ensured that the boys knew their prayers, the
Apostles’ Creed, and the Ten Commandments. Lettore primo also arranged the
readings during morning and evening meals, doing this himself or appointing
one of the older boys if necessary. Like the mistress of novices in the nearby con-
servatory of the Pietà, he likely used one of the small manuals of Christian Doc-
trine produced by confraternities for their Sunday School classes. A manual published in Bologna around this time catechized children by having them memorize questions and answers on basic doctrine. They learned the creed and prayers that would serve in personal, family, and corporate devotions through the rest of their lives, but the text rounded this out with social and sexual lessons to govern their lives as mature Christians in the world. They memorized the works of corporal and spiritual charity, but also “The Four Sins that God will Avenge”: voluntary homicide, sodomy, oppression of the poor, and failing to pay a worker his wages. They encountered the Three Enemies (the Devil, the World, and the Flesh) who would assault them as they matured into men and the Three Powers of the Soul (Intellect, Memory, and Will) that would help them fight back. If the boys’ attention flagged or memory failed, confratelli could buy inexpensive broadsheets of moral codes that itemized this same message of chaste social discipleship in a few dozen rules and post them on the school room walls. The broadsheets reminded the boys to observe feasts and fasts, to offer prayers, and to respect relics and clerics, but also to keep from gambling and blasphemy, to never spend more than they earned, and to avoid prostitutes, theaters, and lawyers.\textsuperscript{19}

More ambitious or well-funded teachers could also draw on popular works like an edition of Epistole e Evangeli, a large traditional text that gave the Gospel and Epistle readings for the Mass (often with an explanatory homily) or perhaps the early-fourteenth-century Fior di Virtù, whose forty chapters catalogued virtues and vices through a combination of legends, maxims, and cautionary tales. Selections from these texts, from lives of the saints, or from other spiritual works were read out during the morning and evening meals by lettore primo or a boy he appointed.\textsuperscript{20}

If Ruggiero proved as quick-witted as his mother Rosa and Girolamo Honesti claimed, he could move rapidly into the classroom of lettore secondo and begin learning basic reading and writing. Promotion and advancement through schools generally was based on skills acquisition and a willingness to pay fees. With fees not an issue in the orphanage, Ruggiero could rise as quickly as his abilities merited. Reading was considered the easier skill and the one more necessary for survival as an artisan, yet many boys were never able to do more than sign their names. Lettore secondo may have used what contemporary Venetian teachers described as libri de batagia, chivalric romances of battling knights, in order to get their boys more interested in reading. These were the very novelle that conservatories fought to keep out of the hands of their girls, but parents
liked them for their boys, and they were widely used in many civic and proprietary schools. These stories spilled out of the books to become the imaginative currency of street ballads, traveling theater, and popular poetry. Their easier morality of stolen kisses and adulterous courtly love contrasted to the moralizing Fior di Virtù, but a middle ground could be found in the equally popular and more recent Vita di Marco Aurelio, a vernacular text that its courtier author Antonio de Guevera (ca. 1480–1545) claimed to have translated from a classical Latin biography of the emperor that he had found among texts collected by Cosimo de Medici. This was the studia humanitatis in translation, history teaching philosophy by example in a historical narrative heavily larded with maxims that demonstrated the key modes of rhetoric. The pseudo-classical text was wildly popular in schools across Italy and through Europe, and may have found its way into the classrooms at the Abbandonati and S. Bartolomeo di Reno.

If Ruggiero picked up reading quickly and easily, he might be allowed to stay in school to learn writing. He would likely begin with mercantesca, the script used by merchants and bookkeepers in their records, and often favored by Italians as they wrote their personal letters or diary-like libri di ricordi. Depending on his skills and prospects, he might then be introduced to the humanist chancery cursive scripts that had emerged in the fifteenth century but had started to spread rapidly after the development of printing. Through the sixteenth century, Italians came to favor this far more readable and beautiful script for correspondence and public documents. Yet it was hard to learn, and orphanages may have decided that they could not afford to invest the time it took to master. One sixteenth-century author estimated that most conventional techniques took two or three years to learn, though this was in the context of advertising his own far easier method that a bright student could master in three months and that even an average student could learn in about half a year.

Oddly, the duties assigned the Abbandonati’s teachers do not include abbaco, the merchant arithmetic that taught future craftsmen, masters, and accountants how to balance their books. Florence was a center of abbaco teaching, and from the fourteenth century Italian communes had been hiring Florentine masters to teach in communally supported schools and so ensure that they would not lack for well-trained merchants and bookkeepers. Abbaco training did not center on an abacus, but aimed to build an ability to use pen and paper, arithmetic, algebra, geometry, and algorism to keep accounts and solve business problems ranging from currency exchange and interest calculations to weights and measures. Math books typically posed problems in very concrete terms: if a braccio of lom-
bard cloth costs 5 Florentine lire, what will it be worth in Provencal soldi? If the sickly husband of a pregnant woman writes a will giving his spouse and anticipated heir different percentages of his estate, what happens to his 1,000 lire legacy after he dies? How are the proportions recalculated if she bears twins after he dies? If one twin is female? As tortured as these examples sound, they were precisely the practical problems that young men would face in the future. Depending on the status of the legacies that their own parents may have left them, the boys may already have faced these problems. Florentine students typically began studying abbaco after they had mastered reading and writing, and before moving on to grammar. Gaining a working knowledge of abbaco took about two years if one went to one of the city’s many specialized abbaco schools. Given the more specialized skills involved, it is entirely possible that the Abbandonati sent its boys out to such schools rather than try to bring an abbaco master onto its own staff.23

If Ruggiero was among the bright students, lettor secondo would begin teaching him grammatica. This was almost certainly in Latin, and learning it carried Ruggiero over a major cultural divide and opened to him a far broader range of occupational possibilities. The most common textbook was called the “Donatus,” though it was not the medieval Ars minor of Donatus, but a more elementary systematization of it that bypassed metaphysical speculations and prepared students more quickly for the challenge of reading classical sources.24

It might take Ruggiero four years to get as far as the grammar text, and by this time only a handful of the two dozen boys who had begun classes with him would still be taking lessons. Studying for much of the day as they did, they likely passed through their schooling more quickly than their peers outside the home who typically took classes for a few hours before returning home or to a workshop to begin working. Ruggiero had by this time received the kind of education that less than one-third of young males in Italy received at schools run by towns, by private schoolmasters, or by religious orders. As religiously motivated volunteer confratelli and consorelle began teaching afternoon Sunday School classes from the mid-sixteenth century, basic vernacular literacy shot up to almost half the population, including many young women. In Bologna through the 1560s to 1580s, when the number of children in the city ages 5 through 14 ranged from seven to ten thousand, anywhere from three to four thousand young children learned reading, writing, and religion at these Schools of Christian Doctrine. Piarist and Barnabite friars expanded this educational revolution through the next century with more formal charitable schools for the children of artisans,
craftsmen, and merchants. Both the Jesuits and the Somaschans had started out teaching the children of these more modest social ranks, but moved by the seventeenth century into becoming “schoolmasters to the upper classes.” As the bar rose for the whole population, a relatively advanced education was one means by which an orphanage could improve the chances of one of its wards finding an apprenticeship in a workshop.

Or more. Ruggiero was sharp and had an ambitious mother. With Girolamo Honesti’s help, he might well enter a monastery, but his chances would improve dramatically if he could join the small number of boys who were allowed to go on and work with lettore tertio. Here Ruggiero would apply his budding Latin skills to the studia humanitatis: history, poetry, rhetoric, moral philosophy, mathematics, and advanced grammar. As he mastered these, he would also be introduced to theology, and would start to engage in public exercises like debate, where his learning was put to the test. Ruggiero would be meeting the standards that reformers set—and less often could enforce—for the new model of clergy, and could hope to find the monastery doors now opening for him.

