Lost but not yet Found: Medieval Foundlings and their Care in Northern France, 1200-1500

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The High Middle Ages was an important period of transition in the care of France's "miserable persons," that is, the poor, sick, widows, orphans, aged, and infirm. By 1400, civic initiatives, parish networks, and lay sponsored hospitals began to take over the care-giving traditionally carried out by monastic houses and episcopal institutions. Foundlings are part of this larger group of the poor and marginal, yet they are more difficult to track within the available sources, and once they were passed on to an institution or a community, their long term care is almost always impossible to follow. This article is an initial foray into the process of finding foundlings in the archives and available texts and of placing these references in a social context that illuminates their plight and the networks of charity that assumed their care in northern France. The growth in numbers of foundlings during the High Middle Ages as well as the strategies that emerged for caring for such children shed light on the larger issue of how particular types of charity were administered and discussed between 1200 and 1500.

The challenge of writing about foundlings is in part documentary. We learn of foundlings almost exclusively through casual references. Indeed, when people and actions – even mundane ones – do not want to be found, remembered, or recorded because of poverty or shame, as in the case of suicides and abandonment, the challenges of writing their histories are

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particularly profound.[1] Most archival encounters with medieval foundlings are largely unintended or the product of a chance reference. Because of this element of randomness, a word about terminology is important. Foundlings were those infants and very young children who were given up or abandoned with the intention or hope that they would be found and cared for in the absence of their natal parents. This article focuses on abandoned children and foundlings in the strictest sense.[2] Orphans, children with one known and surviving parent, and bastards or illegitimate children whose parents were known even if they themselves had a restricted legal standing are of less concern here. Medieval institutions and texts could be quite clear about these distinctions, as shall become apparent.

When we encounter foundlings in official records it is usually for only the briefest possible moment. For example, the judicial records from St.-Martin-des-Champs in Paris offer a glimpse – on 6 September 1336 – of a mother abandoning her three-year-old child on the porch of the residence of the bishop of Châlons. One evocative detail breathes life into the encounter: the child cried after the mother as she fled.[3] We only learn of this instance because the woman was later apprehended and

[1] On the challenges presented by similar sources, see Alexander Murray, *Suicide in the Middle Ages*, vol. 1, *The Violent against Themselves* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), preface and 40-3.

[2] Most Latin texts, particularly testaments, hagiography, and monastic sources, refer to infants and children with the same word: *pueri*. Rarely there are references to female children, *puella*, specifically. *Puer inventi* appears in the hospital legislation discussed below. *Pueri abjectus* is used for a child in a miracle of Thomas Becket, where Queen Eleanor is credited with caring for a foundling abandoned in the road: see James Craigie Roberton, ed., *Materials for the History of Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, Canonized by Pope Alexander III, A.D. 1173*, Rolls Series (London, 1875-85), 1:213-4 and 2:245, cited in R. C. Finucane, *The Rescue of the Innocents: Endangered Children in Medieval Miracles* (New York: St. Martin's, 1997), 50 n. 157. French texts – testaments, hospital records, and legal documents – refer to *enfants trouvés* and *pauvres enfants* (especially wills from the later medieval period) or *enfants jettés* and *laissés*. For the latter, see the hospital regulations for Saint-Esprit-en-Grève in Paris, 1445, below, n. 28.

[3] See the *Registre criminel de la Justice de St.-Martin-des-Champs à Paris au XIVe siècle*, ed. Louis Tanon (Paris: Léon Willem, 1877), 65-6.

prosecuted, though not for abandonment, which was not a crime under civil or ecclesiastical law.

Medieval literature affords further images of foundlings. To offer only one example here: Marie de France's *lai Le Fresne*, or the *Ash Tree*, is based upon the premise of divided twin girls, one of whom, carefully wrapped in silk from Constantinople and given a gold ring as a token of her noble status, was taken on the night of her birth by a loyal family nurse to a large town nearby. There the nurse stopped before the door of a nunnery and prayed. "God," she said, "by your holy name, if it pleases you, keep this infant from perishing." She then left the child in the branches of an ash tree that stood before the abbey gate. The porter of the nunnery found the girl and brought her to his recently widowed daughter, also a new mother, to nurse. The abbess of the nunnery later took in the noble foundling and raised her in the cloister as her niece.[4]

Much in this fiction resonates with historical reality. Abbesses did consent to bring up children in their nunneries.[5] The nurse's prayer for the girl echoes the notes that occasionally accompanied foundlings left at the Ospedal di San Gallo during Florence in the fifteenth century. One slave woman left her infant wrapped in rags with five and a half *denarii* and a message: "The love of God, in charity, so that [I] may find [my] child again." Other messages commended children to God and hoped for future reunions.[6] Such textual fragments and prayers

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[4] The English translation of this short *lai* can be found in *The Lais of Marie de France*, trans. and ed. Glyn S. Burgess and Keith Busby, 2nd ed. (New York: Penguin, 1999), 61-7.

