

DOCUMENTS FOR A HISTORY OF THE HOSPITAL OF SANTA MARIA DELLA SCALA IN SIENA**Gabriella Piccinni**

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Abstract

L'ospedale senese di Santa Maria della Scala si propone alla riflessione europea: per l'imponenza e la ricchezza artistica dell'edificio e per la fortissima identità civica di cui è portatore, dalla sua centralità materiale e simbolica nel tessuto urbano; per l'efficacia delle soluzioni e dell'impianto economico di supporto all'assistenza; per essere stato, dalla fine del Trecento, preso a modello in Italia e in Europa. E, infine, che è quello che più direttamente interessa qui, per la consistenza, varietà e potenzialità del suo patrimonio documentario.

Dopo avere illustrato la struttura della documentazione, composta di 6.849 unità (dal 1240 al 1930) e da 5.566 pergamene del fondo diplomatico (dal 1194 al 1725) si richiama l'attenzione sulle potenzialità della documentazione ospedaliera di divenire fonte per la storia della società, dell'economia, delle istituzioni e della politica: tutto ciò attraverso esempi tratti dalla documentazione senese ma pensando che possano servire anche in una prospettiva comparativa più generale. Nel richiamare l'attenzione sul ruolo rivestito dagli ospedali all'interno del sistema sociale, economico e politico sul quale si reggevano le città italiane degli ultimi secoli del Medioevo, e nel dirigere lo sguardo verso l'economia dell'assistenza, Siena può, infatti, dire qualcosa di nuovo, proprio per la particolare ricchezza documentaria e per alcuni caratteri della sua storia e della sua economia.

Parole chiave: Siena, ospedali, banche, archivi, economia, documenti, povertà, assistenza

Abstract

The Siennese hospital of Santa Maria della Scala is proposed for discussion. The reasons for that are many: the majesty and the rich artistic heritage of the building and the strong civic identity it embodies, represented by its material and symbolic centrality in the urban fabric; the effectiveness of the solutions and the economic support structure for assistance it provides; the fact that, from the end of the 14th century onwards, it served as a model both in Italy and across Europe; and finally, and especially interesting to us, the consistency, variety and potential of its documentary patrimony. After describing the structure of its holdings, composed of 6,849 items (dated between 1240 and 1930) and the 5,566 parchments of the diplomatic collection (dated between 1194 and 1725) we will concentrate on the potential of hospital documents as sources for social, economic, institutional and political history. The examples will be drawn from Siennese documents on the understanding that they are also useful for a general comparative perspective. Siena, due to both its documentary wealth and several features of its history and economy, can indeed contribute much to our knowledge of the role played by hospitals within the social, economic and political system on which late medieval Italian cities were based and to the topic of the economy of welfare.

Key Words: Siena, Hospitals, Banks, Archives, Economy, Documents, Poverty, Welfare

1. *The Documents*

The Sieneese hospital of Santa Maria della Scala has been, for the last twenty years,¹ at the centre of new studies based on either the vast documentary heritage of the institution, or the results of the research carried out around the works of recovery and the valorization of its monumental structure.² The most recent contributions have shown a close relationship between written and material documents; the words and accounts, the notebooks and records of the hospital archive have started a dialogue with the earthenware jars and the objects used in its kitchens, with the images decorating its walls and the covers of its registers and also with the coins and the objects that pilgrims had in their pockets, since the Sieneese hospital was a major landmark in their journey to Rome.³

The awe-inspiring presence of the hospital complex in the urban landscape mirrors the strength of its presence in Sieneese society (Fig. 1). At the end of the 11th century, the hospital appears for the first time in the documents of the canons of the cathedral who founded it (1090); the management of the properties of the Santa Maria went from the canons to the hospital oblates (*fratres*) by means of a complicated historical-institutional evolution; in 1194 Pope Celestine III also granted them the right to elect their own superior;⁴ finally, during its maturity phase (end of the 13th century-beginning of the 14th) the *Comune*, which already supported the hospital and appointed its auditors, decided to place its own emblems on the front door, in order to assert that ‘the said hospital of Santa Maria belongs to the *Comune* of Siena’.⁵ This gesture, although invalidated due to the protests it aroused, is representative of the increasing commitment of the local authorities to welfare, in tune with a process going on throughout Europe. It also evinces the progressively close relationship between the *Comune* of Siena and the hospital between the end of the 13th century and the first half of the 14th. During the second half of the 13th century, the *Comune* was actively involved in the development of the hospital. It funded the extension of the building and its maintenance and granted it vast privileges, especially regarding tax and testamentary matters, while maintaining its supervisory role over the administration of the hospital.

¹ See the rich bibliography, both old and recent, provided in the synthesis by several authors GABBRIELLI 2011 and also in SORDINI 2010.

² On the archaeological research on the site and the monument see CANTINI 2005; FRANCOVICH, VALENTI, CANTINI 2006, pp. 273-298. The results of the excavation of the area in front of the hospital are published in BOLDRINI, PARENTI 1991.

³ Michele Pellegrini, to whom I am indebted for this information, alludes to three volumes, of different relevance and *raison d’être*: first, BELLI, GRASSI, SORDINI 2004; second, the catalogue of the exhibition *Arte e assistenza a Siena*, PICCINNI, ZARRILLI 2003; and finally, PICCINNI, TRAVAINI 2003.

⁴ Actually, two privileges issued within a few days, on 15 and 17 June 1194, respectively, are preserved in the *Diplomatic* section of the hospital, in the Archivio di Stato di Siena.

⁵ ‘lo detto spedale Sancte Marie sia del Comune di Siena’, on the institutional evolution see PELLEGRINI 2003 and 2005.

It seems that the administrators of Santa Maria della Scala, called rectors (*rettori*), were related to the sphere of local power. They usually had a strong background in economy and/or public administration. In two centuries, the hospital achieved remarkable wealth through alms paid in money and donations of landed properties. It managed a sizeable landed patrimony (both in the city and the countryside) and sought to make it productive by selling or bartering the worthless parts.⁶ This wealth allowed the hospital to lend assistance and loan money to the *Comune* of Siena. The wheat grown on its farms not only provided alms but also, in agreement with the *Comune*, moderated price increases in the city during grain shortages.