Of course, that new model was seldom encountered on the streets, and in the 1570s remained largely a dream. It is not even clear whether Ruggiero would have encountered the three teachers that the ambitious magistrates projected in 1542, let alone whether his talents or Honesti’s alms could take him beyond primary lessons. Yet orphanages definitely placed a high premium on education and took it beyond the basics. Around the time that Ruggiero might have been beginning his studies in the liberal arts, S. Bartolomeo was firing the friar who had come in to teach music to its boys. This did not mean that music was no longer part of the curriculum, however, since seven years later in 1585 S. Bartolomeo hired a full-time maestro di musica. The confratelli clearly felt there was work enough for its teachers, since around the same time it ordered them to stop teaching privately outside the home, and appointed some of the more capable older boys to help teach the younger ones, likely filling the role of ripetitori, the lesser-skilled assistants who drilled boys in grammatical rules and abbaco arithmetic. As these confratelli were firming up their educational resources, a Bolognese silk merchant was writing a will that would allow smart boys like Ruggiero to take their education to the very highest level. Francesco Pannolini framed his legacy to allow twenty orphans at a time to study toward doctorates at the University of Bologna. The boys were chosen from the foundling home of the Esposti and the orphanages of S. Bartolomeo di Reno and S. Onofrio. Of 146 boys who were Fellows of the Collegio Pannolini from the time it started in 1617 until Bene-
dict XIV suppressed it in 1745, thirty-six came from S. Bartolomeo di Reno and thirty-five from S. Onofrio. Only one-third actually completed their doctorates, most choosing law, but a few taking medicine or philosophy; the rest entered religious orders. Their humble origins did not prevent these boys from taking positions as university professors, secretaries, and medical practitioners. This was far more than Valeria di Bartolomeo di Pavia—or, for that matter, Ruggiero di Lorenzo di Castelfocognano—could ever dream of.

While larger homes like S. Bartolomeo di Reno and the Abbandonati could build school rooms and hire specialized teachers, S. Onofrio had more modest resources for its two or three dozen boys. Its single teacher, a priest called the *precetore*, taught reading, writing, grammar, and use of the abacus to all levels of students, and had to be ready to teach everything from the moral lessons of Antoniano and the *Fior di Virtù* to the techniques of public disputation. If there happened to be a lot of students due to a wave of entrants, he could draft some of the older boys as assistants. Since many boys would be out during the day working in workshops or searching for alms, the *precetore* had to teach in the evening or on feast days. While firm, he wasn’t to be so severe that the boys began to hate him. He also took the boys’ lessons quite literally into the street. On feast days he led the uniformed boys through the streets, singing the psalms and hymns they had been taught in the classroom and keeping an eye on their manners as the group entered one church after another. Every Saturday afternoon he led the boys into the orphanage’s adjoining public church, where they recited litanies and penitential psalms for the souls of benefactors and *confratelli*. From time to time he took a few of the better-mannered ones on special trips to the homes of some of S. Onofrio’s larger donors and better prospects. The *precetore* was teacher, chaplain, and fundraiser, and, as we will see shortly, this merging came directly out of the kind of work that many of S. Onofrio’s boys performed for the orphanage.

Merging duties was common in cash-strapped orphanages. Though many orphanage teachers were actually priests or friars by vocation, all the homes also hired a separate chaplain to confess and communicate the boys at least once every two months, to lead them in daily matins and vespers services, and to give sermons and hold Sunday Masses for the boys and any *confratelli* who might come. Apart from the moral example that he taught and was expected to demonstrate, a resident priest guaranteed prospective donors that the requiem obligations that they loaded onto their legacies would be observed. These obligations inevitably drew the children in as well. Ruggiero had to pray at set times of the
day for Duke Francesco and his family, for the late Duke Cosimo, and for all other founders and benefactors of the Abbandonati. He and his companions were also expected to get down on their knees during the times when their governors, the magistrates of the Bigallo, were meeting. His counterparts at S. Onofrio had to start their day with a “De profundis” and end it with a “Misere mei” for one donor, while the boys at S. Giacomo had to follow dinner with a “De profundis” for another. And so it multiplied.

*Guardiano*, teacher, and priest were all resident in the larger homes, and each had a distinct kind of authority. The *guardiano*’s supreme local authority could easily conflict with the priest’s broader social authority, and it could be difficult to balance the latter’s insistence on time-consuming religious exercises with the former’s efforts to get the work of the home done. *Confratelli* had to adjudicate the frequent disputes, and one reason for having visitors drop by regularly was to make sure that everyone was doing his or her own work, that disputes among the staff were resolved, that the boys were learning what they had to. We might expect the resulting reports to be a mine of detail on daily life, but on most occasions when S. Bartolomeo’s visitors were asked how things were going with the children, they replied laconically, “things are going well enough” (“le cose passano assai bene”).

But there were exceptions. In 1588, S. Bartolomeo’s priest stormed over to the confraternity rector to complain of his treatment by the *guardiano*. The charges that flew back and forth over the next few days were so confusing that the confraternity called nine of the boys in one by one to relate what had happened. At some point the priest had been having a hard time getting the boys to settle down and be quiet for some religious exercise, and in frustration he had accused the *guardiano* of egging them on rather than helping to set the proper example. Thrusting his face at the cleric, the *guardiano* responded, “I don’t take orders from a priest!” He then began a slow, deliberate, and loud clapping, like the kind he used in the mornings as he walked through the dormitories waking up the boys. All the boys present immediately began clapping in time as well, shouting insults and mocking the priest until he retreated angrily into the classroom, “accompanied by that noise.” This left no question of who the more popular official was, but the *confratelli* could not countenance this kind of deliberate disruption and so fired the *guardiano*. At the same time, however, they laid out a more precise schedule of times for confession, communion, and sermons as a means of keeping priest and *guardiano* out of each other’s way.

As Ruggiero grew older, he could look forward to getting out of the home in
order to work. None of the orphanages in Bologna and Florence followed the example of conservatories and set up internal workshops, because none placed as great an emphasis on the protective enclosure of their wards. Each had grates over the windows and locks in the door, but none lay out the kind of complicated restrictions that conservatories commonly adopted to keep their wards from walking the streets or readily receiving visitors. S. Bartolomeo likely had a gate-keeper of some sort guarding the entrance to its complex, but of all the orphanages only the Abbandonati seems to have thought strongly enough about its portinaro to outline his duties in the statutes. Most of these were conventional: he couldn’t leave the door between dawn and midnight, couldn’t let boys like Ruggiero go out without a written license from the guardiano, and had to lock the boys and staff in over night. More unusually, the authors who drafted the first statutes added some oddly liturgical aspects to his duties, ordering the portinaro to make the sign of the cross on all those entering and leaving, to say an Our Father and a Hail Mary together with them, and to sprinkle them with holy water while saying the “Asperges me.” The authors may have felt that if their magistracy was going to extend control over all lay and clerical ospedali in Florence it might need some way of lending religious legitimacy to its flagship institution. This ersatz ritual was hardly suitable to the home’s staff and clientele, and whatever the intentions of these authors, it is unlikely that the portinaro kept his holy water for long.