[5] See for example *The Register of Eudes of Rouen*, trans. Sydney M. Brown, ed. Jeremiah F. O'Sullivan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), 165 (3 Sept. 1253). The editor states that ten *boys* were being raised at the Cistercian nunnery of Bival, but the term *pueri* could simply mean children of both sexes. Cistercian nuns took in children in other contexts as well.

[6] Iris Origo, "The Domestic Enemy: The Eastern Slaves in Tuscany in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries," *Speculum* 30 (1955): 321-66, esp. 347-8. The late medieval Florentine notes strikingly resemble the notes left with children abandoned to the New York Foundling Home between the 1870s and

suggest the physiological, emotional, and practical difficulty of leaving a child. Finally, it is entirely plausible that widowed women with infants of their own would have worked or served as wet-nurses when the need arose.

Although more laconic, legal texts also offer telling examples. The northern French legal compilation known as the *Coutumes de Beauvaisis* of Philippe de Beaumanoir (ca. 1282) describes in passing what was understood to be a common scenario of abandonment. Embedded in an anecdote meant to illuminate an issue of procedure lies the story of a young woman called before the *bailli* to account for her child, "for it was common knowledge that she had been pregnant and she had been heard in labor, and it was not known what had happened to the child." She answered, "her mother had taken the child when it was born." The baby's grandmother was then summoned, and she explained that she "had given the child to a young man who was the father; and that he had contracted with her that he would take the child to a wet nurse in a good and sure place, for which he had already made arrangements."[7] The child is never mentioned again, and while it would be reasonable to assume that someone disposed of the baby, we are not privy to more detail. In this example public rumor brought the case to the attention of the *bailli*. More often children were left in public spaces only to be found by royal or local officials. In these cases foundlings surface among the records of *baillis* and *prévôts*, but this is much

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the early decades of the twentieth century: see Glenn Collins, "Glimpses of Heartache And Stories of Survival," *The New York Times*, 3 Sept. 2007.

[7] *The* Coutumes de Beauvaisis *of Philippe de Beaumanoir*, trans. F. R. P. Akehurst (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), ch. 63, "Concerning defenses," 663-4. Other telling examples that mention the death of children are in ch. 69, "On misadventure," 711. On the related issues of children out of wedlock and infanticide, both of which betray a mentality related to the problems of unwanted children, see "The Customs of Touraine and Anjou," in *The Establissements de Saint Louis*, trans. F. R. P. Akehurst (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), Book I, no. 14, "On promiscuous gentlewomen," and Book I, no. 39, "On women's misadventure and a repeat thereof."

more common for the late medieval period.[8] In the years 1497-1498, for example, the *prévôt* of Chartres recorded "a found girl" left at the Porte Guillaume and another deposited in the local fish market. He brought both girls to the Aumône Notre-Dame, connected to the Hôtel-Dieu, which cared for foundlings in the region of Chartres. [9]

As moving and evocative as these brief encounters can be, it remains to take up the challenge of making sense and giving meaning to these many small and singular examples. What do the institutions and social networks that responded to foundlings reveal about changes and trends affecting social structures and ideology of late medieval society? A new concern with foundlings and abandonment began to appear in medieval Europe in the thirteenth century. This did not involve an explicit discourse: there were no treatises on such infants, and no new laws attempted to curtail illegitimate births. The "state" did not intervene in the lives of women and men as it did in the nineteenth century. But there are clear indicators that the demography of medieval cities was changing in significant ways linked to class and gender roles, which I will trace briefly for Paris, where the most recent work has been done. As a result of these changes, moral theologians began to ask new questions about population pressures, social vices, the theology of charity, and hospital reform. From their comments on a range of topics we can trace an implicit discourse relating to charity and social welfare generally and to abandonment more specifically. Moreover, at this time and in part influenced by this intellectual context, the first hospital order to accept abandoned children, the Order of the Holy Spirit, began to spread throughout Europe. In northern France, however, caring for foundlings remained the work of parishes and local networks. By the mid-fourteenth

[8] For a case concerning the care of foundlings by local parishes which came before the *prévôt* of Paris in 1316, see Ernest Coyecque, *L'Hôtel-Dieu de Paris au moyen âge: Histoire et documents*, 2 vols. (Paris: H. Champion, 1889-91), 1:68 and 1:289-91.

