

Birth in Rome of the first hospital in the history of Europe. Further development of the Roma's Hospitals



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Forword

The good Samaritan's gospel tale tells us of a man travelling between Jerusalem and Jerico who became victim of marauders, that injured and left him almost dying. He received aid and relief from an other man passing by, an inhabitant of Samaria, who helped him treating his wounds with oil and balms, and then carrying him to an inn, where the injured was relied for further cares to the inn-keeper, and paid what was done, taking obligation to pay all the future expenses.

The facts related by this gospel tale tell us of what were the habits along the caravan tracks in middle and extreme East. Along the way there were sites of rest and restoration, where the travellers could stop for a while restoring their strengths, and those of their burden animals, preparing warm meals, before resuming the travel. But not all the components of the caravan were able to follow the others starting again. The ill and those not yet able to face the fatigue of the journey were left to the care of the few inhabitants of the site, where arose simple building for the rest of the men and stables for the animals. These buildings were the "karavansaraj", example of a spontaneous organization requested by the collective needs.

It is very easy to recognize some analogies with what was developing in Rome since the first centuries of Christianity.

With different finalities from the commercial ones of the caravans a spontaneous tradition was developing among the faithful going in pilgrimage in Rome, to prey on the graves of Peter and Paul Apostles, coming from near and distant places of Christian Europa and all mediterranean area.

The pilgrims coming to Rome were pointed as "romei", and were of all social origin, pushed by religious devotion or by the desire to make amend to their sins. They

arrived in Rome after long and fatiguing travels, by foot or with casual fortune means, confused for the difference of language and for the extraneous environment, tired, sometimes sick, often indigent.

In Rome, outside of the city walls and in the neighbourhood of the Vatican hill, where the Apostles graves were found, and where the emperor Costantinus on about 330 A.D. made to build the first Christian Basilica, a series of spontaneous organization arose, offering a place for minimal recover and rest facilities for those tired, poor, hungry pilgrims, so to make for them a temporary "hospitium". These places were concentrating in "borgo", a district on the right bank of the Tiber, external to the city walls, along the "carrera sancta", the way the pilgrims travelled over in their going to the Constantinian Basilica and to the holy graves.

This tradition went increasing with the years, and those "ospitia" organized by and for the pilgrims, were given the medioeval denomination of "scholae", various and different according to the various provenience of the faithful, above all to resolve their problems of the languages: "Scholae" Francorum, for Longbards, for Ungars, for Frisons. Among those there was the "Schola Saxonum" founded by Ine, a former king of Saxons, who after a severe and rigorous reign on West Wessex from 688 to 726, disliking the lay world left the throne to his brother-in-law Rethobaldus and went to Rome, pilgrim among pilgrims, together with other Saxons.



The flag of Wessex King

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On 727 A.D. Ine was given permission by pope S. Gregorio II (pontifex from 715 to 731 A.D.) to build an house on the right bank of Tiber, close to the “borgo” and very close to a church entitled to Maria, founded on 717, to give a temporary recover for the pilgrims coming from Wessex. This house was therefore the “Schola Saxonum” for “romei” coming from what will be the British islands, and where they could find free lodgings, relief, physical care and, as in unfortunately case, also the burial. In the underground there were the remains of the mansion of Agrippina, wife of Germanico and mother of the emperor Caligola. The church was then pointed to as “S. Maria in Saxia”.

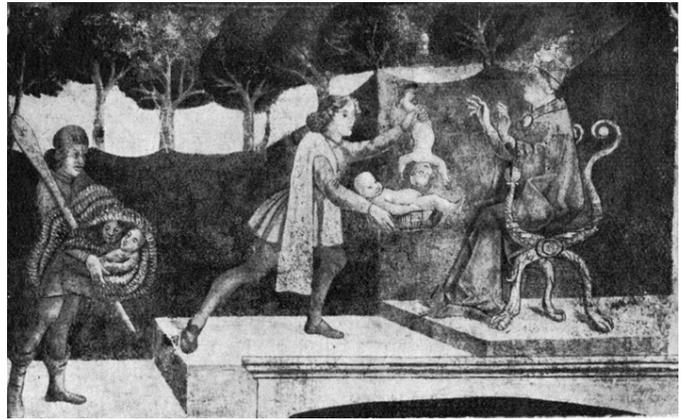
To sustain the costs of the all organization, that could not rely on pilgrims themselves, Ine promoted the institution at home of a tax of a silver denario to be poured from any family of Wessex that had to come sometimes to Rome, the “Romescot” or “Peterspence”, that became the “obolo di S.Pietro” of saxon origin.

