

Stanley Fiorini, *Santo Spirito Hospital at Rabat, Malta. The Early Years to 1575.* (Malta, 1989) pp.199.

This well-produced and well-researched book is much more than what it sets out to be, a history of Santo Spirito Hospital at Rabat, Malta. It is well on the way to being a general history of the practice of medicine in Malta down to 1575, and in fact much more besides. It apparently in fact seems to have started as an undertaking to publish the Santo Spirito accounts of 1494-96 kept at the Cathedral Museum archives, Mdina, but the study of the background soon came to occupy much of the foreground, and the principal document is in effect relegated to Appendix II. This is supplemented by a variety of other sources, several of which are also published in extenso (Appendix I). It is by far the most complete account of the subject published so far, and it is unlikely to be seriously amended except for some details (e.g. the name Santo Spirito in Malta can be taken back in surviving documents at least to ca. 1428 not 1467 as given by Dr. Fiorini) but he is correct in giving 1372 as the first mention of the institution under another name. And he is correct in much of the general outline of the history of the institution.

The main chapters, based largely on Appendix II and similar documentation, are of unexceptionable quality. In particular, Dr. Fiorini details in a masterly way the various stages in the rebuilding which took place in 1494-96 of the structure of the hospital. From a variety of accounts he builds up a detailed picture of the care of the foundlings and other inmates of the institution, the food they received ordinarily and on feast days, the staff of the hospital, both medical and other, the property of the hospital and other income.

But Dr. Fiorini is less reliable when dealing with other aspects. In particular he states that the cathedral chapter was often well represented in the town council, giving seven instances from Univ. 11 and a few others from later sources of the same type. Since Univ. 11 contains the minutes of some 330 meetings of that council, I would suggest that his use of the word "often" is surely wrong; "hardly ever" would be far more appropriate. In fact, the cathedral chapter failed to be present even in meetings when it was suggested that it should contribute to the maintenance of the town schoolmaster's salary or other public expenses. His list of occasions when the church authorities made such contributions really refers to similar occasions when such suggestions were made, with one exception, when the bishop himself was present

and consented. For the record of the actual church consent to such payments, when made and if still extant, one would have to look elsewhere. The town council was helpful with money donations to the church on some occasions, but one gets the impression that it held the purse-strings both of the municipality and the cathedral very much in its hands for most of the second half of the fifteenth century. On the other hand, Dr. Fiorini is substantially correct in his belief that "the Church, the Università, the Hospital were all active constituent elements in the organic closely-knit Establishment" though, as one can see, he may not have caught the precise mode of its operation. On the whole, however, this is a useful book to have for any one interested in wide aspects of social life.

The document transcriptions themselves show great care, but it is advisable and usually the practice on the Continent, except in palaeographical transcriptions (which would have to be far more technically elaborate than Dr. Fiorini's method) to extend all abbreviated words where there is no ambiguity.

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