[9] See Claudine Billot, "Les enfants abandonnés à Chartres à la fin du Moyen Age," *Annales de démographie historique* (1975): 167-86, at 169 n. 10.

century these local networks of care grew increasingly systematic and created their own institutional mechanisms to provide for this population in response to a more complex theology of charity and the specific social and civic needs of the period. By contextualizing foundlings within this history of population change, gender and class dynamics, and the development of moral theology, it is possible to offer a useful framework through which to interpret the many anecdotes of lost and found children.

Although infant abandonment has been well studied in the context of early modern Italy, its history in northern Europe during the High Middle Ages is far less well understood.[10] John Boswell's lauded book, *The Kindness of Strangers*, is one of a very few studies to address the phenomenon of abandonment in the pre-modern context.[11] Boswell's study is impressive for its range from classical antiquity through the fourteenth century, but he is most interested in the monastic custom of child oblation, that is, the donation of children to monastic houses.[12] His comments on the later medieval period are more impressionistic. Ultimately he sees foundling hospitals and the demographic growth of Europe by 1300 as part of a cruel and changed world

[10] For northern Europe, Billot is an exception. For early modern Italy, see Philip Gavitt, *Charity and Children in Renaissance Florence: The Ospedale degli Innocenti, 1410-1536* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990); Brian Pullan, *Orphans and Foundlings in Early Modern Europe, The Stenton Lecture, 1988* (Reading: University of Reading, 1989); Stephen J. Milner, ed., *At the Margins: Minority Groups in Premodern Italy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005); Giuliano Pinto, "Il Personale, le balie e i salariati dell'Ospedale de San Gallo di Firenze negli anni 1395-1406," *Ricerche storiche: Rivista semestrale del Centro Piombinese di Studi storici* 4:2 (1974): 113-68; Richard C. Trexler, "Infanticide in Florence: New Sources and First Results," *History of Childhood Quarterly* 1:1 (1973): 98-116; and idem, "The Foundlings of Florence," *History of Childhood Quarterly* 1:2 (1973): 259-84.

[11] John Boswell, *The Kindness of Strangers: The Abandonment of Children in Western Europe from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance* (New York: Pantheon, 1988).

[12] On the early medieval practice of oblation see Mayke de Jong, *In Samuel's Image: Child Oblation in the Early Medieval West* (Leiden: Brill, 1996).

in which abandoned infants died at higher rates than in the warm and kind embrace of the tenth- and eleventh-century monastic cloister. The history of foundlings gains momentum in the late eighteenth century when the state, especially in France, as Rachel Fuchs and Christine Adams have shown, took a renewed interest in poverty, the family, and public morality. For this period it is possible to compile and analyze reliable demographic and fiscal data.[13] For a medievalist, these studies of foundling homes and gender ideology in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries provide useful methodologies. While the comparative wealth of source material and statistical data does not exist for the medieval period, some important and illuminating parallels