The historical events that came swept away these medieval organizations: the burning of the “borgo” in 817 and the further one in 847 – remembered in a fresco of Raffaello in Vatican Rooms – involved also the Schola Saxonum, and left behind a desolation. Pope Leone IV (847-855) promoted an its rebuilding, but further devastations and sacks hit the city from the Saracens and then from the soldiers of Arrigo IV (1056-1073) and from those of Frederick I Redbeard between 1152 and 1186, with severe injuries to the social environment of Rome, deprived also since more than 500 years of its aqueducts. And so of the Schola Saxonum were left only the ruins blackened by the fire’s smokes.

The innovation

A shining light of new civilization was relighted in Rome when rose to the pope’s throne the great personality of Lotarius of the Earls of Segni, elected in 1198 with the name of Innocentius III, whose reign went on from 1198 to 1216. He found himself to cope with a severely complex and troublesome situation for papal governance from the political point of view for the events of the fourth Crusade, not to mention of political interferences with the Empire and with the South Reign on Normans, and also related to religious and social problems, for the spiritual movements of Domenico Guzman’s and Assisi’s Franciscus. But above all there was in Rome a diffuse indigence and a deep moral degrade. He decided to take measures against the economical poverty of Rome’s people and its very serious social and moral degrade.

Some episodes hit deeply pope Innocentius III feelings witnessing of the painful situation. It was the evident diffusion of infanticides and abortions, driven by the economical and moral desperation of a low-spirited and mistrusted populace. The Pope was deeply touched being informed of the frequent finding in the fishing nets from



Presentation to Pope Innocentius III of the corpses of infant fished in the Tiber.

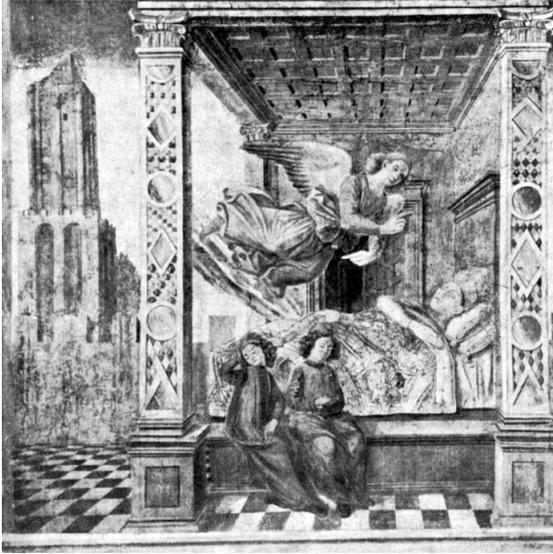
Tiber of the poor corpses of children and foetuses thrown in the river as they were undesired pup cats.

The Pope decided to run in concrete aid of the poor and derelict men following a completely new and innovative course, taking inspiration from the charity enterprises of Guy from Montpellier, whom he met in France, and who had already activated in Rome two simple “ospitia”, the one in Trastevere and the other in S.Agata close and outside to the walls, with the permission of the his predecessor pope Celestino III. In some way they were branches of what the same Guido (Guy) had organized in France.

Guy of Guglielmi’s Earls of Montpellier had instituted an “hospitable home” for sick people, entitled to the “Saint Esprit”, in Pyla-Saint-Gely by the shores of Verdanson’s river, and also the foundation of a brotherhood of men devoted to the care of the sick persons in emulation of the Order of Hospital Knights of Holy Ghost of Jerusalem (Chevaliers Hospitaliers du Saint Esprit de Jerusalem) consecrated to the assistance of the paupers. The Pope had a personal knowledge with Guy during his stay in Paris for theological studies, and therefore involved him in his project.

The great initial success of the enterprise of Pope Innocentius III was to obtain as a gift from King John Lackland (1166-1216) the ground where there has been in the former centuries the old Schola Saxonum. There he built an edifice where to give refuge to rejects new-borns, to needy girls and to sick people. To build the edifice was called the architect Marchionne d’Arezzo, and the government of the new institution was given as a duty to Earl Guido (Guy), inviting him to permanently reside in Rome.

Guido of Montpellier accepted the invitation and took the government of the “Ospitium” of which he was nominated “Commendatore” by the pope, making also in Rome a filiation of the Brotherhood of beyond the Alps with the institution of the “Hospital Order of the Holy Ghost”, making so roman his entire charity enterprise. The Coat of Arms of the new roman “Ospitium” was



Inspiration in dream of Pope Innocenzo III.