When Ruggiero first passed by the portinaro to work, he would likely be collecting alms in Florence’s churches, streets, markets, and homes just as conservatory girls did. The Abbandonati statutes had projected a cadre of professional alms collectors, but also offered instructions on how the boys were to behave as they circulated in pairs through Florence’s churches collecting alms. Ruggiero and his companion would have to take their hats off on entering, go to the main altar and kneel to offer prayers, stay for the whole Mass if it was in progress, kiss the ground in front of the priest, give a blessing to all who gave alms, and then leave with reverence. Did the authors of these statutes really think their boys could manage this? Apparently not, for they followed these fine rules with stern warnings that the boys weren’t to start swearing, gossiping, or mocking others once they hit the street. Regardless, the Abbandonati never did hire alms collectors, and Ruggiero most likely joined with his counterparts at S. Bartolomeo di Reno, S. Onofrio, and S. Giacomo in taking to the streets with his alms box and food bag.

A carpenter had made four small and two larger locking alms boxes for the
Abbandonati soon after it opened, and S. Onofrio went even further and commissioned an alms box for each of its two dozen boys to carry, plus a larger one to put in its church. Its boys seem to have been so effective that other confraternities hired them to collect alms on their feast days, giving a portion of the proceeds to the orphanage at the end of the day. As with conservatories, this labor-intensive and systematic activity targeted particular markets, neighborhoods, and churches on certain days. Saturday mornings were an especially good time to go around to the workshops of craftsmen and collect money. The boys were old enough to go out without chaperones, but at the end of the day the guardiano checked the boxes closely for any signs of tampering, and recorded what had been gathered. The money each child could take in was as significant for orphans as it was for conservatories. As Table 4.1 demonstrates, the boys’ alms gathering earned from 6 to 25 percent of S. Bartolomeo di Reno’s total income through the 1580s and 1590s, and until 1595 it regularly brought in two or three times as much as pledges. For S. Onofrio two decades earlier the amount was even greater; in 1576 the boys’ alms gathering brought in 39.5 percent (liro 1,035.16.0), and general alms a further 36.5 percent (liro 955.4.10).34

Even more than income, this activity brought in significant amounts of food and other necessities. Like the fanciulle, groups of boys took special bags with them to go door to door through every quarter and neighborhood collecting bread or vegetables from shops, private homes, monasteries, and convents. One
stronger boy might take a yoke along to string on flasks of wine like traveling vendors did, and a few others might push a cart, particularly when they moved out beyond the city walls into rural areas in order to get firewood from farmers. All of this was coordinated by the guardiano, who sent out the teams in the morning and greeted them again at the end of the day. He made sure that boys visited regular donors on schedule to collect on their pledges of oil, bread, or wine. He had to know where the merchants’ stalls were, and which squares and streets held markets on which days so that boys could go and get vegetables and fruit. S. Onofrio’s guardiano sent them to the meat markets on Thursday and Saturday, knowing that there would always be some cuts available at the end of the day that the butcher couldn’t save over the following day’s closing and then offer for sale again after that. He also got and gave the refrain that was familiar among local institutions looking for charity: “On fish days, fish among the fishmongers.”

S. Bartolomeo for its part recommended that the food gatherers fish among the politicians. In the early stages of the famine that crippled many homes in the later 1580s and early 1590s, it told them to go around the palaces of Bologna’s senators, many of them located up and down the street from its own quarters on Via Imperiale, in order to shame them into providing for their juvenile neighbors.

Some boys reveled in the chance to get back on the streets and move through the familiar and unfamiliar parts of the city. To control their behavior, the Abbandonati statutes echo conservatory rules against visiting, chatting, or playing. The Florentine home seemed to take a pretty dim view of its boys, because it went on to forbid them from drinking, clowning around or horseplay, sweet-talking fraud, and entrepreneurial free-lance working for their own profit. That notwithstanding, none of the homes provided chaperones to keep the boys in line while on their food patrols. But if some boys found the work liberating, others found the trek for food and alms overly onerous, possibly degrading, and occasionally dangerous. Ruggiero and the Abbandonati boys would have to be cautious and discrete as they went around with their alms boxes. Florentines walking the streets could sometimes turn a corner and find a gauntlet of boys blocking their way with long sticks and demanding payment of a toll. Ruggiero and his companions had to collect in such a way, and in such places, that they wouldn’t be identified with these street gang extortionists—hence the strict regulations on their behavior. And while the gangs most often singled out young women, orphanage boys in brightly colored uniforms loaded down with food and rattling alms boxes made a choice target for everything from thieves to
apprentices out for a mischievous good time.\textsuperscript{38} It all became worse in times of famine. This is likely why S. Bartolomeo’s boys refused to go out in 1590, when famine was particularly bad in Bologna. They had a history of resisting this job, and the orphanage had supplemented their efforts with professional alms collectors for decades, sending them into the streets of the city, and also into outlying towns like Faenza, Forli, and Imola, where they sometimes encountered stiff resistance. Priests in some of these towns had sometimes confiscated the alms and refused to hand them over until ordered to by their own bishops. In good times, it was easier and cheaper to send the boys out to work the streets of Bologna, but the boys’ early modern strike forced their sponsoring confraternity to send its own members out into the streets and to hire more professional alms gatherers. The boys were soon back on the streets, but attempted a second strike two years later.\textsuperscript{39}

But there was more to alms gathering than carrying cassette and food bags. At a fairly early stage, Bolognese orphanages realized that even more alms could be generated by using their wards as the lay celebrants of liturgical rituals. All Italian cities dressed their children as angels and put them at the head of celebratory or propitiatory processions that beat the parish bounds or wove from shrine to shrine on feast days. Bologna’s bastardini—the children from the foundling home of the Esposti—annually marched in white cloaks and angel wings to help celebrate the feast day of their sponsoring confraternity of S. Maria degli Angeli. Florence had a broader tradition of recruiting youths and adolescents into activist youth confraternities and allied religious reform movements, and under Savonarola teams of boys had staged pious processions and patrolled the streets hunting down the card-players and blasphemers who were undermining the holy republic.\textsuperscript{40} Under the duchy, that city’s merchants did not aim to generate anything more than moral capital out of their poor youths. Perhaps the uncomfortable Savonarolan legacy kept the Medici loyalists who ran the Abbandonati from using their boys in this way. By contrast, Bolognese orphanages made their fresh-scrubbed, well-mannered, and uniformed boys into a cornerstone of institutional finance. S. Onofrio developed a particularly profitable business of funeral attendance and performance of requiem observances.

The idea of using boys as paid mourners may have come to the orphanage’s confraternal founders when they first lodged their juvenile charges in the brotherhood’s quarters, an old ospedale dedicated to the fourth-century saint Onuphrius, whose legend had been frescoed on an exterior wall by Cristoforo da Bologna in the fourteenth century. The Egyptian desert hermit was commonly
identified with burials, though less for anything he had done than because two attendant lions had dug his grave.\textsuperscript{41} The S. Onofrio boys were not, so far as we can tell, gravediggers. They sang and marched in the procession that brought the body from the home to the gravesite, and then sang again at the service that was later held in a church. The confraternity aimed to support this work by buying uniforms for the boys, by building up the spiritual treasury of its adjoining church of S. Maria Maddalena through indulgences and aggregations to religious orders and to Rome’s famous hospital, S. Spirito in Sassia, and by outfitting the church with the liturgical trappings and other equipment needed for funerals and requiems, and even an organ to allow for more impressive sung Masses. The orphanage priest was, of course, available to perform whatever monthly or yearly anniversary Masses a legator might wish, and the boys in their turn would sing at these Masses and also recite the offices. Teachers like S. Onofrio’s preceptor and S. Bartolomeo’s music master helped prepare the boys for this work by teaching them the appropriate hymns and responses, and by drilling them in the reserved deportment that was proper in processions and requiems. Ultimately, it was the business of funerals that made sense out of the merging of the preceptor’s duties as teacher, procession organizer, Mass celebrant, and alms gatherer.\textsuperscript{42}

