"I WAS SICK AND YOU VISITED ME:" THE HOSPITAL OF SAINT JOHN IN BRUSSELS AND ITS PATRONS

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ABSTRACT

To understand medieval urban, societal, and economic changes, one only has to look to hospitals, which were the recipients of donations from medieval burgenses, refuges for the sick and poor, and places where local churchmen and nobles sought to deal with the crises of urbanization. While care for the sick and poor seems like a significant enough reason to study hospitals, a study of a single medieval hospital in one city also demonstrates the manner in which societies behaved and interacted. Several social levels of people are identified through the study of one hospital, giving historians a better understanding of town life and the ways in which townspeople interacted in the Middle Ages. Thus, hospitals are at their simplest levels a microcosm of town life in the Middle Ages. They provide a snapshot of medieval life and demonstrate the everyday workings of medieval people.

The hospital of Saint John in Brussels is an exemplar of medieval hospitals, and this study examines the hospital in conjunction with its development during the high Middle Ages. While previous histories of hospitals have been concerned with the hospital itself, the patients, and the care that the brothers and the sisters gave to the inmates, this work moves beyond the institution itself to consider the social, economic, and political context into which the hospital was born. By exploring the many developments that were taking place in society via the hospital’s extant documents, I am better able to understand and demonstrate the cultural transitions that transpired in the high Middle Ages.