NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

Holy Mediocrity: Saintly Matrons and the Dominicans in Late Medieval Italy

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Field of History

By

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EVANSTON, ILLINOIS

September 2018

Abstract

Holy Mediocrity: Saintly Matrons and the Dominicans in Late Medieval Italy

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The task of this study is to explain why a cluster of female saints who were noted not for their miracles but for the moderate – even boring – quality of their sanctity, a paradigm I call "holy mediocrity," emerged in Northern Italy in the late fourteenth century. I examine the development of the paradigm of holy mediocrity through the *vitae* of the women lauded as saints for their moderate piety: Villana delle Botti of Florence (1332–1361), Maria Sturion of Venice (ca. 1379–1399), and Bonacosa da Beccalòe of Milan (1352–1381).

"Holy Mediocrity" elucidates the social implications of spirituality and sanctity to demonstrate how pressures on women in the Trecento and Quattrocento both necessitated and made possible an imitable model of sanctity. Holy mediocrity represented a pastoral initiative by the clergy, and especially Dominicans, to provide realistic spiritual advice to upper-class women who found that the demands of marriage, particularly the marriage debt, were not easily reconciled to the Church's traditional idealization of virginity, and who worried that their wealth would prevent their entry into Heaven. Holy mediocrity posited a new profile for female sanctity – a less transgressive model that sought to circumscribe the potentially disruptive nature of female charisma.

In a broader sense this is a study of late medieval and Renaissance religious culture, which uses one of these moderate holy women, Villana delle Botti, as a microhistory to map the intersections of the sacred and society. To do so, this project not only uses hagiography, monastic records, and city chronicles, but also art and architectural evidence.

Ultimately, this project illuminates the spiritual economy of late medieval Italy and how it functioned. More specifically, it explains the importance of "boring" holy women like Villana delle Botti both to their contemporaries and to our understanding of the religious milieu of the later Middle Ages. It shows why a model of piety was constructed for women to aid them in navigating the competing demands of marriage, motherhood, and piety, and how this paradigm was ultimately subverted by its own mediocrity.

Acknowledgements

This project would not have been possible without the enduring generosity of many. Above all, Dyan Elliott and her insights and keen editorial eye, and whose patience in helping me see this project to its conclusion has rivaled that of the saints in this study. Thanks also to Ed Muir for his guidance, and especially for his help with navigating the challenges of archives and funding, and Marco Ruffini for preparing me with the art historical tools I needed to see this project through.

I am grateful to a number of institutions and their staff for their assistance: the Newberry Library, the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, the Biblioteca comunale dell'Archiginnasio in Bologna, the Biblioteca comunale degli Intronati in Siena, the Archivio di Santa Maria Novella, the Archivio di Stato in Florence, Bologna, Milan, Siena, and Venice, the Biblioteca Nazionale in Florence, the Berenson Library at Villa I Tatti, and the University of Minnesota Library. Emilio Panella at the Archivio di Santa Maria Novella shared his encyclopedic knowledge of the materials there as well as his enthusiasm for this project in its early stage, and I owe a special debt of gratitude to the indefatigable Interlibrary Loan staff at Northwestern worked miracles in helping me track down sources.

The institutional and financial support of Northwestern University, and the Department of History and the Medieval Studies Cluster in particular, made this project possible. I would also like to thank the History Department at Washington and Lee University for the financial support of the William A. Jenks Award, as well as the fellow alumni who established and have funded that award.

This long journey has brought many companions. David Peterson, who first introduced me to Giovanni Dominici and Antoninus when I was an undergraduate, has cheered me on throughout this endeavor. Fellow *italianisti* – Charles Keenan, Celeste McNamara, Azeta Kola, Melissa Vise, and Tovah Bender – have shared advice and commiserated about the challenges and humor that accompany research in Italy. Thanks especially to the medievalists who have joined me in *odium et amor* of Latin: Anne Koenig, Jason Ralph, Raashi Rastogi, and Carissa Harris. Friends in Florence did and have made it a second home, especially Dottie and Mark Dunham, Betty and Cesare Nadalini, Davide Lacovara, Cristiana Ottanelli, and Cynthia D'Alimonte, as well as Lindsay Paiva, Melanie Goldstein, Victoria DeBlassie, Kelli Wood, and Carolyn Zimmerman, who welcomed me into the midst of their cohort.

My family has encouraged and supported me from the outset of this project and in so many others, and this dissertation is dedicated to them and especially to Anne and Betty Lou. Thanks to Anni for her patience and long suffering in letting me turn the kitchen table and parts of rooms into my writing space. Wallace has been a consistent source of moral support, and a reminder that life exists outside of writing. Finally, to Dan, who has believed in me more than myself and without whose support and encouragement this project might never have reached its conclusion.

Abbreviations

Acta Sanctorum.	1st ed., Antwerp and Brussels 1643–1748; 2nd ed., Venice, 1734–1770; 3rd ed., Paris and Rome, 1863–.
ASF	Archivio di Stato di Firenze
ASMN	Archivio del convento Santa Maria Novella Firenze (Florence)
BAV	Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (Rome)
BCA	Biblioteca Comunale dell'Archiginnasio (Bologna)
BCNF	Biblioteca Centrale Nazionale di Firenze
Conv. sopp.	Conventi soppressi (BCNF)
CRSGF	Corporazioni Religiose Soppresse dal Governo Francese (ASF)
Inc.	Incunable
SMN	Santa Maria Novella (Florence)
Tanner	*Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils.* Ed. Norman Tanner. 2 vols. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1990.
Vat. lat.	Codex vaticanus latinus (BAV)
VMO	Jacques de Vitry. *Vita B. Mariae Oigniacensis, AASS,* June, 5:547-572. Trans. Margot King. *The Life of Marie d'Oignies.* Saskatoon, Sasketchewan: Peregrina Publishing, 1986.

Contents

List of Illustrations

Introduction

What happens to the cult of a saint after the initial fervor of the miraculous wanes and the novelty of a new saint fades? Some, like the early Christian martyr saints, flourished in the centuries after their deaths as the narratives of their lives were slowly transformed into stories that were as much fairy tale as biography. St. Nicholas of Santa Claus fame, for example, began his saintly career as the fourth-century bishop of Myra in southern Turkey. There, his piety and charity earned him a posthumous reputation as a saint. In the centuries after his death, reports of miracles accrued at his tomb while legends, like his heroic rescue of three boys from a pickling vat, elaborated his charitable works.[1] Still other saints were adopted as the patrons and patronesses of their hometown or a religious house. These communities preserved and promoted their titular saint in return for the spiritual – and financial – wellbeing of the community. The monks at the monastery of Conques, France stole the relics of St. Foy in January 866 as much out of devotion to the saint's miracles as her lure to pilgrims. The theft was performed under the guise of spirituality but in practice preserved the monastery's financial and juridical independence from a neighboring abbey in Figeac.[2] Meanwhile in Conques, reports of the miracles performed by St. Foy's jewel-encrusted relics offered proof of her sanctity.[3] Not all

[1] Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend,* vol. 1, trans. William Granger Ryan, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 21-27.

[2] Pamela Sheingorn, introduction to Bernard of Angers, *The Book of Sainte Foy,* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 8-10. See also Beate Fricke, *Fallen Idols, Risen Saints: Sainte Foy of Conques and the Revival of Monumental Sculpture in Medieval Art,* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013); Kathleen Ashley and Pamela Sheingorn, eds., *Writing Faith: Text, Sign, and History in the Miracles of Sainte Foy,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

[3] Around 983, a man whose eyes had been ripped out a year earlier had his sight restored in the presence of St. Foy's relics, and he was known thereafter as Guibert the Illuminated. This miracle stimulated popular devotion to St. Foy's cult, and with it an influx of gifts and donations to the abbey. Bernard of Angers, *The Book of Sainte Foy,* 43-50.

saints' cults, however, were so successful. The names of many of the people who attracted the devotion of their communities and compatriots did not survive beyond the lifetimes of their devotees, while others, though memorialized in paint, have faded into anonymity.

This project traces the lives and afterlives of a cluster of female saints who were noted not for their miracles but for the moderate – even boring – quality of their sanctity, a paradigm I call "holy mediocrity." The ideology behind holy mediocrity suggested that married women could achieve mental virginity by being pious, obedient, and chaste within the constraints of marriage, and furthermore could be sanctified for this kind of imitable piety. Holy mediocrity represented a pastoral initiative by the clergy, and especially Dominicans, to provide realistic spiritual advice to upper-class women who found that the demands of marriage, particularly the marriage debt, were not easily reconciled to the Church's traditional idealization of virginity, and who worried that their wealth would prevent their entry into Heaven. In the later Middle Ages, female spirituality was frequently associated with divine raptures and extreme asceticism, phenomena which often appeared flamboyant and captured the imagination of many of the faithful. Holy mediocrity posited a new profile for female sanctity – a less transgressive model that sought to circumscribe the potentially disruptive nature of female charisma. Holy mediocrity did not seek to overturn the dominant paradigm of late medieval female spirituality, but to qualify it and thereby impose controls on it. The task of this study is to explain why this paradigm emerged among a cluster of pious matrons from Northern Italy in the late fourteenth century. Toward that end, this project elucidates the social implications of spirituality and sanctity to demonstrate how pressures on women in the Trecento and Quattrocento both necessitated and made possible an imitable model of sanctity. The ecstatic spirituality of saints like Catherine of Siena, which empowered women

through their direct experience of the divine, was absent in the lives of these saints. Nor were they noted for their ability to effect miracles. Instead, they were venerated for their adherence to a model of submissive, moderate piety and motherhood.

I examine the development of the paradigm of holy mediocrity through the vitae of the women lauded as saints for their moderate piety: Villana delle Botti of Florence (1332–1361), Maria Sturion of Venice (ca. 1379–1399), and Bonacosa da Beccalòe of Milan (1352–1381). All of these women were from wealthy families; they were the daughters of merchant families who made up the growing Italian middle class. All three were married, and all but Maria had children. At least two of the three had ties to the Dominican Order.[4] None of them, however, were officially canonized.[5] The geographical focus of this project is Northern Italy, but with an eye on broader developments throughout western Christendom. This focus on Italy is the result of my own interests and the scholarship on spiritually-inclined laywomen. Daniel Bornstein's translation of the life of Maria Sturion of Venice, which was first brought to light by the Italian historian Fernanda Sorelli's edition of the manuscript, was my initial encounter with the "boring" holy women on whose stories this project relies, and led me to wonder whether there might be other similar figures. Combing through the Bibliografia agiografica italiana for examples of married women saints, I found Villana delle Botti and Bonacosa of Beccalòe. The temporal focus of the study is derived from these sources, and from the wealth of archival and visual material relating to Villana's cult in Florence.

[4] Bonacosa did not have formal ties to the Dominicans, nor does it appear that her confessor or hagiographer were Dominicans. However, the manuscript containing her *vita* also includes the *Regola dell'ordine della Penitenza,* written by Thomas of Siena who, as we will see below, wrote the *vita* of Maria Sturion of Venice and was instrumental in promoting the Dominican third order in Venice.

[5] Villana delle Botti, the only one of the three who has received official recognition, was beatified in the nineteenth century.

In a broader sense this is a study of late medieval and Renaissance religious culture, which uses one of these moderate holy women, Villana delle Botti, as a microhistory to map the intersections of the sacred and society. Sometime around 1420, Girolamo di Giovanni, a Dominican friar at Santa Maria Novella in Florence wrote the Latin vita of Villana, a wealthy Florentine wife and mother who had died nearly half a century earlier. A precociously pious child, Villana had been pressured by her parents to abandon her desire to enter a convent, and instead married a young man from a neighboring parish. After her wedding, her piety began to wane.[6] Soon she had traded her hairshirt for beautiful clothes adorned with gold and jewels, and expensive jewelry. One day, Villana caught her reflection in the mirror. Instead of her usually lovely appearance, her face seemed ugly and deformed.[7] In shock, she rushed to the Dominican church of Santa Maria Novella.[8] There, she threw herself at the feet of a Dominican priest and confessed her sins. Trading her couture for a hairshirt, she resolved to pass the rest of her life in fasting, prayer, and acts of charity. A debilitating illness marked the final months of her life. After her death, her body was dressed in the habit of the Dominican tertiaries, according to her wishes, and moved to the church of Santa Maria Novella. There, it was displayed in the chapel of St. Catherine of Alexandria for thirty-seven days where it remained incorrupt, and emitted an odor of sanctity. Meanwhile, other pious laywomen around Florence began to report visions and miracles of the recently-deceased holy woman.

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[6] "In ipsis maritalibus amplexibus cepit dispensatione divina mens illius sic evagari ut omnis pene fervor tepesceret in ea vite prioris. Qua ex re ammodo pereunti seculo magis quam domino placere studens velud secunda magdalena ad amplioris vite preconia surrectura venustissimum corpus suum olim cinere et cilicio exultantem, gemmis et auro omnique stratus mollitie nititur de cetero confovere." BCNF Conv. sopp. II.IV.167, 75r-v.

[7] Ibid., 75v.

[8] I describe Santa Maria Novella as both a church and a monastery throughout this project because, while the church itself is the focus of this study, it was part of the larger Dominican complex on the site, which housed Florence's Dominican community. This was the first and, until San Marco was founded in 1437, the only Dominican community in the city.

This project not only uses hagiography, monastic records, and city chronicles, but also the art and architectural history of the Dominican monastery of Santa Maria Novella to reconstruct both the social and physical space in which the transformation of Villana's cult occurred. This approach unites a previously disparate iconography, revealing the critical role played by physical spaces in shaping, manipulating, and controlling sanctity in fifteenth-century Florence. The artistic and architectural changes made to Villana's cult between 1360 and 1569 offer insight into the devotional concerns and religious interests of intersecting networks of men and women, and lay and religious in a way that is not possible to uncover using texts alone. While the artworks that were commissioned are often recorded in the contracts drawn up between the patrons of Villana's cult and the artists they hired, their motivations for choosing particular artistic themes are left unspoken. Contextualizing artifacts in relation to what we know about the society and culture that produced them – what Michael Baxandall called the "period eye" – sheds some light on the motivations for a particular commission.[9] This approach, however, is unable to account for the ways that the period eye changed over time. Nor can it address the shifting relationships between works of art and the people, images, objects, and spaces with which they interacted. To stand in a medieval church today is to experience only a shadow of the visual, olfactory, and auditory intensity that would have filled such sacred spaces in the Middle Ages.[10] What elements that have survived are physical artifacts, removed from their spatial, cultural, and social contexts, and leave the modern viewer to recreate the setting and

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[9] Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974).

[10] Recent scholarship on the history of sound is particularly promising. See especially Niall Atkinson, *The Noisy Renaissance: Sound, Architecture, and Florentine Urban Life,* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2016) and "The Republic of Sound: Listening to Florence at the Threshold of the Renaissance," *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance* 16 no. 1/2 (Fall 2013): 57-84; and the Florence DECIMA project, some of the implications of which are described in the volume edited by Nicholas Terpstra and Colin Rose, *Mapping Space, Sense, and Movement in Florence: Historical GIS and the Early Modern City,* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

interactions between the object and its viewers, and to piece together the dynamic multivalences that the object conveyed through its composition, materiality, and colors.[11] The changes made to the physical accouterments of a saint's cult, therefore, would not only have affected the space devoted to a saint like Villana, but would also have altered the relationship of that space to the area around it, creating connections through the visual juxtaposition of elements, while excluding others through separation.

This project, therefore, attempts to write a kind of microhistory of Villana's cult in order to explore how Florentines interacted with the sacred. It argues that the ordering and reordering of sacred spaces through the creation, movement, or destruction of art and architecture was an essential medium for individuals and groups to generate and shape the meaning of the sacred. These changes reflect an implicit understanding of sanctity as possessed of a contagious quality, and worked to delimit sanctity's multivalent meanings in order to highlight or suppress the characteristics of a saint that best fit a network's interests. By emphasizing the role of architecture and material culture, this project takes up recent invitations from art historians to reconsider the limits and potentials of iconographic analysis.[12] It examines how networks of

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[11] On the spatial turn in history and art history, see especially Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life,* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984); Denis Cosgrove, "Landscape and *Landschaft,*" *German Historical Institute Bulletin* 35 (2004): 57-71; Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space,* trans. D. Nicholson-Smith, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Sigrid Weigel, "On the 'Topographical Turn': Concepts of Space in Cultural Studies and Kulturwissenschaften," *European Review* 17 (2009): 187-201. Studies of the Middle Ages and Renaissance that employ spatiality as an analytic include Atkinson, "The Republic of Sound; Roger J. Crum and John T. Paoletti, eds., *Renaissance Florence: A Social History,* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Edward Muir, "The Virgin on the Street Corner: The Place of the Sacred in Italian Cities," in *Religion and Culture in the Renaissance and Reformation,* ed. Steven Ozment, (Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1989), 25-42; Fabrizio Nevola, "Surveillance and Control of the Street in Renaissance Italy," *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance* 16 no. 1/2 (Fall 2013): 85-106; Nicolas Terpstra, "Creations and Re-creations: Contexts for the Experience of the Renaissance Street," *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance* 16 no. 1/2 (Fall 2013): 221-229.

[12] Aden Kumler and Christopher R. Lakey, "*Res et significatio:* The Material Sense of Things in the Middle Ages," *Gesta* 51, no. 1 (2012): 1-17; Jérôme Baschet, *L'iconographie médiévale* (Paris: Gallimard, 2008); idem, "Inventivité et sérialité des images médiévales. Pour une approche iconographique élargie," *Annales. Histoire,*

production employed what I call an "iconography of proximity," in which the spatial relationships between images and objects signify meaning in addition to the meaning of the singular object.

A Historiography of Sanctity

The first modern study of sanctity was Hippolyte Delehaye's 1907 Les Légendes hagiographiques, which was the first to historicize the cults of saints. Delahaye's work set the stage for the gradual acceptance of hagiographical texts by historians as legitimate sources with which to study the past. Deeply immersed in the tradition of the Bollandists, whose painstaking archival work and textual criticism produced entire shelves of edited volumes of the lives of saints, Les Légendes is a manifesto of critical hagiography.[13] Recognizing that hagiographical texts tended to follow stylistic archetypes particular to the genre, Delehaye asserts that the repetitive tropes in the stories of saints' lives should not preclude their use by historians. His goal is to situate hagiography within its broader religious and literary tradition, and his model of the relationship between the saint and society was implicit. He posits a two-tiered model in which the elaborated legends of holy people were seen as a capitulation by enlightened elites to the religion of the laity, which he understands as a diminution of the religion of the learned elites. Saints' lives were written under the influence of two groups: "the people" and the hagiographer. The people exerted their imagination on the figure of the saint and continually reinvented the

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Sciences Sociales. 51e année, no. 1 (1996): 93-133; Leora Auslander, "Beyond Words," *American Historical Review* 110, no. 4 (2005): 1015-1045; Brendan Cassidy, ed., *Iconography at the Crossroads,* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993); William Whyte, "How Do Buildings Mean? Some Issues of Interpretation in the History of Architecture," *History and Theory* 45, no. 2 (May 2006): 153-177.

[13] On the study of hagiography and sanctity at the turn of the twentieth century, see *Sanctity and Secularity During the Modernist Period: Six Perspectives on Hagiography Around 1900,* ed. L. Barmann and C.J.T. Talar, (Brussels: Société des Bollandiestes, 1999). See also Bernard Joassart, *Hippolyte Delehaye: Hagiographie critique et modernisme,* 2 vols., (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 2000).

story of the holy person, but were incapable of recording these inventive narratives in writing.[14] That task fell to the hagiographer, who, for Delehaye, was a member of the intellectual elite. The hagiographer served as the editor of the imagination of the masses and was charged with translating the stories of the people into a standard, written form.[15]

In the second half of the twentieth century, hagiography provided a rich testing ground for new methods of historical analysis. The late 1960s and early 1970s, for instance, saw the use of anthropological methods to explore themes of popular mentalities, demography, and saints' roles in their societies. The idea that, for historians, the supernatural operates within a given culture and society and is not cosmically transcendent is central to these studies. In his 1969 Sociologie et Canonisations, Pierre Delooz explores how saints were made, both within the official procedures of the Church, and by the communities around them.[16] The saint, he argues, is only ever a saint for other people. A person who is considered a saint today – in the sense of a having an officially sanctioned cult – is regarded as such because it is believed that they were a saint in the past, during their own lifetime, a reputation now ensured by the saint's official cult. Sainthood depends on the community's recollection of a dead person's past experience, and the historian, therefore, can never have direct access to the living saint himself, but only the sanctity as it was remembered and recorded by others. Delooz's approach foregrounds the role of social interaction in the creation of a saint, and draws attention to the discursive quality of the categories that communities employed to assess the extent to which a saint conformed to figural precedents. Peter Brown likewise turned his attention to the social role(s) of people regarded as

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[14] Delehaye, *The Legends of the Saints,* trans. Donald Attwater, (New York: Fordham University Press, 1962), 3.

[15] Ibid., 11.

[16] Pierre Delooz, *Sociologie et Canonisations,* (Liège: Faculté de droit, 1969).

holy.[17] In his 1971 article, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man," he situates the "holy man" at the center of his analysis instead of relegating him to the margins of scholarship on Christianity as a misguided fanatic.[18] Brown rejects the assumption that the holy man represents a decline from the ideals of Greek antiquity. Instead, the holy man served a positive social function as a "hinge person" who mediated between God and man, and brought the holy into the world for others. The holy man, he argues, would have been the average person's primary point of contact with the divine. Brown's focus on the holy man as a powerful actor rather than a marginal figure has been profoundly influential. Nonetheless, his analysis leaves out the influence of hagiographic constructions of the holy man, and does not consider the role of gender or social class.[19]

The early 1980s gave rise to statistical studies that quantified saints according to categories such as social class and position, religious order, gender, age, geography, and criteria for canonization. These studies sought to understand the contours of sanctity by studying saints as a collective group, and through these patterns to identify broader social and cultural trends. While Delooz had already begun this work of categorization and quantification, André Vauchez, Michael Goodich, and Donald Weinstein and Rudolph Bell systematically compiled statistical data, which they in turn analyzed to outline typologies of sanctity in the Middle Ages and beyond.[20] Of these, Vauchez employs the narrowest definition of sanctity, examining only those

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[17] Peter Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," *Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (1971): 80-101.

[18] Edward Gibbon, for example, disparaged figures like Simeon the Stylite as one of a "swarm of fanatics, incapable of fear, or reason, or humanity." *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire,* chapter 37.

[19] Brown himself acknowledges these omissions in his retrospective evaluation of this article. See "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity, 1971-1997," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 6 (1998): 353-376.

[20] André Vauchez, *La Sainteté en Occident aux dernier siècles du moyen âge d'après les process de canonisation et les documents hagiographiques,* Bibliothèque des Etudes Françaises d'Athènes et de Rome 241,

figures for whom an official process of canonization was opened.[21] His Sainteté en Occident is a systematic analysis of the formal processes for canonization initiated between 1198 and 1431. Using these processes, Vauchez identifies trends in the medieval understanding of sanctity and shows how the papacy slowly asserted increasing control over sanctity by controlling the authorization of cults through the process of canonization. In addition to its expansive use of hagiographical sources, Vauchez's work considers the cooperation and tensions between popular and clerical attitudes towards sanctity. The result is a study that offers a nuanced depiction of late medieval sanctity based in quantitative conclusions, but situated within broader religious, social, and political trends. Goodich's work, by contrast, takes a narrower chronological focus than Vauchez, focusing exclusively on the thirteenth century, but utilizes a broader definition of sanctity. He employs basic statistical analysis to draw conclusions about the characteristics of thirteenth-century saints from the data. Problematically, many of these conclusions are based on statistically insignificant data, and thus are not especially meaningful, nor surprising. This weakness is especially apparent in his conclusions about the correlation between social class and religious order where, for example, he concludes that the early Dominican saints were generally members of wealthy, upper middle-class families even though he can only determine the social class of 51% of the group.[22] More important than his quantitative analysis, therefore, is Goodich's attention to the biases of the sources, caused by factors such as the formulaic quality of hagiography and the politics of canonization. In addition, he points towards the ways in which

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(Rome: Ecole Française de Rome, 1981), now translated as *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages,* trans. Jean Birrel, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Michael Goodich, *Vita Perfecta: The Ideal of Sainthood in the Thirteenth Century,* (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1982); Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M. Bell, *Saints and Society: The Two Worlds of Western Christendom, 1000-1700,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

[21] Vauchez does not address the bias of the archival record; these 71 processes represent only those that have survived.