Funerals and requiems were a potentially profitable business that had pitted parish priests against the regular clergy across Europe for centuries, and that had made the former in particular somewhat suspicious of confraternities for at least as long. Confraternities had gotten into the business from at least the twelfth century, and many continued to attract members in part because they acted as burial societies. From the later fifteenth century, as Sharon Strocchia has noted, civic governments across Italy judged women’s extravagant funeral mourning disruptive and distasteful, and passed regulations to limit their participation in the processions.\textsuperscript{43} Humanist notions of stoic reserve and propriety had already brought educated public opinion to this point. The funeral of a worthy individual was still thought to need large numbers of mourners, but sumptuary regulations typically limited their costs. The timing could not have been better for the wards of the newly opened orphanages. Well-regulated and somber children in uniform were impressive as public mourners, and could be recruited for less than the cost of professional mourners or clergy. The fact that they had themselves lost their fathers or mothers or both made all the more poignantly dramatic their taking the role of the \textit{puer senex} (aged child).

Their choreographed mourning also targeted directly a very different asso-
cation of youths and funerals. Young boys had more often been found hauling bodies out of graves than helping them in. Public enemies ranging from traitors hanged on a beam to moneylenders who had died in their beds could rightly fear that shortly after the last shovel full of dirt had been put on their grave, a gang of youths would dig it all out again and lift out the body for a ritualized game of humiliation. Dragged down the streets, hung up in public, hacked to pieces, thrown to the dogs, and finally tossed in the river or on unconsecrated ground: this was the fate awaiting a few unpopular individuals after interment of their corpses. While it was all strictly speaking illegal, the youth gangs who performed these rituals frequently enjoyed the enthusiastic support of their neighbors and the tacit approval of their civic governments. Yet the tide was slowly turning on this carnivalesque mob violence through the sixteenth century, and some governments and social reformers were growing anxious about its unpredictability and the ease with which such violence could be manipulated and turned against legitimate authorities. Enlisting adolescent boys as funeral mourners set them up as models of order and restraint rather than disorder and abandon, and so underscored the experiment in social engineering that the orphanages, on one level, represented. At the same time, highlighting these opposite dynamics of interment and disinterment allowed confraternities to send a subtle message to civic authorities: redeemed from the streets and educated in manners and social responsibility, abandoned boys could become supports of the governing regime. Left to their own devices, these same boys could end up as the unruly apprentices of a criminal and potentially rebellious underclass.

All three of Bologna’s orphanages catered to the potentially profitable trade. In January 1574, the month in which S. Onofrio opened new quarters for the boys, 27.3 percent of income was derived from funerals, as compared to 0.75 percent of income from its share of what boys earned in craftsmen’s workshops; through 1576, funerals generated 17.7 percent of S. Onofrio’s income (lire 465.15.2) and salaries only 2 percent (lire 52.15.00). These figures understated the economic impact of funeral attendance, since many families paid with a few dozen loaves of bread or some white or yellow wax. Similarly, S. Bartolomeo di Reno derived 15.8 percent of its income from this activity in the later 1580s, twice what it took from boys’ salaries in workshops. Competition for this business may have been one of the reasons why S. Bartolomeo adopted the new and more dramatic red uniform that would make its boys more impressive in processions. Presenting a bella figura in one funeral would certainly lead to more inquiries and commissions. This alone justified sending the boys out regularly
in small processions with a cleric-teacher to discretely solicit business. Funerals normally brought the boys of S. Onofrio into the streets a few times a week, though in times of plague this could rise to every one or two days.

When famine hit the city in 1590, Archbishop Gabriele Paleotti dangled the promise of a license to attend at funerals in front of the confratelli of S. Giacomo in order to convince them to turn their pilgrims’ hostel into an orphanage. Paleotti was hitting two birds with one stone, addressing both the need to bury the dead and the need to care for the children the dead had left behind. S. Giacomo’s orphanage opened within months, and one of the first acts undertaken by its boys was attendance at the funeral of the patrician Orazio Bombelli. Like early modern ambulance chasers, S. Giacomo’s confratelli pursued the sick and dying with a vengeance; signing the boys up for funerals or anniversary requiems was one of the few things that members of the confraternity had to do. In their efforts to attract legacies, confratelli built a new church in 1606–7, and offered a range of funerary and requiem services. Three accounts of the first half of the seventeenth century show how quickly this business expanded. Work that the boys performed in artisans’ shops represented just under 13 percent of total income in 1612, falling to 7.7 percent in 1646 and 3.7 percent by 1652. In the same period, income generated through legacies that required some requiem observances rose from 12 to 51 to 60 percent. Moreover, through this period, gross annual income almost doubled, from lire 2,996.17.8 to 5,375.2.4.47

The boys did more than walk in funerary processions. S. Bartolomeo’s musically trained boys sang motets and laudi at the open air shrine of the Madonna delle Asse behind the Palazzo Communale every Saturday and on every Marian feast day on commission of the chaplain of one of the city’s traditional governing bodies, the Anziani; this wasn’t a requiem request, and the donor didn’t want attention brought to himself.48 S. Onofrio’s aggressive solicitation of business across the city and locally extended to such traditional parochial duties as bringing the Eucharist to the sick and dying, an activity that further connected them to the S. Onufrius legend and also generated alms. They also brought in painters and colored paper to stage an especially lavish festival on the feast day of S. Mary Magdalene, after whom their church and governing confraternity were named. When people of the neighborhood began bypassing the parish church a few doors away in order to go the orphanage’s chapel, things got nasty. Both parish and orphanage tried disrupting the other’s services by staging competing sermon cycles and by ringing their bells vigorously at strategic times to drown out the sound of the competitor’s priest or preacher. Mediation efforts by some of
the company’s patrician members began in 1590, and by 1609 the warring par-
ties required mediation from Rome, where the Sacra Rota set out eight rules
governing their mutual relations. The rules showed how far the confraternity
had elbowed its way into traditional parochial *cura animarum*. The boys would
now have to take at least their Easter communion in the parish church, they
couldn’t bring the Eucharist to the sick and dying, and the priest had to be in-
vited to attend at the burials of any of the parish dead. Tensions and competi-
tion continued nonetheless, to the point that the Camera Apostolica had to re-
issue the rules in 1692.49

Ruggiero di Lorenzo di Castelfocognano may not have marched in Floren-
tine funeral processions for more practical reasons than these. Most immedi-
ately, the confraternity of the Misericordia acted as the city’s ambulance and
burial service, and the Misericordia brothers were unlikely to share their virtual
monopoly.50 Beyond that, however profitable for the institution, funerals and
requiems were not work that prepared the boys for much beyond the priest-
hood. By late adolescence, it would be all the more difficult to resolve the ques-
tion of a boy’s future if he hadn’t put in his time as an apprentice. This was where
the *confratelli* earned the right to call themselves the orphans’ fathers, since they
took on the parental duty of finding apprenticeships for the boys. And where a
father might have to do this only a few times with his own boys, some of whom
might end up in his own shop or farmed out to relatives, the *confratelli* had to be
looking out continually for new apprenticeship opportunities as new boys
arrived periodically in the homes.