[13] There is a very extensive bibliography on abandonment, wet-nursing, foundling homes, and maternal charity for eighteenth- and nineteenth-century France in both French and English. See, for example, Jean-Claude Peyronnet, "Les enfants abandonés et leurs nourrices à Limoges au XVIIIe siècle," *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 23 (1976): 418-41; Claude Delasselle, "Les enfants abandonés à Paris au XVIIIe siècle," *Annales: Economie, Société, Civilisations* 30 (1975): 187-218; Antoinette Chamoux, "L'enfance abandonée à Reims à la fin du XVIIIe siècle," *Annales de démographie historique* (1973): 263-301; Paule Bavoux, "Enfants trouvés et orphelins du XIVe au XVIe siècles à Paris," in *Assistance et assistés jusqu'à 1610: actes du 97e Congrès national des sociétés savantes* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale, 1979), 359-70; and the articles in *Sur la population française au XVIIIe et au XIXe siècles. Hommage à Marcel Reinhard* (Paris: Société de démographie historique, 1973). In English, see Peter Laslett, et al., *Bastardy and Its Comparative History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980); Olwen H. Hufton, *The Poor of Eighteenth-Century France, 1750-1789* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974); Rachel Fuchs, *Abandoned Children: Foundlings and Child Welfare in Nineteenth-Century France* (Albany: The State University of New York Press, 1984); idem, "Legislation, Poverty, and Child-Abandonment in Nineteenth-Century Paris," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 18 (1987): 55-80; Leslie Page Moch and Rachel Fuchs, "Pregnant, Single, and Far from Home: Migrant Women in Nineteenth-Century Paris," *American Historical Review* 95 (1990): 1007-31; and Christine Adams, "Constructing Mothers and Families: The Society for Maternal Charity of Bordeaux, 1805-1860," *French Historical Studies* 22 (1999): 65-86.

are possible, particularly if we look at migration patterns and employment open to young single women in urban centers.[14]

Demographic pressures and the gendered context for abandonment

As is well known, the population of Europe experienced unprecedented growth during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Urban centers felt this expansion most profoundly, and many cities and towns swelled beyond their original medieval walls. Paris grew from an estimated 160,000 in 1240 to approximately 210,000 by 1328 – a figure it would not attain again until the end of the early modern period.[15] As Sharon Farmer has shown, in Paris, as in many other cities, migration was the principal cause of this growth. Using the tax assessments from 1292 and the canonization records of King Louis IX, specifically the detailed descriptions of miracles performed at the dead king's tomb in St. Denis, Farmer found that of her sample taken from the St. Louis sources, 62.5 percent of the women and 72.7 percent of the men residing in Paris had migrated there from elsewhere.[16] Migrant women in particular came to the city from impressive distances, not just from the suburban hinterland, but from Normandy, Brittany, and Burgundy.

The women who migrated were often poor, traveled with one or two companions, and settled in specific parts of the city, clustering on the right bank in the parish of St.-Merry along the

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[14] See, in particular, Moch and Fuchs, "Pregnant, Single, and Far from Home," 1007-31; idem, "Getting along: Poor Women's Networks in Nineteenth-Century Paris," *French Historical Studies* 18 (1993): 34-49; and David I. Kertzer, "Gender Ideology and Infant Abandonment in Nineteenth-Century Italy," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 22 (1991): 1-25.

[15] Sharon Farmer, "Down and Out and Female in Thirteenth-Century Paris," *American Historical Review* 103 (1998): 345-72, population numbers on 352, see n. 24. Farmer draws on Raymond Cazelles, "La population de Paris avant la peste noire," *Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres: Comptes rendus* (1966): 539-54.

[16] Farmer, "Down and Out," 352. Farmer's conclusions are further elaborated in her study *Surviving Poverty in Medieval Paris: Gender, Ideology, and the Daily Lives of the Poor* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002).

rue St.-Denis and the rue St.-Martin or in the parish of St.-Paul. They often found employment in the textile industry doing needlework, carding or spinning wool, or they worked in domestic service and as laundresses. The unlucky fell ill, lived in abject poverty, or were forced into prostitution to survive.[17] Although some portion of this population no doubt contracted marriages and had families, a significant number of women remained single and alone. These demographic changes generated a social context that allowed for, and perhaps even precipitated, child abandonment. The poor, migrant, female laboring population living in Paris at the end of the thirteenth century has parallels in the nineteenth century, and as Rachel Fuchs and Leslie Page Moch have shown, this was precisely the population that abandoned infants, typically because they did not have the resources to care for them.[18] Moreover, similar patterns of migration, settlement, and poverty can be traced for other medieval cities; one thinks in particular of Montpellier and Marseilles.[19]

The population changes affecting medieval Paris did not go overlooked. Beginning in the late twelfth century the circle of masters and theologians first around Peter the Chanter, then later

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[17] See Farmer, *Surviving Poverty*, n. 16 and n. 17. For the cartulary and rent book of the parish of St.-Merry, see C. Couderc, "Cartulaire et censier de Saint-Merry de Paris," *Mémoires de la société de l'histoire de Paris et l'Ile-de-France* 18 (1891): 101-271.