The present article proposes the Sieneese hospital for discussion. The reasons for that are many: the majesty and the rich artistic heritage of the building and the strong civic identity it embodies, represented by its material and symbolic centrality in the urban fabric; the effectiveness of the solutions and the economic support structure for welfare it provides; the fact that, from the end of the 14th century onwards, it served as a model both in Italy and across Europe; and finally, and especially interesting to us, the consistency, variety and potential of its documentary patrimony. Siena, due to both its documentary wealth and several features of its history and economy, can indeed contribute much to our knowledge of the role played by hospitals within the social, economic and political system on which late medieval Italian cities were based, and to the topic of the economy of welfare. The following section will be devoted to a brief description of the structure of its documentary holdings, whereas the second part of this article will deal with the aforementioned issues.

More than 130 years have passed since 1870, when the *Spedali Riuniti di Siena*, as the hospital was called at that time, deposited the precious parchments of its *Diplomatic* fonds –dating from 1194 to 1725– and two codices of statutes in the Archivio di Stato di Siena.⁷ The Sieneese public archival heritage, as well as the holdings of many private archives, was flowing into the recently created Archivio di Stato. On the other hand, the hospital was evolving into a university hospital at the time (1886).

That first deposit of hospital documents in the Archivio was important due to its antiquity, but it was far from complete. The true archive, and with it, all the documents no longer of use for the administration of the hospital, was not deposited until later, and that in two phases, in 1897 and 1956, respectively. Between 1960 and 1962 the outstanding holdings of the hospital were provided with a modern historical-institutional inventory. The most recent deposit, which is expected to be the last one, took place in 1985, when the great building of Santa Maria was stripped of the hospital wards and began its new life as a museum, cultural centre and exhibition venue.

⁶ See several statutory sections in PELLEGRINI 2005, pp. 43-44, 51-52 and PELLEGRINI 2004, pp. 255 et seq. For an overview of its rural properties see EPSTEIN 1986.

⁷ The history of the archive can be reconstructed from CANTUCCI, MORANDI 1960-62 and ZARRILLI 2003.

During this decade-long renovation process, other archival documents were found by chance, mixed with all sorts of hospital equipment, in a large room that had to be cleared out in order to hold the archaeological exhibition *Case e Palazzi d'Etruria*.⁸ This last deposit was formed by nearly 910 items, specifically documents dating from the 19th century and the first years of the 20th, although some of them dated back to the second half of the 18th century. With the arrival of this last portion, the fonds of the *Ospedale Santa Maria della Scala* in the Archivio di Stato di Siena was complete.

The Siennese hospital preserved, above all, the documents attesting to judicial rulings, in its favour or against it, and those related to its landed patrimony, as did all institutions. Therefore, from the origin of the hospital until the 15th century, these documents articulated the main archival series, the true cornerstone of the fonds, which were labelled as *contratti, privilegi, perpetue, patronati e censi, usufrutti*, (agreements, privileges, perpetual bonds, patronages and *censuses*, usufructs), and supplemented by the equally crucial series that contained the decisions (*deliberazioni*) of the chapter meetings (LUGARINI 2011). As the functions performed by the hospital gradually grew and diversified, its administration became more complex and so did the documents it generated. In particular, the administration of the patrimony of the institution brought about many other series of documents. That is how the second most important nucleus of the archive was formed, including thirty-three large registers related to the administration of the *grance*, fifteen large agricultural estates, or granges, into which the hospital organized its vast landed properties, scattered all over the Siennese state (EPSTEIN 1986).

This series comprises the beautiful *Cabrei*, that is, the inventories of the landed properties of each grange together with depictions of its buildings, acreage and crops. Another important set of documents includes the fonds of several minor originally independent hospitals, which had been absorbed into the hospital of Santa Maria della Scala or into other welfare and charitable institutions. They were small hospitals scattered not only all over the territory of the old Siennese state (roughly the current provinces of Siena and Grosseto), but also beyond its borders.⁹

The Siennese hospital has indeed excelled in the preservation of its own memory. Its archive –which includes the holdings of those minor hospitals– is formed by 6,849 items spanning from 1240 to 1930, that is, 690 years, in addition to the 5,566 parchments of the diplomatic fonds, dating from 1194 to 1725. As should be expected in every important historical archive, some documents have been cast off on purpose while others have gone fortuitously missing over time, however, the archive is virtually complete. At any rate, if its documentary heritage is vast, only a small part of it has been published.¹⁰

⁸ *Case e Palazzi d'Etruria*, Siena, 26 May – 25 October 1995: STOPPONI 1985.

⁹ These fonds consist of 335 cases, registers and files concerning the period 1373-1828 and belong to more than forty originally independent hospitals.

¹⁰ We must note two statutes written in vernacular language, dating from 1305 and 1318, published by Luciano Banchi (BANCHI 1877 and 1864). The 1305 statute has been recently reedited under the coordination of PELLEGRINI 2005.

In any case, we should take into account that the hospital of Santa Maria was born a century and a half before its archive, which only developed by the end of the 12th century. It was then that the institutional reorganization and the independent election of the rector (*rettore*) by the community of friars-oblates enabled an autonomous administration, which in turn created the need for the preservation of documents, weak and unconscious at first but increasingly strong soon after. Institutional awareness (expressed in the consolidation of a name that detached the hospital from the cathedral by turning the affiliation into a mere topographical indicator: from ‘xenodochium et hospitale de canonica sancte Marie domui episcopio senese’ in 1090 to ‘hospitalis Sancte Marie ante gradus Maioris ecclesie’, documented since 1188) also entailed archival awareness. Inch by inch, the simple compilation of originals developed into the preservation of duplicates in the registry. Two cartularies were the result of the arrangement of the documents of the hospital. The first one dates from the middle of the 13th century (1240-45); the second is from the end of that same century (1285) and collects many documents contained in the first one and obviously others, inventoried according to call numbers: the same system adopted later by the cartularies of the *Comune* of Siena.¹¹ In fact, such cartularies were not new; many municipalities of north-central Italy had compiled them since the end of the 12th century as a result of reorganizations and the copy of so many loose documents attesting to the royal and jurisdictional rights of those communities.

