ure in the eighteenth century is another intriguing fact that deserves attention beyond the geographic and chronological context of this book, specifically as the notion was operative in Islamicate societies. How this case study is pertinent to understanding “the early modern period” beyond European boundaries is an issue that must be worked out in future scholarship, as Hamadeh herself acknowledges. Likewise, readers tantalized by suggestions of “synchronicity” and “shared sensibility” between the Ottoman capital and contemporary European cities will find that the focus is squarely on Istanbul, although this is also a strength of the book (242–43).

The emphasis on the creativity and innovation of Ottoman secular architecture and civic culture in the eighteenth century is perhaps the major contribution of the volume, an important corrective to narratives that view this period through the lens of imitation or fossilization attributed to a “Westernizing inclination among the ruling elite” (4). In the focus on the material dimensions—of architecture, urbanism and landscape, and specific internal social forces—Hamadeh effectively complicates the narrative of Western “influence” and Ottoman “degeneration” by presenting eighteenth-century Istanbul on its own terms while acknowledging the “shared sensibility” that also connected a major Islamic capital with its contemporaries elsewhere.

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Notes
1. Such studies include Gilbr Necipoğlu, The Age of Sinan: Architectural Culture in the Ottoman Empire (Princeton, 2005); Sibel Bozdogan, Modernism and Nation Building: Turkish Architectural Culture in the Early Republic (Seattle, 2001); Héghnár Zeitlian Watenpaugh, The Image of an Ottoman City: Imperial Architecture and Urban Experience in Aleppo in the 16th and 17th Centuries (Boston, 2004); and Ethel Sara Wolper, Cities and Saints: Sufism and the Transformation of Urban Space in Medieval Anatolia (University Park, Pa., 2003).


John Henderson

The Renaissance Hospital: Healing the Body and Healing the Soul

John Henderson’s long-awaited book is sure to become the fundamental study on a major but misunderstood institution. One tends to connect hospitals with scientific inquiry and medical practices and only marginally with spiritual well-being, yet the latter was considered at least as crucial to health and healing in the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Henderson establishes the centrality of hospitals in Renaissance society; they were powerful, visible, wealthy, and beautiful—sources of civic pride. Some were comparable in grandeur to the finest churches, palaces, or city halls. At the same time, hospitals operated as complex entities in their own right, engaged in multiple activities but organized as a community. Henderson writes with a clarity and unpretentiousness that make his book a pleasure to read. Extensive archival research, accompanied by new photographs, plans, and statistical charts provide richly textured detail. Henderson’s book is the perfect complement to the broad cross-cultural history by Guenter Risse, Mending Bodies, Saving Souls (1999).

The Renaissance Hospital dislodges modern assumptions about the nature of healing by revealing the principles that constituted physical and spiritual care. Henderson approaches his subject from the multiple perspectives of contemporary Florentines—like the city leaders who mingle with clergy in a fresco commemorating the consecration of the hospital church in 1420. Communal values structured the lives of hospital inhabitants, from whose vantage point the world might have appeared chaotic and hostile. Members of a lay order and medical practitioners attended their needs. Yet boundaries were porous. Clergy served the public in the hospital church linking different worlds, donors went to the institution for periodic retreats and long-term care, and hospital wards were open to visitors. In 1510–11, Martin Luther visited Santa Maria Nuova and praised medical conditions at the hospital in a well-known passage in his notebooks.

It is tempting to draw parallels with today’s healthcare system. There were comparable practices, ranging from challenging, problematic diagnoses to remedies like chicken soup. Social class factored into, if not determined, the quality of care. The wealthy endowed hospitals and received special benefits. Then as now there was insufficient space: wards were crowded, particularly at times of crisis like war. Contagion was an ever-present threat. Plague victims were sent to separate hospitals, the aged to convalescent homes, and others to specialized institutions. Death rates increased as the price of grain rose and income declined. While the medical response to perennial problems may seem familiar, it may be the result of an unfamiliar rationale. For example, the circulation of fresh air was considered salubrious, in part to protect the visitor from the poisonous smell of “rotting flesh,” while for “patients with bad wounds or skull fractures” it was to be avoided (158). According to Henderson’s thesis, well-being in the Renaissance consisted of the comingling of the corporeal with the spiritual, whereas today good health is the product, in variable proportion, of scientific knowledge and cultural values.