The Crest of the Institution.



The breast breeding of the newborn with help of musicians.

the same double cross of the left side of that of Guido family's heraldry, in memory of the belonging to the Temple Knights. The heavenly pope's inspiration for this institution was symbolized above the cross of the same

Coat of Arms with a pigeon representing the Holy Ghost, Father of Pooors.

Guido of Montpellier wanted the Congregation engaged in assisting of the derelicts and in the care of the sick people, inspired to the generosity and unselfish principles of communion and purity of the Apostles' age and of the first communities of Christians. He called to take part on the Congregation volunteers and merciful women, and among the others also wet-nurses to nourish the rejected newborns.

The "Ospitium", afterwards pointed to as "Ospedale di Santo Spirito in Saxia" (Hospital of Holy Ghost in Saxia), was no more only a place of refuge for pilgrims, as the original Schola Saxonum, but a place where it were possible to collect above all the disinherited from birth and the indigent sick people. In short it was an opera of social support, an "ospitium", in the follows pointed as "Ospedale" (hospital) in vulgar Italian, but with a meaning very different from the actual one. The ill were only "assisted" but not "treated" as we now mean with this word because at those times there was not yet sure acquaintances for efficacious treatments. At that time the aim was to give answer to the very natural and elemental needs: a roof, a warm meal, a social environment where to be helped. In fact we cannot forgive the lacking of true therapy remedies in the twelfth century, and therefore the essentially charitable meaning of the entire enterprise, addressed above all for social finality: to breed and protect the orphans and the rejected newborns, to recover all the paupers and assist the sick persons.

Then Rome had about 35.000 inhabitant and therefore the organization of the Hospital, with its 300 available beds, could assist at least 0,9% of the resident populace. Really here is the root of the grandiose innovation of pope Innocentius III, who anticipated of 800 years the concept of welfare.



Charity box to day.

Economical support

The economical support to the institution of “Holy Ghost’s Hospital” was from the still existing incomes of the vanished “Schola Saxonum”, the “Romanscot”, from public charity and from the generosity of the same pope, with the revenues of the Chapter of Chartres’ Diocese conferred to the pope, and with the Chapter of Writtle’s St.Nicolò, close to London, conferred by king John Lackland to the pope Innocentius III.

Moreover Innocentius III founded the privilege of the “Holy Station”, that was a procession to be held in the first Sunday after Epiphany when the Verosnica’s sweat veil was exhibited. At the end of the ceremony three denarius were given to anyone of the 300 refugees and to the 1000 paupers participants to the ceremony. There was the obligation to acquire one scudo from every testament in the town on the condition that its amount were superior than 50 scudos.

The organization

The “Ordine Ospedaliero di Santo Spirito” was organized in its charity activities according to the example of the “St.John Ordo”, and displayed a very complex and different duties, in the care of the sick people and in assisting the rejected children and the indigent motherhood, giving also food and garment to the paupers. No limit there was in recovering anybody needed it. A rotating door, the wheel of the rejected (“ruota degli esposti”), still visible in Borgo S.Spirito but no more active, was available to leave in full anonymity the newborns refused by their mothers.

Those children were adopted from the organization,



Wheel of the rejected newborns to day.

acquiring as a right the roman citizenship, were breed, and when grown up, instructed for a profession and accustomed to agriculture or arts craft. The girls were given timely of a dowry if inclined to marry, or they could continue to be employed in the institution, eventually professing vows as Hospital Nuns.

Also the sick patricians could be accepted for care, on the condition that their movable properties be left at the admittance of the Hospital. It was a community of equals both for residents and for the volunteers that assisted them.

So was constituted the “Ospedale di Santo Spirito”, with its “Ordine Ospitaliero di Santo Spirito” and the hospital houses of Holy Spirit, exempt from any tax and every tribute.

This organization was formalized by pope Innocentius III and Guy of Montpellier on 1204 with a general rule, the “*Regula sive Statuta Hospitalis Sanctis Spiritus*” including 105 articles, approved as definitive on 1220 by pope Gregorius IX.

The fundamental principle of the Rule was “the sick is the master and those who assist him are his servants”. The Statute introduced then a clear difference with the free professional regimen of the rudimentary current care of patients – “free profession” as we could say nowadays – with economical advantages from the praxis. Moreover in the Rule there is not mention of physicians, at that time only scholars of Trivium and Quadrivium comprehensive of medicine, able at the most to do a diagnosis, but scarcely equipped of true medical culture and possibility of efficacious treatments.