In Siena, the *Comune* started its first cartulary, called *Caleffo Vecchio*, in 1203 (CECCHINI 1931-1991; CAMMAROSANO 1991, pp. 36-39). In the preface, the *podestà*, Bartolomeo Renaldini, refers to the good of the *Comune*, the *utilitas*, the *communis honor civitatis* (ARTIFONI 1994). Later he explains that the cartulary had been promoted as an *opus utile*, since many of the documents of the *Comune* had gone missing or been damaged due to the negligence of their custodians and could be lost if their preservation was not attended to (CECCHINI 1931-1991, vol. I, pp. 3-4).

The preface of the 1240-1245 cartulary of Santa Maria della Scala, in turn, is an expression of identity that shows a clear awareness of the managerial purpose of the hospital. The *rettore*, who commissioned the cartulary, wanted to compile in ‘unius libri volumine per manum publicam redigerentur exemplata’, all the contracts of the hospital that were written down on loose papers. There we can read that it was necessary that the hospital preserved those documents, too scattered as to grant proper consultation, and at risk of getting lost:

cum utile visum fuerit et necessarium videretur ut dicti hospitalis instrumenta nimis diffusa que sine laboris magni difficultate propter eorum pluralitatem commode vel expedite inveniri non poterat neque legi et dum quererentur eorum quidam casualiter perdi possent facile vel deleri sive ledi statuit ut in unius libri volumine per manum publicam redigerentur exemplata.¹²

¹¹ Odile Redon notes that the hospital and Cistercian abbey of San Galgano were the first to state the need for a classification based on call numbers: REDON 1999, p. 54.

¹² Archivio di Stato di Siena, *Ospedale di Santa Maria della Scala* 70, c.1v, 1240.

The first extant statute establishing the regulations for the hospital community dates from 1305, but the first rules concerning the preservation of the documents in the hospital archive were added, in Latin and Italian, in 1318. Such regulations did not contemplate the preservation of the archive as a whole but only the safeguard of certain kinds of registers. The aim was to avoid the dispersion of certain documents which established, or modified, judicial rulings in favour of or against the hospital and to ensure the survey of the landed patrimony. The statute entrusted the preservation of the documents to the incumbents of the corresponding offices (the chamberlain, the *scrittore* of the *Camera* and the notary) (BANCHI 1877). Despite the use of numerous boxes and chests, stacked one above the other, the space in the individual rooms of the administration should have been barely enough for the bulk of writings produced by the offices. Therefore, they decided to use other rooms, at least in part, for the safeguard of the documents.

Bit by bit, the functioning of the complex organization regulated by the statutes of the beginning of the 14th century prompted the appearance of new deeds and several new series: *Libri a ricogliere*, *Perpetue*, *Patronati e Censi*, *Usufrutti*, *Entrate e Uscite*, *Contratti e Protocolli*, *Privilegi*, which, together with the *deliberazioni* and the statutes, constituted the core of the hospital archive. The safekeeping of the account books responded to the idea that the different types of books had to be closely related and constitute a coordinated system; within that framework, every book fulfilled its main purpose only in relationship with the others. This accounting approach was in keeping with the complex nature of the multiple activities performed at the Sienese institution, and with the necessity of following the administrative sequence in all its aspects, leading it back towards a global perspective in order to enable a wise and cautious unitary administration.

Girolamo Macchi (Fig. 2) should be remembered among the figures that allow us to reconstruct the history of Santa Maria della Scala. Macchi, who lived between 1648 and 1734, was a founding raised in the hospital. There he became *Scrittore Maggiore* and Archivist (accounting controller) and, especially, the organizer of the memory of the hospital. Abandoned as a child, he spent his whole life in the hospital and, according to his own words, performed several tasks. Probably, the first one, ‘i.e., as a boy in the archive’,¹³ marked his story as a child with nothing behind him with its heritage of memories, and therefore he recounted and reconstructed for the first time the history of the only father he had known, the hospital. His manuscripts are illustrated and full of transcriptions of documents, many of whose originals are lost today.

In May 1999, during the archaeological excavations, a burial chapel appeared under the pavement of the church of the hospital. It contained three perfectly preserved corpses, two of them as a result of embalming and the other one naturally mummified due to the microclimate of the tiny chapel. This outstanding find (no more than ten ‘dressed’ mummies have been found in Italy to date) aroused the interest of the international scientific community. One of those mummies was identified as Girolamo Macchi.

¹³ ‘cioè da fanciullo nell’archivio’, Archivio di Stato di Siena, *Ospedale di Santa Maria della Scala*, 5923, bundle 22, 22 January 1729, cited in MARTELLUCCI 2002.

2. *The Hospital and its Documents as a Source for Social, Economic and Political History*

I will devote the second part of the present article to the contents of hospital archives, whose documents have a lot of potential –frequently, yet to investigate- as sources for social, economic, institutional and political history. The examples will be drawn from Siense holdings on the understanding that they could also be useful for a general comparative perspective.

The archive of Santa Maria della Scala obviously records the history of the hospital, but next to written documents we must not forget that the building itself is also a document, with its monumental character and its less than casual artistic wealth. The Siense hospital appears as a depository of memories to be interpreted through both its material aspects and identity-creating contents, thanks to the studies of archaeologists, art historians and historians and the intersection of their disciplines, eagerly sought by the scholars at the Università di Siena and widely attested to in the aforementioned bibliography.

2.1. *Writing to Rule*

The first example I would like to present is the series of memoranda of the meetings of the hospital chapter, which was chaired by the rector and composed of the friar oblates, initially by themselves and later supported by a board appointed by the *Comune*. The chapter started to record the sessions in 1304. At first, these records did not have a specific registry and their composition and preservation was entrusted to the hospital notary. The series of records of the sessions recorded in specific books starts later, in 1379. From that moment onwards, the sessions were regularly recorded. These records show the interest of the chapter in deciding about several matters: patrimonial management, the loans to the *Comune*, the acceptance of new oblates, different aspects of daily life, the extensions of the building, the life and the future of the foundlings, the services provided by the hospital, the sort of registries that had to be kept, the drugs and the expenditures on the wages of physicians, the food and other products that had to be purchased or produced, and the rebalancing interventions in the administration.