[18] Moch and Fuchs, "Pregnant, Single, and Far from Home;" and Moch and Fuchs, "Getting along." Both articles make clear the importance of female social networks to establish and foster ties with kin and potential employers.

[19] For Montpellier, see Kathryn L. Reyerson, "Prostitution in Medieval Montpellier: The Ladies of Campus Polverel," *Medieval Prosopography* 18 (1997): 209-28; and for Marseilles, see Daniel Lord Smail, *Imaginary Cartographies: Possession and Identity in Late Medieval Marseille* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999). A similar configuration of neighborhoods within medieval cities that sheltered prostitutes and poor women has been traced for York, London, and Prague among many other urban locales. See David C. Mengel, "From Venice to Jerusalem and Beyond: Milíč of Kroměříž and the Topography of Prostitution in Fourteenth-Century Prague," *Speculum* 79 (2004): 407-42.

around his successors at the university of Paris, took up questions relating to pastoral care, penance, and moral theology, many of which focused on issues like marriage, population expansion, alms for the poor, prostitution, and a host of other issues that demonstrate an abiding concern with the social and economic shifts taking place in the early thirteenth century. The Chanter devoted considerable time to discussions of prostitution, which he saw as an ill all too easily accessible to the student populations along the right bank.[20] In 1198 Fulk of Neuilly preached against prostitution and helped found what would become the Cistercian nunnery of St.-Antoine-des-Champs specifically to shelter reformed and repentant prostitutes. In 1225, the university master William of Auvergne continued this campaign and founded the house of Filles-Dieu also for repentant prostitutes.[21] In the following generation Parisian masters began to read medical texts and gloss the works of Aristotle, which in turn informed a new set of questions about the morality, meaning, and nature of population growth, procreation, and contraception. By 1300 preachers' manuals repeatedly addressed the issue of avoiding pregnancy for fear of generating children that parents could not provide for, typically due to the constraints of poverty.[22] In this sense, theological texts and debates began to betray a mentality concerned with population growth, which created conditions for abandonment although they were rarely explicit on this account.

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[20] For the Chanter and his circle generally, see John Baldwin, *Masters, Princes and Merchants: The Social Views of Peter the Chanter and His Circle* 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970). On prostitutes, see 1:133-7.

[21] Farmer, *Surviving Poverty*, 147; and Léon Le Grand, *Les Maisons-Dieu et léproseries du diocèse de Paris au milieu du XIVe siècle d'après le registre de visites du délégué de l'évêque (1351-1369)* (Nogent-le-Rotrou: Daupeley-Gouverneur, 1899), 195-212.

[22] Peter Biller, *The Measure of the Multitude: Population in Medieval Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); and idem, "Birth-Control in the West in the Thirteenth and Early Fourteenth Centuries," *Past and Present* 94 (1982): 3-26.

Institutionalizing charity and the contours of hospital reform

The Parisian masters and their disciples also imagined solutions to the needs of the poor. They advocated donations of alms and charity as penitential mechanisms that both relieved the burdens of sin and cared for those in need. Founding and supporting hospitals and charitable institutions was another preferred means to care for the helpless poor. The thirteenth century saw a vast increase in the number of new hospitals and in the reform of existing institutions.[23] Pope Innocent III, who was schooled in Paris within the circle of Peter the Chanter, was instrumental in the move to reform medieval hospitals. Soon after taking up the pontificate he offered enthusiastic support for the hospital Order of the Holy Spirit founded by Gui of Montpellier, who was also credited with composing its rule. Innocent used Gui's foundation as a model for the hospital he created in Rome, Santo Spirito in Saxia, along the banks of the Tiber.[24] Although it is no doubt a later invention, a legend circulated that Innocent was moved to found Santo Spirito because fishermen on the Tiber had pulled up in their nets the tiny lifeless bodies of abandoned babies, vividly illustrating the plight the city faced with respect to poor women and children. The Hospital of Santo Spirito became the head of a new reformed hospital order, and unlike many other medieval hospitals, its rule made specific provision for the acceptance and care of abandoned children. The order spread throughout Europe,

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[23] See Jean Imbert, *Les hôpitaux en droit canonique du décret de Gratien à la sécularisation de l'administration de l'Hôtel-Dieu de Paris en 1505* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1947), 266-77. These reforms are reflected in the extensive new legislation for hospitals generated between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries. See Léon Le Grand, *Statuts d'Hôtels-Dieu et de léproseries: Recueil de texts du XIIe au XIVe siècle* (Paris: Picard, 1901); and, most recently, Gisela Drossbach, ed., *Hospitäler in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit: Frankreich, Deutschland und Italien. Eine vergleichende Geschichte/Hôpitaux au Moyen Age et aux temps moderns: France, Allemagne et Italie. Une histoire comparée* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 2007).