How did one do this? In his effort to frame a perfect republic, contemporary
Venetian author Giovanni Maria Memmo emphasized that boys needed to learn
a trade at an early age, before inactivity turned to laziness. They should start
working by about age 7, when most normally left the domestic sphere overseen
by mothers and began their first step into the public sphere controlled by fathers.
This broader transfer of authority no doubt encouraged some orphanages to pre-
fer boys of this age over those who were either older or younger. Memmo added
that since a man is more likely to perfect the art that he had a natural inclination
for, fathers should expose their boys to a number of different *arti* and *essercitij*,
so that the child could determine his inclinations and abilities and choose wisely.
Fathers should not selfishly force their children to follow them in their own
occupation, since as often as not, these boys ended up discontented and died
ignorant.51

The larger number of boys in their care narrowed the options for *confratelli*,
but statutes echoed Memmo in enjoining them to consider the boys’ skills and abilities before placing them with craftsmen. Florentine and Bolognese guilds do not appear to have resisted putting *abbandonati* into apprenticeships as their Venetian counterparts did. While the Abbandonati orphanage was in the care of patrician magistrates, guild masters were the backbone of the confraternities that operated Bologna’s orphanages, and they could expect to be called on frequently to test the boys and possibly find places for them. They came regularly to the orphanage to discuss individual boys with the teachers, priest, and *guardiano*, and to set their own eye on the children, bearing in mind the needs of masters they knew who could take on an apprentice. If Ruggiero di Lorenzo di Castelfocognano were a boy of moderate abilities or prospects, he might even be put into domestic service.\(^{52}\)

Memmo argued that fathers should not be ashamed to put their boys in a house with another master, suggesting that at certain social levels the boarding out of apprentices was not widely practiced. In Memmo’s view, the boys would more likely become better masters as a result of living in someone else’s care than if they stayed in the parental shadow. Nervous parents ought to be more concerned with ensuring that the master was a moral man who wouldn’t teach bad habits or involve the boy in illegal activities. They should also ensure that he was humane and not cruel like the many masters who beat their charges severely, sometimes to the point of injury, illness, or death.\(^{53}\)

Orphanage staff and confraternal or magisterial supervisors were not in such a hurry to unload their charges that they ignored questions of shame or security when it came to apprenticeships. They looked for “worthy” ones. S. Bartolomeo di Reno, for example, insisted that supervisors avoid the unstable weaving trade, unprofitable occupations like spinning, and any dishonorable crafts. Beyond that, it echoed Memmo in cautioning against work that the boy didn’t find enjoyable. A similar concern with the institution’s reputation and with the orphans’ long-term prospects led Amsterdam’s Burgerweeshuis orphanage to forbid its charges from shipping out with the East India Company.\(^{54}\) In both instances, these institutions turned their backs on some local employers who were often short of workers because the *confratelli* felt the work was not honorable. There was at least as much concern that the supervisors not make themselves vulnerable to embarrassing charges of exploitation. All the homes firmly prohibited the *confratelli* or magistrates from employing the boys in their own homes or workshops. Rather, as guardians they were to place the boys carefully and then visit
them regularly in their new workplaces to ensure that the boys were behaving themselves and that they were not being mistreated. In the early stages of his apprenticeship, an orphanage boy might expect to see an orphanage visitor as much as once a week, but after a few months these visits would drop off sharply. In order to preserve the dignity of his office, the visitor’s role was limited to investigating the boy’s performance, deportment, and treatment. Collecting the boy’s salary was left to an employee—S. Onofrio’s guardian spent part of his days going from shop to shop for this purpose—or to one of the confraternity’s financial officials.\footnote{55}

If Ruggiero was unproductive, uncooperative, unhealthy, or desperately unhappy he might come back to the orphanage. Yet if his own misbehavior triggered that return, it would not be a happy homecoming. The boy’s new home with a master was encircled with an invisible enclosure, and he could no more leave without formal permission than if he were in the institution itself. The ambitious idealists who penned the Abbandonati’s statutes freely consigned to the galleys all those boys who for laziness, insubordination, or other difetti (defects) were dismissed by their new masters. If they had the temerity to flee, they would be permanently exiled from city and state—though this was just putting the seal of law on something the boy had achieved with his own two feet, and it was largely unenforceable anyway.\footnote{56} Statutes seldom spelled out either crimes or penalties, and seemed to assume that most masters and boys would simply follow the commonly accepted standards of the day. These could be quite rough, for apprentices were not known for their restraint or polite manners. Orphanages dealt with this discreetly, particularly if the boys did not live with their masters.

Religious holidays were often wild times when apprentices from different shops and even different trades would get together for games, conversation, and various sorts of trouble. Memmo complained that the young boys’ carousing overshadowed the spiritual purposes of these feast days and recommended that at the very least they go to church first thing in the morning. Orphanages went even further, by keeping the boys in for the day and using the opportunity to give them their lessons.\footnote{57} Even those who had spent the minimum time with lettore primo or the preceptor could learn more of reading, writing, and keeping the books of the shop or store. In this, orphanages implicitly followed Memmo, who argued that someone who didn’t know how to read, to write in his mother tongue, and to handle numbers lacked what it was to be a human being (“man-
care del proprio esser dell’huomo”). Virtues, arte, and letters are, he wrote, what make us different from “gli altri animali” (all the other animals) and orphanages aimed to ensure that as many of their boys as possible achieved this balance.\textsuperscript{58}

Where, then, did boys like Ruggiero end up? Most of his companions at the Abbandonati worked with weavers, though some turned to other cloth trades or construction.\textsuperscript{59} Bolognese boys ended up in a range of crafts, merchandising, services, and painting. Boys in other institutions like Florence’s Innocenti apprenticed in a similar variety of shops and workshops, and at least some seem to have moved from one shop to another in a protracted search for the work or master best suited to their own abilities. Bartolomeo, called “Abbracci” by his friends, worked with at least four different silk spinners from his first assignment in 1655 at age 9, while around the same time Domenico “Beco” began with a tailor but eventually worked with seven different masters in at least three trades, and Lorenzo “Grillo” began with spinner and ended up as a servant in the home of the cleric Carlo Altoviti.\textsuperscript{60}

Many apprentices continued to live in the orphanage itself, as much to save money as to save their morals. The fee owed to a master was lower if room and board were excluded, and as with fanciulle whose piecework earnings went to their conservatories, the boys could pass on at least some of their earnings to the orphanage to cover their maintenance. That said, the amounts earned from boys’ wages in Bolognese orphanages were nowhere near as great as what they could earn from either alms gathering or liturgical services. Through the 1580s and 1590s, earnings from boys’ wages comprised 6 to 10 percent of S. Bartolomeo’s income. The picture in Florence is less clear. In the same sample years just noted, boys’ paid work generated between 2.6 and 5.3 percent of the Abbandonati’s income. Yet an undated account that seems to come from earlier in the sixteenth century paints a very different picture. Of 187 boys then at the home, 80 were out in botteghe (shops) learning crafts and doing other work, and their work brought in 52.9 percent of the home’s income.\textsuperscript{61} Part of the difference here lies in accounting. The earlier list omits both the proceeds of the alms boxes and also the funds remitted to the Abbandonati from other Florentine ospedali under the terms laid down when Duke Cosimo established it in 1542. Yet beyond that, the Abbandonati was boarding more of its boys outside the home by 1590. The old Ospedale Broccardi on Via S. Gallo was so overcrowded that many boys were getting sick and some were dying in the close, airless rooms. Famine brought in more boys and made the old shelter only worse. While they waited for Duke Ferdinand to agree to let them move over to the S. Caterina convent by the city
wall, the Abbandonati administrators boarded some of the healthier boys outside of the institution in private homes. They may also have let some of the healthy working boys take room and board with their masters, sacrificing part of their earnings as a result.\textsuperscript{62}

Those working boys who continued living at the Abbandonati home returned by early evening in time for a meal. They may have taken their larger meal of the day around noon at their master’s table, but even the lighter meal offered to them in the evening was more substantial than what girls ate in their conservatories, with regular helpings of cheese, meat, and fish adding protein to a diet otherwise heavy in bread and legumes. When he reached the age of 10 or 12, Ruggiero went to the doctor for a physical examination and, if he was deemed ready for it, he would be encouraged to begin fasting on Fridays and through Lent. This meant skipping breakfast and lunch and having only a simple salad or some apples at dinner. If he wanted to try fasting at a younger age, he would be allowed some watered wine and a bit of bread to see him through, but if he was still in the home by age 18 or 20 there would be no such indulgence and also no excuse for avoiding the Lenten fast.