[22] Goodich, 155. On the problems of data and analysis in Goodich, see also Patrick J. Geary's review of the book in *Speculum* 60 (April 1985): 406-408.

late medieval sanctity must be understood in dialogue with the threat of heresy. Weinstein and Bell, meanwhile, utilized digital coding and computer processing to perform their statistical analyses on Pierre Delooz's list of 864 saints who lived between 1000 and 1700.[23] Saints and Society is the most macroscopic of these three quantitative studies, and aims to address "the two worlds of western Christendom" in which saints were dual citizens, that is, the intersection between a holy person's own spirituality and the significance given to that person by their community. By using a nuanced system of coding, they identified patterns in the social qualities of sanctity, and in particular the role of gender, age, class, and geographical region. This data was and remains an invaluable resource. Their analysis of this evidence, however, tends to compartmentalize the information it revealed as either social or religious, rather than exploring the relationship between the two, as the title of the book suggested.[24]

Where Weinstein and Bell fell short in considering the religious world of western Christendom, Richard Kieckhefer excels. Unquiet Souls, published in 1984, is interested in the interior dimension of sanctity. It focuses explicitly on the spirituality and theology of sanctity by discerning commonalities across hagiographical sources. Kieckhefer identifies four common traits – patience, penitence, devotion to the Passion, and rapture/revelation – and seeks to locate these trends within a wider milieu of late medieval spirituality. This study is especially attentive to the ways that hagiographical texts and sources about the lives of saints reflect more about the author's expectations for saints than they tell about the biographical details of the saintly figures

[23] Weinstein and Bell, 277-290.

[24] For example, the chapters in Part 1 are largely about social characteristics – "Children," "Adolescents," "Adults" – with a chapter about "Chastity," a quality inextricably tied up in religion, incongruously inserted in the middle.

themselves. It is also particularly sensitive to questions of gender, gesturing towards the analytical trends that would follow in future studies about sanctity.

The study of sanctity as a cultural phenomenon took on added momentum in the 1980s with Caroline Bynum's paradigm-shifting Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women. Against a background of feminist scholarship and sociology, Bynum highlighted gender as an essential category of analysis. Earlier scholars had tended to equate positive mysticism, characterized by its somatic quality, with women, and negative mysticism, which rejected the claim that God is representable, with men, positing a hierarchy which privileged the latter over the former, and therefore male over female.[25] Christianity had, of course, adopted from the Neoplatonic tradition its emphasis on the duality between the body and the soul, which meant that men were usually likened with the incorruptible soul, and women with the weak, corruptible body.[26] Though Bynum accepted the dichotomy of the spirit as masculine and the body as feminine, she sought to complicate this view of female bodiliness as a reflection of weakness. As the title of the book suggests, to do so she emphasized the religious significance of food to medieval women, and the role of food as a principally female concern in the Middle Ages. [27] Female food piety was not a rejection of the body, nor a sign of internalized misogyny, or even a symptom of medieval anorexia, as Rudolph Bell had argued in his 1985

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[25] Sarah Beckwith, "A Very Material Mysticism: The Medieval Mysticism of Margery Kempe," in *Medieval Literature: Criticism, Ideology, and History,* ed. David Aers, (Sussex, Harvester Press, 1986): 39-40.

[26] See especially Alcuin Blamires, "Paradox in the Medieval Gender Doctrine of Head and Body," in *Medieval Theology and the Natural Body,* ed. Peter Biller and Alastair Minnis, 13-29, Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity,* 2nd ed., (New York: Columbia, 2008), Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), Dyan Elliott, "Flesh and Spirit: The Female Body," in *Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition, c. 1100-c.1500,* ed. Alastair Minnis and Rosalynn Voaden, (Turnhout, Brepols, 2010): 13-46.

[27] This equation of women with food has not gone unchallenged. In her 1993 review of *Holy Feast,* Kathleen Biddick criticized Bynum's desire to see food as primarily a female concern as anachronistic and essentialist, in that it reduces women to the maternal. Kathleen Biddick, "Genders, Bodies, Borders: Technologies of the Visible," *Speculum* 68, no. 2 (1993): 393-397.

Holy Anorexia.[28] Instead, women embraced the bodiliness that likened them to Christ, whose broken body was present at the Eucharist as both literal food and flesh.[29] Just as Christ's body became redemptive food, so too could the female body, associated with food because of its ability to produce nourishment in the form of breast milk, offer vicarious redemption through pain and suffering.[30] This "saving and serving role" fashioned by holy women for themselves through food piety did not, however, overturn the patriarchal structures of medieval society.[31] But it did provide women some spiritual authority and the ability to exert a greater than usual agency over their own quotidian situation.[32]

One of the central issues in the historiography of medieval sanctity, and of women saints in particular, is the question of who is writing the narrative when it comes to the lives of holy people. Holy Feast epitomizes one approach. It emphasizes the spirituality of women saints as described in their vitae and chooses to focus on the spiritual implications of food and fasting for late medieval women. Other scholars, however, have challenged Bynum's tendency to take the vitae at face value as accounts of how women themselves associated food with the bodiliness and suffering of Christ. Amy Hollywood, for example, has drawn attention to the authorial role of the male writers of women's vitae.[33] The problem of "hagiographic translation" is that the hagiographer inevitably brings biases, both intentional and implicit, and in turn interprets and

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[28] Rudolph M. Bell, *Holy Anorexia,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985). See especially Bynum's own discussion of the historiographical trends in the interpretation of female spirituality and asceticism in *Holy Feast and Holy Fast,* 194-207.

[29] Bynum, *Holy Feast,* 269-276.

[30] Ibid., 234-235. Bynum expands this idea of vicarious suffering in her persuasive article "The Power in the Blood: Sacrifice, Satisfaction and Substitution in Late Medieval Soteriology," in *The Redemption: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on Christ as Redeemer*, ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, SJ and Gerald O'Collins, SJ, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 177-204.

[31] Bynum, *Holy Feast,* 235; Beckwith, 47.

[32] Bynum, *Holy Feast,* 233-237.

[33] Amy Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife,* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995).

gives meaning to the life, actions, and behavior of the saint within an individual, cultural, and social framework. Other scholars have addressed this role of authorship in hagiography, particularly in the case of women saints. John Coakley and Catherine Mooney have drawn attention to the complex partnerships between living saints and their hagiographers, emphasizing that such relationships were charged with imbalances of power, both political and spiritual, but that such inequities in fact produced creative potentials.[34] Aviad Kleinberg has also been interested in questions of agency and interaction between saints and their audiences.[35] Like Delooz, he has emphasized the ephemerality of sanctity by showing how holiness was open to the interpretation of a saint's audience, and not an inherent, fundamental quality. Unlike Delooz, however, Kleinberg considers living saints and their agency in their own sanctification. Saints are not passive figures onto which communities project their expectations, but can choose to conform to these tropes.

Finally, gender has continued to be one of the most critical categories in the study of medieval saints and holy people. Barbara Newman, Dyan Elliott, and Nancy Caciola have shown the ways in which female sanctity did not always conform to clerical norms.[36] As a result, women's piety constantly spilled over into the realm of heresy, even as their divine raptures were

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[34] John Coakley, *Women, Men, and Spiritual Power: Female Saints and Their Male Collaborators,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); Catherine M. Mooney, "The Authorial Role of Brother A. in the Composition of Angela of Foligno's Revelations," in *Creative Women in Medieval and Early Modern Italy,* ed. E. Ann Matter, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press: 1994), 34-63; Idem, "Voice, Gender, and the Portrayal of Sanctity," and "*Imitatio Christi* or *Imitatio Mariae*? Clare of Assisi and Her Interpreters," in idem, ed., *Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and Their Interpreters*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 1-15, 52-77.

[35] Aviad M. Kleinberg, *Prophets in Their Own Country: Living Saints and the Making of Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

[36] Barbara Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist,* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995); idem, "Possessed by the Spirit: Devout Women, Demoniacs, and the Apostolic Life in the Thirteenth Century," *Speculum* 73 (July 1998): 733-770; Dyan Elliott, *Fallen Bodies: Pollution, Sexuality, and Demonology in the Middle Ages,* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999); idem, *Proving Woman: Female Spirituality and Inquisitional Culture in the Later Middle Ages,* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004); Nancy Caciola, *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages,* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006).

sometimes classified as diabolical. Other studies have emphasized the political role of female saints. Gabriella Zarri's work on living female saints demonstrates how the rulers of early modern Italian city-states used the spiritual prestige of sante vive to lend spiritual authority to their political regimes.[37] She argues that the sanctity of a living saint could be harnessed to a secular ruler's agenda just as surely as with the church-sanctioned cults surrounding the holy dead.[38] Outside of Italy, Gábor Klaniczay has shown how the dynasties of central Europe called upon the spiritual authority of royal saints for political legitimacy.[39] Other scholars interested in the political role of saints have focused on Catherine of Siena, whose role in securing the return of the papacy to Rome from exile in Avignon is now well-known thanks to the work of scholars like Karen Scott and F. Thomas Luongo.[40]

The Historiography of Villana

Villana and her cult appear regularly in studies of late medieval female sanctity alongside examples of other married saints, but only two books consider her in any great depth.[41] The most

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[37] Gabriella Zarri, *Le santé vive: Cultura e religiosità femminile nella prima età moderna,* (Turin: Rosenberg & Sellier, 1990).

[38] Elliott observes a parallel manipulation of female sanctity by different interest groups in *Proving Woman.*

[39] Klaniczay, *Holy Rulers and Blessed Princesses: Dynastic Cults in Medieval Central Europe,* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[40] Scott, "'Io Caterina': Ecclesiastical Politics and Oral Culture in the Letters of Catherine of Siena," in *Dear Sister: Medieval Women and the Epistolary Genre,* ed. Karen Cherewatuk and Ulrike Wiethaus (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993): 87-121; Luongo, *The Saintly Politics of Catherine of Siena,* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006).

[41] Some books that touch on Villana are: Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 142, 200; Maiju Lehmijoki-Gardner, ed. and trans., *Dominican Penitent Women,* (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), 246; Richard Kieckhefer, *Unquiet Souls: Fourteenth-Century Saints and Their Religious Milieu,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984). 57, 60, 96, 116, 119, 132, 146, 152, 161; Anna Benvenuti Papi, *"In castro poenitentiae":*

important of these, and to date the only complete study of Villana, her vita, and her cult, is Stefano Orlandi's La Beata Villana: terziaria domenicana fiorentina del sec. XIV, published in 1955.[42] Orlandi, a Dominican friar at Santa Maria Novella, served as the monastery's archivist from 1939 and was instrumental in systematizing its collection.[43] His tenure as the archivist of Santa Maria Novella made him especially well equipped to locate Villana's vita within its fifteenth-century Dominican milieu. Orlandi transcribed the original Latin manuscript of Villana's vita from MS II.IV.167 in the Conventi soppressi collection at the Biblioteca Nazionale in Florence, and translated the text into modern Italian, correcting minor errors in the Bollandist's edition of Villana's life in the Acta sanctorum. Orlandi's introduction to the text of the vita covers the historical context of Villana's life and cult in Florence in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the history of Santa Maria Novella, the Dominican tertiaries in Florence, and Villana's family, as well as the alterations made to Villana's tomb between her death in 1360 and her beatification by Pope Leo XII in 1824. Orlandi also speculated that the vita had been written by Girolamo di Giovanni (c. 1387-1454), a friar at Santa Maria Novella who served as prior of the monastery three times between 1419 and 1445, was Procurator General of the Dominican Order between 1421 and 1426, and gave lectures on Dante at the Florentine Studium.[44] Based on the apparent eyewitness testimony in the vita, Orlandi argued that it was written around 1420,

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Santità e società femminile nell'Italia medievale, (Rome: Herder, 1990), 171-203, and idem, "Mendicant Friars and Female Pinzochere in Tuscany: From Social Marginality to Models of Sanctity," in *Women and Religion in Medieval and Renaissance Italy,* ed. Daniel Bornstein and Roberto Rusconi, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996): 84-103; Elizabeth A. Petroff, *Body and Soul,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 174-177; Weinstein and Bell, 270.

[42] Stefano Orlandi, *La Beata Villana: terziaria domenicana fiorentina del sec. XIV,* (Florence: Il Rosario, 1955).

[43] Emilio Panella, "Catologo dell'Archivio di Santa Maria Novella in Firenze," *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum* 70 (2000): 123-134.

[44] Orlandi, *La Beata Villana,* 33-35; Idem, *Necrologio di Santa Maria Novella,* vol. 1 (Florence: Olschki, 1955), 219-223.

during Girolamo's first term as prior.[45] Orlandi's book remains the most thorough and useful work on Villana, but it is hampered in its analysis by Orlandi's desire to promote the history of the Dominicans in Florence, a bias that prevents him from considering Villana within the wider religious milieu of the later Middle Ages.

More recently, Eliana Corbari has been eager to portray Villana as an example of "the literate female audience of Dominican sermons," and to use her vita as evidence that "she was literate and appreciative of Dominican sermons, as well as a visible and vocal participant in the transmission and reception of vernacular theology."[46] In her 2013 study of "vernacular theology" – a term she borrows from Bernard McGinn and Nicholas Watson – she sets out to show that "despite being written in Latin, Villana's vita is an example of vernacular theology" because it represented the concerns of a lay audience and was influenced by the vernacular linguistic and cultural milieu.[47] Corbari's definition of vernacular theology, however, is so broad as to include almost any text, and therefore has little value as a category of analysis.[48] Further, while Villana's vita did address women's concerns – as I show in this project – it was part of a broader interest in the pastoral care of women by Dominicans in late medieval Italy rather than a tool for the dissemination of theology (although the two are, of course, intertwined).

Corbari is particularly interested in the role of women as both an audience for and transmitters of vernacular theology in late medieval Italy, especially as conveyed through

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[45] Orlandi, *La Beata Villana,* 35-37.

[46] Eliana Corbari, *Vernacular Theology: Dominican Sermons and Audience in Late Medieval Italy,* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 14-15.

[47] Ibid., 15.

[48] A similar criticism has been leveled against other studies of vernacular theology. On vernacular theology and its discontents, see especially Bernard McGinn, introduction to *Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics,* (New York: Continuum, 1994), 1-14; Nicholas Watson, "Censorship and Cultural Change in Late Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel's *Constitutions* of 1409," *Speculum* 70 (1995): 822-864; Vincent Gillespie, "Vernacular Theology," *Middle English,* ed. Paul Strohm, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 401-420.

sermons preached in Italian.[49] They were not, she argues, a passive audience for these sermons, but frequently influenced the direction of vernacular theology through their conversations and interactions with men and by disseminating written sermons.[50] In this context, Villana is the perfect example of a learned, married laywoman whose theological education included reading and listening to sermons.[51] Her vita portrays her as "an active, visible, and vocal audience" for the sermons of the Dominicans at Santa Maria Novella because she not only listened to their sermons, but frequently conversed with the friars.[52] Villana, Corbari argues, participated in "a two-directional shared language of vernacular theology" in which she was "inspiring the friars as much as being inspired by them."[53] In turn, her vita served as vernacular theology in its own right.[54] While Corbari's analysis provides a useful contextualization of Villana's life and cult within broader theological and devotional trends in the later Middle Ages, her insistence on characterizing Villana as an exemplar of vernacular theology forces her to rely too heavily on the vita – written by a male Dominican – as a source for understanding the devotional interests of laywomen. As a result, Corbari takes Villana's actions and thoughts at face value, as if the vita is a record of Villana's life as it happened, rather than as Girolamo wanted to portray it. Male authorship does not preclude the text from addressing women's concerns – the subsequent chapters will demonstrate that the lives of saints like Villana attempted to do precisely that – but Girolamo had distinct and multivalent motivations when he ascribed actions and interests to Villana.

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[49] Corbari, 14-15.
[50] Ibid., 15-64.
[51] Ibid., 149.
[52] Ibid., 159.
[53] Ibid., 162, 191.
[54] Ibid., 150, 186-187.

My work on Villana and her cult, and the vitae of other Trecento holy women in that fit the paradigm of holy mediocrity builds upon studies that have foregrounded the role of gender and society in the lives and cults of medieval saints, and particularly those that have addressed the dynamic interactions between saints and their hagiographers and devotees. It points to the productive symbiosis of male clerics and laywomen, and considers the ways in which clerics – particularly Dominicans – tried to provide practical spiritual advice to women, and the unusual extent to which some women listened – or were portrayed as listening –to these men who urged them to practice moderation in their spirituality. Nonetheless, it departs from them by considering the ways in which holiness sometimes functioned outside of and beyond the social and cultural meanings and expectations that people tried to impose on it. I am particularly interested in the fluid and tenuous border between the sacred and the profane, and the role of hagiography in defining and testing that distinction. The overall structure of the project is cumulative, and loosely chronological. Like many of the studies on which this project builds, my emphasis is on the later Middle Ages, though with an eye to the intersection of the medieval tradition with the religious reforms of the sixteenth century. The chapters are structured around different themes that together offer a picture of female spirituality, its construction, and its uses, in the later Middle Ages.

Chapter 1 contextualizes holy mediocrity within the landscape of broader social, cultural, spiritual, and theological trends in late medieval Italy. As secular authorities grappled with demographic pressures in the aftermath of recurrent bouts of plague, humanist writers of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, including Petrarch, Leon Battista Alberti, and Francesco Barbaro, began to reevaluate the value of marriage in light of newly rediscovered classical texts.

Meanwhile, pastoral care of the laity, and especially of women, became a growing concern, particularly within the Dominican Order. This interest was on a continuum with the Fourth Lateran Council's insistence on annual confession, which opened ever-more probing lines of questioning to confessors and penitents alike. By the turn of the fifteenth century, prominent Florentine Dominicans like Giovanni Dominici and Antoninus of Florence were writing spiritual how-to guides for women in response to requests from wealthy matrons for advice on how to manage the duties of their households and families alongside their desire to practice a greater degree of piety.

In Chapter 2 I examine a different facet of this predominantly Dominican interest in the pastoral care of laywomen through the vitae of the three women I have identified as exemplars of the paradigm of holy mediocrity. This chapter analyzes themes that appear across these women's vitae, including anxiety about virginity and its loss, and concerns about wealth and its implications. The typology of holy mediocrity was paradoxical because it rarely provided the distinct signs of holiness – especially miracles and prophecies – that distinguished saints. Instead, these vitae highlighted themes pertinent to the lives of wealthy married matrons – the conjugal debt, marriage, wealth, family, and motherhood – and suggested that the lives of the women they depicted could offer imitable models of piety for other women who likewise sought to live a more spiritual lifestyle within the constraints of marriage. I argue that these moderate holy women were part of a growing emphasis on the pastoral care of women by Italian Dominicans, and an accompanying trend in mendicant spirituality that emphasized holy mediocrity.

Chapter 3 narrows the focus, turning to Villana and her cult, and the efforts of the Dominican friars at Santa Maria Novella to establish her as a saint, and as a particularly Dominican one at that. This chapter draws on anthropological and art historical methodologies to argue that late medieval Italians understood that holiness had a contagious quality, and therefore made efforts to shape and direct this contagion. The Dominicans at Santa Maria Novella capitalized on this contagious quality of Villana's sanctity, and used specific spaces within their church to contextualize her first as a popular saint in the mode of Sts. Catherine and Margaret, and later to legitimize her sanctity as distinctly Dominican. This chapter points to issues of reception, both of Villana as a saint and of the model of holy mediocrity.

Finally, in Chapter 4, I move into the fifteenth century to analyze how Villana's niece and grandson promoted her cult in an attempt to leverage her sanctity in the wake of disputes within the family of Villana's descendants. It suggests that sanctity could be privatized, but with unintended consequences. This chapter considers the role of private patrons, and likewise utilizes the physical artifacts of Villana's cult. It also relies on archival evidence, including wills, legal records, notarial documents, and artists' contracts, which has not previously been considered holistically. By placing these sources in dialogue with one another, I am able to reconstruct the events surrounding production of the key milestones in the history of Villana's cult and their attendant socio-political circumstances.

Ultimately, this project illuminates the spiritual economy of late medieval Italy and how it functioned. More specifically, it explains the importance of "boring" holy women like Villana delle Botti both to their contemporaries and to our understanding of the religious milieu of the later Middle Ages. It shows why a model of piety was constructed for women to aid them in

navigating the competing demands of marriage, motherhood, and piety, and how this paradigm was ultimately subverted by its own mediocrity.

Chapter 1

Constructing a New Spirituality

> Griselda, it is time now for you to reap the fruit of your long patience…what I have done was directed toward a preestablished goal, for I wanted to teach you how to be a wife, to show these people how to choose and keep one, and to acquire for myself lasting tranquility for as long as I lived with you.[1]
>
> —Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron*

This chapter contextualizes the restrained, moderate spirituality of late medieval saints noted for their holy mediocrity within broader social, cultural, spiritual, and theological trends in the later Middle Ages in Florence and beyond. Virginity remained the gold standard for women, and anxiety about its loss was paramount in the minds of many matrons and unmarried women. Even as late medieval religious and secular thinkers increasingly emphasized the importance of marriage, they articulated views of women and marriage that often seemed irreconcilable. As symbols of male power, women's dress was often ostentatious and wordly. Yet as vessels of patriarchal lineage, they were also expected to be modest, chaste, and pious. The discrepancy between these expectations was often exemplified by attire, and women's clothing became a perennial locus of attention in preaching and legislation. Holy mediocrity developed out of these tensions as an attempt to provide a middle road for women. In the twelfth century, a new, affective mode of spirituality surrounding the suffering of Christ began to develop, fostered by Lateran IV's mandate to confess and the literature of confession. This kind of piety came to be epitomized by the frenzied devotion to a tortured, crucified *Christus patiens* embraced by female saints like Catherine of Siena. Holy mediocrity rejected this extremism. Shaped by a new

[1] Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron*, trans. Mark Musa and Peter Bondanella, (New York: Signet Classic, 1982), 797.

pastoral initiative advanced in guides to good living, this model of sanctity stressed moderation. So although indebted to more extreme forms of affective piety, holy mediocrity also provides an important critique.

I. The Renaissance of Marriage

Profound demographic changes swept across Europe in the fourteenth century, initiating a reevaluation of marriage by secular humanists and civic authorities. In Florence, as in most of Italy, a series of famines struck, first in 1329 and again in 1340 and 1346. These famines set the tone for the precipitous population decline that would characterize the rest of the century, as well as economic instability caused by inflationary prices.[2] Between 1329 and 1330, grain prices nearly tripled, forcing the Florentine *comune* to spend over 70,000 florins to feed the city's inhabitants.[3] Again in 1340, the city, along with most of Italy, was struck by famine. In 1346, the failure of crops led once more to soaring prices, this time compounded by widespread disease that killed much of the livestock in the region.[4] The chronicler Giovanni Villani noted that this famine was far more severe than those in years past. "In 1329 and 1340 there was great scarcity, as we have already mentioned, but then you could find some grain and some fodder in the city and the *contado,* but in this year you could find neither, especially not in the *contado.*"[5] The shortages in the *contado* drove many farmers into the city, where grain prices shot up. To cope

[2] Giovanni Villani, *Nuova Cronica di Giovanni Villani,* ed. Giuseppe Porta (Parma: Ugo Guanda, 1991), book 10 and book 12.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid., book 12, ch. 73.

[5] "E con tutto che l'anno 1329 e del 1340 fosse grande caro, come addietro in quegli tempi facemmo menzione, pure del grano e della biada si trovava in città e in contado; ma in questo anno non si trovava ne grano nè biada, e specialmente in contado…" Ibid.

with the shortfalls, the city government distributed loaves of bread to 94,000 people per day, by Villani's estimate, from April through June 1347.[6]

Against this background of famine, the plague reached Florence in 1348 with devastating results. Boccaccio described the disease as unstoppable and the carnage "infinite" as the sick were abandoned by the healthy, and dead bodies piled up in the streets.[7] Matteo Villani, who continued his brother Giovanni's chronicle after his death in 1348, couched the devastation in religious terms, asserting that "whatever you might find in the writings since the Flood, nothing has had the universal sentence of mortality that so encompassed the entire world as that which came in our own day."[8] Quantitatively, the population of Florence dropped by roughly 60%, from a high between 90,000-120,000 in the 1330s to around 42,000 after 1348.[9] Eight subsequent waves of plague between 1400 and 1478 would continue to devastate the population; in 1374, the population had recovered to about 60,000 only to be reduced by roughly 12,000 during a second wave of plague in 1400. By the time of the *catasto* of 1427, the population of Florence was fewer than 40,000.[10]

As a result of this economic and social upheaval, Florentine society became obsessed with marriage, recognizing that rebuilding the city's population was essential to restoring economic and political stability. Families budgeted and invested so that their daughters could

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[6] "E trovassi in mezzo Aprile nel 1347, che da novantaquattromila bocche erano, che n'aveano a dispensare per di." By this calculation the city was baking and distributing nearly 190,000 6-ounce loaves per day. The quality, predictably, was abysmal: "…faceano pane della farina del comune sanza abburattare e trarne crusca, ch'era molto grosso e crudele a vedere e a mangiare." ["…they baked bread from the *comune's* wheat without sifting or removing the chaff, which was very rough and painful to see and to eat."] Giovanni Villani, book 12, ch. 73.