[24] See Paul Brune, *Histoire de l'ordre hospitalier du Saint-Esprit* (Paris: Picard, 1892); and Pietro de Angelis, *L'Ospedale di Santo Spirito in Saxia*, 2 vols. (Rome: Acad. Lancisiana, 1960-62).

though it took root most profoundly in Italy and southern France.[25]

As important as the expansion of the Order of the Holy Spirit is for identifying shifts in the charitable landscape and the need to address the care of unwanted children, it was not until the middle of the fourteenth century that the order took root in a definitive way in northern France.[26] Moreover, in the north a circle of reform-minded bishops initiated an agenda of hospital reform that rendered the care of foundlings more complex. During the thirteenth century many of the existing hospitals in France – the Hôtels-Dieu in Paris, St.-Pol, Amiens, Troyes, and Provins – gained new or rewritten rules regulating the behavior of the hospital sisters and brothers. Such legislation also defined who was to be admitted into the hospitals, for how long, and on what grounds. Several institutions curtailed the care they extended to pregnant women, poor women, children, and women who sought to give birth in the hospital space itself. In 1263, the rule for the Hôtel-Dieu-le-Comte of Troyes, which was extended

[25] On the foundation and spread of the order, see Gisela Drossbach, *Christliche Caritas als Rechtsinstitut: Hospital und Orden von Santo Spirito in Sassina (1198-1378)* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2005). For its spread throughout France see Brune, 339-415. For the implantation of the order in southern France, see Michèle Revel, "Le Rayonnement à Rome et en Italie de l'ordre du Saint-Esprit de Montpellier," in "Assistance et charité," ed. Edouard Privat, special issue, *Cahiers de Fanjeaux*, 13 (1978): 343-55; and Paul Amargier, "La Situation hospitalière à Marseille," in ibid., 239-60.

[26] There may have been a priory of the Holy Spirit in Troyes as well as an early house connected to the order in Paris, specifically to care for foundlings, but the evidence for these foundations before the fourteenth century is very thin: see Brune, 225 (for Paris) and 401-2 (for Troyes). Concerning the foundation in Troyes, see also Henri D'Arbois de Jubainville, "Etudes sur les documents antérieurs à l'année 1285, conservés dans les archives des quatre petits hôpitaux de la ville de Troyes," *Mémoires de la Société d'Agriculture de l'Aube* 21 (1857): 49-116, at 65-6 and 116. St.-Esprit-en-Grève, the hospital in Paris connected to the order, officially was founded in 1363 under the patronage of a circle of bourgeois merchants to provide for children who had lost their parents during the severe fighting and devastation occasioned by the campaigns of the Hundred Years' War. Yet within eighty years of its founding St.-Esprit-en-Grève refused to take in foundlings.

to the Hôtel-Dieu in Provins, was very precise on this point, stipulating that "foundlings are not to be received in our house, for if we were to receive them, such children would pour in with such abundance that there would not be sufficient goods to care for them, and what is more, the care of such children does not pertain to us, but falls to the parish churches."[27] In contrast with foundlings, here *pueri inventi*, orphans received hospital care until they reached ten years of age. The distinction and the clarity of this statute indicate that foundlings were a pressing issue for hospitals and ultimately for the urban communities and parishes that had to address the moral complexity and financial strain such children posed.

Northern France: Between parish and hospital

These archival traces and methodological reflections beg the question, which I am only able to answer in the most general way at this point: what happened to these children? Some information exists about where and how they were cared for, but conclusions remain elusive. In 1445, the hospital of St.-Esprit-en-Grève in Paris, under royal order, closed its doors to foundlings and accepted only orphans whose mothers had died in childbirth in the same hospital. All other children "found discarded or left by churches, in parishes or along the streets of the city, [were] to be cared for strictly by the parishes, churches or streets where they were found."[28] The royal order imagined that concentric circles of care encompassing neighborhoods, parishes, and local churches would cope with the problem.