Homes generally worked hard to ensure that the boys received the diet that their gender and station required, and they were helped in this by their sharecroppers and donors. S. Bartolomeo di Reno followed contemporary patricians and institutions in buying up land in the rural community of S. Giovanni in Persiceto northwest of the city, and by 1588 had at least four sharecroppers there turning over half of their yields. An anonymous donor to S. Giacomo gave 1,000 lire in 1627 with the stipulation that it be invested and that the income be spent buying fish or meat for the boys to eat on Tuesdays. Up to that point, they ate that well only on Thursday or Sunday, thanks largely to what butchers and fishmongers gave when the boys came with their bags and baskets at the end of the market day. Fearing perhaps that the donation would be folded into general revenues, the donor warned that if S. Giacomo failed to give the meat to its boys, the legacy would revert to the boys of S. Onofrio.\textsuperscript{63}

Those boys already enjoyed food that thoughtful donors put on their table. Festive customs and seasonal availability determined what arrived in the S. Onofrio kitchen. Through 1574, for example, donors sent cheeses, meat, eggs, and pies, together with the more common gifts of bread, flour, wine, and oil. At the end of February, the boys went door to door and collected eggs, cheeses, and various pies or torte for a carnival feast (“per fare carnevale”). At Easter they collected even more eggs—291, according to the account book—and some torte;
Alessandro Gandolfo provided them with a live lamb, and Francesco Calice sent over a quantity of beef. Gandolfo came through at Christmas as well, this time with some pork, and Laura Bentivoglio and Piero Rastelo provided more pork and some beef for that feast. Private individuals like Gandolfo and Bentivoglio were dependable donors of meat and bread who wanted to make sure that the boys would enjoy a decent festa. While Gandolfo’s gifts were modest, Laura Bentivoglio sent baskets of legumes, containers of flour, and loads of firewood every few weeks from the imposing palace just up the street. With relatives sitting on the confraternal governing board and serving periodically as S. Onofrio’s rector, she considered this group of orphaned and abandoned boys to be her own particular charge, and periodically nominated one for entry. Officials were expected to be generous with food, and those serving S. Onofrio did not disappoint. Groups based in the neighborhood might feel the same way; the confratelli of S. Sebastian sent quantities of cheeses over from their casa a few blocks away as a way of celebrating the feast day of their patron saint, while the guild of Salaroli gave sacks of flour a few days before Easter. In times of need, S. Onofrio sent individual confratelli to visit the guilds directly and appeal for food, targeting those whose members more often drew apprentices and laborers from the orphanage, and possibly those whose own liability had been eased when the orphanage took in the orphaned child of a dead guild member.64

Donors of treats wanted the boys to have a party, but there was also more to their generosity. Food was one of the most common markers of class, and these Bolognese and Florentines still worked with medieval codes that stipulated that different classes ate different foods as much for natural as for cultural reasons. When nobles and patricians ate white bread, artisans a brown loaf, and laborers a coarse dark bread, it was not just cost that determined their selection. Mothers and doctors knew that a laborer’s tough constitution required a rougher bread to keep it going; white bread would not have enough substance or nutrition. By the same token, a laborer’s loaf would be indigestible for a person of better breeding. This code carried on to legumes, vegetables, fruits, and even garlic which, growing underground, was considered the very badge of the lower classes who lived close to the earth.65 The social politics of diet helped set the orphanage table. The regents of contemporary Amsterdam’s Burgerweeshuis orphanage were obligated by their own statutes to spend more per person on food than their counterparts at the same city’s Alemoezeniersweeshuis. The former institution sheltered the orphans of craftsmen and citizens, while the latter sheltered the orphans of the poor and indigents. The regents were true to
their statutes, spending over 50 percent more per child on their charges to ensure that these enjoyed meats, vegetables, and sweets—particularly sugar, for which the Dutch were developing an insatiable sweet tooth—that the indigent children, facing bowls of gruel meal after meal, could only dream of.\textsuperscript{66}

That said, Italian orphanage diets and food budgets are extremely difficult to describe and calculate since so much was built on donations and the rents in kind offered by sharecroppers, and both of these were often recorded imprecisely if at all. More to the point, in the absence of a continuous registry of boys, it is impossible to determine how many mouths were consuming the quantities of grain, wine, and meat that are listed.\textsuperscript{67}

Culinary treats evaporated in times of famine. Even staples were hard to come by as doors shut in the boys’ faces, pledges of flour and bread went unfulfilled, and prices rose. As conditions began worsening through 1588 and into 1589, S. Bartolomeo di Reno took stock: through the first half of 1589, its boys had collected 855 kilograms of bread, but eaten 12,105. They had collected almost 5,000 liters of wine, but drunk almost 16,000. The situation had become desperate almost overnight. In 1588, the home spent lire 3,718.3 on bread and wine alone, but took in lire 6,100.05 in alms and boys’ salaries. A year later bread and wine had soared to lire 4,936.04, and alms had collapsed to lire 4,810.12.\textsuperscript{68} The crisis was compounded by an ambitious purchase of real estate in S. Giovanni in Persiceto that S. Bartolomeo had made on the very eve of the famine. The farm had cost more than double all the \textit{ospedale’s} property purchases over the previous twenty-five years, and S. Bartolomeo counted on its rental revenues to carry the remaining loan, but the famine threw over all its careful calculations. Further liquidations made no significant impact, and with the succession of \textit{anni sterili} the urgent need to feed and clothe the orphanage \textit{famiglia} finally forced it to sell the property again. Marc Antonio Fibbie, a member of the board of Twelve Conservators who guarded S. Bartolomeo’s finances and someone who had also been involved in S. Onofrio for many years, bought it for the original purchase price less than a year later, paying part of the price directly to the creditors in cash and part to S. Bartolomeo in food. By the end of October 1591, with the disappointment of yet another meager harvest, the \textit{confratelli} authorized 500 lire to buy food for the boys “who don’t have bread, so they can live,” another 35 lire to gild the cross of the flagellant \textit{fratelli} who would process through the city seeking more alms, and a sum to make an “honorable” funeral shroud to cover the boys who died of hunger.\textsuperscript{69}

The hunger years of the late 1580s and early 1590s had a profound impact on
charitable institutions that housed large numbers around Europe, and some of them adopted strategies or rules meant to prevent a recurrence of the crisis that had almost resulted in their collapse. S. Bartolomeo’s *confratelli* threatened in the depth of the famine to simply open the doors and let the boys free. When that raised no public response, they approved a plan to approach noble and patrician families and ask each to shelter a single boy until the famine had passed. Both of these ideas had been raised at different times by promoters of Bologna’s central poorhouse, the Ospedale dei Mendicanti, and in neither case did the threats or ingenious alternatives gain a positive response. Members of the senate ignored an invitation to attend a special meeting in September 1593, and even after more liquidations, emergency strategy meetings, and appeals to the archbishop, the visitor was still reporting that things would only get better when the children had enough to eat. Smaller S. Onofrio required that any grain removed from its internal storehouse be immediately replaced, and this strategy together with its far smaller size seems to have allowed it to weather the period of 1588–93 with less distress than S. Bartolomeo.