[7] Boccaccio, 7.

[8] "Ma per quello che trovar si possa per le scritture, dal generale diluvio in qua, non fu universale giudicio di mortalità che tanto comprendesse l'universo, come quella che nei nostri di avvenne." Matteo Villani, *Cronica,* ed. Giuseppe Porta (Parma: Ugo Guanda, 2007), 6; Intro., lines 25-29.

[9] Anthony Molho, *Marriage Alliance in Late Medieval Florence,* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 27-28.

[10] Molho, *Marriage Alliance,* 7; David Herlihy and Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, *Tuscans and Their Families: A Study of the Florentine Catasto of 1427,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 67-70.

marry, parents obsessed over finding the best possible match for their children, preachers warned against anything that might get in the way of marriage, and notaries made their livelihoods by documenting dowries and marriage contracts. Nowhere was this emphasis on marriage more apparent than in middle-class families that aspired to preserve and develop their wealth. The family was the most important social connection for the middle- and upper-class individual, even above loyalty to the city, the Church, or business partners.[11] Marriage was the key means to ensure the continuation of a family's legacy across generations, and in turn to ensure its economic stability and success. As Samuel Cohn has shown through his research on wills, after the second wave of plague in 1378, Florentines increasingly tended to consolidate familial patrimony in their wills rather than dividing it into many small gifts.[12] The production of male heirs in particular was key to establishing a line of inheritance that would ensure that the family's wealth would remain with the family.

Despite this obsession with marriage, demographic pressures over the course of the fifteenth century made it ever more difficult for women to find a husband. Christiane Klapisch-Zuber and David Herlihy, in their study of Florentine society through the lens of the Florentine *catasto* tax records, found that the negotiating position of brides in Florence steadily declined

[11] This obsession with marriage was not the birth of the nuclear family, as some scholars have argued characterized the Renaissance in Italy. Fifteenth-century Florentines were not interested in marriage as a way to build families that centered around a single generation. Instead, a significant percentage of Florentine households tended to be multinuclear, meaning that multiple generations cohabitated in one house even after marriage. In his *Della Famiglia,* Leon Battista Alberti advises that all members of the family, except married daughters, reside in one house, both for the practical reason that a physically divided family doubled household expenses, and for the intangible drawbacks which "are more easily felt than described." Even if a family were to grow so large that it could not remain under one roof, Alberti advises that they "at least be united in one common will." Leon Battista Alberti, *I Libri della Famiglia,* bk. 3, trans. Renée Neu Watkins, (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1994), 194.

[12] Samuel Cohn, *The Cult of Remembrance and the Black Death: Six Renaissance Cities in Central Italy,* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

through the fifteenth century.[13] As life expectancy improved following the waves of plague in the second half of the fourteenth century, the age of men at first marriage steadily increased, in turn increasing the gap between the ages of spouses. This created an imbalance in the ratio of women to men on the marriage market, which hovered around 118:100 throughout the fifteenth century.[14] Statistically, therefore, many women had no chance of finding a husband. Fewer grooms meant more competition for spouses, which in turn drove up the cost of dowries as women and their families competed for eligible men. By the first half of the fifteenth century, the average Florentine dowry was somewhere between 433 and 600 florins, a sum that represented an average of fourteen percent of a household's wealth.[15] Providing for the marriage of a daughter, therefore, required extensive financial planning and still came as a sizeable blow to her family's wealth. The daughters of wealthy families had the best chance of finding a husband because they could offer the highest dowries. This in turn created a ripple effect. Since eligible bachelors were in higher demand than eligible bachelorettes, men could be more selective in choosing a spouse, and could delay marriage in the hopes of maximizing the financial rewards of the arrangement. While the average age of women at their first marriage was eighteen, the average age of men who married for the first time was around thirty, and about twelve percent of Florentine men reached the age of fifty without marrying.[16] Despite the dangers of childbirth for women, lower life expectancies for men meant that many men died bachelors. Women from less

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[13] Herlihy, David and Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, *Tuscans and Their Families: A Study of the Florentine Catasto of 1427*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 202-231.

[14] Herlihy and Zuber, 215; Molho, 216.

[15] These two averages come from Molho and Herlihy and Zuber, respectively. Molho's average is based on dowries paid out of the *Monte delle doti*, while Herlihy and Zuber's is based on income taxes recorded in the 1427 *catasto*. See *Tuscans*, 228.

[16] Herlihy, "The Natural History of Medieval Women," in *Women, Family, and Society in Medieval Europe: Historical Essays, 1978-1991*, (Oxford, Berghahn Books, 1995), 57-68; Herlihy and Zuber, 215; Molho, 132-138, 216.

wealthy families in turn were forced to look for matches that at best offered parallel social standing, and many suffered a loss in their social status in marriage.

The Florentine government for its part tried to encourage the creation of families through legislation and economic policies that financially supported marriage, while also attempting to stem the city's own financial problems. In December 1421, the Council of the People discussed a bill submitted by the priors and colleges that proposed that unmarried citizens not be allowed to hold public office.[17] This proposal to disempower the unmarried simultaneously stressed the importance of family and procreation, equating suitability to hold public office with virility and the ability to produce legitimate offspring.[18] Though the proposal was never signed into law, it is indicative of the broader cultural emphasis on marriage and procreation in fifteenth-century Florence.

The Florentine government also used financial incentives to encourage its citizens to marry. One of the more popular measures it implemented was the *Monte delle doti*. Created in 1425, the *Monte* attempted to remove impediments to marriage by creating an investment pool to fund dowries. Fathers could invest in the fund when their daughters were infants, and could withdraw the return on that investment when their daughters married. [19] This ensured that young women would have a dowry sufficiently large to marry someone of equal or higher social standing. The *Monte* created a system in which Florentine fathers could deposit 100 florins in

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[17] Both the priors and the colleges were elected governing bodies. The priors were the elected heads of each of the Florentine guilds (seven from the major guilds, two from the minor guilds, and one serving as the *Gonfaloniere)*, while the two colleges were elected advisory councils, which the priors were required to consult. On the structure and function of the Florentine *Signoria,* see John M. Najemy, *A History of Florence, 1200-1575,* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 35-62.

[18] Molho, 28.

[19] On the details of how the *Monte* functioned, see Molho, 27-33; Julius Kirschner and Anthony Molho, "The Dowry Fund and the Marriage Market in Early *Quattrocento* Florence," *The Journal of Modern History* 50, no. 3 (September 1978), 403-438; and Julius Kirschner, *Pursuing Honor While Avoiding Sin: The* Monte delle doti *of Florence*, Quaderni di studi senesi 41, (Milan: A Giuffrè, 1978).

cash to the funded public debt (the *Monte comune*) for a term of seven and a half or fifteen years, with a return of 250 florins for the former, and 500 florins for the later. At the end of the investment period the girl's dowry would be paid out to her husband, with the important caveats that the marriage had been consummated and the girl was still living.[20] If the girl died before the term of the deposit expired, regardless of whether she had married or not, both the principle and the interest of the investment reverted to the city.[21] If she married after the term of the investment expired, her husband would receive only the principle originally invested and none of the additional interest.

The *Monte* filled a confluence of critical economic needs in Florence. On one hand, the cost of dowries had begun to rise significantly since the early 1300s, a trend that accelerated in the first decades of the fifteenth century, and would rise still higher by its end.[22] This came as a result of a growing imbalance between the numbers of men and women of marriageable age, as we have already seen. The inflation of dowry prices meant that many middle-class Florentine families were unable to afford the cost of a dowry that would allow their daughters to marry someone of appropriate social standing. The *Monte* offered high rates of return on a reasonably modest initial investment and therefore put a sufficiently large dowry within reach for families who might not otherwise have been able to afford it. The *Monte* also filled the government's urgent need to raise its liquidity. The Florentine public debt was over 2 million florins, and

[20] Molho, 30.

[21] This was the case even if the girl had been married for nearly the entirety of the term of investment.

[22] Herlihy and Zuber, 221-223. Writers as early as Dante lamented the rise in dowry prices. Dante converses with his great-great-grandfather, Cacciaguida, in Paradise, who ancestor tells him that when he was alive "no daughter's birth brought fear unto her father, for age and dowry then did not imbalance – to this side and to that – the proper measure." ("Non faceva, nascendo, ancor paura/la figlia al padre, ché 'l tempo e la dote/non fuggien quince e quindi la misura.") *Paradiso* XV.103-105.

continued to rise over the course of the Quattrocento.[23] In 1423, war with Milan broke out and the city found its finances precariously overstretched just as another wave of plague struck. After repeated and urgent discussions in the city council about how to raise new funds, in February 1425 the Council passed two bills that together created the *Monte delle doti*. Since investors deposited their principle in the public debt, this system had the dual goal of decreasing the city's debt by attracting cash investments while also stimulating the marriage market.[24]

Despite the apparent appeal of a system that linked the possibility of low-risk profit to the duty of fathers to provide dowries to their daughters, the *Monte* was initially a failure in terms of the number of investors it attracted. Only two fathers made deposits in the first four years of the *Monte*, both of these in 1425. In 1428, therefore, the city government reduced the initial deposit to 75 florins, raising the annual interest rate from 12.99 to 13.5 percent per year for seven-and-a-half year deposits, and from 11.33 to 17.4 percent for fifteen-year investments.[25] This attracted a small but underwhelming number of investors, with thirty-eight girls registered between 1429 and 1432. The government again made small adjustments to the terms of the fund in late 1432, before drastically overhauling the *Monte* in the summer of 1433, this time guaranteeing the return of the initial deposit if a girl died before the term of investment expired, offering new terms of investment, and decreasing the minimum deposit to 60 florins.[26] Within two months, 879 deposits had been made and 67,231 florins raised.[27]

[23] Molho,29.
[24] Ibid., 31.
[25] Ibid., 30-32.
[26] Ibid.,33-34.
[27] Ibid., 34.

The Humanist Defense of Marriage

As authorities faced new demographic pressures, secular thinkers were reevaluating marriage in light of the economic and social changes of the Quattrocento. Humanists grappled with the long tradition of secular and religious thought that privileged celibacy over marriage. Petrarch (1304–1374), in a letter to Pandolfo II Malatesta of Milan in which he responds to a request for advice about whether marriage or celibacy was better, stated that because "the good of the many should be preferred to the good of the individual," marriage should be preferred over celibacy.[28] Although celibacy offered freedom from the responsibilities and burdens of marriage, and ultimately was better for the health and salvation of the individual because of the time it allowed for thinking, the individual had to decide between what was best for himself, and what was best for his household and family.[29] Petrarch concedes that "although I think nothing sweeter than celibacy and nothing more tranquil, your situation and that of your family, nevertheless, begrudges you this sweetness and tranquility."[30] Coluccio Salutati (1331-1406), who was appointed Chancellor of Florence in 1375, went further than Petrarch in reevaluating marriage. Salutati reversed his own position on the topic, arguing first that the contemplative life of the cloistered religious was preferable to the active life of the laity, but later asserting that active citizenship was of greater value than celibacy and monastic withdrawal because the former benefitted the community, while the latter only the individual.[31]

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[28] Petrarch, "Epistle 1: Letter to Pandolfo Malatesta 'An magis expediat'," in *De rebus familiaribus et variae*, vol. 3, ed. Joseph Fracassetti, (Florence: Le Monnier, 1863), 119.

[29] Petrarch, *"*Letter 1," 117-120.

[30] "Quamquam enim nihil dulcius caelibatu arbitrer, nihilque tranquillius, status tamen tuus ac tuorum hanc tibi dulcedinem ac tranquillitatem invidet." Ibid., 119.

[31] Anthony F. D'Elia, *The Renaissance of Marriage in Fifteenth-Century Italy,* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 24-25.

Quattrocento humanists found a model of their own in Cicero, whose active involvement in politics and open concern for and dedication to his family challenged the earlier ideal of the eremitical intellectual life. Humanists like Petrarch and Salutati were forced to come to terms with the newly-discovered letters of their intellectual hero, which revealed Cicero's active and ambitious political life and shattered the image of the statesman as contemplative recluse who remained above the quotidian fray of Roman politics. Cicero's letters revealed his deep entanglement with contemporary politics, as well as his role as a married man and his concern for his family.[32] At first, early humanists were shocked by this new information. Petrarch wrote a vitriolic letter to Cicero in Hades, criticizing him for squandering his time on base politics.[33] Unlike Petrarch, however, Salutati saw in Cicero an exemplum of how an intellectual might balance his studies with the obligations of family and state, a position that Salutati's successor as chancellor, Leonardo Bruni (1370-1444) took up and elaborated. In his biography of Dante, Bruni writes "the first union, the multiplication of which forms the state, is that of husband and wife; there can be no perfection where this primary condition does not exist."[34]

Treatises on marriage and family proliferated in the fifteenth century. Intended as equal parts rhetorical exercise and practical how-to guides, these treatises emphasized the importance of marriage for preserving lineage and provided an idealistic blueprint for choosing a wife and ordering a household. The earliest of these, *On Wifely Duties* (1416), was written by the Venetian aristocrat Francesco Barbaro (1390-1454) to Lorenzo de' Medici on the occasion of the latter's marriage. Barbaro self-consciously models his advice on ancient writers and takes the

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[32] D'Elia, 24.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Leondardo Bruni, *Le vite di Dante e di Petrarca,* quoted in Hans Baron, *In Search of Florentine Civic Humanism: Essays on the Transition from Medieval to Modern Thought,* vol. 1, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 19.

good of marriage as a given. Marriage, writes Barbaro, is a rich and fertile field from which all other duties follow, and thus should be undertaken with appropriate reflection and preparation.[35] According to Barbaro, above all else a husband should expect obedience from his wife, who should always carry out her husband's orders without protest.[36] Such an arrangement would ensure harmony between the spouses, which, in turn, would guarantee that the household would run smoothly. Wives, writes Barbaro, should "imitate the leaders of bees, who supervise, receive, and preserve whatever comes into their hives, to the end that, unless necessity dictates otherwise, they remain in their honeycombs where they develop and mature beautifully."[37] Within the household, a wife's most important duty is the creation and education of children in order to safeguard the legacy of the family and the household. "Diligence in accumulation of money for the family is really worth nothing…unless a great deal of care and really extraordinary amount of energy is expended on the upbringing and instruction of the children to whom the wealth is to be left."[38] After all, Barbaro concludes, the desire to bear and raise children should be so innate in a woman that to do otherwise would be to "totally repudiate the rules of nature."[39] Barbaro is especially concerned with the idea of moderation. In all of these things, the ideal wife should strive for moderation, being thrifty but not cheap in supplying the household, quiet, serious, and humble in her behavior inside and outside the house, and modest in her dress. A wife who

[35] Francesco Barbaro, *On Wifely Duties*, trans. Benjamin G. Kohl in *The Earthly Republic: Italian Humanists on Government and Society*, ed. Benjamin G. Kohl and Ronald G. Witt, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978), 191.

[36] Ibid.,193.

[37] Ibid., 217.

[38] Ibid., 220-221.

[39] Ibid., 221.

practices care, prudence, and diligence in all her responsibilities, writes Barbaro, increases the dignity of her husband's household.[40]

One of the most popular treatises on marriage was the *Libri della Famiglia,* a four-part work on the family written by Leon Battista Alberti (1404–1472) in 1430. Alberti, who never married, composed a treatise that took an idealized view of marriage and the family in Florence's upper-middle-class. The treatise takes the form of a dialogue between Lionardo Alberti, a twenty-nine-year-old bachelor, Giannozzo Alberti, sixty-four, married, and a father, and Adovardo Alberti, forty-five, and also married, with four children. Through their dialogue, Alberti outlines the ways in which marriage maintains a family's lineage and property.[41] The third book deals specifically with the household, which Alberti views as the basis for a family's prosperity, and considers how a husband and father can maintain complete and unchallenged control over his wife and children while avoiding getting overwhelmed with the quotidian details of household management. He describes marriage as a practical good that ensures the preservation of family and property by allowing the husband to focus his efforts on business and concerns outside the home while his wife manages the daily affairs of the family and household. In such a relationship, it was critical that wives be utterly obedient to their husbands, a position that Alberti elaborates more fully than Barbaro. Giannozzo, the group's patriarch, advises that parents should teach their daughters obedience, since "a girl who knows how to obey her father and mother soon learns to please her husband."[42] A husband in turn should look for a wife who is virtuous since she could then learn from her husband whatever he might wish to teach her.[43]

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[40] Barbaro, 206
[41] See D'Elia, 31.
[42] Alberti, 81.
[43] Ibid., 82.

Finally, a man should seek a wife known for her chastity and purity because "the woman's character is the jewel of her family and the mother's purity has always been a part of the dowry she passes on to her daughters."[44] Women were adornments for their families, but a wife's character was integral to the status and longevity of her husband's patrimony.

II. The Humanization of Spirituality

The contradictory expectations placed on women was indicative of the tenuous position of married women, whose obligations to their families frequently conflicted with theories of female chastity and modesty. Women were expected to aspire to virginity even as their families pressured them to marry, and virginity and its loss weighed heavily on the minds of matrons. Holy mediocrity represented a pastoral initiative by the clergy, and especially Dominicans, to provide realistic spiritual advice to upper-class women who found that the demands of marriage, particularly the marriage debt, were not easily reconciled to the Church's traditional idealization of virginity, and who worried that their wealth would prevent their entry into Heaven. These tensions became even more pronounced when it came to a married woman's spiritual life, where virginity and asceticism were the traditional paradigms, as we will explore in the next chapter. Only gradually did theologians begin to suggest that the duties of marriage and motherhood might be thought of as their own sort of spiritual devotion.

An important first step was the humanization of the divine. In the eleventh century, Christian spirituality increasingly came to focus on Christ in his suffering humanity. This model supplanted the open-eyed *Christus triumphans* – the victorious conqueror of death – of Romanesque crucifixes with a tortured, exsanguinated, and pitiable *Christus patiens* whose

[44] Alberti, 83.

suffering on the cross stood in for the punishment that humanity deserved for its sins.[45] This shift was heralded by Anselm of Canterbury's *Cur deus homo,* in which Christ's humanity is critical in the narrative of human redemption. So enormous was the debt humanity owed to God that Christ became incarnate and discharged the debt through his death. Only by being simultaneously fully human and fully God could Christ's sacrifice make full satisfaction for sin, and atone for humanity.[46] Humanity in turn owed love and praise to Christ, and should meditate on the magnitude of his sacrifice.

This emphasis on the significance of Christ's humanity in the redemptive work of the Crucifixion profoundly influenced the spirituality of the later Middle Ages. By stressing the importance of Christ's dual nature as both fully human and fully God, Anselm initiated the development of a new type of spirituality in which the Passion became the ultimate display of Christ's human nature. Humanity, for its part, could participate in His sacrifice through empathy.[47] "I am mindful of your passion, your buffeting, your scourging, your cross, your wounds, how you were slain for me, how prepared for burial and buried," writes Anselm in a

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[45] On the history and theology of this transformation see Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement*, trans. A. G. Hebert, (New York: Macmillan, 1951); Ewert Cousins, "The Humanity and the Passion of Christ," in *Christian Spirituality: High Middle Ages and Reformation,* ed. Jill Raitt, (New York: Crossroad Press, 1988), 375-391; Rachel Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion: Devotion to Christ and the Virgin Mary, 800-1200,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); and Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Growth of Medieval Theology: 600-1300,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978). On these changes in art and literature, see Thomas Bestul, *Texts of the Passion,* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996); Anne Derbes, *Picturing the Passion in Late Medieval Italy: Narrative Painting, Franciscan Ideologies, and the Levant*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); James H. Marrow, *Passion Iconography in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages and Early Renaissance: A Study of the Transformation of Sacred Metaphor Into Descriptive Narrative*, (Kortrijk, Belgium: Van Ghemmert, 1979); Amy Neff, "The Pain of *Compassio*: Mary's Labor at the Foot of the Cross," *Art Bulletin* 80 (June 1998): 254-273; Evelyn Sandberg-Vavalà, *La croce dipinta italiana e l'iconografia della Passione,* (Rome: Multigrafica, 1980); Jeryldene Wood, *Women, Art, and Spirituality: The Poor Clares of Early Modern Italy,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[46] Anselm of Canterbury, *Cur deus homo,* 1.11-13, 19-20, 2.6-8, 11, 14.

[47] James F. McCue, "Liturgy and Eucharist in the West," in *Christian Spirituality: High Middle Ages and Reformation,* ed. Jill Raitt, (New York: Crossroad Press, 1988), 427-438.

prayer addressed to Christ.[48] Turning to interior reflection he asks, "why, O my soul, were you not there to be pierced by a sword of bitter sorrow?...Why could you not bear to see the nails violate the hands and feet of your Creator? Why did you not see with horror the blood that poured out the side of your Redeemer?"[49] The significance of Christ's humanity in Anselm's theology heralded the devotional treatises of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries which elaborated in graphic detail Christ's suffering during the Passion. [50] Later writers, including Bernard of Clairvaux, Jacobus de Voragine, and the author of the *Meditationes vitae Christi*, would weave together the brief New Testament accounts of the Crucifixion with other sources, including Isaiah's Man of Sorrows from the four Servant Songs of the Book of Isaiah, and Psalms 21 and 56. These elaborated the sparse Gospel accounts into graphic, affectual narratives designed to help their readers develop an emotional response to the Passion through empathy for Christ's suffering.[51]

Of these initiatives, Domenico Cavalca's *Specchio della croce*, written in the Italian vernacular sometime in the 1330s, was among the most influential in the dissemination of an affective, Dominican spirituality in Italy. Cavalca (c. 1270-1342) was an Italian Dominican and was deeply immersed in both the traditions of Dominican spirituality and theological study

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[48] Anselm, "Prayer to Christ," in *The Prayers and Meditations of St. Anselm*, trans. Sister Benedicta Ward, (New York: Penguin Books, 1973), 95.

[49] Ibid.

[50] For the role of Anselm of Canterbury and Bernard of Clairvaux as initiators of interior spiritual reflection, see R. W. Southern, "Medieval Humanism," in *The Middle Ages: Readings in Medieval History,* ed. Brian Tierney, vol. 2, 5th ed. (Boston: McGraw Hill, 1999), 144-156.

[51] The relatively brief New Testament accounts of the Passion particularly reflect the writings of Isaiah, the prophet of the Old Testament. Medieval writers used the four Servant Songs of the Book of Isaiah to elaborate upon the sparse Gospel accounts of the Passion and incorporated Psalms 21 and 56 into their narratives, which from the eleventh century became increasingly graphic and affectual. Marrow, *Passion Iconography*, 8.

within the Tuscan Dominican intellectual milieu.[52] He lived at the monastery of Santa Caterina in Pisa, which, like Santa Maria Novella in Florence, produced an exceptional number of spiritual writers, including his contemporaries Giordano da Pisa and Simone da Cascina. Cavalca wrote a number of religious works in the Italian vernacular intended for private, lay devotion, including the *Trattato sulla Pazienza* and the *Trattatello dei Dieci Comandamenti*, as well as the *Specchio dei peccati*. The *Specchio della croce* was by far the most popular of these: Anne Schutte has identified twenty-eight printed editions published between 1476 and 1550, and the National Library of Florence alone holds fourteen early printed editions published between 1470 and 1499.[53]

Cavalca asked his readers to meditate on the intense, gruesome suffering of Christ's Passion in order to inspire gratitude for the enormous sacrifice that was made on the cross. The magnitude of Christ's suffering, Cavalca reminds his readers, had to be monumental in order to make up for the gravity and universality of human sin.[54] Because Christ was perfect in his humanity, argues Cavalca, he experienced the physical and emotional pain of his execution more acutely. "Christ's suffering on the cross was especially painful," he tells us, "because he was not tied to the cross like the thieves, but affixed to the cross with large nails through his hands and feet, which feel greater pain than any other part of the body."[55] Cavalca assures his readers that "we can be sure that the nails were long and big because the body of Christ was large and

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[52] On Cavalca's life, see P. Tito Sante Centi, introduction to *Lo Specchio della Croce*, (Bologna: Edizioni Studio Domenicano, 1992), 6-11.

[53] Anne Jacobsen Schutte, *Printed Italian Vernacular Religious Books, 1465-1550: a Finding List*, (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1983), 127-128. See also Centi, 5-21.

[54] Domenico Cavalca, *Lo Specchio della Croce*, ed. P. Tito Sante Centi, (Bologna: Edizioni Studio Domenicano, 1992), 182-186.