2.2. *The Book of the Pilgrim*

A piece of European history pervades the documents of the Siense hospital through a very particular register called *Il libro del pellegrino* (the book of the pilgrim), which records money deposits. In 1382, a new accounting was set in motion for the deposits made by pilgrims; however, it only came to our knowledge through a register compiled in 1410, ‘a little book where all the deposits made by *Romei* (pilgrims to Rome) or other pilgrims were written, which have been for years written in the books of the hospital e inde si cassino’.¹⁴ That is, it was a book of accounts;

¹⁴ ‘uno libricciuolo nel quale si scrivano tutti e’ dipositi de’ Romei o d’altri e’ quagli già più anni apaiuno scritti ne’ libri dello spedale e inde si cassino’

one of those auxiliary registers containing a summary of pending entries with their creditors and debtors. On the basis of this small register we know that, between the 14th and the 15th centuries, a certain number of elderly men and women, anziani ragazzi, who went on a pilgrimage to Rome coming from even the most peripheral regions of Europe, deposited in a hospital of their trust the gold, silver, copper and counterfeit coins and the odd ingot and jewel they brought along. Many of these people would die during their travel but *Il libro del pellegrino* recorded the identity, origin and also the age, height, colouring, visage, beards, moles and scars of these unfortunates, all of which would have been of use to identify them in case they had come back to retrieve the properties they had deposited with the hope of returning. After a while, if the pilgrim had not make it back to claim his or her possessions, the money in all kinds of currency that appears in the register, was exchanged for common Siense currency, which was confiscated and recorded in the cash book of the chamberlain, with the intention of restoring the equivalent of the initial deposit in case the pilgrims did come back; hence the consecutive entries in the books of creditors. This simple document is quite exceptional, due to both the careful physical descriptions with the purpose of identifying the owners and to the fact that the actual specific coins that people carried in their pockets rarely appear in medieval sources. Also in this regard, besides the description of the faces and bodies of the travellers recorded in order to identify them, the book is a beautiful exception due to the, sometimes, experienced explanations included by the friar who assesses the quality of the coins among the variety of currencies we discover in the pockets of the pilgrims. In addition to providing a complete overview of late medieval European currency for the first time in Italy, this impressively assorted sample case, allows us to grasp the international character of the travel from the pockets of the traveller himself.¹⁵

2.3. *The Frescoes of the Pilgrim Hall: A Manifesto of Hospital Good Governance*

Between 1434 and 1444, two Siense painters, Lorenzo di Pietro, known as Vecchietta, and Domenico di Bartolo, who were both renowned artists in Siena and well informed about the stylistic innovations circulating in Florence at the time, received the remarkable commission of decorating the main hall of the hospital, the *pellegrinaio* (pilgrim hall). The idea was to transform that austere and solemn space not only into the place of welcoming for travellers and the sick, but also into a space representative of the grandeur and prestige of the hospital, a place to honour the piety, mercy, generosity, and administrative sagacity of its rectors. It is difficult to imagine that the artists did not bear in mind the other iconographic programme that makes Siena so special, the frescoes called of the *buongoverno* (good governance) performed by Ambrogio Lorenzetti in a hall of the public palace in 1338-39, and where, on the other hand, Piety is the figure depicted at the head of the old man sitting on the throne portraying the *Bene comune* (common good). Therefore, it is interesting to regard the frescoes of the pilgrim hall not only as a narrative of the

¹⁵ PICCINI 2003. The *libro* is published in the appendix.

policy and the culture of the time,¹⁶ but also as a sort of hospital *buongoverno*. The iconographic scheme of the frescoes on the west wall includes the care of the sick (Fig. 4), the feeding of the poor and the rearing of foundlings. On the other hand, on the east wall we are able to read the institutional history of the hospital: the mythical foundation by a cobbler (the blessed Sorore), the bishop giving alms for the enlargement of the building (Fig. 5), the appointment of the rector (Fig. 6), and finally the extension of privileges by Pope Celestine III (Fig. 7). The detailed contents of the paintings on both walls can be easily compared with the information provided by written documents.

Besides the frescoes of the pilgrim hall (and many others that decorate the halls of the hospital), I would like to recall briefly the covers of so many registers of hospital accounts, preserved in its archive, which are decorated with motifs related to their content and/or with the Virgin to which the hospital is dedicated. These codices belong to different series, which correspond to the many branches of the complex administration of the hospital. Thus, the typical Siennese custom of embellishing administrative books with the works of renowned artists was not exclusive to the initiative and experience of the municipal magistratures –attested to by the splendid collection of small wooden boards commissioned by the *Comune* of Siena from mid-13th century onwards for the account books of the State, maintained by the offices of *Biccherna* and *Gabella*–.

2.4. *The Hospital and the City*

I have already highlighted how the documents of the Siennese hospital archive provide a rich and precious source of memory for the understanding of urban life. Therefore I will only insist here on the importance of searching the archives of the hospital in order to understand urban history, since they are a true treasure trove for the understanding of society, politics and economy. The centrality of the hospital in the history of Siena is mirrored by the centrality of its documentary heritage in the reconstruction of such history. In fact, there is a deep connection between the significance of the hospital in the history of the city and the significance of its complex set of sources –the oldest sources are only material, while later sources are material, written and iconographic– for our possibilities of reconstructing that history and attempting global interpretations.

If the city and the hospital have remained connected, so have their documents. Furthermore, the history of the hospital, due to its old and close links with the city and its political institutions, is also partly written in public records. The hospital is permanently present in the memoranda of the meetings of the city council –extant in Siena in the form of a practically complete series spanning from 1221 to 1808–; in the city statutes of 1262, 1309 and the subsequent ones; in the account registers –the exceptional extant series of credit and debit entries of the *Comune* from 1226 to the 18th century, generated by the *Biccherna*, the office that managed the public revenue and the *Gabella*, the office in charge of the general collection of taxes since 1289–; in the registers of the

¹⁶ For an interpretation of the frescoes of the pilgrim hall in the context of the political and cultural history of their time see PERTICI 2012.

auditors of the *Comune* –the *regolatori*, an office instituted in 1363 and entrusted with the audit of the accounts involving public funds–; and finally, in notarial deeds recording testaments and donations *pro remedio anime* –extant in Siena since 1221–. All these documentary fonds of the *Comune* of Siena are full of information regarding the life of the hospital, whereas, in reciprocal exchange, the presence of the city’s society is clearly apparent in the documents of the hospital.

