

REVIEWS

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DROSSBACH, Gisela / WOLF, Gerhard (eds.), 2015. *Caritas im Schatten. Der Liber Regulae des Hospitals Santo Spirito in Sassia: Eine Prachthandschrift des 14. Jahrhunderts.* Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz / Max-Planck-Institut, Verlag Friedrich Pustet.

Caritas im Schatten is the title of a carefully edited volume by Gisela Drossbach and Gerhard Wolf in which several international specialists analyse in depth the *Liber Regulae* of the hospital of Santo Spirito in Sassia (Rome), the rule of the hospitaller order and a masterpiece of 14th-century illumination. The studies included in the volume deal with the style and iconography of the codex, but they also link the images and the medieval text with their place of production and with the context for which they were intended. The result is a book of great scientific rigour that spans many disciplines.

The book is divided into two main sections: a collection of specialised articles and the edition of the text and miniatures of the codex. Drossbach opens the first section with a historical contextualisation (pages 13-20) linking the *Liber Regulae* to cities such as Rome, Assisi and Avignon. The rule, commissioned in the mid-14th century, is an excellent example of the statutes and functioning of a late medieval hospital; the Order of the Santo Spirito of Rome was one of the most significant social and charitable institutions of the time, founded on the initiative of Pope Innocent III with the aim of focusing exclusively on caring for the poor. The editor compares it to the Franciscan order and inaugurates what will be one of the central themes of the study: miniatures as a method of propaganda and as a source of historical analysis.

Then, Kurmann discusses the relationship between the historiated initials and the iconographic tradition that inspired the codex (pages 21-32), focusing on how the artistic influences were linked to the content of the rule. Scenes such as the admission of the novices into the order draw directly from the text, but show stylistic features that refer to such remarkable artists as Giotto. Wolf focuses on the figure of Christ in an initial “I” as an exceptional graphic document (pages 67-74), and L’Enngle analyses several initials (pp. 97-110) to reveal their peculiarities and highlight the difficulties of the illuminators in adapting conventional iconography to the book format. The author describes the visual effects and the scenographic strategies used, emphasising the importance of architectural representations as decorative frames. Helas goes even further and relates these historiated initials to the medallions and drolleries in the same book (pages 111-128). These initials would be arranged with the aim of structuring a particular discourse in line with the statutes of the hospital order. In this regard, the copyists would have made use of iconographic sources that they would have adapted to the hospital’s own context, as is the case of the Bolognese Bible preserved at El Escorial, which Hoffmann links directly to the *Liber*

Regulae (pages 61-67). Apart from this Bible, Gibbs (pages 75-88) discusses the presence of a maximum of two copyists, characterised by a style full of vegetal decoration with a palette typical of Tuscan circles, stressing the Giottoesque style and the resemblance to Sieneese artists such as Ambrogio Lorenzetti. Pfändter (pages 89-96) identifies elements from Bologna, Rome and even Avignon, and analyses in detail the extent to which these three cities conditioned the decoration of the Hospitaller Rule.

From a more historical perspective, Helas also explores the possibilities of miniatures as tools for understanding everyday life in a hospital in the Middle Ages (pages 33-60). The self-representation in the *Liber Regulae* of a fourteenth-century charitable institution should not only provide insight into the order itself, but also into the way it related to a context marked by poverty and illness. Later on, the same author traces a route through the most important hospitals in medieval Rome (pages 129-146). Drawing on the miniatures, and linking them to the content of the rule, Helas discusses some of the activities that took place in the hospital of Santo Spirito (washing the feet and face, attending to the beds, dealing with lepers) and details the medical situation in 14th century Rome. The other side of the same coin is analysed by Bergdolt, who wonders how Rome's functional hospitals, including the Santo Spirito, reacted to the arrival of the highly contagious and deadly Black Death (pages 147-158). On a couple of occasions, the *Liber Regulae* illustrates cases of plague, but it seems that the institution avoided those infected as a matter of internal security and took them to specialised hospitals.

At the beginning of the second major section of the volume, Murano makes a codicological analysis of the hospital rule (pages 159-176) and ventures to formulate a few hypotheses about the number of hands through which the volume has passed and the conservation processes it has undergone. The review of some fragments and the type of writing leads again to the elaboration of a certain historical context, which closes the collection of articles and gives way to the edition of the *Liber Regulae* itself, featuring all the illuminated pages in full colour.

In conclusion, this is an edition that studies the *Liber Regulae* in a way that has never been done before. The codex had already been the subject of analysis during the first half of the 20th century, but it lacked a publication that, from the perspective of the history of art, social history and history of hospitals, highlighted the importance of miniatures as a source of information for understanding a fundamental institution in the social and economic life of medieval Rome. Drossbach and the other scholars demonstrate that the *Liber Regulae* is an excellent source for understanding this historical period and, at the same time, come to conclusions that form a solid basis for building future studies.

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