[55] "Ancora fu acerba la morte di Cristo, perocchè non fu legato in croce come gli ladroni, ma fu confitto con grossi aguti nelle mani e negli piedi; nelli quali luoghi per rispetto di nervi si sente più dolore che in niuna altra parte del corpo." Ibid., 178.

beautiful and could not have been supported by small nails."[56] In addition to the physical pain of the Crucifixion, Christ's suffering was further accentuated by the timing and location of Christ's execution at Mt. Calvary, a site of criminal executions, in the daytime during a Jewish festival. People from throughout the province would have been in Jerusalem, and Christ's Crucifixion took place publicly in front of all the people.[57]

Although Cavalca's gory description of the Passion followed earlier writers in their elaborate descriptions of Christ's suffering, his innovation was in asking his readers to move beyond gratitude for the sacrificial atonement to imagining it as an exemplum of Christian virtue.[58]

> To make satisfaction for the vice of gluttony, and to give an example of abstinence, he wished to suffer hunger and thirst, to suffer and to undergo every deprivation even unto death….to make satisfaction for the sin of lust and every disordered desire of the flesh, and to give an example of purity, he wished to suffer and to embrace virginity, and he wished to be whipped and nailed to the cross and to undergo every agony. To make satisfaction for our avarice and to give us an example of generosity, he embraced poverty and wished to be denuded, and as a symbol of generosity he wished to have his hands pierced and for his blood to be scattered from his wounded body for the sake of our redemption. To make satisfaction for our wrath and impatience, and to give an example of meekness, he went like a gentle lamb when it is sheared and slaughtered…and did not cry out, and bore the persecutions, insults, and bitter pains with complete patience….To make satisfaction for the sin of envy and to give an example of charity, he asked God to forgive his executioners and bore the grave injustice of seeing Barabbas set free while he

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[56] "E dobbiamo certamente credere che quelli chiodi furono molto grandi e grossi, perocchè il corpo di Cristo era grande e bello, e non si sarebbe potuto reggere con piccolo chiodi." Cavalca, 178.

[57] "Ed in ciò fu maggiore la vergogna di Cristo, se consideriamo il luogo ed il tempo. Il luogo, ch'è nel monte Calvario dove si giustiziavano gli malfattori; il tempo, perocchè fu di dì e non di note, e specialmente perchè allora era la festa de' giudei, alla quale era tenuta di venire tutta la provincia e turba de' giudei. E pubblicamente davanti a tutta la gente fu battuto, schernito, spogliato, crucifisso e menato attorno per più sua vergogna ed obbrobrio." Ibid., 176-77.

[58] Early iterations of this idea of the Passion as model for virtue can be found in Bernard of Clairvaux and Aquinas. For Bernard's theology of the Passion, see especially "Sermon on the Passion of the Lord," in *St. Bernard's Sermons for the Seasons and Principal Festivals of the Year*, Vol. II, trans. Ailbe J. Luddy, (Westminster, Maryland: Carroll, 1950), 135-53. Like Bernard, Aquinas argues that Christ's suffering fulfilled a dual task both as a remedy for sin and as an example of virtue because "there is no virtue that did not have its example on the Cross" and thus, affirms Aquinas, "the more one conforms himself to the Passion of Christ, the greater is the pardon and the grace which he gains." Aquinas, "Sermon on the Apostles' Creed," in *Catechetical Instructions of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Joseph B. Collins, (New York: J. F. Wagner, 1939), 274.

> himself was condemned to the cross….To satisfy the sin of sloth and to give an example of perseverance, he desired that his suffering be prolonged and complete…and he desired to be crucified and nailed to the cross in order to demonstrate his constancy….To satisfy the sin of vainglory and pride, and to give an example of perfect humility, Christ desired to be derided, slandered, mocked, and ridiculed until his death on the cross.[59]

For Cavalca, the virtues Christ demonstrated held as much importance as the physical sacrifice of his death. The atonement rendered by the Passion was not in Christ's physical suffering alone, he argues, but in the examples of virtue it provided. Rather than focusing on the minutiae of theological discourse, therefore, Cavalca sought primarily to move the spirits of his audience to devotion by eliciting from them an emotional response to the suffering endured by Christ. For Cavalca, meditation on the Passion could lead readers to an introspective contemplation of their own shortcomings. By recognizing that these shortcomings had been rectified by the blood shed by Christ, his readers might also begin to appreciate the example of virtue that Christ provided on the Cross.

The *Specchio* is noteworthy, therefore, because it seeks to transform something inimitable – in this case, the Passion – into points of empathetic identification, and it recognizes the quotidian pressures that might prevent or hinder a reader from engaging with prolonged spiritual meditation. Despite his use of extended, often graphic meditations on the Crucifixion

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[59] "Perocchè di sopra è detto che venne a satisfare per lo nostro peccato e per darci esempio di virtù, vediamo come insieme per le sue pene satisfa alla nostra colpa, e come egli ci dà esempio di virtù. Per satisfar del vizio della gola e darci esempio di astinenza, volle patire fame e sete ed ogni necessità, digiunare, ed alla morte non avere da bevere, come è detto di sopra. Per satisfare al peccato della lussuria e d'ogni disordinato diletto di corpo, e darci esempio di purità, volle affaticarsi, ed elesse virginità, e volle essere flagellato e confitto, e ricevere ogni asprezza. Per satisfare alla nostra avarizia e darci esempio di larghezza, elessa povertà, e volle essere spogliato; ed in segno di larghezza volle avere le mani forate, e da molte parti del corpo spargere il sangue per nostra redenzione. Per satisfare alla nostra ira ed impazienza, e darci esempio di mansuetudine, venne come agnello mansueto…e non gridò, quando fu tonduto ed ucciso; e con somma paziena sostenne quelle persecuzioni, obbrobrii ed acerbi dolori….Per satisfare al peccato dell'invidia e darci esempio di carità, pregò Dio per gli crucifissori, e sostenne sì grande contrarietà di vedere liberare Barabba, e sé giudicare ad essere crucifisso….Per satisfare al peccato dell'accidia e dare esempio di perseveranza, volle che la sua pena fosse lunga e universale, come è detto; e volle essere crucifisso e confitto in croce per mostrare la sua costanza….Per satisfare al peccato della vanagloria e della superbia, e darci esempio di perfetta umilità, volle essere vergognato, infamato, schernito ed illuso, ed umiliossi per infino alla morte della croce." Cavalca, 188-190.

and suffering of Christ, Cavalca frames these meditations within a broader narrative of human virtue, linking each element of Christ's suffering to a particular sin, and in turn to a specific virtue. The *Specchio* also promoted a pragmatic devotion. It was intended as a guide for personal, daily meditation as evidenced both by Cavalca's self-conscious address to a lay, vernacular audience. In the prologue to the work he asserts that "I thought that I would write a work that was not too elevated in content, and not in Latin, but in the vernacular, so that some devoted laypeople will be inspired in their devotions, and especially those who do not have the chance to devote themselves to prayer as they would like, whether because they have little education or are too busy with other things."[60] For that reason, wrote Cavalca, the work would be written and organized in a simple manner, and would seek to be useful rather than elegantly written.[61] Although writers often made such boilerplate statements of modesty about their own authorial skill, the organization and content of the *Specchio* suggests that Cavalca was sincere in trying to write for a lay audience that was educated neither in Latin nor in theology. The division of the work into short, discrete sections allowed the reader to engage with the parts of the text for which they had time. The empathetic pragmatism that permeates this work would become a hallmark of the genre referred to as "guides to good living" that would flourish a century later, discussed in greater detail below.

As the image of Christ victorious over death was gradually replaced by that of the tortured, exsanguinated Man of Sorrows, an affective spirituality emerged that foregrounded

[60] "Ho pensato che…una opera fare: non sottile, nè per grammatica, ma in volgare, acciochè alquanti divoti secolari, perocchè sono idioti e molto occupati, non possono vacare, secondochè desiderano, e intendere allo studio dell'orazione, abbiano alcuno indotto a divozione per quest'opera." Cavalca, 24-26.

[61] "E perchè quest'opera ho composta solamente per alquanti secolari semplici, i quali non hanno grammatica, in sua utilità procedo semplicemente, curandomi più di dire utile, che di dire bello." Ibid., 26.

holy women.[62] Rose of Viterbo, a thirteenth-century teenage mystic and saint, embarked on a program of preaching and prophesy after experiencing a graphic vision of Christ crucified with "his face and body so cruelly afflicted that in her soul she felt great pain and compassion for him."[63] And so devoted was Clare of Montefalco (c. 1268–1308) to Christ's Passion that after she died, her sisters cut open her body to remove her heart, and found inside it the insignia of the passion, including the cross, the scourge, the lance, the sponge, and the crown of thorns, which had been imprinted there through her meditation.[64] Bridget of Sweden (1303–1373) experienced a vision of the entire narrative of the Passion in all its gory details, including the specifics of how Christ was nailed to the cross: through the most solid part of the bone, his body so distended that "that nearly all of his veins and sinews were bursting," while blood ran into his eyes and over his face."[65]

Cavalca's most ardent reader, an outspoken ascetic from Siena, epitomized this new affective spirituality and its imitation of Christ's suffering.[66] Catherine of Siena (1347–1380)

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[62] Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women,* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987); *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Northern Germany and Beyond,* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007); Richard Kieckhefer, *Unquiet Souls: Fourteenth-Century Saints and Their Religious Milieu,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 87-121.

[63] "Appararuit ei Jesus Christi veluti cruci fixus. Ad cuius visum et crudele spectaculum commota sunt vescera eius, et tam ingentis doloris et compassionis aculeus pertrasivit animam eius." *Vita Secunda* in Giuseppe Abate, *S. Rosa da Viterbo, Terziana Francescana: Fonti Storiche della Vita e loro Revisione critica,* (Rome: Miscellanea Francescana, 1952), 129.

[64] *AASS,* August 3, 672-673.

[65] Bridget of Sweden, *Revelations,* vol. 1, trans. Denis Searby, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 128. Bridget, like her predecessors, refers to Psalm 22 for the idea that Christ's body was pulled so tightly on the cross that his bones could be numbered. See Thomas Bestul, *Texts of the Passion*, 46-50. Other women described and enacted similarly spectacular and gruesome scenes. The fifteenth-century Italian mystic, Stefana Quinzani, experienced a physical imitation of Christ's passion in which her body was invisibly flagellated by demons, and she appeared as if her hands had been pierced with real nails with her "joints pulled and extended, the veins raised, and her hands black." [*Stefana Quinzani's Ecstasy of the Passion,* in *Dominican Penitent Women,* ed. and trans. Mailju Lehmijoki-Gardner, (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), 194-195.] On women's devotion to the Passion, see especially André Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages,* trans. Jean Birrell, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Pres, 1997), 348-386.

[66] For Cavalca's influence on Catherine, see Eliana Corbari, *Vernacular Theology: Dominican Sermons and Audience in Late Medieval Italy*, (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2013), 103-148; Kerra Gazerro Hanson, "The

would become one of the most well-known saints of the late Middle Ages, and her life an inspiration and model for other holy women in the centuries after her death.[67] After experiencing what she described in her letters as a "mystical marriage" to Christ, she began to experience visions of Christ's Passion. [68] These culminated in 1376 when she received the stigmata, which, by her request, remained invisible.[69] According to her *vita,* Christ appeared to Catherine while she was praying and offered her the stigmata as a sign that he would fulfill her prayer. Grasping her outstretched hand, "he took a nail, rested the point of it on the center of the palm of [her] hand, and pressed it into [her] hand with such force that it seemed to pierce right through it, and [she] felt agony as if an iron nail had been driven through it with a hammer."[70] From that moment, she began experience physical manifestations of the Passion, including pain in her chest that echoed Christ's agony when his arms were stretched on the cross and his bones were "dragged apart," and headaches that mimicked Christ's pain when the crown of thorns "pierced the bone of the head right through to the brain."[71] She was even invited by Christ to drink blood from the gash in his side.[72]

Blessing of Tears: The Order of Preachers and Domenico Cavalca in St. Catherine of Siena's 'Dialogo della divina provvidenza'," *Italica* 89 (Summer 2012): 145-161; Grazia Mangano Ragazzi, *Obeying the Truth: Discretion in the Spiritual Writings of Saint Catherine of Siena,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 151-161; Jane Tylus, *Reclaiming Catherine of Siena: Literacy, Literature, and the Signs of Others,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 37, 127-128, 165, 235.

[67] On this, see especially Tamar Herzig, *Savonarola's Women: Visions and Reform in Renaissance Italy,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 25-30, 39-65.

[68] Catherine's letters suggest that she received Christ's foreskin in lieu of a wedding ring, though her hagiographer, Raymond of Capua, omits this detail and instead describes a more traditional gold ring set with four pearls and a diamond. See Catherine of Siena, "Letter 221," "Letter 50," and "Letter 261," in *The Letters of Catherine of Siena,* vol. 1, ed. and trans. Suzanne Noffke, (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2000); Raymond of Capua, *The Life of Catherine of Siena,* ed. and trans. Conleth Kearns, (Washington, DC: Dominicana, 1994 [repr.]), 107.

[69] Raymond of Capua, 184-187.

[70] Ibid., 185.

[71] Ibid., 200.

[72] Other female saints reported being invited by Christ to drink from his side. Angela of Foligno describes such an experience in the *Memorial,* which she dictated to an anonymous Franciscan friar, Brother A. "Christ on the cross appeared more clearly to me while I was awake….He then called me to place my mouth on the wound in his

While this sort of affective piety offered tremendous spiritual authority to the women who wielded it and to their male confessors and spiritual advisors, it was also a source of anxiety to clerics who were ambivalent about this degree of female prominence in religious life.[73] By virtue of their visions, miracles, and prophesies, women like Catherine could claim for themselves spiritual and political authority directly from God, something that their male confessors recognized.[74] Catherine of Siena was noted as much for her graphic accounts of the crucifixion as for her involvement in politics, and it was the former that afforded her a role in the latter. But this same spirituality that offered a modicum of power to women and their confessors could in turn be used to criticize the Church, the pope, and the clergy. In 1376, the same year in which she received the stigmata, Catherine travelled to Avignon both to try to convince Pope Gregory XI to return from to Rome from France – where the papacy had been stationed for 67 years – and to broker a peace deal between the papacy and the city of Florence to bring an end to the War of the Eight Saints.[75] She also maintained extensive epistolary networks with prominent religious and secular leaders across Europe, and frequently took an authoritative view of ecclesiastical reform and personal morality.[76]

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side. It seemed to me that I saw and drank the blood, which was freshly flowing from his side." Brother A, *Memorial,* in *Angela of Foligno: Complete Works,* ed. and trans. Paul Lachance, (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1993), 128. On Angela's hagiography and the role of Brother A, see especially John W. Coakley, *Women, Men, and Spiritual Power: Female Saints and Their Male Collaborators,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 111-129.

[73] See especially Dyan Elliott, *Proving Woman: Female Spirituality and Inquisitional Culture in the Later Middle Ages,* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004); Catherine M. Mooney, "Voice, Gender, and the Portrayal of Sanctity," in *Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and Their Interpreters,* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 1-16.

[74] Coakely, *Women, Men, and Spiritual Power,* 7-24, 170-192.

[75] See F. Thomas Luongo, *The Saintly Politics of Catherine of Siena,* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), and Karen Scott, "*Io Caterina:* Ecclesiastical Politics and Oral Culture in the Letters of Catherine of Siena," in Karen Cherewatuk and Ulrike Wiethau, eds., *Dear Sister: Medieval Women and the Epistolary Genre,* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1993): 87-121.

[76] See Noffke, *The Letters of Catherine of Siena;* Scott, "*Io Caterina*."

As discussed earlier, the initial shift towards an affective spirituality centered around Christ's Crucifixion coincided with the declaration at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 requiring all Christians to confess at least once a year to their own priest. There was nothing new about confession. For the first time, however, annual confession was explicitly mandated by the Church, and those who did not comply were excommunicated.[77] The Fourth Lateran Council's insistence on regular confession made instruction about the proper conduct for confession and communion a necessity for clergy and laity alike. The three centuries after Lateran IV saw an outpouring of what Leonard Boyle has called *pastoralia,* which initially included guides for confessors – addressed to clergy – and, later, guides to confession – addressed to laypeople.[78] Among this flowering of *pastoralia* were numerous manuals for confessors, which circulated widely and were especially concerned with practical issues. Some of the most celebrated include Raymond of Peñafort's *Summa de poenitentia* (begun c. 1225), John of Freiburg's *Summa confessorum* (c. 1298), and Antoninus of Florence's *Defecerunt* (1437–1439).[79] Priests saw themselves as doctors, charged not only with identifying sin, but healing it.[80] Antoninus, who, in

[77] Lateran IV, c. 21, 1:245. See also Rob Meens, "The Frequency and Nature of Early Medieval Penance," in *Handling Sin: Confession in the Middle Ages,* ed. Peter Biller and A.J. Minnis, (Woodbridge, Suffolk: York Medieval Press, 1998), 35-61; Pierre J. Payer, *Sex and the New Medieval Literature of Confession, 1150-1300,* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2009), 14-22; Thomas Tentler, *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation,* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015 [repr.]), 20-22; 28-31.

[78] Tentler, 12-23.

[79] The *Defecerunt* also circulated under the titles *Summa confessionis, Summa confessionalis,* and *Confessionale.* Gilberto Aranci, "I 'confessionali' di S. Antonino Pierozzi e la tradizione catechistica del '400," *Vivens Homo* 3 (1992): 277-278. On confessors' manuals, see Biller and Minnis, eds. *Handling Sin*; Leonard E. Boyle, "The Inter-Conciliar Period 1179-1215 and the Beginnings of Pastoral Manuals," in *Miscellanea Rolando Bandinelli Papa Alessandro III,* Filippo Liotta, ed., (Siena, 1986), 45-56, and "The Fourth Lateran Council and Manuals of Popular Theology," in *The Popular Literature of Medieval England,* ed. Thomas J. Heffernan, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 30-43; Michael E. Cornett, "The Form of Confession: A Later Medieval Genre for Examining Conscience," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, 2011); Joseph Goering, "The Internal Forum and the Literature of Penance and Confession," *Traditio* 59 (2004): 175-227; Payer, *Sex and the New Medieval Literature of Confession*; Tentler, *Sin and Confession*.

[80] Lateran IV, c. 21, 1:245: "The priest shall be discerning and prudent, so that like a skilled doctor he may pour wine and oil over the wounds of the injured one."

addition the *Defecerunt,* also wrote two vernacular confessors' manuals: the *Omnis mortalium cura* (c. 1429), and the more widely-circulated *Curam illius habe,* or *Medicina dell'anima* (1442–1446).[81] The latter took its title from the story of the Good Samaritan who nursed back to health a traveler who had been robbed and beaten on the road from Jerusalem and Jericho.[82] Antoninus explains, "because Christ knew that...he instructed 'curam illius habe.' Those who are called rectors are charged with dispensing medicine for the soul, and for each sin, which is called an infirmity of the soul."[83] Although confessors might view themselves as spiritual healers, annual confession also became a means to oversee and regulate spirituality by offering confessors greater and more frequent access to the interior lives of their penitents, ostensibly to monitor for signs of heresy.[84]

The detail of the various *summae* suggests that confessors' interrogations of penitents became ever-more probing over the course of the later Middle Ages. Because of the Church's traditional ambivalence over sex, the exercise of the conjugal debt was probably the area of marital life that was most at odds with a woman's spiritual vocation. A number of these guides address this challenge. For instance, Antoninus's *Omnis mortalium cura* instructs confessors that

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[81] On Antoninus's writings, including his confessors' manuals, see Aranci, "I 'confessionali'," 273-292; Stefano Orlandi, *Bibliografia Antoniniana,* (Vatican City: Tipografia Poliglotta Vaticana, 1962); Maria Pia Paoli, "S. Antonino 'vere pastor ac bonus pastor': storia e mito di un modello," in *Verso Savonarola: Misticismo, profezia, empiti riformistici fra Medioevo ed Età moderna,* ed. G. Garfagnini and G. Picone, (Florence, 1999), 83-139; idem, "Antonino da Firenze O.P. e la direzione dei laici," in *Storia della direzione spirituale,* vol. 3, ed. Gabriella Zarri, (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2008), 85-130. I am very grateful to David Peterson for this bibliography.

[82] Luke 10:25-37. Schutte lists 16 editions of the *Curam illius habe* printed in Italy between 1472 and 1544. *Printed Italian Vernacular Religious Books,* 44-46. As early as the second century, the Parable of the Good Samaritan had been interpreted as an allegory, with the unnamed man allegorized as mankind, the inn as the Church, and the Samaritan as Christ. For an overview of this allegorical interpretation, see especially Riemer Roukema, "The Good Samaritan in Ancient Christianity," *Vigiliae Christianae* 58, no. 1 (February 2004): 56-74.

[83] "Et perche bene sapeva che ciascuna pecorella allui commessa e ciascuno presidente e subiecto a molte infirmita spirituali po ancora gli disse inanzi Curam illius habe. Sono decti gli rectori e gli altri che hanno a confessare medici dell'anima e ciascuno peccato si chiama infirmita dell'anima come dice Innocentio extra de penitentiis e remissionibus cum infirmitas." Antoninus, *Curam illius habe,* Newberry Inc. 6355, 4r.

[84] Payer, 17-21.

a husband who demands the debt from his wife when she is menstruating is guilty of a mortal sin.[85] While these manuals are almost comic in their attention to detail, such a comprehensive analysis of marital sex by a cleric points towards a fundamental shift in the attitudes of confessors towards the conjugal debt in particular, and sin in general. By the end of the twelfth century, the discernment of sin had increasingly come to focus on the penitent's intentions rather than their actions.[86] Antoninus stipulates, for example, that married couples who have sex for the sake of pleasure alone, and not with the intention of having children or rendering the conjugal debt are guilty of a mortal sin.[87] This emphasis on intention must have been reassuring to women in particular, for whom the tensions between marriage and virginity were particularly intense. If actions and outer appearances were no longer the sole indicators of sin, a young woman could, for example, take comfort in her intention to remain unmarried even if she was forced into matrimony by her parents or relatives. Likewise, a matron might be comforted by her intention to remain chaste within her marriage even if she was unable to act upon this intention when her husband demanded payment of the conjugal debt.

The parsing of sex in confession left its imprint on other genres. An Italian treatise from the mid-fifteenth century, the *Tractatus de debito coniugali,* traces the situations and occasions in which it was permissible for spouses to have sex. This treatise was written by Franciscus de

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[85] "Item quando la donna ha il tempo o vero infirmita consueta, non debe [rendere]…et colui el qual rechiede in tal caso…pecca gravemente et…mortalmente." BAV Inc.V.209, 47r.

[86] Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock,* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 183-194.

[87] "Nota quanto al modo de usare el matrimonio se e fuori del debito loco natural dove se fanno li figlioli e peccato mortale e gravissimo….Ma nel modo humano naturalmente usato come quando la donna sta piu sopra o volta le spalle al marito o altri modi bestiali…e segno quasi de mortale concupiscentia…non essendo c'e alcuna casone legittima che lo excusa o per infirmita o per altro e a chi la donna e gravida o infirma per la quale cosa non po stare con lo marito….Questo al debito loco e modo observato nel matrimonio da la intentione….La prima sie per havere figlioli. E percio suo instituto e cosi in se non e peccato. La seconda sie per rendere il debito ala compagnia sua rechiesto de cio o expressamente o per alcuni acti e segni de cio demonstrative e questo non gli e peccato." BAV Inc.V.209, 46r-v.

Platea (d. 1460), a Franciscan who had studied civic and canon law in Bologna.[88] In the *Tractatus,* Franciscus enumerates twenty-four ways that it is possible to sin within marital sex. Spouses should not render the debt in a holy place, for example, because such an act pollutes the consecrated space.[89] If one of the pair exacts the marriage debt while in a holy place, it would be preferable for them to find a different place to have sex than to postpone the act, but only if the spouse exacting is in danger of committing adultery. Still, an exception could be made if the couple was taking refuge in a holy place for a long time and had no other option.[90] The treatise also takes questions of intentionality into account. If a husband willfully makes himself impotent so that he is unable to render the marriage debt, he sins mortally, but if he becomes impotent because of fasting and prayer he does not sin.[91] By the fifteenth century, some protections had been built into the marriage debt.[92] Spouses are not obligated to render, for instance, if doing so would be detrimental to the health of the other, such as if one spouse had leprosy that might be contracted by the other during intercourse.[93] This was a marked departure from the twelfth-century when Innocent IV had allowed lepers to extract the debt.[94] Nor are spouses obligated to render the debt if insane, except during periods of lucidity.[95]

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[88] On Franciscus's role as a leading legal mind of the Franciscan Observant movement, see Thomas M. Izbicki, "The Origins of the *De ornatu mulierum* of Antoninus of Florence," *MLN* 119 (January 2004): S142-S161.

