

Reviews

Brolis, Maria Teresa and Andrea Zonca. *Testamenti di donne a Bergamo nel medioevo. Pergamene dall'archivio della Misericordia Maggiore (secoli XIII–XIV)*. Preface by Attilio Bartoli Langeli. Fondazione MIA. Bergamo: Editrice Pliniana, 2012. Pp. xlvi, 275. ISBN 978-88-904421-9-3 (paperback) n.p.

As a source for historical studies, wills and testaments have long attracted the attention of scholars and enjoyed a rich historiography. This is, in fact, what Attilio Bartoli Langeli points out in his preface to this volume (pp. xi–xv) and Maria Teresa Brolis reiterates in the second paragraph of her introduction (pp. xxi–xxiii). The volume itself examines a core group of 47 wills and testaments drafted between 1253 and 1399 by 45 different women from the city of Bergamo, in northern Italy. Being only a sampling of a much larger number of wills and testaments, the volume does not attempt to carry out a quantitative analysis of the collection, but rather a qualitative reading of the selected group. The decision to focus on women's wills reflects the long-standing interest in the history of "gender" that has had so much success in the last decades.

Editing primary sources is always a very revealing and rewarding experience. In this case, the editor and the reader enter into a microcosm of women consisting of 37 widows, 6 single women, and 3 married women. It is not surprising that in this sampling widows should be in the majority: with the death of their husbands, they generally became the primary point of reference for the family—or for what remained of it—and gained more "autonomy" than they enjoyed before, becoming freer to choose and to decide their own matters. The women present in these wills all come either from the nobility or from the middle and upper-middle classes of Bergamo. As Brolis points out, "in light of their own specific situation, Bergamasque women chose as their heirs three major categories of persons: sons and grandsons, members of their birth families, the MIA [the confraternity of the Misericordia Maggiore of Bergamo, which ran the local hospital]" (p. xxxi).

The confraternity of the Misericordia was, in fact, the major association in the social and religious life of Bergamo. Between 1265 and 1339, the MIA had 1,730 women enrolled as members—the enrolment list of these women was published a few years ago by Maria Teresa Brolis and others as *La matricola femminile della Misericordia Maggiore di Bergamo (1265–1339)* (Rome, 2001). It thus seems completely "normal" that women should direct their testamentary dispositions towards this confraternity, as is also completely "normal" that these wills and testaments should have been kept and preserved in the confraternity's archive. Each of these wills and testaments contains a story that tells us something about the attitudes, interests, relationships, and even the feelings of the individual testators.

In looking at the various types of wills and testaments, Brolis often focuses on the items these women left behind (pp. xxxiii–xxxviii) and notes that

in some cases “the will becomes a kind of key into the woman’s house that, through the objects left as a gift or sold to obtain money to be used in various ways, allows us to look at her furniture, into her wardrobe, and even into her kitchen” (p. xxxiv).

Brolis’s introduction is followed by Andrea Zonca’s complete and accurate transcription of the 47 wills and testaments, followed in turn by a glossary of terms. A detailed analytical index of names, places, and institutions compiled by Attilio Bartoli Langeli closes the volume.

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Sartor, Ivano (ed.). *S. Maria dei Battuti di Treviso. L’Ospedal Grando secc. XIII–XX*. 3 vols. Crocetta del Montello (TV): Terra Ferma, 2010. Pp. 303, 302, 534 + ill. ISBN 978-88-6322-033-9 (hardcover) Euros 190. Vol. 1, *Profilo istituzionale: dal medioevo all’età moderna*. Contains: “Cronologia dell’Ospedale di Santa Maria dei Battuti in Treviso” (17–31); Giampaolo Cagnin “La Scuola e l’Ospedale di Santa Maria dei Battuti di Treviso in età medioevale” (33–177), David D’Andrea “L’Ospedale di Santa Maria dei Battuti di Treviso dal medioevo all’età moderna” (179–243). Vol. 2, Danilo Gasparini, *Le terre della pietà: il patrimonio immobiliare e fondiario dell’Ospedale* (1–290). Vol. 3, Ivano Sartor, *Dalla Pietà alla Sanità pubblica: L’Ospedale Civile di Treviso nei secoli XIX–XX* (1–534).

This elegant set of three volumes, all enriched with hundreds of colour pictures, delineates the history of the Hospital of Santa Maria dei Battuti in Treviso from its medieval origins to the present. The volumes are edited by the Italian historian Ivano Sartor and outline the ancient and modern developments of an institution that was born in close conjunction with the brotherhood of the same name. Each article is followed by an annotated bibliography and various appendices.

The first volume contains a detailed and useful chronology of the Ospedale and the essays by Giampaolo Cagnin and David D’Andrea dedicated to an institutional profile of this and other hospitals in the Veneto up to the modern age. The history of the foundation and its growth are analyzed in light of the changes in the culture and mentality of the times. The brotherhood of Santa Maria dei Battuti was founded in Treviso in 1261, at the time of bishop Alberto from Vicenza and after the end of the cruel Da Romano tyranny. The name of the institution derives in part from the widespread cult of the Virgin, to whom many churches in Treviso were dedicated, and in part from the practice of beating one’s breast or even flagellating oneself during processions.

The brotherhood was originally founded to provide assistance to the poor, to orphans, and to prisoners, but soon found its *raison d’être* in the