

the audience, as always, remains implicit in the sources. Polecritti's use of the Italian sermons, particularly the 1427 Sienese cycle, is to be commended, but one wonders what else would have emerged from more time spent with his *Omnia Opera*, mentioned here only twice. Aware of the limits of the historian and sensitive to modern misinterpretations, Polecritti argues that the best way to learn from the past is to accept the information in its own context. For this reason, she relies substantially on the words of Bernardino himself to describe fifteenth-century Siena and the Sienese, which makes for a book as lively and entertaining as the preacher himself.

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Sá, Isabel dos Guimarães. *As Misericórdias Portuguesas de D. Manuel I a Pombal*. Temas de História de Portugal. Lisbon: Libros Horizonte, 2001. 149 pp. ISBN 972-24-1149-7.

The author explores the role of the *Misericórdias* – unquestioned rulers of charity in Portugal and its administrative territories – since their foundation in the kingdom of Dom Manuel I up until the era of the Marquis de Pombal, in light of the most recent studies and documents. After the second half of the 20th century, many innovative studies were conducted by Portuguese scholars on the *Misericórdias*, partly in the wake of the computer revolution that invaded Portuguese historiography and allowed for research and data collection that until that time had been impossible to carry out.

Isabel dos Guimarães Sá not only analyses the *Misericórdias* as institutional tools of the Kingdom and its Empire, but also studies the role they played in Portuguese local life. Particular attention is given to the initial years of these confraternities during the reign of Dom Manuel I (1495–1521). Chapter 1 starts by discussing the myth that the origin of *Misericórdias* is to be attributed to Queen Dona Leonor; it also examines the context in which they first appeared. Chapter 2 studies the structure of the institution both in Portugal and in its Empire (privileges, finances, administration, etc.). Chapter 3 peruses the recruitment of brothers, leadership, and internal and external conflicts. Chapters 4 and 5 enlighten the reader on the complexity of the numerous confraternity rituals and on their charitable practices. A thorough list of liturgical and non-liturgical rituals and the corresponding acts of charity is provided. Finally, Chapter 6 raises the issue of the impact on the *Misericórdias* of the Marquis de Pombal's legislation. The marquis' attempts to restrict vagrancy and mendicancy, and his repressive measures and work ethics influenced the future role of these confraternities.

In this volume Isabel dos Guimarães Sá successfully illustrates how the *Misericórdias*, which acted according to the same rules and values across such a vast territory, reigned without competition over such a long period of time while building a stable presence in Portugal. She demonstrates how the *Misericórdias* performed an

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