[89] Franciscus de Platea, *Tractatus de debito coniugal,* Bologna, Biblioteca Comunale dell'Archiginnasio, MS A170, 71r. On anxiety about sex in churches, see Dyan Elliott, "Sex in Holy Places: An Exploration of a Medieval Anxiety," *Journal of Women's History* 6, no. 3 (1994): 6-34.

[90] Franciscus de Platea, BCA, MS A170, 71r.

[91] "Sed ille qui se reddit inpotentem ieunando [sic] et orando intencione bona se reddit inpotentem modo licito si tamen rationabile fuerit obsequium suum sic enim ieunando non reddit se totaliter inpotentem ad reddendum debitum quamvis minus potentem se reddit." Ibid.

[92] On this, see Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage,* 149n55.

[93] Franciscus de Platea, BCA, MS A170, 69r.

[94] Elizabeth Makowski, "The Conjugal Debt and Medieval Canon Law," *Journal of Medieval History* 3 (1977): 111.

[95] Franciscus de Platea, BCA, MS A170, 69r.

This manuscript, which also includes Antoninus's *Defecerunt* and his treatise *De ornatu mulierum,* and an excerpt from a manual to confession addressing the question of when a woman who had given birth could enter a church, reflects a shift towards pastoral direction intended expressly for married women.[96] As Geneviève Hasenohr has shown, pastoral guides and sermon collections prior to Lateran IV tended to address women only obliquely, if at all, and lumped all women together, regardless of their profession or sexual status.[97] By contrast, *ad status* sermons written for men partitioned the audience on the basis of their social status and profession.[98] Over the course of the century after Lateran IV, however, writers increasingly began to categorize women on the basis of chastity, differentiating between virgins, whether nuns or young girls, and married women. The Franciscan academic, Guibert of Tournai (c. 1200–1284), for instance, classifies his female audience into four groups: married women, widows, virgins and girls, and religious women.[99] In the category of religious women, Guibert groups those who had taken formal religious vows together with tertiaries and those who had adopted a life of voluntary poverty. A woman's social status, the work she performs, and the place she lives are all irrelevant to Guibert. Instead, her status derives from the extent to which she adheres to the virtue of chastity. In this regard, Guibert's standards were exacting, but not uncompromising:

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[96] On the *De ornatu mulierum,* see Izbicki. For Antoninus's preaching on clothing, see especially Peter Howard, "Preaching Magnificence in Renaissance Florence," *Renaissance Quarterly* 61 (Summer 2008): 325-369.

[97] Geneviève Hasenohr, "La vie quotidienne de la femme vue par l'église: l'enseignement de 'Journées Chrétiennes' de la fin du moyen-âge," *Frau und spätmittelalterlicher Alltag,* Internationaler Kongress krems an der Donau 2. bis 5. Oktober 1984, Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse, Sitzungsberichte, 473; Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für mittelalterliche Realienkunde Österreichs, no. 9 (Vienna, 1986), 21-28.

[98] Ibid., 20-23. On the *ad status* collections that emerged in the 13th century, see David D'Avray and M. Tausche "Marriage Sermons in *ad status* Collections of the Central Middle Ages," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire au Moyen Age* 47 (1980): 71-119.

[99] Guibert of Tournai, *Sermones ad omnes status,* ed. Carla Casagrande, *Prediche alle donne del secolo XIII: Testi di Umberto da Romans, Gilberto da Tournai, Stefano Borbone,* (Milan: Bompiani, 1978), 63-112.

> A woman is truly a virgin only when such a state is voluntary, not when it is forced. This is what Jerome meant in his letter to Eustochium, regarding Paul: "Why does the Apostle have no precepts regarding virgins? Because that which is offered without constraint constitutes a greater merit." I, however, would take care to differentiate [between] those who remain chaste only out of fear or shame, because such women would sin, if they dared, but instead they do not because they are afraid of becoming pregnant or perhaps have not found someone they desire….However, if at a later time those who guard their virginity out of fear or by circumstance or by constraint change their intentions, they are not completely deprived of merit and virtue.[100]

For Guibert, as in the case of the manuals for confession discussed above, intentions mattered. Even so, his categorical reliance on the hierarchy of chastity as his framework for preaching to women still meant that a woman who remained a virgin by no choice of her own was regarded as more virtuous than a pious married woman or a widow.

The *ad status* sermons of Guibert's Dominican contemporary, Humbert of Romans (d. 1277), illustrate a profound change in sermons intended for female audiences, as well as a growing interest in the pastoral care of women by the Dominicans. Unlike Guibert, Humbert does not address women according to their sexual status, but in relation to the position they position they occupy within society, in a manner more similar to *ad status* sermons to men. His audience is divided into two broad categories – religious and lay – with the former superior to the latter because the life of the spirit is superior to that of the body. He further subdivides the category of religious women by those who have taken formal religious vows, and those, such as tertiaries and beguines, who have devoted themselves to a life of poverty and devotion.[101] Laywomen, meanwhile, are demarcated by their position and power in society: noble women,

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[100] "Sit ergo mulier voluntaria virgo, non coacta. Under Jerolamus ad Eustochium exponens Paulum: 'Cur,' inquit, 'de virginibus preceptum non habet Apostolus? Quia maioris est meriti quod non cogitur et offertur.' Sed absit ut eam castam dixerim illam quam timor aut pudor tantummodo cohibet, peccaret siquidem si auderet, timet ne concipiat, vel forte non invenit qui eam appetat vel impetat….Tamen qui virginitatem custodiunt ex timore vel ex complexione vel coactione, si voluntas correcta fuerit et formata non privantur merito penitus et virtute." Guibert of Tournai, "Ad virgines, sermo secundus," ed. Casagrande, *Prediche alle donne,* 105.

[101] Humbert of Romans, *De eruditione praedicatorum,* ed. Casagrande, *Prediche alle donne*, 40-60.

bourgeois women, domestic servants, poor, rural women, and prostitutes. Among laywomen, status derives from power and wealth.

Crucially, Humbert departs from tradition to suggest that men and women do not have to give up their secular lives in order to ensure their salvation, but can live and work in the world in a way that is pleasing to God.[102] Although the threat of usury led to a deep disparagement of commerce for most of the Middle Ages, Humbert's advice coincides with the appearance in the late thirteenth century of a handful of male saints from the *popolo* – artisans and merchants – who worked in trades.[103] Their hagiographers were ambivalent about their labor and tended to minimize its role in the lives of these saints. Nonetheless, their contemporaries admired them for their piety despite, if not because of, their work. Humbert, by contrast, explicitly accords spiritual merit to the quotidian duties of the household, citing the admonishment given to Sarah by her parents before she left their home to live with her husband Tobit: "And the parents taking their daughter kissed her and let her go, admonishing her to honor her father and mother-in-law, to love her husband, to take care of the family, to govern the house, and to behave herself irreprehensibly."[104] A wealthy matron, for example, who cannot give away her riches can instead urge her husband to give alms. By encouraging her husband in charity and piety, she sanctifies them both.[105] Humbert is not categorical, however. Women whose wealth permits them to

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[102] Casagrande, "Introduzione," *Prediche alle donne,* xv-xvi.

[103] These include Homobonus of Cremona (d. 1198), a merchant who was canonized by Pope Innocent III in 1199, Raymond 'Palmerio' of Piacenza (1139/40–1200), a shoemaker, Facio of Cremona (d. 1272), a goldsmith, Albert of Villa d'Ogna (d. 1279), a wine porter, Luchesio of Poggibonsi (d. c. 1240), a grocer, and Peter 'Pettinaio' (d. 1289), a comb seller. Vauchez, 202-203.

[104] Tobit 10:13. Humbert of Romans, "Ad mulieres burgenses divites," ed. Casagrande, *Prediche alle donne*, 48.

[105] "Item licet Burgenses solent commendare eleemosynam uxoribus suis, et de eis in hoc confidere, tamen sunt quaedam, quae durae sunt ad opera misericordiae, cujus contrarium debet esse in mulieribus: propter quod dicitur Ecclesiastici 26. 'Ubi non est mulier, ingemiscit aeger.' Per quod innuitur mulieris esse, ut sit pia ad indigentiam miserorum. Item, sunt quaedam, quae parum curant de salute virorum, dummodo in hoc seculo sint in

delegate their household responsibilities should not spend too much time on these things, and instead should go to church often to listen to sermons and spend time in pious activities.[106] Further, despite Humbert's categorization of women's status outside of the hierarchy of chastity and his efforts to sacralize the quotidian aspects of their lives, their primary role is that of helpmate to the piety of men rather than focusing on their own spirituality.[107] Their actions are only implicitly regarded as helpful to their own salvation, except when it comes to sin, for which they remain fully culpable.

It would be another century until the kind of piety suggested by Humbert coalesced into explicit advice for women, and matrons in particular, that conceived of their role within the household and family as a kind of spiritual devotion. This only becomes apparent with the proliferation of "guides to good living," practical – often excessively so – how-to manuals for living a moral life, addressed to the laity.[108] Whereas manuals for confession were addressed to the clergy, guides to good living were written for laypeople and aimed to provide models for imitation or models to be avoided.[109] The abundance of these guides was emblematic of a broad cultural demand for guidance about how to live morally, and in particular for women's desire for advice concerning managing competing secular and spiritual demands. They also filled a gap for

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prosperitate insimul, cujus contrarium fecit Caecilia, quae virum suum crudelem, et infidelem convertit ad Dominum, et leonem convertit in agnum, iuxta illud 1 ad Corinthios 7. 'Sanctificatus est vir infidelis per mulierem'." Humbert of Romans, "Ad mulieres burgenses divites," 47.

[106] "Item, quaedam sunt ita occupantes se circa curam domus suae, et alia secularia, quod parum vacant eis, quae Dei sunt. Et quia ad haec necessitas paupertatis eas non inducit, tanto magis debent vacare Ecclesiae frequentandae, et auditui Sermonum, et aliis bonis pertinentibus ad Deum." Ibid., 47-48.

[107] Sharon Farmer, "Persuasive Voices: Clerical Images of Medieval Wives," *Speculum* 61 (1986): 517-543.

[108] Hasenohr, 19-101. See also Glenn D. Burger, *Conduct Becoming: Good Wives and Husbands in the Later Middle Ages*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018).

[109] John Van Engen, *Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life: The Devotio Moderna and the World of the Later Middle Ages*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 314-316.

priests, who frequently lacked the financial means or educational training to access the more sophisticated manuals for confession discussed above.[110]

Jacopo Passavanti's *Specchio della vera penitenza* marks a subtle but important shift, and anticipates these guides to good living. Passavanti (d. 1357) was the son of an aristocratic Florentine family. After taking the Dominican habit at Santa Maria Novella in Florence, he entered the University of Paris to study theology.[111] After returning to Florence, he earned a reputation as a gifted preacher, and was invited to give a Lenten sermon series in 1354. The following year Passavanti compiled and edited these sermons into the *Specchio della vera penitenza,* supposedly at the request of those who had heard him preach the previous year. Even at its most descriptive, Passavanti does not explicitly describe an image, but instead uses language that invites the reader or listener to imagine Christ's suffering on the cross. In a section that discusses the kinds of things that stand in the way of true penitence, Passavanti urges his

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[110] These illiterate or uneducated priests were so dangerous to the spiritual well-being of penitents that Antoninus asserted that "those who do not know these things might better go to hoe a field than to confess; for them, it would be better to watch real sheep instead of taking care of souls." [Antoninus, *Curam illius habe,* Newberry Inc. 6355, 31r.] So dire was the situation that his *Curam illius habe* implored priests to remember at the very least the words for the consecration of the Eucharistic host, lest a mistake render the consecration invalid. ["Et perche molti sono tanto ignoranti che non fanno quasi le parole della consecratione del corpo e del sangue di Christo substantiali qui le porremo. Quelle da consecrare il corpo di Christo sono "Hoc est enim corpus meum." Et posto che enim non sia della substantia della forma peccherebbe non dimeno mortalmente chi la lasciasse. Ma lasciando alcuna dell'altre parole non consecrarrebbe." Antoninus, *Curam illius habe,* Newberry Inc. 6355, 31r.] According to Aquinas, whom Antoninus cites, only the words of consecration must be spoken correctly in order to effect the sacrament, because it is these words alone which signify transubstantiation. [*Summa Theologica* 3.78.1.] Even with such admonitions and efforts to improve the education of parish clergy, pastoral visits revealed systematic shortcomings in the ability of priests to perform even the most rudimentary pastoral care. On the deficient education of parish clergy, see Payer, 31-35. On the education of clergy before the implementation of seminaries at the Council of Trent, see Christopher M. Bellitto, "Revisiting ancient practices: priestly training before Trent," in *Medieval Education,* ed. Ronald B. Begley and Joseph W. Koterski, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 35-49; Pietro Delcorno, "'Quomodo discet sine docente?' Observant Efforts towards Education and Pastoral Care," in *A Companion to Observant Reform in the Late Middle Ages and Beyond,* ed. James D. Mixson and Bert Roest, (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 147-184. On episcopal visitations in Italy in the fifteenth century, see Riccardo Parmeggiani, "Visite pastorali e riforma a Bologna durante l'episcopato di Niccolò Albergati (1417-1443), *Rivista di Storia della Chiesa in Italia,* no. 1, (2015): 21-47; Celestino Piana, "Visita pastorale alle chiese della città di Bologna sotto il cardinal Albergati nel 1437," *Rivista di Storia della Chiesa in Italia* 40 (1986): 26-54.

[111] On Passavanti's life, see especially Ginetta Auzzas's introduction to her edition of Passavanti's *Specchio,* (Florence: Accademia della Crusca, 2014).

readers not to think that they have sinned too much to be saved. Instead, he encourages his readers to reflect on Mary Magdalene, Peter, the adulterous woman of John's gospel, and the many other sinners who repented and were saved:

> Christ was, after all, crucified for the sake of sinners. His blood was shed for you, and offers mercy and pity; the wound in his side reveals an injured heart, but one full of love and charity; his open arms and the tilt of his head draw you toward peace and to his friendship; his hands and feet nailed to the cross summon you with patience and calmness. The cross is placed before our eyes as an example of penitence, and as a mirror of virtue and holiness. It is a ladder for us to ascend to the glory of God and eternal happiness.[112]

Passavanti's description of Christ on the cross forgoes the gory descriptions favored by earlier writers, and relies instead on readers' familiarity with images of the Crucifixion.[113] His innovation is to enlist meditation on the Passion explicitly in order to encourage readers to engage in penitence and confession – not, as in the case of earlier writers in the Anselmian tradition, to draw them into sorrow by pondering the extent and brutality of Christ's suffering. Nonetheless, Passavanti is still more interested in meditation and abstraction than in devising a spirituality for the *vita activa.*

Passavanti is also traditional in imagining his projected audience. Like Guibert of Tournai and other preachers of the high Middle Ages who compiled *ad status* sermon collections, he relies on the traditional categorizations of men by their profession, and women by their sexual status. While men sin because of the demands of their profession and their social

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[112] "Iesù per voi crocifisso vi chiama. Il sangue suo grida, e proffera misericordia e pietade: il lato aperto vi mostra quore d'amore ferito e pieno di caritade; le braccia aperte, il capo chinato vi trae a pace e a sua amistade; le mani e'piedi confetti v'invitano con pazienzia e con tranquillitade. La croce è posta davanti agli occhi vostri essemplo di penitenzia, e specchio di virtude e di santitade, e come scala per la quale si sale alla gloria di Dio e alla eterna felicitade." Passavanti, *Lo Specchio,* 56-57.

[113] On the role of images in the visions of late medieval mystics in Italy, see Lina Bolzoni, *The Web of Images: Vernacular Preaching from Its Origins to Saint Bernardino da Siena,* trans. Carole Preston and Lisa Chien, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003); Chiara Frugoni, "Female Mystics, Visions, and Iconography," in *Women and Religion in Medieval and Renaissance Italy,* ed. Daniel Bornstein and Roberto Rusconi, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 130-164; William Hood, *Fra Angelico at San Marco,* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993).

status, women's sin, by contrast, is overwhelmingly sexual in nature. The brutal story of the black knight is particularly illustrative:

> Once there was a charcoal burner named Eliando who lived in the county of Nevers in France. One night, he saw a naked and disheveled woman being chased by a knight on a black horse with flames erupting from its head, eyes, and nose. The knight held a blade in his hand, and when he had run the woman down, he grabbed her by the hair and stabbed her through the chest, and threw her body into the charcoal burner's pit until it was burned and ashen. Then he threw the corpse over the horse's neck, and rode off the way he had come. The vision was identical for three nights, until Eliando enlisted the count of Nevers as a witness. The count confronted the knight on horseback, who replied, "You know me and my martyrdom, for I am Giuffredi, your knight….This woman…is the lady Beatrice, the wife of Berlinghieri, who is also your knight. This condition of hunter and prey belongs to her because she killed her husband out of lust. Now she must suffer and be killed every night at the hands of her lover, and be thrown by him on burning coals."[114]

Passavanti uses this story as an example of the efficacy of penitence, even up to the moment of death; Giuffredi and Beatrice are saved from eternal punishment by confessing to their sins and begging forgiveness as they are dying, and are punished in Purgatory instead of Hell. But the

[114] E avendo egli [Eliando] accesa la fossa de' carboni una volta, e sendo la notte in una sua capannetta a guardia della incesa fossa, senti in su l'ora della mezza notte grandi strida. Usci fuori per vedere che fosse, e vide venire in verso la fossa, correndo e stridendo, una femmina iscapigliata e ignuda; e dietro le venia uno cavaliere in su uno cavallo nero correndo, con uno coltello ignudo in mano; e della bocca e degli occhi e del naso del cavaliere e del cavallo uscia fiamma di fuoco ardente. Giugnendo la femmina alla fossa, ch'ardea, non passò più oltre, e nella fossa non ardiva di gittarsi; ma correndo intorno alla fossa, fu sopraggiunta dal cavaliere, che dietro le correa; la quale traendo guai, presa per li svolazzani capelli, crudelmente la feri per lo mezzo del petto col coltello che tenea in mano. E cadendo in terra, con molto ispargimento di sangue, si la riprese per li insanguinati capelli, e gittòlla nella fossa de' carboni ardenti; dove lasciandola stare per alcuno spazio di tempo, tutta focosa e arsa la ritolse; e ponendolasi davanti in su 'l collo del cavallo, correndo se n' andò per la via dond' era venuto. La seconda e la terza notte vide il carbonaio la simile visione. Donde, essendo egli dimestico del conte di Niversa….Venne il conte col carbonaio al luogo della fossa; e vegghiando insieme nella capannetta, nell'ora usata venne la femmina stridendo, e 'l cavaliere dietro, e feciono tutto ciò che 'l carbonaio avea veduto. Il conte, avvegna che per lo orribile fatto ch'avea veduto, fosse molto spaventato, prese ardire. E partendosi il cavaliere ispeitato colla donna arsa attraversata in su 'l nero cavallo, gridò iscongiurandolo che dovesse ristare, e spore la mostrata vision. Volse il cavaliere il cavallo, e fortemente piangendo, si rispose e disse: Da poi, conte, che tu vuoi sapere I nostril martirii, I quali Iddio t'ha volute mostrare, sappi ch'io fu' Giuffredi tuo cavaliere, e in tua corte nodrito [sic]. Questa femmina, contro a cui io sono tanto crudele e fiero, è dama Beatrice, moglie chef u del tuo caro cavaliere Berlinghieri. Noi prendendo piacere di disonesto amore l'uno dell'altro, ci conducemmo a consentimento di peccato; il quale a tanto condusse lei, che per potere fare più liberamente il male, uccise il suo marito. E perseverammo nel peccato in fino alla 'infermità della morte; ma nella infermità della morte, in prima ella e poi io tornammo a penitenzia; e confessando il nostro peccato, ricevemmo misericordia da Dio, il quale mutò la pena eternal dell 'nferno in pena temporale di purgatoro." Passavanti, *Lo Specchio,* 46-48.

story also speaks to Passavanti's framework for evaluating sin. Both Giuffredi and Beatrice are punished for a sexual sin, but Giuffredi's offense is exacerbated by his violation of the codes of knightly behavior. Nonetheless, Beatrice's sin is the greater of the two. Not only did she commit a sexual sin, but she also killed her husband in order to persist in her adultery. Even worse, Passavanti implies, her actions drew Giuffredi into further sin by prolonging the couple's affair, and as a result he now enacts her purgative punishment. But Beatrice is also responsible for the couple's redemption from Hell: it is she who first repents of their sin. With regard to women, therefore, Passavanti takes the traditional stance that while they are the cause of much sin, they are also able to alter marital and social relations by indulging or containing their propensity for sexual sin.

The development of a spirituality directed towards woman that emphasized moderation rather than excess culminated in the writing of Giovanni Dominici, a prominent Dominican theologian, preacher, spiritual advisor, and reformer whose intellectual and pastoral influence on the spirituality of late medieval Italy cannot be overstated. Born in 1356, Dominci was a member of a wealthy Florentine family and was the son of a Florentine silk merchant and a Venetian noblewoman. When he was sixteen he took the Dominican habit at Santa Maria Novella and rose quickly through the ranks of the order. From 1388 to 1399 he lived in Venice, where he was instrumental in setting up that city's first Dominican convent, Corpus Domini.[115] Dominici knew Catherine of Siena personally, and was also well-acquainted with women noted for their non-flamboyant spirituality, in particular Maria Sturion in Venice. Dominici had supported her desire to join the Dominicans at Corpus Domini, and was present at her own investiture as a Dominican

[115] Daniel Bornstein, introduction to Sister Bartolomea Riccoboni, *Life and Death in a Venetian Convent: the chronicle and necrology of Corpus Domini, 1395-1436*, ed. and trans. Daniel Bornstein, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 3-10.

tertiary.[116] In 1399 he was exiled from Venice for his involvement with the wandering bands of penitents called the *Bianchi*.[117] From there he returned to Florence where, among many other roles, he served as spiritual advisor to a number of Florentine noblewomen, including Bartolomea degli Alberti.

In 1401, Bartolomea wrote to Dominici requesting spiritual advice after her husband was exiled from Florence. He responded with the *Regola del governo di cura familiare*.[118] This text exemplifies Dominican pastoral guidance to lay women. Like Passavanti's *Specchio*, the *Regola* not only promotes moderate piety, but also provides an explicit spiritual how-to guide showing how such piety should be pursued. It is also remarkably pragmatic. The *Regola* addresses married women like Bartolomea according to the practical demands imposed by their roles as wives and mothers, and also attempts to attend to their spiritual needs rather than projecting expectations of chastity and sexuality on them. Dominici was especially concerned with reconciling the duties of marriage with women's desire to live a religious life. Alongside the standard authorial tropes of modesty and insufficiency for the task at hand the *Regola* also begins with Dominici weighing the challenges of providing advice to a laywoman and to other laywomen who might read the text. Bartolomea's situation is fraught, he reasons, because she

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[116] For a more complete biography of Dominici, see Nirit Ben-Aryeh Debby, *Renaissance Florence in the Rhetoric of Two Popular Preachers*, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001), 15-28.

[117] See Bornstein, *The Bianchi of 1399: Popular Devotion in Late Medieval Italy*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993).

[118] Bartolomea's husband had been exiled from Florence in 1401, along with all other male members of the Alberti family over the age of 18, leaving Bartolomea in charge of the family and its assets – an unusual, but not unprecedented, position. Prior to the *Regola*, the two had corresponded extensively about practical and spiritual matters, and Dominici had composed two other treatises for Bartolomea: *The Book of Love (Il Libro d'amore)*, an extensive commentary on the thirteenth verse of 1 Corinthians, and the *Treatise on Ten Questions (Trattato delle dieci questioni)*, a mystical treatise discussing the value of faith and belief in response to ten theological questions posed by Bartolomea. On Dominici's role as a spiritual advisor to women, see especially Daniel E. Bornstein, "Le donne di Giovanni Dominici: un caso nella recezione e transmission dei messaggi religiosi," *Studi medievali* 36 (1995): 355-361; and Nirit Ben-Aryeh Debby, "The Preacher as Women's Mentor," in *Preacher, Sermon, and Audience in the Middle Ages*, ed. Carolyn Muessig, (Leiden: Brill, 2002): 229-254.

herself is uncertain of her spiritual vocation and he fears that his advice might sway her in one direction over another rather than towards the vocation for which she is called.[119] Nor does he wish to suggest that one state of life – virginity, chastity, or marriage – is preferable to another, lest someone in one state find themselves dissatisfied and desiring another path.[120] Each person has been given particular spiritual gifts and vocation, and should embrace the state in which they find themselves and not seek or envy the vocation or gifts of another.[121]

Dominici, therefore, advises that spiritual perfection can be found by embracing the gifts and vocation that one already has. Unlike Passavanti, he is less concerned with swaying his readers towards spiritual change than in encouraging them to find solace and spiritual nourishment within the current conditions of their lives. A wife, for instance, could make herself into a sort of hermit through the performance of her household duties:

> make yourself into a hermit, not one shut in by walls, or locked away with an iron key, but a hermit set apart and enclosed within divine love, growing in humility…and keeping your soul with God when you work.[122]

Wives, Dominici argued, were better able to serve God than virgins because marriage tests and strengthens their faith:

> You know how much thought you have put into pleasing your husband carnally; how much concern in attending to his needs; how many wearisome nights taking care of him when he was sick; how often you were subject to his demands, how many sorrows you

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[119] Giovanni Dominici, *Regola del governo di cura familiare*, ed. Donato Salvi, (Florence, Angiolo Garinei Libraio, 1860), 5.

