

understanding of the worldviews and networks of knowledge between Malta and Italy that shaped antiquarian activity.

During my time in Rome, my research focussed on the three decades from the posting of Fabio Chigi to Malta as Inquisitor and Apostolic Delegate in 1634, to the end of his papacy, as Alexander VII, in 1667. I was able to examine several strands of the intensive correspondence that bound this remote island group to the metropolis. The five years that Fabio Chigi spent in Malta were a period of particularly formative and intensive antiquarian activity. In 1637, the Cardinal's nephew Francesco Barberini deployed the Jesuit polymath Athanasius Kircher, as well as his librarian and trusted friend Lucas Holste, to Malta to accompany the Landgrave of Hesse, a recent convert to Catholicism. The acquaintances and lasting friendships formed between Chigi, Kircher, Holste and the Maltese antiquarian Giovanni Francesco Abela resulted in a thriving exchange of ideas that persisted well after their departure. Chigi's meticulous diary reveals a keen interest in ancient numismatics, while his personal correspondence with Holste documents Barberini's active interest in Abela's collection of ancient coins, shedding light on the inseparability of patronage, power and antiquarian collections. New light was also shed on the intrigues which isolated Abela and pushed him out of his office as Vice-Chancellor of the Order of Saint John in 1640, which also had consequences for his antiquarian efforts. Another thread that emerges insistently from the written accounts of the period was that antiquarian practices were inseparable from the construction of imaginary geographies. These constructs were also an arena of contestation, in which the islands of Malta were alternately cast as a remote fragment of North Africa, or as integral part of Europe.

A wider aim that needs more work, and that is now being pursued, is to chart how the intertwined biographies and microhistories of individual actors contributed to a paradigm shift in the way archaeological remains were perceived and managed.

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REUBEN GRIMA

(Department of Conservation and Built Heritage, University of Malta)

reuben.grima@um.edu.mt

ROME FELLOWSHIP

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Leprosy and religion in medieval Italian society: the evidence from thirteenth-century sermons

Whilst a Rome Fellow at the BSR I conducted research exploring how the disease of leprosy was used as a metaphor for sin in Italian sermons written during the thirteenth century. It is often taken for granted that medieval religious discourse placed, as a matter of routine, a negative moral construction on states of illness and disease. Assumptions about the association between leprosy and sin in medieval sermons are by no means unwarranted — the physical disease provided a convenient, immediate and tangible metaphor for the state of sinful and corrupted souls. Nevertheless, even a

cursory glance at thirteenth-century Italian sermons on leprosy shows that these systems of metaphorical meaning and correspondence were complex, multivalent and unstable. The project I began in Rome seeks to map the different and changing ways in which thirteenth-century preachers interpreted narratives of biblical leprosy in sermons designed to provoke a spiritual response from their audience. As such, my fellowship was primarily spent working with manuscripts of sermons in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, along with other libraries in Rome and further afield in Naples, Florence, Padua and Assisi.

In studying these manuscripts, my aim was to explore the exegetical and religious discourse found in medieval sermons by reading them within the context of two significant cultural developments which offered thirteenth-century Italians new ways of conceptualising leprosy. The first of these was the advent of Greco-Arabic medicine and natural philosophy in Latin-speaking Europe, initially via Salerno and later via Toledo. Did newly translated medical descriptions of disease disrupt exegetical traditions on which preachers depended? In research due to be published in early 2023, I argue that yes, they did — at least to some extent. In particular, my findings point to the appropriation of high-level medical knowledge by Italian preachers before the middle of the thirteenth century — significantly earlier than has previously been realised. Moreover, my analysis indicates that this knowledge came not from Aristotelian texts translated in Toledo and disseminated through Paris, but rather from traditions of Salernitan practical medicine.

A second significant cultural development was the rise of the *leprosarium*, which had by the thirteenth century become a prominent civic institution in much of Italy. Easily dismissed as a byword for misery and exclusion, the leprosy hospital was a highly ambivalent space. Legally privileged and often staffed by quasi-religious attendants, hospitals played important social and spiritual roles. I have not yet established whether or not there is a discernible relationship between the blossoming of hospitals in medieval Italy and changing patterns of metaphorical interpretation in sermons which deal with leprosy. Indeed, it would be difficult to determine the extent to which a long-established Christian message of charity, and increasingly zealous strictures about penance, may have galvanised popular support for hospitals in the thirteenth century. However, my initial findings do suggest that the ubiquity of civic *leprosaria* furnished preachers with a rich mine of compelling yet flexible imagery, which could signal penance and redemption for the faithful just as easily as they signalled the moral corruption and eternal exclusion of sinners. My research in this area will continue, and in future work I intend to probe these issues further by considering the relationship between three overlapping homiletic strategies for interpreting the figurative and spiritual meaning of leprosy with reference to biblical paradigms, medical and anatomical sources, and thirteenth-century social expectations about sickness.

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EDWARD SUTCLIFFE

(Department of Religion and Theology, University of Bristol)

e.sutcliffe@bristol.ac.uk