Evolution of the conceit of Hospital as a place for medical care

Going on with years the physicians began to take part in the organization of the Holy Spirit Hospital, first time in history, on free activity to meet all the needs of the more indigent.

The well disclosed proclamation, of apparently darkening meaning, “*Ecclesia abhorret a sanguine*”, perhaps stated in the Tours’ Council on 1163, or according to other sources emanated with an ecyclical with such title from the same pope Innocentius III on 1215, was not intended to discourage any surgical activity but it was a formal prohibition for the ecclesiastics of every level to withdraw them far from the money’s temptation or from the profit. Therefore the surgical praxis, what it then was, remained reserved to the lays, although with the limitations due to the superstitions of that age and to the conveniences. In the Hospital of the Holy Ghost sometimes was allowed to study on the corpses, while such exercise was prohibited elsewhere. Exactly here Leonardo da Vinci was allowed to make anatomical research (“pope (Leo X) has been informed that I have skinned three corpses”).

As we will successively remember, in the XVI Century



Remembering the old Sistine's wards.

a didactic Amphitheatre was built here to teach anatomy. This made possible to widen anatomical notions, that were further developed in the following centuries – and not only in Rome – and were the roots on which the Medical School of Rome developed. With the Avignon's exile (1309-1376) and the Oriental Schism the economical revenues went cancelled and as a reflex the Institution had a deep decadence. With pope Eugene IV Coldumer (1431-1447) came a new resurgence: the restoration of the buildings, and the direct government of the Institute of Holy Ghost by the same Pope, who made large money donations, and stated in 1446 the reform of the “Hospital Rule” (Regola Ospedaliera).

To be remembered that this Rule remained effective also for all the roman hospitals which were constituted in the following centuries, downright to the passage of the health management to the Reign of Italy, from 1870. Sixtus IV della Rovere rose to the throne on 1471, and from 1471 and 1478 ordered grandiose works for the reconstruction of the city, and on regard of the Istituto di Santo Spirito, disposed the building of a completely and imposing new edifice, conceived with very innovative criteria for the age, and confided its building to the architect Baccio Pontelli, and the result was a model of progress for hospital constructions, and affirming that “Our hospital has been built at the expences of the Rome's Church”.



Hospital of Santo Spirito in Saxia rebuilt by Sixtus IV and Church of Holy Spirit.



The ancient ward still in use at the end of nineteenth century.

There was two wide Wards, the "Corsia Sistina", where the beds of the patients were aligned at comb along the long sides, with the altar for the Mass at the end. The Corsia was decorated with a series of frescoes illustrating some episodes of the history of the old innocentian hospital.

Among the frescoes of the Corsia Sistina are remembered some episodes at the root of the charitable organizations of the origins. One of them remembers the presentation to the pope Innocentius III with the children's corpses found in the nests of the Tiber's fishermen. An other picture describes the wet-nurses nourishing at their breast the newborns while musicians gladden the room.

With the papal bull of 23rd January 1477 Sixtus IV proclaimed "Our Hospital of Holy Ghost in Saxia of Alma Urbe, which We recently have rebuildt from the ground and widened with sumptuous opera, help and refuge of all the paupers, has no other Superior than the Roman Pontifex".

Spreading in Rome and in Europe of Hospitals

At the end of '400 (XV Century) there were in Roma four hospitals: Arcispedale di S.Spirito in Saxia, SS.Salvatore e S.Giovanni in Laterano, S.Giacomo in Augusta for the incurable, and S.Maria della Consolazione at the border of the Jewish Quarter. Pope Leo X of 'Medici (1475-1521) ordered to assist and take care in the S.Giacomo Hospital the syphilitics, affected by the "morbo gallico"

The assistance principles stated according to the will of the Church had a contagious diffusion, and this model begun to spread in many places of Europe and very widely in Italy, particularly in the southern regions. Already one century after Pope Innocentius III was possible to find in Europe about 500 hospitals functioning with the same principles, the same denomination and the same coat of arms of the Roman one. For these reasons the original and first of them in Rome was denominated "Arcispedale di Santo Spirito in Sassia".

With the wealth meanwhile acquired many investment in real estates were made and their revenues were employed from the Arcispedale to give free assistance to the indigents. The same meaning and aim was that of the foundation of a Bank, the **Banco di S.Spirito** on 13th December 1605 by pope Paulus V Borghese.