[120] "Temo di commendare tanto la virginità o la castità, che chi è obbligato a matrimonio non voglia fare di se a Dio sacrificio di rapina: nè ancora vorrei sì lodare il sacramento del matrimonio, che la vergine s'inchinasse a lasciare l'ottima parte presa." Dominici, 4.

[121] "Però nel numero sta l'altra particella della notizia della perfezione delle cose da Dio fatte, faciente ogni creatura in numero graduale di perfezione. Chi vuole determinare se l'oro é fine, o quanto manca da sua finezza, annovera I gradi o veramente carati….Io credo ogni stato che da Dio procede, o vero movimento perfetto, in se contenga mistura di ventiquattro virtù; e quale vi mancasse, sarebbe da purificarlo tanto tornasse al debito termine: come ciascuna spezie create consiste in numerose perfezioni raccolte in ella, alla quale mancandone solo una, non sarebbe quella ma sarebbe un'altra." Ibid., 16.

[122] Non sarai romita murata, o serrata con chiave di ferro, ma come romita separata e rinchiusa nell' amor divino, guadagnado in umilità…tenendo l'anima con Dio quando lavori." Ibid., 101.

> suffered in his misfortune; how many tears you shed because you forgave him when he so carelessly upset you; how much you begged him for his permission or for some trinket; how much you worried waiting for him to return.[123]

Marriage, therefore, is cathartic and prepares women to serve God. Dominici, however, goes further. Marriage is not only therapeutic, he argues, but is such good preparation that widows are better able to serve God than virgins. First, widows have more experience in life and have endured the bitterness and difficulties that come with it, while the unmarried virgin, who lacks worldly experience, is tempted by worldly things.[124] Further, because widows are used to serving their husband, they have more experience attending to the needs of men, and so are better equipped to serve God.[125] Dominici also recognizes the practical constraints that marriage exerts over a woman's time, and how the loss of free time for prayer and other spiritual devotions might provoke anxiety in his readers. "Your husband," he says, "is more the master of your time than you are."[126] Therefore, a wife should obey her husband in all things, even if his demands on her time prevent her from praying or from other spiritual devotions.[127] Particularly if her spiritual inclinations would interfere with rendering the marriage debt, which in turn might lead her

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[123] "Perchè tu, vedova, sai meglio servire a Dio per esperienzia che non sa la vergine, la qual mai non fu serva d'uomo….Tu sai quanto studio già ponesti per piacere a tuo marito carnale; quanta sollicitudine per attendere a'suoi bisogni; quante male notti per servirlo nelle sue infermità; quanta subiezione ne'suoi comandamenti, quanti dolori nelle sue avversità; quanti pianti, se levemente l'offendesti, perchè ti perdonasse; quante supplicazioni per avere da lui una licenzia o qualche vanità; quanta ansietà aspettando sua tornata…" Ibid., 102-103.

[124] "La prima si è che avendo provato l'angoscioso mondo e pien di fatiche e di subiezioni, ne debbe essere tanto stanca, che quasi per natura il debbe avere in odio, e ad ogni suo servigio esser paurosa e inimica. E quanto più s'ha il mondo in dispregio, tanto più allegramente e sanza difficultà si serve al sommo Bene. La vergine può esser tentata, e creder sia qualche dolcezza nel mondo, che vede bramato da tanti, ed ella non sa rispondere che non l'ha provato; la quale in verità non v'è, e tu vedova per esperienzia il sai….Dove è più resistenza si richiede virtù maggiore, e a maggior virtù si debbe maggior premio." Dominici, 101-102.

[125] Ibid., 102-103.

[126] "…lo sposo è del tempo più signore che non se' tu." Ibid., 88.

[127] Boccaccio takes the ideal wife's unwavering obedience to her husband to the extreme in the story of the patient Griselda, a peasant girl who marries a nobleman, who in turn puts her fidelity to the test through a series of trials. The nobleman feigns the executions of both of the couple's children before throwing her out of their home in nothing but a shift, pretending to divorce her, and demanding that she attend his wedding to his new wife (who was secretly the couple's daughter) as a cleaning woman. Griselda bore all of these indignities without complaint, and at last, recognizing her loyalty, the nobleman revealed all trials he had put her through and accepted her once again as his wife. Boccaccio, *Decameron*, day 10, story 10.

husband into the sin of adultery, it is better, writes Dominici, for her to accept her husband's desires and commands.[128] Likewise, a wife should obey her husband even when it comes to wearing ornate and ostentatious clothing. Although these things are vain, and women should avoid them as much as possible, God excuses sins committed under obedience to the husband.[129]

The *Regola* also addresses wealth and its uses, another major concern of upper-class wives. In part three of the *Regola,* Dominici reminds Bartolomea of Christ's command to "sell all you have, give it to the poor, and follow me."[130] Doing so, he admits, is not feasible for everyone, and especially not for a mother who still has an obligation to care for her children. The best remedy, therefore, is to exercise moderation in all things. He suggests to Bartolomea that instead of ridding herself of all of her wealth, she can demonstrate her love for God by giving to strangers and should spend money building churches, monasteries, and hospitals, providing dowries to young women, freeing prisoners, clothing the naked, and giving to everyone what they need.[131] She should not spend money on rich decorations for churches, "dressing Eve in gold or fine blue within the walls of the church while her fleshly children are left to die of cold or starve of hunger."[132] Instead, Dominici advises, "rebuild a ruined or abandoned church or a hospital which has been abandoned due to poverty rather than building a new church" – an

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[128] Dominici, 88-89. Surprisingly, Bernardino of Siena questioned the assumption of equality in the marriage debt, and recognized female spirituality as a legitimate reason for women to refuse sex with their husbands. On this, see Dyan Elliott, "Bernardino of Siena Versus the Marriage Debt," in *Desire and Discipline: Sex and Sexuality in the Premodern West*, ed. Jacqueline Murray and Konrad Eisenbichler, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 168-200.

[129] "E arrendendoti a lui, protestali il peccato sarà suo, e mangia per obedienzia, ma non per volontà, temperando si la gola che Dio t'abbi iscusata." Dominici, 90.

[130] Ibid., 108.

[131] "Arai ancora in questo stato stando a dispensare i ben del tuo signore a'forestieri i quale sono tutti altri poveri non inchiusi ne'membri due detti di sopra. Così si possono spendere i beni in fabbricare chiesa, monasteri, spedali; maritar fanciulle, liberar prigioni, vestir mal vestiti, dare a ciascuna che chiede per l'amor di Dio, dove tu non sai essere stremità o ultimo bisogno." Ibid., 122.

[132] "Dipigner chiese ad onor di Dio, e dotaria di ricchi vestimenti e vasi, lodo di quelle ch'avanza poi sono gli afflitti consolati; e usansi bene. Ma vestire donna Eva d'oro o fino azzurro dentro nel muro, e la sua figliuola di carne vera lasciar morir di freddo o mancar di fame, non è ragionevole." Ibid., 125.

admonition that calls to mind St. Francis's renovation of San Damiano in Assisi.[133] Even in charity, however, Dominici cautions against excess, warning that those who buy and sell too many masses risk the punishments of Purgatory or Hell.[134]

Dominici's protégé, Antoninus of Florence (1389–1459), likewise idealized married, moderate piety for women. The son of a Florentine notary, Antoninus was inspired by Dominici to enter the Dominican Observant Order, which Dominici had worked to reform.[135] In 1405 he joined the Order as a novice, and spent his novitiate in Cortona, before returning to Tuscany a year later. He would travel extensively in Tuscany and Naples over the course of his career, before finally accepting the post of archibishop of Florence in 1446. As archbishop, he earned a reputation for modesty, morality, and spirituality, and he was revered as a saint from the time of his death in 1459.[136] In addition to the manuals for confessors described above, Antoninus wrote at least three treatises for upper-class Florentine women: the *Regola di vita Cristiana* for Ginevra Cavalcanti around 1441, the *Nave spirituale* for Annalena Malatesta, a Dominican tertiary, between 1450 and 1454, and the *Opera a ben vivere* for Dianora Tornabuoni around 1454.[137] As with Dominici's *Regola,* and his own earlier manual for confessors, *Curam illius habe*, the *Opera* was written in the Florentine vernacular.

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[133] "Se vuogli spendere quantítà di danari, più ti consiglio rifacci una chiesa guasta o abbandonata, o spedal rifiutato per povertà, dotando di quelle che puoi, che fabbricar di nuovo." Ibid., 122.

[134] "Preziosissime sono le messe, dette per salute de'passati, ed ancor de'vivi; ma gran peccato fa chi la vendo o chi la compra. Se vuoi andare in inferno e cavare una anima di purgatorio, compera molte messe; e tu comperatore con tutti i venditori, se penitenzia non fate prima moriate, ven'andrete allo 'nferno." Ibid., 114-115, 119.

[135] On Antoninus's life, see especially Peter Howard, *Beyond the Written Word: Preaching and Theology in the Florence of Archbishop Antoninus, 1427-1459,* (Florence: Olschki, 1995); David S. Peterson, "Archbishop Antoninus: Florence and the Church in the Earlier Fifteenth Century," (PhD dissertation, Cornell University, 1985).

[136] Antoninus was canonized in 1523. On his cult, see Sally J. Cornelison, *Art and the Relic Cult of St. Antoninus in Renaissance Florence,* (New York: Ashgate, 2012).

[137] See Paoli, "Antonino da Firenze O.P. e la direzione dei laici," 85-130; Theresa Flanigan, "Art, Memory, and the Cultivation of Virtue: The Ethical Function of Images in Antoninus's *Opera a ben vivere*," *Gesta* 53 no. 2 (2014): 175-195.

In some respects the *Opera* is closer to the late medieval Passion narratives than to Dominici's extensively pragmatic advice. For example, Antoninus provides a detailed description of Jesus' and Mary's suffering at the crucifixion, and encourages Dianora to meditate on this image:

> kneel before a crucifix and grasp with the mind's eye, more than with those of the body, consider His face. First, the crown of thorns, fixed on his head, penetrating the skin; then the eyes, filled with tears, and blood, and sweat; then the nose, filled with mucus, and tears, and blood; the mouth, filled with bile, and saliva, and blood; the beard, likewise filled with saliva, and blood, and bile, and spittle…then the face, completely obscured, and spittled, and bruised by blows from the cane, and completely bloodied.[138]

Meditation and prayer like this is especially important, but, warns Antoninus, its value is not the number of prayers said. Instead, prayer must be done with sincerity, "for the purpose of prayer is to lift the mind towards God and heavenly things…lifting our spirits from every worldly obstacle and thought and merging us with God."[139] Further, while frequent prayer is important, it must not interfere with household duties.[140] Instead, advises Antoninus, women should always use household work as an opportunity to meditate on spiritual matters, "chewing and ruminating on godly things."[141]

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[138] "Quando avete udito messa o innanzi, o volete in camera vostra, inginocchiatevi dinanzi ad un Crucifisso, e cogli occhi della mente, più che con quelli del corpo, considerate la faccia sua. Prima, alla corona delle spine, fittegliele in testa, insino al celabro; poi gli occhi, pieni di lacrime e di sangue e di sudore; poi lo naso, pieno di mocci e di lacrime e di sangue; la barba, similemente piena di bava e di sangue e di fiele, essendo tutta sputacchiata e spelazzata; poi la faccia, tutta oscurata, e sputacchiata, e livida per le percosse delle gotate e della canna, e tutta sanguinosa." Antoninus, *Opera a ben vivere*, (Florence: M. Cellini, 1858), 149-53.

[139] "La vera orazione non è altro che spiccarsi colla mente da ogni cosa terrena, e levare la mente a Dio, e alle cose celestiali: non è altro, che ispiccare e dipartire le anime nostre da ogni impaccio e pensiero mondano, e unirle con Dio." Ibid., 140-141.

[140] "Per respetto che la carità vostra è coniugata, e dovete essere suggetta e obbediente al vostro sposo, per questa cagione non vi so dire che voi vi leviate la notte, come i religiosi, a dire l'ufficio; ma bene vi conforto, che abbiate buona sollecitudine di levarvi la mattina di buon'ora….E fatto così, o tutto o in parte, innanzi che usciate fuori, ordinate la casa, se nulla avete ad ordinare, per modo che le cose di casa siano fatte al tempo loro; a ciò che la famiglia vostra sia consolata, e voi, quando sarete in chiesa, possiate stare con la mente pacifica, e senza struggimento." Ibid., 142-48.

[141] "Quando siete occupata in qualche esercizio, di sempre masticare e rugumare qualche cosa di Dio, mentre che vi esercitate manualmente." Ibid., 188.

In order to persevere in her piety in the face of so many competing obligations, Antoninus advises that she imagine her spiritual life as a garden. She must guard it and enclose it so that neither man nor beast may enter and quickly spoil that which had taken much time and work to cultivate.[142] Next, she should build a gate by which she may enter the garden, and she should place a porter by the gate who will be discreet and will not open the gate to strangers.[143] She must also procure a gardener, who will plant the garden at the correct time, and who will cultivate the plants as they grow.[144] Finally, she must seek out any weeds, and root them out.[145] This analogy calls to mind the *hortus conclusus* of the Virgin, but it also points to Antoninus's persistent desire to strike a balance between piety and pragmatism. To lead a life of piety, a woman should be resolved in her purpose, and remove herself as often as possible from circumstances that might cause her to fall into sin.[146] Women of means are especially susceptible to the spiritual dangers of social obligations like "marriages, dances, festivals, jousts, and other spectacles," Antoninus warns, and it is best to avoid such things altogether when possible.[147] At home, women should pray before morning and evening meals, but avoid conversation after dinner, instead attending to household duties, reading devotional literature, sermons, and meditating and praying. Alongside prayer, Antoninus advises Dianora to fast every Friday,

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[142] "La prima cosa che gli convien fare, si è di turarlo molto bene intorno, per modo che nè bestie, nè li mali uomini vi possino entrare a gustare l'orto suo; a ciò che in poco spazio, per una poca di negligenza, non perda quello che con molta fatica, in molto tempo, s'avea acquistato." Ibid., 94.

[143] "La seconda, sì gli bisogna fare una porta, dove si possa entrare nell'orto; e che a detta porta ci ponga un portinaio che sia discreto, il quale non apra se non a que'che conosca." Ibid., 94-95.

[144] "La terza, è bisogno che si sappia procacciare un ortolano, il quale sia sperto a seminare l'orto a'tempi suoi, e che sappia conducere la sementa a perfezione, insino a tanto che i frutti siano da ricogliere." Antoninus, *Opera a ben vivere*, 95.

[145] "La quarta, che esso signore spesso ricerchi l'orto suo, e come vi vede alcuna mala erba, che non avesse a producere buon frutto, che lo pronunzii all'ortolano; a ciò che l'ortolano la consideri, e se gli pare non buona, che la levi via, con ogni sua radice." Ibid.

[146] "Chi è partito dal peccato, e desidera di far bene, e di possedere buona pace nella conscienza sua, gli bisogna fare uno buono proposito nella mente sua, di mai più non peccare, e di levare dal canto suo ogni occassione di quelle cose, che l'avesseno inducere a peccato." Ibid., 98.

[147] Ibid., 153-56.

except when Christmas falls on a Friday, and throughout Lent, but to abstain from fasting when sick or for other legitimate occasions.[148] He also admonishes her to confess frequently but to "avoid fuss" and to receive the Eucharist twelve times a year on the first Sunday of Advent, Christmas, Candlemas, Annunciation, Good Friday, Easter, Ascension, Pentecost, the Nativity of John the Baptist, the Assumption of the Virgin, the Nativity of the Virgin, and the Feast of All Saints.[149] In all of these things, he advises, "let us be as careful as we can that the intention remains hidden, for we do not desire to be seen and recognized for our works, and praised and rewarded for them by men, but instead let all of our love be used to honor God."[150] In this way, she could protect herself from worldly temptations and guard her desire for spirituality.

This view of spirituality that not only embraced the state in which a woman found herself, but even sanctified it, set the stage for a new construct of married piety – a view that could conceive of a married woman living a holy life. The categorical separation of the *vita activa* from the *vita contemplativa* was being challenged by a more moderate model that focused on the spiritual merit of a woman's intentions, even if she was unable to follow through in her actions. Augustine had conceded in the fourth century that, with regard to spiritual marriage, action did not need to follow intention in order to find merit with God if one of the spouses refused to commit to a life of chastity.[151] It was not until the later Middle Ages, however, that writers, particularly within the Dominican milieu began to seek ways to illustrate this advice with imitable examples, as we will see in the next chapter. The flourishing of literature devoted

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[148] "Tutti li digiuni e vigilie comandate, e tutti li venderdì dell'anno (eccetto che quanto la Natività del Nostro Signore Gesù Cristo venisse in venderdì) e tutta la quaresima, voglio che digiunate; quando infermità, o accasione legittima non v'occorresse." Ibid., 134.

[149] Ibid., 135-36.

[150] "Quando abbiamo fare alcuna opera, che ce la bisogni fare palese, ingegniamoci quanto possiamo, che la intenzione sia occulta, cio è lo desiderio nostro non sia che da uomini sia veduta, per intenzione di volerne da loro nè lode, nè premio; ma che sia tutto l'affetto nostro adoperare ad onore di Dio." Antoninus, *Opera a ben vivere,* 96.

[151] See Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage,* 60.

to pastoral care combined with a conception of piety as something that not only could exist within marriage, but might even be encouraged by it, paved the way for the kind of sanctity exemplified by a holy woman like Villana delle Botti.

Chapter 2

Holy Mediocrity: Sanctity and Dominican Spirituality

To really be a saint
You gotta really be a virgin
Dry as a page of the
King James version[1]

—Josh Ritter, "Getting Ready to Get Down"

Medieval hagiography tended to privilege virginity, with some notable exceptions. And yet, in the fourteenth century, a new paradigm of sanctity emerged that featured wealthy, married matrons. Holy mediocrity dispensed with the distinct signs of holiness that traditionally distinguished saints, and instead demonstrated how these women embraced a model of restrained piety that let them reclaim mentally the virginity that they had lost physically. This chapter explores the lives of three local saints noted for their moderate piety, and argues that these *vitae* were written to provide practical guidance to other women who found themselves in a similar situation.

I. Hagiographical Tradition

Holy mediocrity grew out of the medieval hagiographical tradition. In the early Middle Ages, virginity reigned supreme as the prototype of female sanctity.[2] Women like Cecilia, who

[1] Josh Ritter, "Getting Ready to Get Down," *Sermon on the Rocks,* Pytheas Recordings, 2015.

[2] In the early church, virginity had often been wrapped up with martyrdom. As early as the third century, however, theologians had begun to differentiate between "red martyrdom," which was predicated on suffering at the hands of others that ended in death, and "white martyrdom," which was earned through purity and ascetical suffering. As opportunities for red martyrdom diminished over the course of late antiquity and the early Middle Ages, white martyrdom increasingly became the only option. On typologies of sanctity in the early church, see especially Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); Elizabeth A. Clark, *Ascetic Piety and Women's Faith: Essays on Late Ancient Christianity,* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1986); Elliott, *The Bride of Christ Goes to Hell: Metaphor and Embodiment in the Lives of Pious Women, 200-1500,* (Philadelphia, University of Pennyslvania Press, 2012), 9-62. On red and

converted her husband to Christianity on their wedding night, earned their sanctity by virtue of the virginity that they preserved at all costs.[3] When it came to marriage, Augustine had celebrated its "goods" – indissolubility, chaste fidelity, and offspring – and stressed that a woman's physical integrity was less important than her intention. "Purity is a virtue of the mind," he argued, "and it is not lost when the body is violated."[4] Yet while Augustine defended the dignity of marriage, he did not go so far as to suggest that that the married state was equal to virginity. Married people and virgins belong within one universal Church, and "the married are certainly able to follow His [Christ's] footsteps [*vestigia*], even if their feet do not fit perfectly into the footprints, yet following the same path," he wrote.[5] Although virgins should not think of themselves as superior to the married, neither were the two states on the same level. For Augustine, however, virginity was primarily a disposition of the will rather than a condition of the body, and so it was possible for a woman to retain mental virginity even if she had lost her bodily virginity. Jerome was less optimistic. He was of the mindset that marriage was just marginally better than fornication, and asserted that only virgins would receive full blessedness in Heaven. Jerome popularized the now-familiar hierarchy based on the parable of the sower and seed (Matt. 13:8): in Heaven, virgins would receive a hundredfold fruit, widows sixtyfold, and wives thirtyfold.[6] He wrote:

> We are not ignorant of [Paul's] words, "Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled." We have read God's first command, "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish

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white martyrdom, see idem, *Proving Woman Proving Woman: Female Spirituality and Inquisitional Culture in the Later Middle Ages*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 62-74.

[3] See Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 63-66.

[4] Augustine, *City of God*, Book 1, ch. 16.

[5] Augustine, *On holy virginity*, 28.

[6] Clarissa W. Atkinson, "'Precious Balsam in a Fragile Glass': the Ideology of Virginity in the Later Middle Ages," *Journal of Family History* 8, (1983): 131.

> the earth"; but while we honor marriage, we prefer virginity, which is the offspring of marriage. Will silver cease to be silver, if gold is more precious than silver?[7]

Although Jerome agreed that virginity was a state of both mind and body, his tripartite hierarchy nevertheless remained unchallenged.[8] The tradition passed down from the church fathers, therefore, regarded virginity as superior to matrimony.

The rise of Mary Magdalene to a place of prominence as the *beata peccatrix,* or holy sinner, also mitigated the stigma attached to married saints. Beginning in the twelfth century, the Magdalene's cult demonstrated that even with a sexual past women could win favor with excessive penance, and perhaps even reclaim some of the luster of lost virginity. As Katherine Jansen has shown, for medieval Christians, the Magdalene at once represented sanctity and sinfulness.[9] The hagiographical tradition conflated the identities of three distinct women: the sinner who washed Christ's feet with her tears and hair, Mary, the sister of Martha, and Mary of Magdala, whom Christ had cured of demons.[10] Through her penitence and profound love of Christ, the Magdalene had been redeemed from her former life as a prostitute by virtue of her mental purity, and was transformed from a lowly sinner to an exalted virgin. She was so glorified by her redemption, in fact, that she was worthy to be the first to see the resurrected Christ, and thereafter called *apostolorum apostola* (apostle of the apostles).[11] Not only did this entitle her to wear the floral wreath traditionally reserved for virgins, but it also placed her at the head of the company of virgins in heaven.[12] The thirteenth-century Dominican preacher, Tommaso Agni,

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[7] Jerome, *Against Jovinian,* I.3.

[8] On virginity as the gold standard, see Barbara Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist: Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature,* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 19-45.

[9] Katherine Ludwig Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen: Preaching and Popular Devotion in the Later Middle Ages,* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); Ibid., "Like a Virgin: The Meaning of the Magdalen for Female Penitents of Later Medieval Italy," *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 45 (2000): 131-152.

[10] Luke 7:36-50, Luke 10:38-42, and Luke 8:2/Mark 16:9, respectively.

[11] Jansen, *Making of the Magdalen,* 62-82.