Medieval people – and women in particular – did rely on the sort of social networks, however tenuous and fragile at times,

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[27] "Statuts de l'Hôtel-Dieu-le-Comte, à Troyes" in Le Grand, *Statuts d'Hôtel-Dieu*, no. 89, 115. See no. 88, 115, on pregnant women.

[28] Discussed and citied by Joseph Berthelé, "La vie intérieure d'un hospice du XIVe au XVIe siècle: L'Hôpital du Saint-Esprit-en-Grève à Paris," *L'Hôpital et l'aide sociale à Paris* 7 (Jan.-Feb. 1961): 81-91; 8 (Mar.-Apr. 1961): 225-35; 9 (May-June 1961): 375-83; 10 (July-Aug. 1961): 537-41; 11 (Sept.-Oct. 1961): 687-703; and 12 (Nov.-Dec. 1961): 847-53, quotation on 688-9. See also Bavoux, 359-70; and Billot, 170.

that the royal order envisioned as their first recourse. We see these connections among the impoverished sick women of Paris who – with considerable aid from friends – were able to find cures at the tomb of Saint Louis. It is certainly possible that women helped one another with the problems and challenges of unwanted children or children that they could not readily care for on their own given the constraints of day-labor and low wages, particularly in the absence of the financial help, physical protection, and social capital male relatives and friends could extend. There were limitations to such aid, however. Migration to cities meant that women often left behind or severed the networks of female kin and family who would have helped support and care for a child, which in turn would have allowed women to continue working. Thus when we consider abandonment we must recognize that behind that choice, in most cases, were women who had in various ways exhausted the limits of their immediate social networks.[29]

What then was the next layer in the concentric circles that created the social structures of care? In most cases, the parish followed the neighborhood. In the absence of specifically designated institutions for foundlings, this pattern appears as the most common outlet for care of abandoned children. There is much more to be learned about how the medieval parish functioned. Unfortunately, records of medieval parishes are extremely sparse. Some parishes in northern France appear to

[29] Particularly germane here are comments by Moch and Fuchs concerning the complexity of women's networks, including the "weaker ties" formed by employers, more distant familial relations, and vertical social relations that also constituted part of women's networks and information gathering: Moch and Fuchs, "Getting along," 34-7. For the importance of the social capital extended by male relatives in the context of pre-modern female migration, see Sheilagh Ogilvie, "How Does Social Capital Affect Women? Guilds and Communities in Early Modern Germany," *American Historical Review* 109 (2004): 325-59. The significance of female family members (so-called allomothers, or other mothers) in the creation of a network of childcare and practical know-how has been suggested by Sarah Blaffer Hrdy, *Mother Nature: Mothers, Infants, and Natural Selection* (New York: Pantheon, 1999). I would like to thank Daniel Lord Smail for this reference.

have had officials charged with ministering to the needs of abandoned children. Such was the case in Reims, as we learn from a dispute in 1275 when two parishes contested responsibility for an abandoned child. The matter was referred to the *carcerarius*, an official in charge of such matters who referred in his testimony to the typical procedures for cases involving foundlings.[30] This text opens a window onto the everyday workings of local parish institutions into which we so rarely have insight but which facilitated charity at its most basic and arguably important level.

By the later Middle Ages, wealthy members of the local bourgeoisie began to take on new roles as civic patrons and to care for the poor and sick in their midst, supplementing parish charity. Testamentary evidence is particularly useful for illuminating the intersection of parish care and local individual initiatives. While it is common in testaments from the thirteenth century to find alms bequests intended for the poor, local hospitals, nursing sisters, the infirm, and the leprous, several testaments from the beginning of the fourteenth century set aside income for foundlings as well. A cluster of wills from the first three decades of the fourteenth century offers insight into the charitable practices of a circle of bourgeois merchant drapers and their wives and widows in Paris. Among these wills are those of Jehanne Haudry and her husband Etienne, Jehan de Troyes, and the widow Jehanne du Faut, who lived much of her life as a wealthy benefactor and semi-religious woman.[31] All four testaments offer small sums to support abandoned children at

[30] Gaston Robert, "Les Chartreries paroissiales et l'assistance publique à Reims jusqu'en 1633," *Travaux de l'Académie nationale de Reims* 141 (1926-7), 127-264, document cited on 165-6. Referenced in Boswell, 349 n. 90.