2.5. *The Recognition of the Public Service Nature of the Hospital*

With the urbanization of people from the countryside and the population growth that the city experienced from the 12th and 13th centuries onwards, the number of people in need also grew. The contrast between wealth and poverty was so sharp that it became an almost obsessive and central issue of the religious sentiment of the population. Up to that moment, the citizenry had supported both the birth of the hospital and its enlargement in order to cover new needs, entrusting it with the task of organizing and making functional the old, varied and uneven forms of assistance to the weak. Gradually, the city’s society faced the dissemination of new forms of need and learnt to recognize them by trying out new modalities of help.¹⁷ During the 14th century, municipalities all over Europe took care of assistance. They started to protect and sponsor hospital institutions, granting them tax privileges and encouraging donations, which were necessary to bear the costs of a social policy that ‘the State’ (or in this case, the city) included then in its expenditure forecast. Thus, charity and religious sentiment that were at the origin of donations and assistance, started to gain public significance through the desire, the impulse and the tutelage of urban authorities, who were aware of the social need for intervention. Urban medieval hospitals, as we have previously said, aimed their activity at a wide scope of beneficiaries: foundlings, the elderly, the poor, travellers and pilgrims, widows, girls without dowry, women in labour, critical and chronic patients, such as leppers, etc. They provided several specific and free services, such as shelter, material and moral support, alms in the form of food and clothing, even house-to-house, health care, dowries and beds for travellers. Hospitals also contributed to the creation of a ‘future’ for foundlings (work, marriage, convent or foster-parents) and probably offered chambers or small apartments to wealthy people who were undergoing difficulties due to age or sudden family loneliness (couples of elderly spouses, widows or widowers) in exchange for the donation of their properties or a money deposit. All these cases are vastly attested to in the documents of the Sieneese hospital (SORDINI 2010).

2.6. *Hospital Models*

From 1399 onwards, several Italian rulers discussed the assistance model.¹⁸ The process of hospital reformation that involved the Lombard and Venetian regions, was aimed at deciding

¹⁷ I have expounded on these topics in PICCINI 2012.

¹⁸ We won’t go into detail regarding the contribution of the protestant Reformation to the organization of welfare in the cities of the Ancien Régime, since much has been said on the matter. Instead, I would like to note the considerations and data provided by ALBINI 1993, pp. 84, 114-127; ALBINI 1989; LEVEROTTI 1981, pp. 89-92; GAZZINI 1993; HENDERSON 1997, pp. 15-19 for this period.

between a general hospital (*grande*) (a centralized model such as that of Siena and, later, Milan) where several assistance services were provided in the same space, and a hospital scattered over the territory (following the Florentine model) where diversified structures took care of specific issues and problems. Thus, in many occasions, in order to solve a crisis of the previous welfare and assistance system, the possible implementation of the Sieneese or the Florentine model was appraised, and that in regard of the control mechanisms of civil authorities over the hospital, the quality of the assistance, the management organs and the architectural design (ALBINI 2002, n. 8-11). We have found traces of the discussion of hospital models inspired in the Sieneese example in 1399 and 1456 reports circulating in Milan and the Lombard region¹⁹ but also outside Italy. In 1414, Emperor Sigismund of Luxemburg asked for a sketch of the Sieneese hospital.²⁰ In 1524, the description of S. Maria Nuova in Florence was requested by the king of England and in 1546 by Emperor Ferdinand I (LEVEROTTI 1981). Finally, the Florentine experience is echoed in Portugal (ABREU 2009). In Barcelona, where interesting welfare practises were experienced,²¹ the archive of the cathedral contains an extant recount of the management of the Sieneese hospital. But there is still more. In 1431, when the hospital of Palermo was founded, the hospitals of the Aragonese area (Barcelona, Naples, Gaeta, Rodi) as well as the two Tuscan hospitals of Florence and Siena were taken as examples.²² As attested to in the ordinances of the new hospital that was to be erected in Palermo by merging all the existing hospitals, a stable model was needed,

Item ki la universitati digia mandari oy scriviri a Barsalona, Neapoli in Gayta, Florenza, Sena, Rodu et altri famusi chitati, undi sianu simili famusi et caritativi hospitali et duviti ortari et haviri la particularitati di loru boni modi et ordinacioni di li loru hospitali aczochi di tucti loru boni ordinacioni et modi sindi pocza agregari unu optimu modu et ordini alu dictu novu hospitali circa la su gubernacioni et regimentu et si mancassi alcuna cosa fussi iuntu omni meglu modu et ordini hi si pocza trovati ad conservacioni di lu dictu novu hospitali.²³

¹⁹ LEVEROTTI 1981 and 1984, appendix, p. 288.

²⁰ The document is published in MILANESI 1854, pp. 63-65.

²¹ *L'almoïna dels pobres de la Seu Barcelona* was a charitable institution endowed with the necessary funds to provide for the sustenance of the poor and managed by the canons of the cathedral. Nothing new so far: it is but one of the many institutions of this nature born around the cathedrals of the Crown of Aragon between the 12th and the 13th centuries; we find them in Girona, Vic, Lleida and la Seu d'Urgell in the Catalan territory and also in Valencia and Majorca. The first appeared in Aragon, that is, Jaca, Roda d'Isàvena, Huesca and Zaragoza. Next to these establishments emerged others, such as the municipal institutions of the cities of Vic and Banyoles (here I draw from MUNTANER I ALSINA 2013).

²² On Renaissance Florentine hospitals, see an extensive overview in HENDERSON 2006.

²³ Briefly cited in BRESI 1986, p. 748. The document is preserved in the Archivio Storico Comunale di Palermo, Atti del Senato, reg. 30, cc. 17r-20r, 4 January IX ind. 1430 [1431]. It contains the ordinances of a new hospital that was to be erected in Palermo. It begins with the following words 'Capituli et ordinacioni facte et costituti per la Universitati di la felichi chitati di Palermu cum consensu et voluntate di li nobili Franchiscu di Vintimigla, di Ardoynu di Jeremia, Guillelmu di Lachabita et Petru di Afflictu chitatini electi' and with the king's approval. The document expresses their intent to merge the hospitals of the city of Palermo in order to 'reduchiri ad unu notabile et famusu hospitali undi li poviri peregrini et altri miserabili et inabili persuni pozanu essiri beni ressi, gubernati et subveniri di loru necessitati secundu voli, comanda e testi la voluntati di lu predictu serenissimu signuri re et di lu magnifici signuri vicere, comu apparì per soy sacri littere et per lu reverendu signuri archiepiscopu di Palermu ...'. The patronage of the new hospital would be entrusted to the confraternity of S. Bartolomeo and S. Giovanni 'di li tartari'. According to the statutes and ordinances of the new hospital, among which c. 17v: 'Item ki la universitati