[12] Ibid., 286-294.

explained that she held her prominent position among the saints because she "superseded the virgins in the catalog of saints, was equal to the apostles on account of her title apostle of the apostles, but subordinate to the Virgin Mary because the Virgin was without peer."[13] Though the Magdalene herself had never been married, her rehabilitation provided hope for other women, including matrons, that their physical loss of virginity did not bar them from enjoying the hundredfold heavenly fruits promised to virgins.[14]

The twelfth century also saw the emergence of the Beguines, communities of laywomen whose claims to sanctity were based on manual labor, piety, and mystical experiences rather than virginal privilege. Mary of Oignies (1177–1213), a matron who was made famous through the *vita* written by Jacques de Vitry, is a case in point. The daughter of a wealthy family, Mary was represented as a spiritually precocious child, much to the dismay of her parents.[15] When she was fourteen years old, they married her to a young man named John. The two probably consummated their marriage, though the *vita* is ambiguous enough that scholars have continued to debate this point.[16] Although Mary's *vita* associates her renewed penitence to her newfound freedom from her overbearing parents, it was also quite likely precipitated by her loss of her virginity. Soon after her marriage, she resolved to undertake a life of piety and penitence, and conviced her husband to take a mutual vow of chastity. After her separation from John, Mary's life was marked by a rejection of familial wealth and a life of extreme asceticism that would ultimately compensate for her lost virginity. Among her penitential practices was extreme food

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[13] Tommaso Agni da Lentini, MS BAV Vat. lat. 4691, quoted and translated in Jansen, 287n2.

[14] Jansen, "Like a Virgin."

[15] Jacques de Vitry, *Vita Mariae Oigniacensis*, *AASS* June 5 (Antwerp, 1727), 630-666. See also Thomas of Cantimpré's *Supplement* to Mary's life, ibid., 666-677.

[16] On the question of Mary's virginity, see Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage,* 239n168, who summarizes the historiography around this point and argues that Mary's hagiographer, Jacques de Vitry, would not have withheld evidence that she had remained a virgin.

deprivation, including subsisting on the Eucharist for thirty-five days.[17] After consuming a small portion of meat and diluted wine when she was sick, Mary was filled with such remorse that she used a knife to cut off a hunk of her own flesh in self-inflicted penitence.[18] She was also beset by demons, endured illness, and deprived herself of sleep. As a reward for her devotion, Mary was restored to virginity and granted the hundredfold reward reserved for virgins.[19] Even so, such a transformation was not recommended to all. Mary's hagiographer, Jacques de Vitry, explicitly advises readers of Mary's *vita* that her asceticism is not to be imitated, but only admired.[20]

Mary of Oignies' cult remained local and unofficial. In the late twelfth century, however, official canonization became centralized through the papacy.[21] Elizabeth of Hungary (1207-1231), a saintly matron, received the special imprimatur of canonization within a few years of her death. She was one of the first married women with children venerated as a saint, and the first to be officially canonized. Although her confessor, Conrad of Marburg, would attempt to present Elizabeth in the paradigm of the holy resisters of marriage, Elizabeth had married willingly, and her union with her husband, Ludwig, produced three children. Their marriage was apparently a happy one, and Elizabeth was grief-stricken when she learned that Ludwig had died while on Crusade. After his death, she took up the life of a pious widow under a vow of

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[17] Jacques de Vitry, *VMO,* 642.

[18] "Adeo autem gustato spiritu desipiebat ei omnis delectation carnalis, quod dum aliquando ad memoriam reduceret, quia post quamdam gravissimam quam habuit aegreitudinem, carnalibus et modico vino temperato qua ex necessitate uti coacta est. Ex quadam praeteritae delectationis abominatione sese affligendo, requiem non habuit in spiritu suo, donec prateritas, qualescumque delicias, carnis suae cruciate mirabiliter recompensaret. Fervore enim spiritus quasi inebriata, prae dulcedine Agni Paschalis carnes suas fastidiens, frustra non modica cum cultello refecavit, quae prae verecundia in terra abscondit." Jacques de Vitry, *VMO,* 641.

[19] "Tu [Dominus] vero centuplum reddidisti ei in hoc seculo." Ibid., 640.

[20] "Nec hoc dixero ut excessum commendem, sed ut fervorem ostendam. In iis autem et multis aliis, quae privilegio gratiae operata est, attendat lector discretus, quod paucorum privilegia non faciunt legem commune. Eius virtutes imitemur, opera vero virtutum eius, sine private privilegio imitari non possumus." Ibid., *VMO,* 639. On the distinction between imitation and admiration, see Richard Kieckhefer, *Unquiet Souls: Fourteenth-Century Saints and Their Religious Milieu,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 12-14.

[21] André Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages,* trans. Jean Birrell, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 13-84.

obedience to her confessor. Although the most extreme part of Elizabeth's saintly career began with her husband's death, witnesses to her life also stressed her love for her husband and underscored that absenting herself from her husband's bed was penance for her.[22] It is probable that in the eyes of her confessor, however, neither her restraint during marriage nor her commitment to poverty and the care of the poor after Ludwig's death were enough to mitigate the stain of marriage. Conrad exercised unquestioned authority over Elizabeth, abetting her own austerities and subjecting her to such harsh penitential practices that she died at the age of twenty-four.[23] Elizabeth was the only contemporary matron to be included in Jacobus de Voragine's immensely popular *Golden Legend* (c. 1260), revealing how far the thirteenth-century spiritual landscape had shifted from the virgin martyrs of the early Church.[24] Her popularity also suggests a demand for saints outside the usual cast of virgins, even as official canonization signaled the rejection of this demand.

In thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Italy, the rehabilitation of marriage set the stage for the rise of wealthy matrons who converted to a life of ostentatious penance. Angela of Foligno (d. 1309), Margaret of Cortona (1247–1297), Umilità of Faenza (d. 1310), and numerous others dramatically rejected their wealth and traded it for radical asceticism, frequently in the mode of Francis of Assisi.[25] After nearly a decade of marriage and two sons, both of whom died shortly

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[22] *Dicta quatuor ancillarum*, trans. Kenneth Baxter Wolf, in *The Life and Afterlife of St. Elizabeth of Hungary: Testimony from her Canonization Hearings*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 197-198.

[23] Elliott, *Proving Woman*, 85-89, 95-106.

[24] Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, trans. William Granger Ryan, vol. II, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993): 304-305.

[25] See also the lives of Umiliana dei Cerchi (1219–1246), Chiara of Rimini (1282–1346), Michelina of Pesaro (1300–1356), Aldobrandesca of Siena (d. 1309), and Santuccia Carabotti (d. 1305).

after their baptism, Umilità convinced her husband to agree to live together in chastity.[26] She eventually became a hermitess, eating only bread and water, and occasionally some raw vegetables, depriving herself of sleep, and wearing a hairshirt.[27] While Umilità had desired enter a convent from a young age, Angela of Foligno was initially content with worldly pleasures.[28] She and her husband were married for nearly two decades and had several sons before her sudden conversion. The reasons for this change are not clear, but when she was about thirty-five she began having pangs of guilt about her sinfulness, and feared being damned to hell.[29] After her conversion, her spirituality was characterized by intense devotion to Christ's Crucifixion, of which she had vivid visions, as well as renunciation of her wealth and charity to the poor.

Margaret of Cortona was not married, but lived with a young nobleman with whom she had a child.[30] In addition to this illicit arrangement, she was also vain and arrogant, and flaunted her wealth by wearing fine clothing. Her partner's murder left her homeless and penniless, and she resorted to begging outside the city gate of Cortona. Soon, she became attracted to the Franciscan tertiaries, and through them met Fra Giovanni da Castiglione Arentino, who would become her spiritual director. After taking the habit of the Franciscan tertiaries, Margaret began a punishing regime of ascetical practices, and she became "like a new Magdalene."[31] She showed off her newfound piety by having herself led with a rope around her neck, barefoot and dressed

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[26] She had harbored a desire to enter a convent since childhood, but was thwarted in doing so by her father's death. Her husband's agreement to this chaste arrangement was precipitated by his near-fatal illness. *AASS*, May 5, 206. On her relationship with her husband, see Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage*, 243-244, 252.

[27] *AASS*, May 5, 208-209.

[28] A formal *vita* does not survive for Angela. On the authorship of the other texts related to her cult, see especially Catherine M. Mooney, "The Authorial Role of Brother A. in the Composition of Angela of Foligno's *Revelations*," in *Creative Women in Medieval and Early Modern Italy: A Religious and Artistic Renaissance*, (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 34-63.

[29] Brother A, *Memorial*, in *Angela of Foligno: Complete Works*, ed. and trans. Paul Lachance, (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 124.

[30] *AASS*, February 3, 297-356.

[31] Ibid., 302.

in rags, around the neighboring town of Montepulciano, where she had previously flaunted her wealth.[32] This transformation was also symbolic, and offered an especially salient example of the potential spiritual redemption that women who had lost their virginity might expect. Margaret's hagiographer recounts that on the feast day of Catherine of Alexandria, Christ assured her that even Mary Magdalene had been raised to celestial glory among the virgins, and was, next to the Virgin and Catherine of Alexandria, the greatest in the chorus of heavenly virgins.[33] Christ's assurance comforted Margaret, whose own scandalous extramarital affair had filled her with guilt. Her sexual history made her redemption all the more profound, and illustrates the extent to which women might expect to recover their lost virginity, albeit through extraordinary penitence.

Unlike Elizabeth of Hungary, who shared a loving relationship with her husband, and mourned his untimely death, these women showed marked hostility to their family, including their children. Umiliana dei Cerchi (1219–1246), for example, sent her daughters away to live with the family of her late husband.[34] Angela of Foligno prayed for the deaths of her mother, husband, and sons, and, to her immense relief, her prayers were granted.[35] Margaret of Cortona was especially cruel. After her conversion, "she had cast aside maternal affection to such an extent…that it was as if she had never given birth to her son," and she deprived him of the same food from which she fasted.[36] According to her hagiographer:

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[32] "Quapropter ad Montem Politianum arripere suum iter decreverat et per illam terram, in qua variis fuerat ornata vestibus, per quam auro infertis crinibus, eques et pedes, uncta facie, sui viri opulentiam demonstrando incesserat, in sui abiectionem honoris, tonso capite, semicinctus inducta, ostiatim volebat ab illis eleemosynam petere, apud quos gloriata est rerum copiis abundasse. Ordinaverat etiam tunc mulierem quamdam secum ducere, quae ipsam velatam fascia duceret velut caecam et per funem in collo positum retineret, et voce praeconia diceret, 'Haec est illa Margarita, quae olim suis moribus in elationem erectis, sua vana gloria et malis exemplis, multas in terra nostra animas vulneravit'."*AASS*, February 3, 306-307.

[33] Ibid., 313. See also Jansen, *Making of the Magdalen,* 288.

[34] *AASS*, May 4, 287.

[35] Brother A, *Memorial,* 126.

[36] "…sic erat exuta maternis affectibus…vel si numquam filium peperisset." *AASS*, February 3, 304.

> She preferred eternal Love to the son of her womb to such a degree that she did not want to cook anything for him lest it interrupt her time for prayer. In fact, she rarely spoke to her son, except to say, "My son, when you return to the cell, take whatever raw food you find and eat it in silence, since I find no reason for interrupting divine praises."[37]

At last, Margaret abandoned her twelve-year-old son to the care of the Franciscans, and apparently never saw him again.

II. Holy Mediocrity

Holy mediocrity sought to revise this hagiographic tradition by creating imitable models of sanctity that dispensed with extreme asceticism, and made room for the husbands and children of these saints. I have identified a cluster of three women in late medieval Italy who were recognized as holy people by their contemporaries, for whom a hagiographic *vita* was written in support of their sanctity, and whose lives as described in these *vitae* were characterized by a model of holy mediocrity. They are Villana delle Botti of Florence (1332–1360), Maria Sturion of Venice (ca. 1379–1399), and Bonacosa da Beccalòe of Milan (1352–1381). None of them were canonized; only Villana delle Botti received a much-belated papal imprimatur on her sanctity when she was beatified in the nineteenth century. At least two of these women had ties to the Dominican Order, and all were wealthy, from upper- and middle-class – but not noble – families. Crucially, they were all married, and two of the three had children. The remainder of this chapter focuses on the lives of these three women, and Villana in particular, because of the relative depth of the textual and visual record of their cults. It is likely, however, that there were

[37] "…tum quia aeternum adeo filio uterino praeponebat amorem, ut nihil ei coquere vellet, ne tempus impediretur orandi, tum quia raro secum loquebatur eidem. Dicebat namque, 'Fili mi, cum ad cellam redieris, sicut cibum crudum inueneris, ita sume, tenendo silentium, quia tempus divinis laudibus impendedendum in te nulla ratione distribuam'." *AASS*, February 3, 303.

other women promoted as saints within this model of holy mediocrity whose *vitae* have been lost or not yet brought to light.

These *vitae* were almost certainly intended for other wealthy, married women, as well as, perhaps, unwed or yet-to-be married girls and their parents. Hagiographical *vitae* were traditionally the first step in an appeal to the papacy that a process for canonization be undertaken on behalf of a holy person, and were generally written in Latin.[38] Of the lives of the women examined here, however, only Villana's is in Latin. Her *vita,* therefore, might have been written as part of a canonization process. Both Maria and Bonacosa's *vitae,* meanwhile, were written in the vernacular: Maria's in Tuscan Italian, and Bonacosa's in a northern Italian dialect.[39] While Jacques de Vitry had seen the actions of his holy penitent, Mary of Oignies, as too extreme for imitation, Maria's hagiographer, Thomas of Siena, took pains to point out her imitability, hopeful that she would inspire other young women who read his account of her life. While alive, he writes, Maria's piety and prayer was "a holy example to other relatives, friends, and strangers," and her decision to take the Dominican habit, despite her young age, "provided a holy example for those around her."[40]

The manuscript containing Bonacosa's anonymous *vita* – Biblioteca Riccardiana MS 1399 – is explicit on the question of imitation. The text concludes with a short "Treatise on the Rule of Life," written in reply to an "illustrious and eminent" woman named Bianca. The Bianca addressed in the letter is likely Bianca Visconti di Savoy (1337–1387), the duchess of Milan.[41] The letter describes to Bianca how a pious Christian widow, unable to enter a monastery due to

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[38] On the formalization of the canonization process in the Middle Ages, see especially Vauchez, *Sainthood,* 85-103.

[39] On the language of Bonacosa's *vita,* see Ratti, xxi-xxxviii.

[40] Thomas of Siena, "Legend," 172, 154.

[41] Ratti, xvii-xviii.

her temporal obligations, ought to live. The advice offered by the anonymous author of this letter is in the mode of Giovanni Dominici in the *Regola del governo di cura familiare,* composed around 1401, discussed in the previous chapter. The author advises Bianca to say the canonical hours as often as she is able, to participate in the duties of her household and family, and, "if there is time," to read or meditate on spiritual things.[42] In addition to the *vita* and this letter, the manuscript contains a series of short treatises: *Gli otto gradi della scala del cielo (The Eight Rungs of the Heavenly Ladder), Degli apostoli e dei primi santi (On the apostles and the first saints), Dell'efficacia dei suffragi (On the Efficacy of Suffrages), Il significato dei paramenti e della messa (The Significance of the Paraments and the Mass),* and *Regola dell'ordine della Penitenza (Rule of the Order of Penitence).*[43] All of these texts are in the vernacular, and each provide practical guidance – on prayer, the Mass and liturgy, and the lives of the saints. *The Eight Rungs of the Heavenly Ladder* and *On the Efficacy of Suffrages* assured readers of the usefulness of prayer for the souls of the dead in Purgatory, while *The Significance of the Paraments and the Mass* explained the significance of the liturgy and the ornaments of the church. These were the sort of texts that were often mentioned as the prefered reading material in the lives of women saints. Villana's hagiographer, for example, mentions that "when she had the time, she read avidly from the collections of stories of the lives of the Church Fathers and of the Saints."[44] Furthermore, the inclusion of the *Regola dell'ordine della Penitenza* also suggests a connection with the Dominican project to promote the typology of holy mediocrity. This text,

[42] "E se el ghe fosse altro tempo…" Ratti, 101-106. The letter writer also notes that she will have more time for contemplative activities in the summer because there is more light, and so there would be more time between each of the canonical hours than in the winter.

[43] Biblioteca Riccardiana, MS 1399.

[44] "Si quando autem vacare illi contigisset sacre scripture libros, et patrum collationes ac gesta sanctorum tanta cum aviditate legebat." BCNF Conv. sopp. II.IV.167, 75v.

which provided the insititutional foundations of the Dominican third order, was written by Thomas of Siena, who was also the author of the *vita* of Maria Sturion.[45] Bonacosa herself did not have formal ties to the Dominicans, nor do we know if her confessor or hagiographer was Dominican.[46] But, as we have seen, Bonacosa's spirituality fit neatly within the model of moderate sanctity that the Dominicans were most active in creating and promoting. The combination of Bonacosa's *vita* with these texts on practical spirituality and the *Regola* of the Dominican tertiaries indicates that this manuscript was compiled with an audience of spiritually-inclined, possibly Dominican-influenced, female readers in mind.

The *vitae* that employ the paradigm of holy mediocrity rely on some standard hagiographical tropes. Women like Bonacosa are described as being precociously pious, a common characteristic in the lives of medieval women saints.[47] From infancy, Bonacosa was noted for her virtue, honesty, and obedience, which increased as she grew.[48] Maria, meanwhile, was "a girl or young lady of exceptional probity and honesty, adorned with good habits."[49] Villana favored sleeping on the bare floor, and surreptitiously wore a hairshirt.[50] Despite the relatively moderate quality of their piety, however, precocious saints like Villana sometimes encountered resistance from their families.[51] Villana's parents forbade her from sleeping on the floor, so she instead sprinkled oats in her bed so that their roughness would disturb her all night,

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[45] On the origin and authorship of the *Regola dell'ordine della Penitenza,* see especially Lehmijoki-Gardner, *Dominican Penitent Women*, 4-8.

[46] Ratti offers some cursory observations about the author of the *vita* in his introduction to the text, xxxviii-xli.

[47] See Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M. Bell, *Saints and Society: The Two Worlds of Western Christendom, 1000-1700*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 19-47.

[48] "Splendent per uirtue, honesta, e obedient, fin da la soa infantia aue lo don de pietà e gratia de misericordia, sempre in lei cresando a poco a poco fin a grado de perfection ascendendo." Ratti, 3-4.

[49] Thomas of Siena, "Legend," 116.

[50] "Namque mordentissimo ad carnem cilicio semper utens jeiuniis disciplinis et orationibus noctes pene singulas ducebat insompnes. Si quando autem lapso corpusculo vel modicum quietis dari opportuisset aut super nudam terram accumbens capiti lapidem durissimum supponere consueverat." BCNF Conv. sopp. II.IV.167, 75r.

[51] See Weinstein and Bell, 37-45.

but her family would be none the wiser.[52] Bonacosa's adolescent conflict with her family centered around her clothing, which, as we have already seen, was frequently symbolically charged for women. She began to dress fashionably, and, for a time, took great pleasure in dressing well.[53] One morning, however, she was filled with a renewed sense of piety, and began to lament that her mother had not warned her of the pitfalls of such vanities.[54] Bonacosa's critique of her mother is subtle in a genre that traditionally exaggerated conflicts between pious children and resistant parents.[55] Nonetheless, it is an instructive, yet not offensive, hint to female readers: it suggests that a parent's failure to instruct a daughter in the virtue of humility could also be an impediment to her spirituality. This tacit admonishment echoes Giovanni Dominici's advice to mothers in the *Regola del governo di cura familiare:*

> Clothes do not take children's minds away from God. But things like silver, gold, jewels, embroidery, lace, prints, and other distracting things should be left off children's clothes. Instead, dress them in honest colors, simple designs, without many alterations, doing the same for the girls as for the boys, or perhaps all the more so because, as a result of their imperfect nature, they are more prone to distraction.[56]

Bonacosa's hagiographer says as much, indicating that her preoccupation with her clothing was a distraction from her piety, which returned with renewed fervor once the spell of vanity was broken.

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[52] "Aut hoc ipsum a parentibus agere prohibita, avenam clandestine per universam lectuli mollitiem spargere." BCNF Conv. sopp. II.IV.167, 75r.

[53] "Vero è, commo è communa usanza del mondo, se così se por dir, ela si la piglay, commo è etiamde la usanza, de le puerile abusione uno pocho la traxe. Unde foe la per alcuno tempo molto affecta per cason de soe uestiment, e auea alegreza di soy ornamenti." Ratti, 4.

[54] "Unde eio si marecordo che una fyada inter le laude matutine piatosamente lamentandose e dicendo, 'O per qual cason la mea bona matre za per tempo passao mi e la mea cara soror non a restricto da queste puellare e curiose uanitate?'." Ibid.

[55] Weinstein and Bell, 37-47.

[56] "… i vestimenti non tolgano la mente de' fanciulli da Dio vero. Però tutto quello gli può superfluamente dilettare, come ariento, oro, pietre preziose, ricamature, intaglio, stampe e altri travisati lascia stare; colori onesti, tagli debiti, non con trope mutazioni, vestiri loro: e così questo osserva nelle femine come ne' maschi, o tanto più quanto quella più imperfetta natura n'è più vaga." Giovanni Dominici, *Regola del governo di cura familiare,* ed. Donato Salvi, (Florence, 1860), 136-137.

Tensions between saints and their families also erupted over marriage, especially when a woman had committed herself to virginity. Although some moderate saints consented (or at least acquiesced) to marriage – Bonacosa and Maria's *vitae* suggest that they submitted to their families' wishes without a fight – others dreaded marriage so deeply that they tried to escape altogether by running away from home, often in the hope of joining a monastery or religious order.[57] Villana, hoping to flee to a convent to avoid her impending marriage, hid herself in a sewer, where she was discovered only after her family and their servants had turned the house upside down looking for her.[58] After Villana's failed attempt to run away from home and join a convent, her father quickly intervened to arrange her marriage to Rosso. This union was driven, the hagiographer notes, by Andrea's love of worldly riches and in spite of his affection for his daughter.[59]

The desire to escape marriage points towards a very real feeling of fear and anxiety about what would be lost. Although the psychological/moral dimension of virginity had been recognized since patristic times, the dominant discourse on virginity was inescapably embodied and physical intactness remained central to a woman's relationship with Christ.[60] Women would go to great lengths, therefore, to protect their physical integrity in order to preserve this privileged relationship. Even so, the distance between physical and mental intactness decreased over time. Augustine, as we have seen, asserted that physical virginity was never as important as mental purity, and that proud or mentally unchaste virgins forfeited their right to be called

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[57] Ratti, 5; Thomas of Siena, "Legend," 117.

[58] BCNF Conv. sopp. II.IV.167, 75r.

[59] "Pater eius quem mundana prosperitas adhuc magis delectabatur nobilissimo cuidam iuveni eam illico desponsavit quamvis modis omnibus reluctantem." The hagiographer describes Villana as "patris refrigerium, domus solatium." Ibid. At least one of Villana's brothers – or perhaps stepbrother – was a friar at Santa Maria Novella. Fr. Niccolò delle Botti's death on July 1, 1363 is recorded in the Necrology of Santa Maria Novella.

[60] See Atkinson, "'Precious Balsam'"; Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist*, 19-45; Weinstein and Bell, 87-97.

virgins.[61] By the fourteenth century, virginity had been democratized so that even a mother of fourteen, like Margery Kempe, was referred to as a "maiden in her soul" by Christ in her visions.[62] Thus some spiritually upwardly-mobile matrons clung to the conviction that a woman who had lost her physical virginity might still mentally be a virgin. This shift towards a spiritual, rather than physical, definition of virginity also opened the way for saintly matrons to embrace bridal imagery – traditionally the preserve of virgins – to describe their own mystical encounters with Christ.[63] Such imagery became central to the spirituality of fourteenth-century female mystics – not just for virgins, like Catherine of Siena, but also for matrons like Bridget of Sweden who described elaborate rituals uniting them to Christ.[64]

Like mainstream hagiography, holy mediocrity remained fixated on virginity. Yet unlike other hagiography, holy mediocrity not only confronts the trauma of its loss, but also attempts to transcend this trauma by a redirection to the mental aspects of virginity. It is a difficult and not entirely successful balancing act: while acknowledging that marriage and virginity were essentially irreconcileable, it nevertheless points to a chance for spiritual fulfillment on the other side of virginity. Such a message would have been especially assuring to young female readers. While never outrightly condemning marriage, the authors of these *vitae* were indebted to traditional hagiographic patterns that tacitly indicted marital sex by inferring that marriage transformed formerly pious girls into vain women.[65] Despite her youthful probity, Maria "still gave herself to, occupied herself with, and took delight in those vanities of bodily adornment in

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[61] Augustine, *City of God*, Book 1, ch. 16. See Atkinson, "'Precious Balsam'."
[62] Atkinson, "'Precious Balsam'."
[63] See Elliott, *Bride of Christ*, 213-232.
[64] On Catherine's betrothal, see Raymond of Capua, *The Life of Catherine of Siena*, trans. Conleth Kearns, (Washington, DC: Dominicana Publications, 1994), 106-109.
[65] On chastity and its loss, see especially Weinstein and Bell, 73-99. On women who are forced to break vows of chastity, see especially Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage*, 219-231.

which adolescents commonly find pleasure….She was encouraged and incited by her mother and father, who constantly urged her toward a worldly marriage."[66] Maria's parents were especially eager to find their daughter a husband because she was the oldest of four girls in the household, and her hagiographer tacitly condones her marriage on the grounds that her fiancé was the son of a prominent and wealthy family.[67] In a similar fashion, Villana reluctantly obeyed her father's insistence that she marry, and she and her husband "celebrated according to the traditional marriage customs."[68] No longer a virgin, Villana's spiritual fervor dwindled and, "like a second Magdalene," she traded her haircloth shirt for expensive dresses adorned with precious jewels and gold thread.[69] Villana's hagiographer reflected upon this change. "This transformation," he asserts, "did not happen without the permission of God, who frequently lets some of his chosen ones fall into obvious error so that they, upset by dread of their sins, might eventually be joined more closely to Him weeping and repenting."[70] The hagiographer's depiction of Villana's marriage is hardly flattering. Nonetheless, he does not unreservedly condemn her marriage. Marriage, these *vitae* suggest, provides an opportunity for women to demonstrate their patience and humility by acquiescing to the physical demands – especially the conjugal debt – implicit in the married state. A temporary indulgence might, in fact, lead to a holy reaction, an outcome that would be both reassuring and instructive to the reader. A century later, this pattern was still at play. As a very young girl, Catherine of Genoa (1447–1510) rejected the trappings of her noble upbringing and decided when she turned thirteen that she wanted to enter a convent. Instead, at

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[66] Thomas of Siena, "Legend," 116.

