

Book Reviews

material not readily available elsewhere. Kābin's personal knowledge makes this a very interesting account indeed.

The work ends with a detailed bibliography and reference list and there is also an appendix which reproduces a number of important pictures and documents. The book is well illustrated throughout and contains many useful maps and tables. It is a valuable document, and should be consulted by anyone with a serious interest in the history of medicine in the Baltic. Its strength lies in the skill and conviction which Ilo Kābin brings to this difficult task, and he is to be congratulated on his scholarship. It is a pleasure to be able to recommend it highly.

D. B. Jack
The Medical School, Birmingham University

MIRI RUBIN, *Charity and community in medieval Cambridge*, Cambridge University Press, 1987, 8vo, pp. xiv, 364, £30.00.

This excellent book marks a definite break with the traditional historiography of English hospitals. Although it is largely concerned with the hospitals of medieval Cambridge, and in particular with the Hospital of St John, its range of interests and ideas goes far beyond the traditional emphasis on a hospital as an institution or group of buildings. It endeavours to set it within a context, of the economic life of medieval Cambridge (a hazardous and not always successful undertaking), of religious and popular ideas of charity, and, most important, of the variety of measures, both formal and informal, for relieving weaker members of the community from some of their misfortunes, especially sickness and poverty. Hence Dr Rubin looks at the charitable role of Guilds, funeral bequests, and feasts, in addition to the more obvious role of the hospital.

But even when examining the hospital, she is alert to the multiplicity of aims involved. Religious motives of charity are aligned with the religious obligations of the inmates of the College Hospital at Newton to pray for the souls of the founder and his family. St John's hospital not only sheltered and fed the weak, but also, at times, served as a provider of cheap loans, in direct opposition to the Jews across the road. Cambridge also had its specific charities, within and without the Colleges, for aiding poor students, and Dr Rubin charts the complicated way in which the Hospital of St John was used to accommodate not only the sick but also favoured students of the Bishop of Ely, as well as a religious community and paying guests. One can see how its transformation to a fully academic College in 1509 could be easily represented as causing no harm to the townsfolk of Cambridge, who had been earlier strong supporters of the hospital as a place for sheltering the sick and needy. This multiplicity of function for some hospitals can be traced back to St Basil in the fourth century, and helps to explain why in the mid-sixteenth century Henry VIII's Commissioners could equivocate over whether the "spittle house" at Sittingbourne was not also a fraternity, and describe the St James' Guild at Tong as a fraternity or hospital (J. Scarisbrick, *The Reformation and the English people*, p. 26.) One can see dimly also the dislocation of the whole system of charity in Cambridge and its surrounding villages brought about by the Reformation, and, equally, the way in which Parish relief could be made a substitute.

Dr Rubin has read widely, and makes sound use of parallels from the Continent, where the common English identification of a hospital solely with medical care is less apparent. But it would be going too far to see the general absence of any care from a physician in a medieval hospital solely as the result of an overriding belief that God alone can cure. Even in a prosperous city like Cambridge, there may have been few learned *medici*, and even fewer who treated gratis. And, as was also realized, nursing and a good diet might be at least as effective as expensive potions. The phenomenon of a medieval hospital without a physician becomes much more intelligible when set in the broader context so ably sketched in this book.

Vivian Nutton
Wellcome Institute