The title of the book is a bit misleading since the author devotes most of his inquiry to the Florentine Hospital of Santa Maria Nuova—an exceptional institution well-known throughout Europe.
and the largest hospital in a city renowned for its charitable institutions. Henderson compares it to modest, specialized institutions like Sant’ Antonio and San Jacopo, and to grander hospitals like San Paolo, San Matteo, and of course the Innocenti. Tuscany was a region of wealthy establishments like the Ospedale del Ceppo, Pistoia, and Santa Maria della Scala, Siena. Henderson also places his subject in the context of other famous Italian hospitals such as Filarete’s Ospedale Maggiore, Milan, and Santo Spirito, Rome. In the end however, The Renaissance Hospital: Healing the Body and Healing the Soul resembles a case study more than the broader inquiry suggested by the title. This is but a minor complaint, as I would argue that the case study is the most effective method of exploring the hospital in history at this moment in scholarship. Recent studies have produced fascinating accounts of single institutions, demonstrating the difficulty of constructing a single category for “the hospital.”

The number of institutions operating in Europe from 1300 to 1600 was vast, and to bracket them in terms of chronology, geography, or function is problematic. For example, hospital architecture was more varied than is usually assumed. The cruciform plan, rarely appearing outside of Lombardy, was promoted by Filarete as the ideal, as he vied with Florentine architects for a commission from the Sforza of Milan. The hospital was a site of both regional and theoretical competition. Local traditions and exigencies usually prevailed with the result that differences are more revealing than similarities. Furthermore, as Henderson indicates, hospital architecture drew more inspiration from churches than from utopian ideas.

Henderson’s account intersects in multiple ways with architecture and the visual arts. He narrates the development of the cruciform plan and speculates on the origins of the loggia associated with early Tuscan hospitals. Typically, his most significant contributions concern the Hospital of Santa Maria Nuova, a large complex consisting of cloisters, residential quarters, a pharmacy, and church as well as sick wards. He bases his account on new documentation, animated by the rituals that defined the hospital community. In his discussion of the decoration of the hospital church of Sant’ Egidio he focuses on altarpieces commissioned by distinguished Florentine families. Salient details emerge about the façade of the early hospital, destroyed to make way for Buontalenti’s loggia (1612–18). Medical and ceremonial rituals privileged objects like the hospital jars that belong to a rich material culture, and Henderson focuses here as well. Despite the occasional lapse, Henderson recognizes that visual images are complex, and he resists using them solely as documentation.

Rituals reenacted in Santa Maria Nuova animated both interior and exterior space; physical and spiritual healing gave form to customs and beliefs. Practices ranged from the familiar, such as anatomical studies and chemical solutions, to folk and homeopathic treatments. A fascinating section on the Ricettario (medical recipes) of Santa Maria Nuova reveals beliefs surrounding objects that surface in the visual arts: the healing powers of certain fruits and flowers, or the attribute of a beautiful complexion. Medical and church rituals differentiated between genders, not to mention social class and age. Space was crucial in establishing differences, and not surprisingly there were different treatments and expectations for women. In general, hospitals reserved the largest wards for men, more modest ones for women, and private quarters for the elite, while the poor were often turned away. The Hospital of Santa Maria Nuova maintained unusually spacious wards for women. The earliest, built in the early fourteenth century, was located across from the main complex, but by the mid-seventeenth century, female patients occupied a large cruciform building equal in size and adjacent to the male wards. Female physicians and care-givers tended a large community who in turn received support from female benefactors, some of whom found refuge in the hospital. In many hospital churches, portraits of female donors appear as confraternity members, mothers, wives, daughters, and widows.

The author’s assessment of the Renaissance hospital is surprisingly positive in that it reveals progressive practices and lively social spaces. Critical of Michel Foucault’s vision of domination, and with immense expertise, Henderson chooses to focus on the dynamic nature of the healing process. Hospitals become vibrant sites where ideology, culture, and human relations converged but (it should be noted) also clashed. It is best to avoid generalizations based on Tuscany’s hospitals and their flagship, Santa Maria Nuova, because there remains more to the telling of the story. Hospitals flourished throughout Europe, the New World, and around the Mediterranean, nurturing and exchanging attitudes about healing body and soul.

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Maurice Howard

The Building of Elizabethan and Jacobean England


Maurice Howard’s approach in The Building of Elizabethan and Jacobean England reflects a broad sea change in the way the art and architectural history of early modern England is being investigated and discussed. Until quite recently the academic study of virtually all visual media in this era was carried out principally from the perspective of the connoisseur’s concerns for the polite and formal elements of classical or neoclassical design. Buildings and artifacts were largely valued, appreciated, studied, and (in the case of the more portable artifacts like portraits) displayed according to how closely they measured up to those standards. More often than not, the history of English architecture in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries narrated the progression toward an essentially classically defined notion of excellence, demonstrating how the established canon of artists, sculptors and architects, generation by generation, worked toward that end. Given that approach, it stood to reason that the portraits, monuments, artifacts, and buildings of the political and