2.7. *Hospital Documents and the Origin of the Welfare State*

The study of old hospitals all over Europe does not only respond to a wish to pay homage to the monumentality and artistic wealth of the buildings where welfare activities have been performed for centuries. The history of hospitals as institutions of solidarity and voluntarism goes hand in hand with economic and social history. Furthermore, historians also encountered the history of hospitals when they started to discuss the origins of the welfare state, the ‘welfare before welfare’, the ‘economy of welfare’ and the ‘enterprises of charity’; the search for the origin of the welfare state entails the study of the documents of old European hospitals. Better yet, the study of old hospitals, especially from the 13th and 14th century onwards, points to the issue of the relationship between society, ethics and economy. Therefore, from an economic and social perspective, the hospital of the Italian communal period is the product of the collective endeavour to face the problems of individuals who were unable to see to their own needs due to different reasons. Charity itself, if spent on welfare, also appears as a part of a system of redistribution of wealth based on voluntary contributions (alms in money, donations of properties to furnish a rent) and free manpower or work paid in board and lodging with an ethical motivation behind.

Currently, historiography approaches hospitals as one of the most successful forms of social protection, created, organized and funded by the citizenry;²⁴ it was one of the ways in which the men of the past staunched the wounds of social sufferance, in an effort to shake off the social and personal unhappiness to which economic crisis and social change seemed to bind them. As for myself, studying medieval hospitals adds to my conviction that if a society copes with its own crises and transformations –due to growth or decrease– and overcomes the degradation and uprooting processes related to them, and the subsequent destabilization of ethical principles and references, it is because it succeeded in organizing and funding some sort of social protection. The increasing awareness that charity (in this case, the assistance to those in need) was a necessity and a social duty gave birth to a painstaking and slow redefinition and revision of the hospital establishment.

2.8. *The Hospital Becomes an Enterprise*

All of the above is attested to in the documents of the hospital. In my opinion, the first question we must answer is: where did they find the financial resources for the functioning of the hospital? My aim is to draw attention to the progressive structuration of hospitals as enterprises of public charity.

digia mandari oy scriviri a Barsalona, Neapoli in Gayta, Florenza, Sena, Rodu et altri famusi chitati, undi sianu simili famusi et caritativi hospitali et duviti ortari et haviri [c. 18r] la particolaritati di loru boni modi et ordinaccioni di li loru hospitali aczochi di tucti loru boni ordinaccioni et modi sindi pocza agregari unu optimu modu et ordini alu dictu novu hospitali circa la su gubernaccioni et regimentu et si mancassi alcuna cosa fussi iuntu omni meglu modu et ordini hi si pocza trovati ad conservaccioni di lu dictu novu hospitali’.

²⁴ I have expounded on this concept in PICCINNI 2011 and 2012.

In Italy, in particular, we need to start the appraisal of many administrative and account registers of hospital enterprises, which were sometimes complex and nearly always multifunctional, within an also complex society, which was no stranger to business, money or ethical motivation. Urban hospitals, at least the major ones, became in fact important economic subjects which tried to create enterprises organized around the institutional goal of ‘making charity work’ or, in our own words, to supply resources in order to provide and manage, at least, the different forms of welfare. Such entrepreneurial connotations and supervising functions became more apparent over time, and emerge constantly in the form of administration books in the endless Italian hospital archives; these books are direct sources for the study of the institutions that produced them, but also contain an unsuspected wealth of name lists of the poor who received alms, the dead, the oblates of both genders, the series of prices, wages, currency rates and so on.²⁵

2.9. *Italian Hospitals Discussed How to Apply Rationality to Economy*

During the last centuries of the Middle Ages, a new idea of productivity caught on. In Tuscany we find the first hints of the formation of a hospital ‘entrepreneurial mentality’²⁶ in the first years of the 14th century. A very interesting passage of the 1318 statutes of the Sienese hospital is quite explicit. In that occasion, in the general context of recurrent crises that threatened major landed patrimonies, they deemed it necessary to write down that the development of principles of cost-effectiveness, which inspired their management in order to avoid bankruptcy, had made progress in ecclesiastical milieus, in hospitals and in aristocratic seigniories (‘le abbadi e li ospitali, le chiese e li nobili et altri’, abbeys and hospitals, churches and nobles and others). The administrators of the Sienese hospital were aware of this development and even took part in it. In fact, they wrote it down to justify the creation of more efficient tools for the review of accounts, since ‘è manifesta cosa, e publicamente si sa e dicese in Toscana e altro[ve]’ (it is manifest, and widely known and said in Tuscany and other places) that the administrator who does not take care of his own credit and debit entries, is destined to see his own initiatives fail shamefully shortly after, suffering ‘a povertà e vituperio’ (poverty and insults).²⁷ In the documents of another Italian hospital, that of San Marcello in Vicenza, we find a still clearer, if somewhat later, testimony. In 1490 the chapter of the hospital, in a moment of economic difficulties, formulated a principle of rationality: ‘poyché Dio eterno per sua clementia se à dignato creare l’homo rationale in questo mondo azò ch’el possa ordinare e dominare tute le cosse create sopra la terra ad uxo et comodo suo’ (since God eternal in his mercy saw fit to create Man rational in this world, so that he can order and rule over all the things above Earth according to his use and needs) with the

²⁵ See the historiographical reinterpretation of GARBELLOTTI 2002. On the archives of the confraternity, which include welfare experiences, see GAZZINI 2009b.

²⁶ On the harmonization of the charitable efforts of welfare institutions and their entrepreneurial management see some considerations in TODESCHINI 2002, pp. 477-479 and 2000, p. 46.