Far to the north, Amsterdam’s Burgerweeshuis took a more businesslike approach by entering into futures trading on the Baltic grain trade and requiring its regents to have a minimum of a year’s requirements in storage at all times. According to Anne McCants, the experiment in buying grain futures ultimately increased the orphanage’s food costs, but even had they known this in advance, the regents would likely have been willing to pay for the peace of mind that it gave. In late-sixteenth-century Bologna, as Matt Sneider has shown, *ospedali* like S. Francesco and S. Biagio (for pilgrims) and S. Maria della Morte and S. Maria della Vita (both for the sick) traded farms and plots in order to get rid of low-producing lands, consolidate far-flung holdings into larger farms, and so improve their ability to supply their own needs. More followed S. Onofrio’s practice of stockpiling grain, and S. Maria della Vita and della Morte became major players in the city’s grain market. Though not liquid capital, land proved to be a remarkably fluid resource. Heavy mortgaging of their properties helped *ospedali* weather the subsistence crisis of the early 1590s, and many began redeeming these mortgages by the beginning of the next decade.

**Bodily Disciplines**

In the Abbandonati home, Ruggiero followed some of the same domestic rhythms that conservatory girls did, though he was not expected to do any do-
mestic duties. The deputy nurse ensured that he had a bath at least once a week and had his head washed when required; she also aired out the dormitories so that miasmic vapors could not collect and make him sick. If he did fall ill, Ruggiero took rest and medication in the Abbandonati infirmary. In a smaller home like S. Onofrio, the battle against head lice was waged by the guardiana, who washed the boys’ heads in a great brass basin every two weeks. A professional doctor on retainer handled serious illnesses, visiting the home when necessary and likely examining the health of boys nominated for entry. Were Ruggiero to become more desperately ill, he might be sent on to Florence’s S. Maria Nuova hospital; his Bolognese counterpart might go to the hospital of S. Maria della Vita or, more likely, be returned to family or guardians until he regained health. For all that, plague could throw the home into chaos. Adding to its annus horribilis of 1588–89, when the guardiano was sacked for challenging the priest and property was sold to buy food, S. Bartolomeo had to contend with plague. Its first victim may have been the new guardiano, Horatio Mangardini, dead in March 1589, only three months after taking the job. In view of the immediate crisis in the home, he was quickly replaced by Giovanni di Bianchi, one of the three candidates who had lost out to Mangardini. Thinking perhaps that the orphanage doctor Alfonso Riccobone hadn’t sufficiently scrutinized the ten boys accepted the previous December, officials replaced him with another, Hieronimo Bellintani.

A year later, company historian Alessandro Stiatici wrote of the plague in his chronicle of S. Bartolomeo. Stiatici claimed that some of the new boys had been infected with “tigna & altri diversi mali.” Also known as tegna or tarma, tigna’s symptoms included head rashes and open sores with worms that any but the most negligent doctor, visitors, and guardiano should have seen immediately. Still, some contagious boys came into the beds of S. Bartolomeo’s dormitory, where almost a hundred slept. In Stiatici’s graphic account, like “a sick sheep who infects the whole sheep pen,” their worms wriggled across the bedcovers and into the brains of the healthy boys sleeping in the shut-up dormitory and infected them. Stiatici’s diagnosis may be imprecise and dramatic, but he had watched the plague march through the home claiming one after another. The priest and teacher both fell deathly ill, as did the new guardiano Giovanni di Bianchi. While they recovered, Bianchi’s wife and 20-year-old son did not. The contagion then hit the professional alms collector and the invitatore, a man who ran errands through the city including delivering door to door the written notices calling confraternity members to their meetings. This brought the plague
uncomfortably close to the homes of individual confratelli, and the massaro and Doctor Bellintani acted quickly to contain the rapidly spreading contagion by isolating the worst cases in the home’s infirmary. Remarkably, none of the boys died. The last victim, alms collector Thomaso Belfante, died in late October, leaving three daughters. S. Bartolomeo di Reno dowered these girls, but there is no record of them entering its companion institution, S. Maria del Baraccano, when that conservatory next accepted girls the following April.74

Cleaning the soul was more important than cleaning the body, since hell would burn more intensely than any fever. Beyond daily matins and vespers services Ruggiero went to Mass weekly and took communion at least every second month. The home prepared him for some of the devotional rhythms practiced in confraternities, though this did not extend to flagellant discipline. This didn’t mean, though, that Ruggiero might not feel the whip. Blasphemy, disobedience, and complaining about the officials were all considered spiritual faults that needed quick correction. By the same token, going out without a permit, fighting, or damaging furniture also pointed to a boy who had to be wrenched off a downward slope. From time to time, boys fled in order to escape the life and discipline, and the Abbandonati held that they could never return. S. Bartolomeo lost boys through its open windows, but kept the door ajar for their return, so long as they passed a second time through the formal review process. At the same time, the home secured its main entrance with a metal gate in 1587, and heard from a visitor in 1593 that the most important problem in the home at the time was ensuring that the bars over the dormitory windows were locked at night to prevent the boys from escaping and, presumably, to keep thieves and sodomites from entering.75

We can assume that sexual propriety was an issue very much on the minds of all adults who were trying to shape the lives of adolescents. They read their Antoniano, even if they didn’t aim to apply all its lessons. There is an implicit ambivalence in efforts to shape the boys’ sexual morality, probably because many of these men were themselves fathers and assumed a degree of license. We can see a bit of this from the griping of a Bolognese teacher, Giovanni Antonio Flaminio, whose Dialogus de educatione liberorum ac institutione (1523) gives an unvarnished if perhaps exaggerated view of the merchants and professional men of his day. Flaminio complained of corrupt and depraved pupils who echoed the contempt their fathers demonstrated toward teachers, treating them like cooks or stable-hands. They snorted at religion and mocked clerics. In front of their sons, these
men boasted of the women they had seduced and the men they had murdered. They armed them with knives, recruited them into their feuds, and applauded when the boys were audacious or impudent. Flaminio’s solution was to hustle the boys into boarding schools away from the subversive example and active encouragement of their fathers. The men who poured their time, energy, and money into running orphanages probably had a less laissez-faire or libidinous view of childrearing. Yet in contrast to the stern warnings and overt enclosure that preserved girls’ virginity, orphanages used circumlocution in their statutes and never guarded the gates quite as closely.

Though not quite a “boys will be boys” indulgence, the general impression we get from statutes and other records seems to be that their supervisors, like many parents, were more concerned that the boys’ activities would throw the institutional family into disrepute than that they might pervert or ruin the boys themselves. Ruggiero’s lettore primo and his counterparts in other homes had drilled their boys in catechisms that counseled chastity, and we can imagine the prectore, chaplain, and guardiano trying to discuss the lessons of someone like Antoniano at the dinner table. We don’t find boys being thrown out of homes or forced into marriage as a result of getting girls in trouble, though given what we know of adolescent culture then, the argument from silence is hardly compelling in this case. Did the adults, armed with popular superstition, try to dissuade boys from masturbation by warning them that it would use up their limited lifetime supply of semen?

