

Hospitals Classical antiquity had already known various kinds of hospitals, for example, for the poor, the sick, foundlings, and so forth. While the autonomous hospital continued to exist in Byzantium, the Western hospital of the early Middle Ages was not an independent establishment but belonged to an abbey obligated to receive the poor, pilgrims, and the ill.

Since about 1130, hospitals increasingly appeared as largely independent institutions. André Vauchez has called this increase a "revolution of the love of neighbor." The cause of this development was, on the one hand, the influence of or its contemporaneity with new religious movements (especially, by the early thirteenth century, the mendicant orders) and an essentially spiritual orientation to suffering and, on the other hand, the role of the laity and rise of ruling elites (princes, urban elites) and the formation of independent communes.

In the late Middle Ages there arose a great number of specialized institutions, such as orphanages, houses for the mentally ill, and large hospitals. They were increasingly used by the propertied social ranks, and by the beginning of the fifteenth century they were hardly seen any longer as answering the needs of the rising numbers of poor. The differences between late medieval and early modern hospitals grew. Not only was there increased diversity among the inhabitants of hospitals (pilgrims, the poor, the elderly, the sick, prebendaries, foundlings) but also the parties controlling them (now orders, confraternities, communes). In addition, the functions assumed by hospitals increased. For example, they were used as homes for the elderly, poor houses, schools, financial institutions, or even wine cellars and beer cellars. Because of the diversity of functions and controlling parties surrounding "hospitals," social historians currently question the soundness of the concept of the hospital. They are not alone, as scholars in the fields of archaeology and architectural history also contest the concept. The various forms of hospitals could stand in competition with each other, as well as complement one another. Considering their institutional diversity, many methodologically diverse subjects (constitution, the concept of the foundation, finances, norms, memorialization, medicine, nutrition, festivals) are relevant to

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their study. From this perspective, the hospital presents itself, on the threshold of the modern period, as a reflection, but also a producer, of socioeconomic processes.

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