²⁷ BANCHI 1877, pp. 43-44: ‘Anco et imperciò che è manifesta cosa, e publicamente si sa e dicese in Toscana et altro’, che le abbadi e li ospitali, le chiese e li nobili et altri, li quali e le quali non guardano e provisione non averanno nelle loro e de le loro spese et entrate; e quelli e le chiese leggiermente e di certo deverrieno a povertà e vituperio’.

certainty that ‘l’homo in tute le conse ch’el se adopera sempre acostarse a la raxon mediante la quale ogni cossa se reduce a buon porto’ (Man tries to approach reason in everything he does, since in this way everything comes to a good end), and with endless faith in the thaumaturgical effects of reason, that ‘hè de tal sorte che fa aprire l’ochio de l’intellecto a l’homo’ (in such way that opens the eye of intellect in Man); and still ‘nullo dié dubitar gubernandose cum raxone, poder may venire in miseria alguna’ (when ruling through reason, no doubt must be allowed, since no misfortune can come). Thus, hospitals arrived at the idea of composing an estimate balance of the incomes the institution was to receive and the expenses to be expected during the following year from the application of rationality to economy.²⁸

2.10. *Hospital and Credit*

Sieneese documents show the strong role played by the Sieneese hospital in the world of credit, which stands particularly and vividly out among the activities of the enterprise-hospital –and not only due to the extant typologies of documents–. In fact, the hospital of Santa Maria accepted the deposits of money (especially gold and silver coins) voluntarily entrusted to it for safekeeping by men and women on their way to Rome and promised their reimbursement upon return (PICCINNI, TRAVAINI 2003), but it also received the savings of citizens in the form of money deposits the hospital could reinvest and on which it paid interests. All of the above illustrates the nature and economic services of a charitable and welfare institution, which was gradually entering a fully fledged monetary economy, and was conditioned by it, in a city that had made of money loans one of its strong points. I expounded on this matter in the book I devoted to the bank of Santa Maria della Scala, which was based on the study of a separate account register recording banking activities in the form of approximately half a million current accounts spanning from 1348 to 1377 (PICCINNI 2012). The hospital-enterprise played a strong role in credit mediation: it received money from individuals, it paid interests on that money and loaned it to the state, which, in turn, paid interests to the hospital. It is not surprising that this became the main enterprise of the city, especially in the 14th century; it benefitted from charity making it productive by means of a careful administration, redistributing it through welfare and using mainly voluntary staff who had to be, at least in principle, competent and honest. It seems clear that the Sieneese hospital, almost as a company of merchants and bankers, funded its own activities through the obtention of capital from the deposits of money of third parties. It managed, used, ‘moved’ and loaned money that was not its own –at least not originally– to the *Comune*, and received, together with pious donations, the savings of the citizens.

2.11. *Comparisons: European and Italian Examples of Hospitals Loaning Money to Municipalities*

It would be certainly interesting to compare Siena with the history of other major hospitals known to have been involved in loans to city councils. As usual, the extant testimonies among

²⁸ This beautiful document is published in BIANCHI 2010, pp. 225-228.

the documents of the Santa Maria della Scala seem precocious, since we find loans to the *Comune* of Siena at least since the last decades of the 13th century (PICCINI 2012, pp. 261-263), but the governments of other cities also incurred debts with charitable institutions: we have many data for Treviso and Venice, Florence, Milan, Vicenza, Padua and Freiburg, which span from the beginning (Freiburg) to mid-14th century (Florence), up until the 16th century.²⁹ The loaning and funding of public debt performed by the Confrérie du Saint-Esprit and the Hôpital de Nôtre-Dame in Freiburg are to be noted; they laid out capital on private and, especially, public debt at interest rates that varied between 7 and 10% at the beginning and then stabilized at 5% from the middle of the century onwards (MORARD 1987, pp. 275-296; VEUTHEY-WOLHAUSER 2002, pp. 77-81). The hospital of the Holy Spirit was explicitly called the ‘banque du Saint-Esprit’ (bank of the Holy Spirit) in reference to its activity in 1465. We also find confraternities that invested in the financial market of the city and used the profits to fund themselves in Cologne from 1427 onwards (FRANK 2009, pp. 226-227).

2.12. Comparisons: Other Examples of Money Deposits in Hospitals in Europe and Italy

The documents of the Sienese hospital, with their singular quantitative and qualitative wealth, make us wonder if the conclusions drawn from them can be actually applied to other welfare realities of medieval Europe. The disparity between the number of available documents in each case and the scarcity of studies covering such a long chronological span, advise against comparison, which would have to be only approximate at present, in the hope that new specialized research fills in this knowledge gap. However, scattered evidence suggests the existence of loans in the hospitals of other Italian cities. During the 14th and 15th centuries, in Milan, all major urban hospitals took part in this activity; for instance, the Ospedale Nuovo resorted to loans, some of them involving huge sums of money.³⁰ In 1463, a deposit bank is documented in 1463 in the Casa Santa dell’Annunziata, in Naples, and its activity became more explicit in 1547, when the Casa, claiming the emission of credit receipts since the 15th century, demanded to add to its charter the privilege of exercising banking activity, already enjoyed by the Monte di Pietà; by 1600, seven Neapolitan welfare entities were authorized by the state to perform as public banks.³¹ The money deposits in the *Ospedale degli Innocenti* is recorded from 1509 to 1579, (including the deeds exclusively devoted to deposits from 1564 to 1591), until the 1579 bankruptcy.³²

²⁹ Data summarized in BIANCHI 2009, pp. 239-269.

³⁰ ALBINI 1993, p. 99, referring to the study in PECCHIAI 1927, which records a list of debts incurred between the first decades of the 14th century and the first decades of the 15th by the rectors of the Milanese hospital (PECCHIAI 1927, pp. 92-94). In particular, in the 14th century, the author notes one loan in the Ospedale Nuovo and eleven in the hospital of San Simpliciano. In 1424, the hospital of the Brolo was deeply in debt. Zerbi analyses some of the loans received from 1391 to 1407 (an interest-free loan and two loans at 12-12,5% interest) and the register of debtors and creditors from 1394 to 1410 (ZERBI 1955, pp. 25, 28-30, 33).

³¹ The unfortunately isolated document of 1463 is recorded in the appendix of DE MARCO, NAPPI 1985, pp. 34-35. See also SILVESTRI 1953 and DE ROSA 2002.

³² SANDRI 2001

2.13. *The Hospital Acts as a Private 'Company', Except for Its Purpose*

The technical competence and the ability to manage businesses and money, which constituted a sort of cultural heritage developed by the Sienese in their business companies all over Europe and in the pontifical Curia,³³ bore its fruits in the hospital; its rectors had a background in the financial management of the *Comune* and belonged to families that were or had been engaged in banking activities. In the bank of Santa Maria della Scala, the rectors put money to work, opened, managed and closed current accounts, signed obligations and mandates, weighed coins, calculated and bargained profits, sealed, unsealed and cancelled with a cut the documents attesting to these transactions and carefully managed such a complex bookkeeping.

