

Percorsi di protezione della gravidanza del parto e della prima infanzia. Exhibition catalogue ed. Giancarlo Baronti. Corciano, 7–22 August 1999. Corciano: n.p., 1999. 127 pp., b/w and colour illustrations, no ISBN, no price.

This catalogue highlights the most recent exhibition mounted in conjunction with the “Agosto Corcianese” program in the Umbrian town of Corciano. The fruit of a collaborative effort between the *Pro Loco* of Corciano, various cultural bureaus, the University of Perugia, and the Banca di Credito Cooperativo di Mantignana, the aim of the exhibition, like previous ones, was “to document a specific aspect of popular culture.” In this case, it presented works expressing our perennial fascination with, and anxiety toward, the “cardinal moments of human life”—pregnancy, childbirth, and infancy.

Assembling works found in local museums, the exhibition and its catalogue can be divided into two principal sections: paintings representing Christian iconography and relics reflecting popular superstition. The works are a thematically organized sampling of Umbria’s rich cultural patrimony, evidence of the region’s status not only as geographical centre of the peninsula, but also as an important centre of Italian culture. The commentaries on the catalogue entries consist of three short essays that examine various aspects of the exhibit: the first discusses a newly recovered fresco in the church of San Fortunato in Perugia depicting the Virgin Mary nursing the child Jesus; the second outlines the activities of the orphanage of Santa Maria della Misericordia in Perugia; and the third examines relics pertaining to pregnancy, birth, and infancy.

This last essay discusses various amulets and talismanic stones traditionally linked to pregnancy and childbirth, thereby offering a rare glimpse into popular tradition and superstition. Its author, Giancarlo Baronti, provides an insightful discussion of items thought to possess therapeutic qualities, such as the so-called eagle stones. Because of their rarity and cost, these stones were used primarily by elite women, such as the duchess Isabella d’Este who, in a letter from 1494, wrote of the “pietra de Aquila” which she recommended for its ability to “facilitare el parto.”

Luigi Tittarelli’s essay on the foundlings of the Ospedale di Santa Maria della Misericordia will be of interest to confraternity scholars because the confraternity of the Misericordia was involved with the hospice from its inception. For reasons of space and brevity Tittarelli does not discuss in depth the confraternity’s role as founder of the orphanage, but he does refer the reader to several other secondary sources that will serve that purpose. Confraternity scholars will find in it a general overview of the orphanage and a good bibliographical source. Social historians will appreciate the essay’s fascinating discussion of wet-nursing arrangements, as well as its child care and mortality statistics.

While the three short essays make no attempt at presenting a unified approach to the theme of motherhood, the catalogue as a whole can be quite useful to scholars. As its editor points out in the introduction, the objective of the exhibition and of the catalogue was “to make the objects speak.” By providing high quality reproductions and adequate descriptions, the reader will find that the catalogue

does just that: it leaves interpretations to others and allows the paintings and relics to express the anxiety and joy surrounding the “cardinal moments of life.”

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Sandri, Lucia. *L'Ospedale di S. Maria della Scala di S. Gimignano nel Quattrocento. Contributo alla storia dell'infanzia abbandonata*. Biblioteca della “Miscellanea storica della Valdelsa”, 4 [Castelfiorentino]: Società storica della Valdelsa, 1982. 217 pp. no ISBN. L. 15,000

Lucia Sandri is one of the Italian scholars who has contributed the most to our understanding of patterns of infant abandonment and surrogate institutional care for children in fifteenth century Tuscany. She has written extensively on Florence's Ospedale degli Innocenti and other institutions and, apart from her own work, has promoted collaborative research through conferences and essay collections. This earlier work of Sandri's demonstrates the careful archival scholarship that characterizes her more recent books and articles, and sets the institution in its broader social context.

The Ospedale di Santa Maria della Scala in San Gimignano arose in 1315 from the legacy of a local notary who stipulated that its administration and name follow those of Siena's famous Ospedale di Santa Maria della Scala. It remained under Sienese direction until Duke Cosimo I merged it with Florence's Innocenti in 1553–54 as a prelude to his conquest of Siena the following year. Following patterns seen elsewhere, the Ospedale's greatest influx of legacies came in its first few decades, and particularly in the wake of the Black Death of 1348. These were sometimes the gifts of older people whose generosity allowed them to live and work in the home as oblates and then to be buried by the Ospedale after their deaths. Inventories of 1428, 1453, and 1478 allow Sandri to track the patrimony of the Ospedale which, while it declined in certain respects, still allowed the institution to supply its own agricultural needs.

Particular chapters trace the personnel of the Ospedale (including wetnurses) and its peripheral activity of organizing pilgrimages, but the bulk of Sandri's work is given over to analyzing the foundlings: their origins, gender, age, and condition on entry, and their passage out of the home back to families, to work, to marriage, or to religious vocations. The overwhelming majority of children entered within the first month after birth, over 85% of them illegitimate. Most were left just after sunset or around midnight, deposited in a small font attached to a column or left at other institutions and passed on to the foundling home. From 1413 to 1512, 400–500 infants (a twenty-year documentary lapse prevents a firm figure) were abandoned, almost 60% of them girls. Only 40% left the institution alive; of the remainder, 25% died within 4 weeks, 40% within a year, 22% by age 3, and 13% by age 6. The living left for fates which, for the most part, are unknown; of