

THESIS ABSTRACT

“CHARITY AND THE ECONOMY OF POWER: THE OSPEDALE DI SANTA MARIA DELLA SCALA AND SIENA'S NETWORK OF CHARITY IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY”

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This study examines charitable institutions as a source of power through an analysis of Siena's largest and most prominent hospital, the Ospedale di Santa Maria della Scala. This analysis is accomplished by situating Santa Maria della Scala in the context of relationships between Siena and its surrounding territory before and after Siena's annexation to the Grand Duchy of Tuscany in 1557. Using the hospital as an avenue to explore these relationships, this work moves beyond traditional studies of politics and political structures to look instead at sources of power within rising states and the forces that shaped the distribution of power.

Following an introductory chapter, the second chapter begins with the eleventh century origins of Santa Maria della Scala, focusing on the relationship of the hospital's confraternity and administration with Siena's cathedral canons and the communal government. Throughout, emphasis is placed on the social, religious, and political power the hospital accumulated within Siena through serving as the city's central source of charity and playing a key role in civic rituals and devotions.

The third chapter shifts the focus outside the walls of Siena, surveying the origins, extent, and growth of the hospital's patrimony. This chapter, which includes two case studies (one of the Grancia di Prata and one of Spedale di Santa Caterina della Ruote di Todi), highlights the economic power and influence Santa Maria della Scala exercised across the Siennese state through its vast network of farms and small hospitals.

The fourth chapter then moves to an examination of the ways in which the gathering political crises of the first half of the sixteenth century impacted the hospital and its network. Through the early sixteenth century, Siena's government drew as needed on the social, religious, and economic power of the hospital to reinforce ties with both the urban population and subject communities. Using the letters of the hospital's rector and other supporting documentation, this chapter shows how internal political strife, increasing foreign involvement in local affairs, and the war at mid-century upset the distribution of power and strained relations between Santa Maria della Scala and the city government. The crisis of war necessitated negotiation not only with Siena's

political and military leaders, but also with the enemy. These interactions foreshadow the power dynamics that evolved following the war, and are the subject of the fifth and final chapter.

As the final chapter details, after Siena's loss of independence and its incorporation into the Grand Duchy of Tuscany in 1557, competition for control of the hospital ensued between local elite and the Medici of Florence. Although the Siennese government attempted to exercise authority and autonomy through regulation of Santa Maria della Scala, the Medici grand dukes were able to exploit divisions among the nobility to increase their own power in Siena and bring the hospital under Medici control. However, because Santa Maria della Scala maintained economic power through its network and remained central to Siena's civic and religious life, the hospital was able to function simultaneously as a local power centre and as an arm of the territorial state.

An analysis of Santa Maria della Scala and Siena in the sixteenth century thus contributes to a more robust understanding of the ways that the Medici grand dukes used charity and charitable institutions as tools of centralization to consolidate their political power and highlights the complexity of power dynamics that comprised the Grand Duchy of Tuscany. Furthermore, it demonstrates that charitable institutions, especially those established and managed by confraternities, deserve continued and increased attention in debates surrounding the transition in Italy from medieval communes to early modern states, and the distribution of power within those states.