The books of the hospital bank were kept as those of so many Tuscan private societies (companies) that managed commercial and banking businesses. Therefore, the banking services provided by the Sienese hospital were quite similar to the services offered by the banks managed by private business companies which, for years, had funded their activities by means of investing the considerable capital they obtained through the deposits of third parties.

They were similar except for their purpose. In fact, this banking activity was not conducted in secret; therefore it did not contradict the charitable and assistential goal of the institution. The hospital staff were convinced of their righteousness and their respect for the essence of the wishes of their donators, when they created the enterprise and provided themselves with expert personnel, when they administered productively the money entrusted to them through charity, because that wealth would be returned in the form of assistance services. The hospital, its friars and administrators, and also the citizens who deposited their money there, seem to have been aware of a fact well known to us: money works in so far as it circulates and money in itself is neither good nor bad, it all depends on the use we make of it. That involved assistance, because only if the hospital became an operational enterprise would it be able to grant social protection to the population and carry out its statutory goals.

Regarding the social purpose of the Sienese hospital, documents show that the hospital chapter, the government of the city and the citizenry were in complete agreement. Throughout the 14th century, this charitable institution, connected to the patronage of the *Comune*, developed an increasingly articulated physiognomy that equipped it to give social meaning and direction to part of the religious sentiment of the citizens, provide assistance, competently manage a remarkable landed patrimony, operate in the field of credit, manage rather complex current accounts and lend money to the *Comune*. The hospital, which collected money through the alms and the deposits in its 'bank' and organized and provided services, acted as an influent mediator in the process through which the ethical impulse that led individuals to put at the disposal of others their own

³³ For a general overview on this topic, see the miscellany CIPOLLA 1987.

goods and labour was transformed into assistance for all those who needed it, that is, became socially useful. The slow development and transformation of the idea of the priority of *bene comune* (common good) over personal good lies in the background, and is the most similar concept to the modern idea of the duties of the *res publica* towards citizens that those societies conceived.

2.14. *Hospitals versus Monti di Pietà. The Relationship between Society, Credit and Ethics*

In general, the history of Italian hospitals is clearly related to that of the *monti di pietà*, the most famous late medieval establishments combining a charitable purpose with credit services. For instance, the Sienese hospital could legitimately use the savings that citizens had entrusted to it for an agreed time. Supporting this stated ethical function, the Virgin appeared on the cover of a register that listed the deposits for which the despised interest were paid (around 5%).

In Siena, the complex process I have tried to outline had a certainly precocious stage in the banking activity of the hospital, which, by mid-14th century received part of the capital withdrawn from the private sector; a second important and far less studied stage began in 1472 with the birth of a lay and public *Monte dei Pegni* (the *Monte Pio*), which made an effort to discipline the world of pawnbroking, that is, usury in consumer loans, during several decades. It is significant that the hospital, precisely because it had been born to provide for both the poor and the wealthy, was among the main sponsors of the *Monte*, with 2,000 non-repayable florins over the total 7,600 (SAPORI 1972, pp. 39-40).

2.15. *The Most Successful Form of Social Protection*

In my opinion, the creation of an ‘enterprise of public charity’ was one of the most innovative operations carried out by the middle-class government, which in Siena took the name of the *Nove* between the 13th and the 14th centuries. On the basis of the Sienese example, we could conclude that the most successful form of public social protection, among the different options tested at the time, was implemented in late medieval urban hospitals. Therefore, the hospital archive must be regarded as the place where a ‘collective stroke of genius’ took shape, a piece of the construction process of an urban culture of solidarity. In that sense, the citizenry as a whole looked for solutions to the problems of the people in need and did so through the creation of enterprises with a distinctly economic focus. It is for all these reasons that I insist on proposing the documents of the Sienese hospital for discussion, but also because of the contributions they may add to the study of the origins of the welfare state and the relationship between society, credit and ethics, which was a chief concern at that time and still is today.

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Fig.1. Siena: Main façade of the Hospital of Santa Maria della Scala, facing the duomo (phot.: A. Conejo)



Fig.2. Girolamo Macchi: Origins of the hospital of Santa Maria della Scala in Siena, drawing of the façade of the hospital, c. 1720 (Archivio Stato Siena, ms. D-113, cc. 59-60; phot.: A. Conejo, © Archivio Stato Siena).



Fig.3. Siena: Hospital of Santa Maria della Scala, Hall of the Pilgrim (phot.: A. Conejo, © Santa Maria della Scala)



Fig.4. Domenico di Bartolo: "Caring for the Sick", 1440-41. Siena: Hospital of Santa Maria della Scala, Hall of the Pilgrim (© Santa Maria della Scala)



Fig.5. Domenico di Bartolo: "Reception of Pilgrims and Distribution of Alms", 1440-41. Siena: Hospital of Santa Maria della Scala, Hall of the Pilgrim (© Santa Maria della Scala)



Fig.6. Priamo della Quercia: "The installment of the First Rector", 1440-41. Siena: Hospital of Santa Maria della Scala, Hall of the Pilgrim (phot.: A. Conejo, © Santa Maria della Scala)



Fig.7. Domenico di Bartolo: 'Extension of the Privileges by Celestine III', 1440-41. Siena: Hospital of Santa Maria della Scala, Hall of the Pilgrim (phot.: A. Conejo, © Santa Maria della Scala)



Fig.8. Domenico di Bartolo: 'Rearing and Marrying of Female Foundlings', 1440-41. Siena: Hospital of Santa Maria della Scala, Hall of the Pilgrim (© Santa Maria della Scala)



Fig.9. School of Giacomo Pacchiarotti: 'Our Lady of Mercy', illustrated cover. *Deliberazioni*, Siena, 1 January 1508 - 24 March 1512 (Archivio Stato Siena, Ospedale 26).



Fig.10. 'Virgin and friar of the hospital of Santa Maria della Scala', illustrated cover. Book of deposits and loans from 1346 to 1373 (Archivio Stato Siena, Ospedale 173).



Fig.11. Milieux of Andrea di Bartolo: illustrated cover, Usufructs, deposits and loans, Siena, 1 January 1416 - 1 september 1603 (Archivio Stato Siena, Ospedale 172).