On 1548 **Bartolomeo Eustachio** became the Chief ("Protomedicus") of the Ospedale di Santo Spirito, and was permitted to teach anatomy: he modified a place building a didactic amphitheatre were to dissect corpses coming form the same hospital and from that of "Consolazione". In the XVII Century there were in activity in Rome more Schools of Anatomy beside many hospitals: Arcispedale di Santo Spirito in Sassia, Ospedale di S. Giacomo in Augusta, Ospedale della Consolazione. This didactic initiative became grounded in this last Hospital in 1643 for the will of the chief **Giovanni**

Guglielmo Riva, who was the Maestro of **Giovanni Maria Lancisi**, who in 1714 inaugurated the Hospital Library, in which were also kept the anatomical Tables of Bartolomeo Eustachio.

In the old pharmacy of the same Hospital ("Spezieria") drug researches were made, among the others the use of the bark of china for the treatment of the malaria fevers which tormented the Pontine campaign.

Giovanni Maria Lancisi was "Archiatra pontificius" of pope Innocentius XI Odescalchi (1611-1689) and of Clemens XI Albani (1649-1721), and instituted that didactic binomium that became fundamental for teaching Medicine: lectures ex Cathedra in the College of University "La Sapienza" – the University of Rome, "Studium Urbis" instituted by pope Bonifacius VIII Caetani (1294-1303) on 20th Aprile 1303, six months before his death, with the pope bulla "In suprema praeminentia dignitatis" - and clinical praxis in the "Spedale di Santo Spirito in Sassia".

Antonio Pacchioni of Reggio Emilia (1665-1726) was Assistent of the Malpighi in the "Ospedale della Consolazione", and then Chief in the "Ospedale S. Salvatore ad Sancta Sanctorum in Laterano", and then Chief in the "Ospedale della Consolazione".

The teaching of Medicin in the Hospitals of Rome

Until 1870 remained in function the reform for the teaching of Medicine of Pope Leo XII Della Genga (1823-1829). In this reform was stated that the public praxis of Medicine was permitted and allowed only to the students that had regularly followed the entire prescribed Course of University Studies, while there was an absolute forbidding to practice the Health Art to those lacking a regular Laurea or licence granted by the University.

These dispositions arose remonstrance by the Deputy of the roman hospitals, because as a consequence would be lost the presence in the hospitals of the novices, apprentices as nurses or potential physicians. Then the orders of Leo XII were modified, conferring free teaching of Medicine and Surgery in the Hospitals, but the students were obliged of the knowledge of Latin.

Was also stated that the career in the hospitals would be only possible with concourses until the higher levels.

"Pio Istituto di Santo Spirito" and "Ospedali Riuniti di Roma"

When Rome became Capitale d'Italia, the Rome's hospitals were brought together under an unique central government, represented by a Commission of twelve members nominated by the Ministry, by the Provincial Council and by the municipal one. The Commission had to elect a President and as many Deputies as the number of the hospitals. The unification was then modified with the Constitution of 24th May 1896 of an unique entity named "Pio Istituto di S.Spirito ed Ospedali Riuniti di Roma".

At that time the **Pio Istituto di S.Spirito ed Ospedali Riuniti di Roma** included, with the same organization, the following Hospitals of the city: Santo Spirito in Saxia since 1204, S. Giovanni in Laterano since XIII century, S. Giacomo in Augusta for Incurable, since XIV century, S.Maria della Consolazione since XV century and active until 1937, S.Maria della Pietà since XVI century, S. Maria e S. Gallicano of XVIII century. And the Policlinico Umberto I - founded on 19th January 1888 and finished at the end of 1902, S.Camillo de Lellis (founded in 1928 as Ospedale della Vittoria, then intermediately named Ospedale del Littorio), S. Filippo Neri of 1940-1960.

Other Hospital were built, as that of S.Giovanni di Dio Fatebenefratelli on the Tibers' island since XVI century, but of completely autonomic administration and not included in the unified organization of Ospedali Riuniti di Roma.

The growth of the financial deficit with the decreasing of the resources that came from donations, legacies and privileges, forced the Institute to alienate many of its real estates in Latium and in other regions, and finally to put at end in 1870 the tradition of the Rome's hospitals to give total free medical assistance to all the patients coming for help and treatment.

In the roman hospitals flourished anyways a meaningful medical culture, as they were dedicated both to the treatment of the patients and also to the practical teaching in the Hospital Medical School ("Scuola Medica Ospedaliera"). With this School the formation of the new doctors were refined with the practical activity at the bed of the patients and in the operatory theatres, when the Schools of Specialization were yet to be instituted.

Acknowledgements

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