

integral part in the building of Portugal as a modern state while also undergoing the transformations that Portuguese society as a whole experienced.

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Spicciiani, Amleto. *Povert  e assistenza nel Medioevo*. Pisa: Servizio Editoriale Universitario di Pisa, 2000. 253 pp. Euro. 9,30.

Amleto Spicciiani's collection of six essays – one of them in English, the rest in Italian – investigates the development of medieval and early modern Italian organized charitable agencies that aided and supported the families of labourers, craftsmen and trades people stricken by poverty in Lombardy, Emilia, Tuscany and the Veneto. Spicciiani provides extensive, detailed descriptions of eleventh to fifteenth century records taken from the archives of confraternities (particularly that of the “Buonomini” of San Martino), and gives us many personal insights into the quantitative data he presents. These archival records document all of the Confraternities' affairs, from their procedures in providing assistance (public distribution of goods, home visitations), to the quantities and the types of aid (money, food, grain, linen, wool, etc.) given to working class families in hardship.

The essays are set in sequential order according to the respective time period they examine; at the end of each article Spicciiani concisely summarizes the numerous records contained therein, and then provides us with insightful inferences drawn from the extensive statistical information that he has placed before us. One such inference – which Spicciiani iterates in the second, fourth and fifth essays – is his astute deduction that the large influx of craftsmen and prominent trades people who in the later thirteenth century were compelled to turn to public institutions for assistance incited a new, broader and more inclusive definition of the category of ‘*poveri vergognosi*’ – a title that traditionally had exclusively denoted members of the nobility who had fallen into poverty through unforeseeable circumstances. Spicciiani's interpretation of the statistical information underscores how, from the thirteenth century onwards, changes in confraternal and public attitudes toward the poor were observably linked with socio-economic and political circumstances. The author's comments for the most part focus on the Buonomini Confraternity's selective distribution of alms based on the social status of individual families; poor people whose surname tied them to a highly recognisable family of the now powerful merchant class would receive more alms than those who had no such affiliation. Regardless of the author's very specific points of reference, the detailed statistical and documental information he provides can be of interest to researchers from outside the field of Confraternity Studies and the realm of religious studies altogether, such as Anthropology, Economics, Geography, History, Political Science, and Sociology.

Spicciiani's opening essay is perhaps the most important for the majority of readers, as it furnishes us with some background information that places the following

five essays in their proper context, and will thus be the point of focus for the balance of this review. In the initial section of the article, we learn that as early as the second half of the eleventh century, people of various trades united with their peers and formed corporate groups, which were documented beneficent organisations that guaranteed monetary and material assistance for the families of members who fell into difficult times. Spiccianni traces the development of mutual assistance agreements to their confraternal foundation, based on the Christian principles associated with brotherly love, among members of eleventh century Italian confraternities. There follows an analysis of the progressive growth of corporate agreements – founded on the same principles as their religious predecessors – between labourers and artisans of several industries, particularly the mercantile, wool and textile workers of the latter half of the twelfth century. Spiccianni subsequently outlines the way in which some mercantile and banking corporations began to grow in size and in wealth, eventually becoming so powerful that they influenced the political affairs of their respective cities. The newfound political power of the select corporations repositioned their locus of motivation, and they subsequently transformed universal corporate beneficence into solidarity of an exclusive professional group. This camaraderie between professionals eventually (by the beginning of the fourteenth century) developed into the rigid solidarity of a quickly rising social class that advanced its own interests through its political influence. Responsibility for the welfare of colleagues who had fallen prey to hunger and poverty was diverted back to the religious institutions whence the mutual assistance groups originated.

All six essays create a clear and lively picture of socio-economic change in Italy between the 11<sup>th</sup> and the 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, as Amleto Spiccianni highlights with his insight the historical significance of statistics and catalogued information.

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Wilson, Carolyn C. *St. Joseph in Italian Renaissance Society and Art. New Directions and Interpretations*. Philadelphia: Saint Joseph's University Press, 2001. xxi, 281 pp. ISBN 0-916101-36-3 US\$49.95.

Carolyn Wilson's absorbing book is a welcome contribution to our understanding of the role of St. Joseph in Italian Renaissance art and piety. This thoroughly-researched study effectively dismisses the long-held perception of St. Joseph as a marginal figure in pre-tridentine Renaissance art who provides comic relief as he seemingly slumbers through the momentous events at the dawn of the Christian era.

Modern scholarship, as Wilson argues, has misrepresented the role of St. Joseph in Italian Renaissance art. Wilson's book aims to dispel a number of misconceptions, including the traditional view of Joseph as primarily a Counter-Reformation saint, the interpretation of St. Joseph as a largely comic character, the over-emphasis on the saint as the model father figure, and the assumption that all references to St. Joseph