

drals,” it is instead a fine, labour intensive list of documents, related to Cologne and its cathedral, ranging from the thirteenth to the seventeenth century. Each chapter is introduced with a solid, if short, summary of the literature and sources, written by one of Cologne’s archivists.

Michael Milway

Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies

Victoria University (Toronto)

Aranci, Gilberto. *Vittorio Dell’Ancisa. Un prete fiorentino del Cinquecento e l’origine delle “Stabilite nella Carità”*. Pubblicazioni dell’Archivio Arcivescovile di Firenze, Studi e Testi 4. Firenze: Giampiero Pagnini Editore, 1997. 141 pp. ISBN 88-8251-015-8

This is a study of the origins of the “Stabilite nella Carità,” a women’s organization (and eventually a convent) originally established in Florence in the sixteenth century but now in Monticelli (Tuscany). With this work Gilberto Aranci focuses on the figure of Vittorio Dell’Ancisa and on his role in the founding of the Stabilite. He analyses carefully the relatively limited source material available at the convent and Dell’Ancisa’s correspondence.

The volume is divided into seven chapters. Chapters one to five focus on Dell’Ancisa’s life (1537–1598), something that has not received sufficient attention in other scholarly works on the Stabilite or on Florentine religious life in the Cinquecento. In providing such a detailed biography, Aranci’s expressed intention is to shed more light on the progressive steps that finally led to the founding of the convent. One of the most important sources for this section is the late seventeenth-century biography of Dell’Ancisa by Francesco Cionacci, who also gathered a number of Dell’Ancisa’s letters into a folder. Aranci also pays careful attention to Dell’Ancisa’s friendship with Saint Philip Neri, a key figure in his life for he encouraged and supported Dell’Ancisa’s already generous inclination to charitable activities. Aranci also stresses the fact that the Stabilite were originally established as a hostel for pilgrims, it then became reserved exclusively for women, and only at a later date (1589) did Dell’Ancisa decide to turn it into a temporary shelter for homeless young women. Some of these young women eventually took the veil and remained in the community for the rest of their lives (hence the name Stabilite, meaning “established, settled”).

The last two chapters are dedicated to Vittorio Dell’Ancisa’s written works, especially to those that established the regulations for the running of the House and set the rules to be followed by the women in it. Aranci explains in detail the elaborate allegories of Dell’Ancisa’s works on the body and the soul, and looks closely at his treatise on meditation, providing an edition of it in the appendix.

Aranci’s study will be of interest to scholars working on Florentine confraternities and on the religious life of Cinquecento Italy because of the enormous contribution it makes in bringing to light the life and works of Vittorio Dell’Ancisa, a Florentine priest (an Oratorian) whose spiritual life and whose

charitable mission found their roots in the Florentine confraternity network of that time. Dell' Ancisa had been, in fact, an active member of Florentine confraternities, from the Arcangelo Raffaello (in his youth) to San Tommaso d'Aquino (in his adulthood).

Gabriella Corona  
Centre for Medieval Studies  
University of Toronto

Arrizabalaga, Jon, John Henderson, and Roger French. *The Great Pox. The French Disease in Renaissance Europe*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997. xv, 352 pp., 30 plates, 8 figures, 7 tables. ISBN 0-300-06934-0

The great pox—a loathsome disease, often transmitted venereally, characterized by sores and great pain—appeared suddenly and virulently in Europe in the last decade of the fifteenth century. Its arrival in Italy coincided with the French invasion of the peninsula, giving rise to its most common name (at least outside of France), “the French Disease.” Modern scholars associate it with syphilis, but the authors of this new study on the impact of the disease on Europe choose to restrict themselves to the terms commonly used in the sixteenth century. Their choice of terminology is the signal of a new approach. The authors do not study syphilis itself as a biological entity (the traditional approach), but rather the phenomenon of “the French Disease,” that is, the reception of the disease by Renaissance Europe—the social, cultural, and especially intellectual reaction to it.

Despite its general title, the book is in fact a series of case studies, which are focused almost entirely on Italy, with one comparative excursion into Germany. The bulk of the case studies deal with the debates between physicians as they tried to cope with a disease that was not described by the classical and Arabic medical authorities, and did not fit into traditional, Galenic explanations of diseases and their treatments. The authors approach these debates, not from hindsight as a march towards enlightenment, but rather as a strategy to protect the reputation and profession of the physician, which was damaged when doctors could neither explain nor treat the disease. This approach yields useful insights, relating the theories developed by the doctors to explain and categorize the disease to their individual training, and their theoretical and political allegiances. In the process, the authors demonstrate how the sudden appearance of the disease forced the doctors to develop original ways of looking at disease in general, thus helping to transform medical theory. However, the authors' approach leads to a curiously fragmented discussion of the doctors' debates, which are framed almost entirely in terms of their training, their desire to further their careers, and the socio-economic necessity of protecting their profession. There is little consideration given to whether or not they were intellectually intrigued by the disease, or whether they provided any actual insight into its nature or cure. It is as if scholars' publications were discussed purely in terms of the influence of their teachers and as a strategy