[31] For Jehanne de Faut's and Jehan de Troyes' testaments, see Archives de l'Assistance Publique, Paris, Fonds St.-Jacques, no. 14 (1330) and no. 17 (1332) respectively. For the Haudry wills, see the edition and discussion of the texts and their context by Boris Bove, "Vie et mort d'un couple de marchands-drapiers Parisiens, d'après les testaments de Jeanne et Etienne Haudri (1309, 1313)," *Paris et Ile-de-France Mémoires* 52 (2001): 19-81. An analysis of these testaments, particularly as they relate to the contours of bourgeois charity, appears in Farmer, *Surviving Poverty*, 79, 88, 145-51.

Notre Dame. Probably the testators left their alms to a fund administered through the cathedral to aid foundlings, though the terminology is not precise.[32] It is possible that some children were abandoned at the cathedral, either at its door or inside.

The contours of lay piety visible in these wills are indicative of a shift in charity that took place at the end of the thirteenth century when laymen increasingly created charitable institutions for the specific needs of their communities.[33] In this case we are privy to the vertical networks of care extended by wealthy bourgeoisie to the poor on an individual basis. Such efforts, however, found parallel and complimentary initiatives under the auspices of municipal governments and civic funds. In many cases these charitable impulses overlapped as members of local governing bodies were also prominent burghers whose testaments and personal charity reinforced municipal institutions.[34] By the fourteenth century, when urban fiscal accounts became more numerous and detailed, the care and provision for foundlings took on greater specificity. The *Cartulary of the town of Provins* indicates that for the years 1274 to 1332 payments were made to women – presumably wet-nurses – who cared for foundlings who, unlike orphans, were

[32] Laurent Bouchel, writing in 1671, mentions a "lit en bois" to the left of the nave of Notre Dame where children were placed to encourage gifts and offerings from those coming into the church; some of those children may have been abandoned there. See Laurent Bouchel, *La Bibliothèque ou Trésor du Droit Français*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1671), 1:1013-4; and Léon Lallemand, *Histoire des enfants abandonnés et délaissés: Etudes sur la protection de l'enfance aux diverses époques de la civilisation* (Paris: Picard, 1885), citing Bouchel on 132-3. People may have gone out of their way, and outside their own parishes, to abandon children and infants at Notre Dame because it was so close to the Hôtel-Dieu. See the comments by Farmer, *Surviving Poverty*, 78-9.

[33] See the introductory comments by Gavitt, 8-18.

[34] The bourgeois commitment to local charity needs further investigation across time. The decisions and charitable impulses of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century merchants and citizens are comparable to those of organizations such as the League of Mothers of Families and the Society for Maternal Charity. Particularly important are the cross-class connections fostered between women through the mechanism of directed charity. See the discussion in Moch and Fuchs, "Getting along," 46-7; and Adams.

maintained at the expense of the civic community.[35] Similar accounts listing payments for the care of foundlings exist for Amiens, Douai, Marseilles, Lyon, and no doubt other urban communities in northern France.[36] Indeed, such a system of paid wet-nurses has been documented for Chartres in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.[37]

As these brief examples demonstrate, by the end of the thirteenth century the social context for the abandonment of infants and children had changed in important ways. While the occasional references to foundlings and abandoned children resonate with the modern reader, we need to consider such anecdotes within the complex historical contexts of rapid urban growth, the pressures of forced poverty, and shifts in employment and gendered migration that created new problems, which in turn demanded new solutions grounded in local charity and civic mechanisms of care. While some hospitals closed their doors to foundlings on moral grounds and out of fear of exacerbating a problem, new foundations like the Order of the Holy Spirit emerged precisely to care for such children. The tension between these two efforts illuminates the issues surrounding foundlings and their care. Yet the initiatives of lay piety and municipal governments at the end of the thirteenth century make it incumbent upon us to reassess Boswell's harsh world of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. In response to a changing environment, lay and ecclesiastical hierarchies worked in different ways to provide for a population of infants and children who had no one else.

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[35] The *Cartulary* is a copy of the communal records from the second half of the thirteenth century through the first decades of the fourteenth: F. Bourquelot, "Notice sur le manuscrit intitulé cartulaire de la ville de Provins (XIIIe et XIVe siècles)," *Bibliothèque de l'Ecole des chartes* 17 (1856): 193-241 and 428-60, material cited on 439-40.

[36] Lallemand, 110, 121-4.

[37] Billot.