Sodomy seems to have been the sexual activity that worried Ruggiero’s guardians more. Renaissance sources used the term to describe both fellatio and anal intercourse, and may have extended it to fondling and kissing between boys as well. But while it seems to have concerned the guardians more than heterosexual activity, the evidence in orphanage records is so scanty and indirect that it is difficult to either confirm or qualify Michael Rocke’s assertion that “sodomy was an integral facet of male homosocial culture” in Renaissance Florence, much less that it was a common, if limited, experience for many Florentine adolescent males that their parents and guardians tacitly accepted. Children as young as 6 were involved, but only rarely; passives were more often ages 15 to 18, at which point most ceased participating in it while a few became involved as active partners. Prosecutions had waxed and waned under the Office of the Night from 1432 to 1502, but its judicial activity seemed to bear out the view common in Italy and beyond that this was a particularly Florentine vice: in their periods of
activity through the fifteenth century, a similar magistracy in Venice convicted 268 people and one in Geneva only 5. Florence’s Office of the Night investigated 15,000 to 16,000 men over seven decades, and convicted almost 3,000 of them.\textsuperscript{77}

Despite the stiffening of prosecutions under Savonarola and the republican government of 1527–30, the Office had been so slack during periods of Medici rule that some believed that the Medici saw sodomites as a constituency worth courting. Cosimo I initially followed this pattern, if pattern it was, until 1542, when earthquakes in his home territory of the Mugello and lightning bolts that hit both church (the cathedral dome) and state (some government buildings) in the city of Florence brought a sudden change of heart and the promulgation in short order of new laws against sodomy and blasphemy. The senate passed these laws on the same day (7 July), and contemporary chronicler Bernardo Segni certainly saw them as Cosimo’s moral prophylactics against divine wrath. Opening the Abbandonati orphanage fit in with both laws. One-third of the fines from the new blasphemy laws went into the Abbandonati’s coffers, continuing a long local tradition of using vice to support virtue. From 1440, half of the fines collected by the Office of the Night from convicted sodomites went to support various convents on Via S. Gallo, and in later years proportions went to the Convertite convent for reformed prostitutes and to the foundling home of the Innocenti. The connection to the sodomy laws was more preventative. The Abbandonati took the city’s most vulnerable boys off the streets and away from those who might prey on them sexually. In the 1550s, Cosimo I ordered the S. Niccolò conservatory opened to shelter orphan girls who were vulnerable to sexual assault, and the Abbandonati served a similar purpose for preadolescent boys. The 1542 sodomy law was passed only four months after the Abbandonati began operation. Unlike some earlier codes, this law levied penalties against young passives who usually had been almost overlooked, and it raised penalties for those passives who were repeat offenders. Both provisions would have hit those young abandoned boys who made—or at least were suspected of making—a living as male prostitutes. The Abbandonati could provide such boys with an alternative way of surviving after the death of one or both of their parents. In the end, after roughly a decade of more intensified prosecution, convictions (if not punishments) declined considerably from the 1550s.\textsuperscript{78}

Of course, if one of its purposes was to keep boys like Ruggiero from prostitution, the Abbandonati also had to work to make sure that its dormitories didn’t turn into schools for sodomites. Orphanage statutes never named sodomy directly, but it was the perceived threat looming behind a number of precautions
and prohibitions. Since apprentices often slept more than one to a bed, and were thought to be particularly vulnerable to the suggestions, inducements, and assaults of journeymen and masters, there may be more than just cost behind the common practice of having boys work in shops during the day but return to the oversight of the orphanage by night. But the threats and gossip weren’t just outside. Youth confraternities and flagellant companies that raised their whips at night had always been subject to raised eyebrows and suggestive gossip. How much more so a dormitory of boys who were looked after by some adult males that slept under the same roof? Rocke has noted the “strong collective character” of sodomy, but the orphanages do not seem to have been identified as brothels in the public imagination.\textsuperscript{79} Clearing boys out of the homes by age 18 may have helped control some of the gossip, though it would not prevent younger boys from servicing each other. S. Bartolomeo di Reno thought it worth recording in 1583 that its newly opened dormitory had a single bed for each boy—it did not spell out the reasons for its pride or relief, but individual beds certainly reduced the opportunities for consenting encounters or assaults. What had been stated in its 1550 statutes was that the guardiano had to prowl the halls and dormitories of both the boys and the staff day and night at all hours on the look out for anything dishonorable or dishonest, and had to report these activities immediately to the confraternity’s rector and massauro. The officials, for their part, were to expel any boys or staff whose vices, scandals, or fighting dishonored the home. The passage was repeated twice in two pages, with added emphasis on reporting any thing (cosa alcuna), and the final note that if the guardiano failed to report any dishonorable activities, he would be considered guilty of them himself and would be thrown out immediately. S. Onofrio had similar regulations.

Given the prevailing culture of sodomy, adult males like the preceptor, the priest, and the guardiano were likely to be seen as a greater threat to the boys than older putti (boys) were. Popular plays, songs, and gossipy legend stereotyped teachers as irrepressible sodomites. Ruggiero’s teachers and supervisors at the Abbandonati were warned that the best way to keep the “wolf of human nature at bay” was to keep themselves in the “collective eye” (occhio corporale) of the guardian and rector. None of them should sneak off to the storerooms, or bedrooms, or remote corners of the house, and when they met with the boys, there should always be at least eight in the group. The rules condemned silence as much as the act itself, judging that anyone who failed to report was complicit.\textsuperscript{80} These concerns help us understand why homes routinely wanted their male staff to be over 30 or even, in the case of S. Bartolomeo di Reno, over 40;
in late-fifteenth-century Florence, the overwhelming number of active partners arrested by the Office of the Night were between ages 18 and 30.\textsuperscript{81} Ruggiero’s overseers at the Abbandonati were to make sure that the boys received training in moral virtues, and that day and night they were kept occupied so that they wouldn’t fall into the dangerous leisure that would give opportunity to commit “an infinity of sins.”\textsuperscript{82}

Prayers and a diet of bread and water were the first tools used to correct a wayward boy, but if he continued his slide into immorality then by the third or fourth time he could face a whipping. The \textit{guardiano} and rector could certainly impose this, but homes wanted to both build self-discipline and get their wards ready for the kind of discipline that they might face once they entered a craft and became subject to the justice of the guild. To this end, if Ruggiero broke the rules, the Abbandonati’s \textit{guardiano} and rector could empanel a tribunal of seven of his most God-fearing and upright peers (“piu timoratj e piu recti di tutta la casa”) to hear the case against him and give a punishment that did not exceed the regulations. The experience was considered as valuable for the juvenile judges as it was for the juvenile delinquent, though it no doubt left lingering resentments in the home and may have opened the judges to some kinds of unpleasant retribution. If a boy simply would not submit to discipline, then he could be expelled. Only the Abbandonati, whose early supervisors were eager to send male-factors to pull the oars on Florence’s galleys, set out the procedures for expulsion.\textsuperscript{83}

As Ruggiero grew into adolescence, he spent more and more of his time outside the home working with craftsmen, collecting alms, or participating in public liturgical life. It was an experience opposite that of the girls in the conservatories, whose movements were ever more restricted as they matured into their late teens. But all of this was not far from what adolescent girls and boys who still lived with their parents experienced. Orphanage children were being prepared to enter their new lives with the best possible advantages: virginity and a dowry for girls, and education and an occupation for boys. Ruggiero would have to be able to handle the culture of the streets confidently if he was to survive, and for that he needed to be allowed to experience it in manageable doses while he was still under the protective care of those he could consider his surrogate parents, the Abbandonati staff and the Bigallo magistrates. Having seen something of the life of girls like Valeria di Bartolomeo di Pavia and boys like Ruggiero di Lorenzo da Castelfocognano, we can turn our attention now to the adults who stood to them \textit{in loco parentis}. Who were these people, and what motivated them to take on the challenge of caring for orphaned and abandoned children?