[67] Thomas of Siena, "Legend," 118.

[68] "Celebratis igitur ex more numptiarum solempniis." BCNF Conv. sopp. II.IV.167, 75r.

[69] "Qua ex re ammodo pereunti seculo magis quam domino placere sudens velud secunda magdalena ad amplioris vite preconia surrectura venustissimum corpus suum olim cinere et cilicio exultantem, gemmis et auro omnique stratus mollitie nititur de cetero confovere." Ibid., 75r-v.

[70] "Mira res. Talis est enim mutation dextere excelsi quod electos suos in aliquod sepe manifestum dedecus prolabi sinit, ut tandem sue feditatis horror perculsos ceu lacrimantem penitentem familiarius sibi iungat." Ibid., 75v.

age sixteen she was married against her will to a man "who was entirely opposite of herself in his mode of life" and began to devote herself to "the diversions and vanities of the world."[71] Even Catherine of Siena (1347–1380), one of the lucky few who was able to uphold her chaste resolve, found her spiritual fervor waning as she approached the age of marriage, a period that would haunt her in later years.[72] Incited by her mother and sister, Catherine began to spend time on her appearance, and "the fervor of her prayer cooled off and the continuity of her state of recollection was broken."[73] Catherine's hagiographer, Raymond of Capua, prefaces this episode by explaining that God "sometimes permits his saints to sink low by their frailties, that they may react all the more strongly, live for the future all the more watchfully, soar towards the pitch of perfection all the more eagerly and earnestly, and win the victory at last over the Enemy of our race all the more gloriously."[74] These metamorphoses of once-pious girls into dissolute married women demonstrate the potentially corrupting power of marriage when viewed through the lens of the hagiographer's strong pro-virginal prejudice. But in the case of holy mediocrity, such stories were also hortatory: they warned both married and unmarried pious readers of the dangers of marriage, and inspired virtuous living and appropriate penance, where necessary. In this way, marriage became a spiritual trial.

Even as marriage was slowly being reconceived as a trial to be endured on the way to sanctity, moderate saints did not always calmly acquiesce to matrimony and might still express their discontent at being deprived of their virginity, as we have seen. While they do not reject their families outright, as would virginal saints, they sometimes express distinct hostility. In one

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[71] *The Life and Doctrine of Saint Catherine of Genoa,* trans. G. Ripley, (New York: Catholic Publication Society, 1875), 11-12.

[72] Raymond of Capua, 41.

[73] Ibid., 41-43.

[74] Ibid., 40.

such instance, Villana was briefly endowed with "prophetic inspiration" and predicted that her father's ship would sink at sea during a storm and leave the family in financial ruin.[75] This, she declared, was a fitting punishment for her father's avarice. His greed was all the more condemnable because he had ignored Villana's childhood spiritual vocation in order to marry her to an affluent and well-connected suitor.[76] Holy mediocrity may have tempered the transgressive characteristics of female piety, but it did not prevent hagiographers from passing judgment through the voices of their hagiographical subjects.

In addition to the psychological effects of the transition from virginity to marriage, women also grappled with the practical loss of control over their time – the very thing that Paul had warned about centuries before. Clerical authorities like Antoninus of Florence encouraged unwed virgins to spend their ample free time in devotion and prayer.[77] This advice, though well suited to women who became nuns rather than wives and continued the contemplative life in the convent, did not take into account the future role of many young women as wives and mothers. When a young woman was married, she not only experienced profound changes to her physical situation – the move from her parent's house to her husband's or in-laws, sexual intercourse, and childbirth – but also a new set of time constraints. Women were not free to choose how to spend their time but subject to their husbands in all things.[78] This forced renunciation of the *vita contemplativa* for the *vita activa* meant that women like Villana lost the time for devotion and

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[75] "Nempe ut sepe merchatores assolent naufragium passus ex maximis divitiarum copiis ad grandem inediam est reductus." BCNF Conv. sopp. II.IV.167, 76r.

[76] "Quo deprehenso pater eius quem mundane prosperitas adhuc magis delectabatur." BCNF Conv. sopp. II.IV.167, 75r.

[77] See, for example, Antoninus, *Opera a ben vivere*, (Florence: M. Cellini, 1858), 48-50.

[78] Geneviève Hasenohr, "La vie quotidienne de la femme vue par l'église: l'enseignement de 'Journées Chrétiennes' de la fin du moyen-âge," *Frau und spätmittelalterlicher Alltag*, Internationaler Kongress krems an der Donau 2. bis 5. Oktober 1984, Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse, Sitzungsberichte, 473; Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für mittelalterliche Realienkunde Österreichs, no. 9 (Vienna, 1986), 34-35.

prayer – the very activities that clerics had told them were essential to their spiritual wellbeing. The tripartite division of spiritual merit based on chastity was not simply intellectual, therefore, but a very tangible reality for women in the later Middle Ages. The position of wives at the bottom of this hierarchy would have been felt by these women all the more acutely if they had been accustomed to frequent prayer and spiritual devotion before marriage and were confronted by its loss. Women who married were not only stripped of their status as virgins, but were also confronted with the tension between the ideals of the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa,* the active and contemplative modes of life.

The husbands of moderate saints played a muted but significant role in making marriage into a spiritual trial. Villana's husband, Rosso, to whom she was married in 1351, makes only three appearances in the text and is never mentioned by name. We meet him first near the beginning of the narrative when he is described simply as "a noble young man" whom Villana's father had selected for her to marry despite his daughter's reluctance. The two were wed "according to the customs of the day," at which point Villana's youthful spiritual ardor began to wane "in his marital embraces."[79] Later, after Villana's spiritual conversion, Rosso appears alongside Villana's parents in opposition to her plan to go begging door-to-door to gather alms for the poor.[80] Rosso shows up once more near the end of the *vita* after Villana's death. Here the hagiographer reports that at the moment of her death, Villana's body began to emit a sweet odor that lingered in her room long after her body had been removed and that her husband, when he was feeling sad at the loss of his wife, would go into the room and immediately would begin to

[79] "Nobilissimo cuidam iuveni eam illico desponsavit quamvis modis omnibus reluctantem. Celebratis igitur ex more nuptiarum solempniis. in ipsis maritalibus amplexibus cepit dispensatione divina mens illius sic evagari ut omnis pene fervor tepesceret in ea vita prioris." BCNF Conv. sopp. II.IV.167, 75r.

[80] "Artissime paupertatis tanta cupiditate fragravit ut frequenter hostiatim mendicare omnino proposuerit, nisi a parentibus et marito prohibita extitisset." Ibid.

feel happier.[81] The decade-long span of Villana's marriage to Rosso is compressed into these three short moments, and there is no indication of the relative length of time between their marriage and Villana's spiritual conversion and her death in 1361.[82]

In Villana's *vita* her husband is a convenient figure through which her hagiographer tacitly underwrites his typology of holy mediocrity. Despite his relative absence from the text, however, Rosso, in his specific role as husband, is the driving force behind the events in Villana's life and her sanctity. It is their marriage that precipitates Villana's turn away from her childhood piety and towards worldly concerns of secular life. Again it is Rosso, alongside Villana's parents, who thwarts her efforts to increase the intensity and public nature of her piety. Finally, Rosso provides firsthand proof of his wife's sanctity with his surprisingly sentimental account of the odor of sanctity that remained in his wife's room after her death and which brought him comfort in a time of grief. This moment stands out as a rare instance of conjugal appreciation – albeit posthumous – in a narrative that repeatedly uses Villana's marriage as a plot device to illustrate the impediments to her spirituality. Here, however, we glimpse a tender moment as a grieving husband mourns the wife he has recently lost. Rosso's sadness at his wife's death, and his sentimentality about the ability of her presence to comfort him, perhaps also offers insight into the quality of his marriage to Villana. For other women readers of the *vita*, this subtle allusion to a loving marriage may have resonated as realistic, and in turn would have offered consolation that marriage, though an impediment to spirituality, might also be enjoyable and loving.

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[81] "Mox autem cepit ex sacro corpore tante suavitis odor emanare….Quo suavissimo odore diebus multis camera illa redolevit. intrantibus cunctis mire yocunditatis solatia conferebat. Unde dicere solebat sponsus eius quod numquam adeo mestus erat quin predictam cameram ingrediens exilaratum se omnino sentiret." Ibid., 77r.

[82] I have not been able to determine whether Rosso remarried after Villana's death, though Florentine marriage customs would have made this likely. Rosso died in 1367.

Bonacosa's relationship with her husband, Gabriel, is even more nuanced and, like Rosso, he is depicted sympathetically despite being the cause of some of Bonacosa's sins and anxieties. He also plays an essential role in the narrative. Gabriel was a "decent young man who loved God very much, but was given to certain frivolous expenses, and occasionally enjoyed spending an evening in the company of women and in carefree conversation, but who was honest."[83] The two were married for a decade, and they are depicted as having a loving relationship since the hagiographer uses expressions like "her dearly beloved husband" and "her husband's solicitude for her."[84] Yet Bonacosa's affection for her husband was a spiritual trial for her. She was especially conflicted over her desire to be physically attractive to him – in part because she feared he would cheat on her if she was not – and her sense that she needed to set aside these things in order to embrace a life of piety. She admits to her confessor, for example, that she felt compelled to wear makeup because she worried that her husband would otherwise commit adultery.[85]

Bonacosa and Gabriel's relationship also suggests a fulfillment of St. Paul's expectation that a pious wife could lead her husband to a more virtuous life (1 Cor. 7:14) through the example of her own piety.[86] Three years into their marriage, in 1373, Bonacosa experienced a spiritual conversion. From then on, although the two continued to live together, "they remained

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[83] "…zouene piaxeuel e honesto, lo quale la molto in Deo amaua negota men castamen; ma uno pocho affecta per tropo expensa, ouero alcuna acriositae de uestiment ela si era, et si delectaua alcuna fiada in le compagnie de le done e in yocose parole, ma pur honesta." Ratti, 5.

[84] Ibid., 17, 82.

[85] "Nè etiamde dato ben per alcuno tempo che la se auesse depincto, zò era perchè ela dubitaua e temeua chel so marito non adulterasse." Ibid., 22.

[86] Although Paul meant this for both spouses, it was especially associated with the wife. See Sharon Farmer, "Persuasive Voices: Clerical Images of Medieval Wives," *Speculum* 61 (July 1986): 517-543, especially pp. 526-534.

chaste until her death" in 1381.[87] The *vita* does not explicitly refer to this arrangement as a spiritual marriage, nor did the couple make a formal vow of mutual chastity. Nonetheless, Gabriel all but agreed to a spiritual marriage, which is signaled by him granting permission to Bonacosa to sleep on a pallet on the floor instead of in their marital bed, and agreeing to let her give away her fashionable clothing.[88] As a result, notes her hagiographer, Bonacosa "merited the sixty-fold fruit awaited by widows."[89] Although such an arrangement was somewhat unusual for such a young couple, the hagiographer tacitly condones their chaste marriage by carefully noting that Bonacosa and Gabriel had already had children by this time.[90] Despite Bonacosa's earlier misgivings about her husband's fidelity, he apparently became a faithful partner after her conversion. He also gave his imprimatur to her spiritual practices, including letting her wear plain, simple clothes instead of ornate ones, as noted above.[91] His permission was not categorical, however, and he is also a voice of moderation in the *vita.* Bonacosa, for example, decides to take on the penitential practice of sleeping on the floor rather than in a bed. While her husband assents to her giving up the comfort of a bed, he does not permit her to sleep on the bare floor, but on a pallet.[92]

Gabriel's fidelity is rewarded explicitly at the end of the *vita* when makes a final appearance during the drama of Bonacosa's final illness and death. Although he was worried

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[87] "Ela sia stata inseme in una habitation con lo so caro dilecto sposo zouano delicao…quanto fo in si fin a lo so beato transitu sempre ste continent." Ratti, 17.

[88] Ibid., 11, 15.

[89] " Dondo, segondo alcun fan zudixio per alcuna raxon, se poy dir che l'a facto fructo precioso e meritao in Gloria premio sexagesimo, lo qual specta a le done uidue." Ratti, 17.

[90] "…li quay [figlioli] ananze la predicta soa uocation ela auea generao…" Ibid.

[91] "…fe pregher dolze e piatose a lo Segnor Deo e prega la so marito, e si obtene da lo so marito de deuer deponer tuti li ornament de le vestiment." Ibid., 11.

[92] "Ancora poxo lo predicta uocation demete la molitie del lecto e giaxeua sopra una tabula lignea o uero altra cossa dura a si sotometando occultament. Apresso con consentimento del so marito se transferì a giaxer sopra la pallia, e da la pallia tornoe al giaxer de la tabula de lingo o uero sopra le assie." Ibid., 15.

about his wife, he had not come to her sickbed "out of respect for her divine Spouse," and instead had left her in the care of her priest and a doctor.[93] When Bonacosa's confessor asked her if he should call her husband to the room, she demurred at first, but later invites him to read to her, comforting him by assuring him that he has earned God's favor because he never abandoned her.[94] The couple's final moment together is a tender one. Gabriel remained by Bonacosa's bed while she drew near to death. At the moment of her death, "she lifted her left hand as high as she could, as if trying to touch something, and placed it against his beard."[95] Here, the hagiographer recasts Gabriel as a Christ-like figure. In the hours leading up to her death, Bonacosa had meditated on the Passion, and had conversed with Christ, her divine Spouse. In this final scene, however, the *vita* is intentionally ambiguous, implying that Bonacosa is experiencing one last vision of Christ, and reaching out for him, and yet it is her husband's face that she strokes. This last gesture, therefore, is not simply a sentimental farewell from a wife to her husband, but also cements Gabriel's rehabilitation from a dissolute youth into a faithful spouse, a transformation made possible through Bonacosa's devotion to him, and her example of virtue.

Whereas Bonacosa and Gabriel's marriage was characterized by symbiosis and the shared spiritual journey of both spouses, there was no hint of mutual support or affection in Maria's marriage. She made a politically favorable marriage at the age of fifteen, but her husband, Giannino, abandoned her almost immediately after their wedding to become a

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[93] "La solicitudine del marito mortale e terreno, dato ben che ela l'auese grande, pur a respect del diuin e sopran Spoxo, ela lo auea per nient." Ibid., 82.

[94] "Sì che uoglandolo chiamare, ela lo demandaua solament per nome, digando: "Gabriel, andeuene pur, che ale ben quì lo Padre meo." "E oltra queste parole, dixeua alora al so marito: 'Gabriel, voy possi ben fare lezere qualche cossa, se uoy uoli; my non fo miga per zo forsa. El è ben qui lo Padre meo, chi non ma miga abandona'." Ibid., 82, 90.

[95] "Ma mo dixeua così: 'Eio uoglo dormire.' E responde lo so marito: 'Tu poy ben dormire'….Poso le qual parole, eleuando la man sinistra in alto quanto piu ela pode, desiderando de palpare alcuna cossa, poso questo la applica ancora ala barba." Ratti, 92-93.

mercenary, but not before the marriage was consummated.[96] Left in the care of her in-laws, Maria was unwelcome and unhappy and soon returned to her parents' home.[97] Maria's abandonment left her in a peculiar position: she could not fulfill all of the obligations of marriage without her husband's presence, nor could she remarry. She was also unable to take a formal religious vow without her husband's consent. This predicament left her hagiographer at odds to explain his subject's sexual status, and he stumbles as he tries to depict her both as an exemplary wife who fulfilled the marriage debt and a newly-celibate woman whose current state of marital chastity was imposed as much by circumstance as by choice:

> As an example for married women, especially those of youthful age, I am constrained to explain here the commendable behavior of matrimonial chastity observed by this beloved woman. Despite having a young dissolute man for her husband, when this beloved woman found herself in his company [for a short time] after her conversion…she nevertheless maintained and observed fully and boldly that chastity which is required by holy matrimony....And, reader, I do not want you to suppose that this beloved woman had been…anything less than chaste in worldly terms, simply because she called herself a bad woman during the period when she was with her husband….However, after her conversion she conceived such affection not just for true matrimonial or widowly chasteness, but even virginity.[98]

This passage is addressed directly to the female audience of the *vita*, and reminds them that matrimonial chastity is not the same as virginity. Through penance and piety modeled on Maria's example, however, even married women could become chaste almost to the point of becoming virgins again, and Maria's life offered a roadmap for getting there.

Although the polarization of virginity and marriage was not categorical, the practical pressures of demographic decline coupled with the rising costs of marriage, discussed in the

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[96] "…by the Lord's dispensation she did reside with her husband for a little while until he left Venice….She happened to say that before her conversion she had acted like a most sinful woman with her husband." Thomas of Siena, "Legend," 130.

[97] Ibid., 117.

[98] The timeline here is unclear. Thomas implies that Maria's conversion began before her husband left Venice, and that she was in his company for a short time during this period. Thomas of Siena, "Legend," 130.

previous chapter, lent new urgency to a perennial discourse. As secular authorities grappled with the new demographic realities that threatened long-held suppositions about the value of marriage relative to celibacy, and continued civic measures to promote marriage, religious thinkers attempted to reconcile an equally long-standing tradition that privileged virginity with the new demographic and social realities of the fifteenth-century. Preachers like Bernadino of Siena promoted a view of family and sexuality that would not be out of place in a contemporary Republican party debate. Bernardino railed against deviant sexual acts for a decline in family values and decreasing fertility.[99] Fewer than 50 percent of Florentine laypeople were living with a spouse; the results, as we have seen, were the rising costs of dowries, the growing gap in age between husbands and wives, and, in turn, the large numbers of widows who chose not to remarry after their husband's death. Bernardino drew attention to the large numbers of unattached single people across both genders, which he argued invited a plethora of sexual disorders, including prostitution, homosexuality, and the seduction of married women and nuns.[100] Single men were particularly to blame.[101] Those who remained single or showed no interest in marriage were incapable of living a virtuous life in secular society and were surely sodomites:

> Woe to him who doesn't take a wife when he has the time and legitimate reason! For those who remain single become sodomites. And take this as a general rule: when you see

[99] Michael Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships: Homosexuality and Male Culture in Renaissance Florence,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 19-86.

[100] Herlihy, "Santa Caterina and San Bernardino: Their Teachings on the Family," *Atti del Simposio internazionale Cateriniano-Bernardiniano, Siena, 17-20 Aprile 1980,* ed. Domenico Maffei, Paolo Nardi, and David Herlihy, (Siena: Accademia Senese degli Intronati, 1982), 925.

[101] Single men were numerous in fifteenth-century Florence; the 1427 *catasto* shows that there were a significant number of permanent bachelors in the city, with one in eight men never marrying. Herlihy & Zuber, 211-215.

> a man of the right age and in good health who doesn't take a wife, and who hasn't already been practicing chastity for spiritual reasons, take it as a bad sign about him.[102]

Such men were doubly to blame for the catastrophes facing contemporary society because they were not contributing to creating children, and their behavior drew the wrath of God who imposed punishment in the form of plague and other disasters.[103] Preaching in Florence in 1424, Bernardino argued that "Tuscany has the fewest people of any country in the world, solely on account of the vice of sodomy," because, according to him, men who did not marry were essentially committing filicide by failing to procreate.[104] From nearly every point of view except that of sainthood, a fruitful marriage was to be hoped for. Bernardino asserted that it was not enough for men and women to be married. Childless marriages purposely caused by a couple's use of sexual techniques to prevent pregnancy, or the use of abortion, were an even worse sin than confirmed bachelorhood. In a 1424 sermon on the marriage debt, Bernardino admonished couples who went "against nature" in marriage. "Every time you go against the natural use, that is, in such a way that conception and pregnancy cannot take place…you sin against nature."[105] Again in 1427, he warned that "every time [a couple] joins together in such a way that children cannot be conceived, it is a mortal sin, every time."[106] The unborn children of these couples cried out urging "vendetta, vendetta, vendetta" against their sterile parents.[107] Bernardino's explicit rhetoric about the type of sexual relationships permitted between spouses was representative of

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[102] "Guai a chi non toglie moglie avendo el tempo e cagione legittima! chè non pigliandola doventano soddomiti. E abbi questa regola generale. Come tu vedi uno in età compiuta e sano della persona, che non pigli moglie, abbi di lui cattiva istificanza se già non fusse da stare per ispirito in castità." Bernardino of Siena, *Le prediche volgari,* ed. Ciro Cannarozzi, 2 vols. (Pistoia: Alberto Pacinotti, 1934), I: 416. See also Franco Mormando, *The Preacher's Demons: Bernardino of Siena and the Social Underworld of Early Renaissance Italy,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 109-163; Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships.*

[103] Rocke, 36.

[104] Bernardino, *Prediche* (Florence, 1424), 1:34, quoted in Rocke, 36.

[105] Mormando, 113-114.

[106] Ibid., 114.

[107] Ibid., 37.

broader cultural expectations for married couples. As we saw in the previous chapter, in the wake of the demographic disasters of the previous century, Quattrocento Florentines were increasingly obsessed with the preservation of family lineage, a necessary precondition of which was the production of children, preferably multiple boys.[108] Women like Bonacosa and Villana, therefore, were examples of upstanding matrons who had fulfilled their familial and civic duty to have children.

Yet if marriage was an impediment to sanctity, motherhood was a nearly insurmountable obstacle, and the children of these women are strikingly absent from their *vitae*. Bonacosa, we learn, remained in her husband's home after taking a vow of chastity, but she was separated from her children "whom she had borne before her vocation."[109]Although the hagiographer describes her separation from her children as "being orphaned from them," he offers no other evidence that this separation was a painful one. Nor do we find any evidence of Villana's role as a mother in her *vita*. Her son, Jacopo, is never mentioned in the text, and his existence is known to us only by means of other texts, in particular two versions of his will.[110] Despite this relative silence, we can

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[108] The recurrent waves probably had the highest mortality rates among young people because those who had survived previous waves retained some immunity while those who had been born after a previous wave lacked such immunity. This resulted in a massive population imbalance in which the population of Florence was heavily weighted on either end with old people and young people. Though average life expectancies plummeted after 1348 from 35-40 years in the early fourteenth century to lower than 20 in the 1380s, those who lived through one wave of plague tended to survive future outbreaks, and it was not unusual to live to advanced old age. See Herlihy & Zuber, chapter 6.

[109] "Ela sia stata inseme in una habitation con lo so caro dilecto sposo zouano delicao, orfanaa de figlioli, li quay ananze la predicta soa uocation ela auea generao, quanto fo in si fin a lo so beato transitu sempre ste continent." Ratti, 17.

[110] ASF CRSGF 102.104 and 106. Jacopo's will fits all of the patterns for middle-class Florentine wills of the Quattrocento. He returned his wife's dowry and gave her the use of his property, which would have encouraged her to remain with their children instead of remarrying. Further, he gave 200 gold florins to each of his daughters, Mona and Villana, for their dowries, and his own patrimony to his son. On Florentine testimonial patterns, see Samuel Cohn, *The Cult of Remembrance and the Black Death: Six Renaissance Cities in Central Italy*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), and Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, "The 'Cruel Mother': Maternity, Widowhood, and Dowry in Florence in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries," in *Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 117-131.

still see the effects of holy mediocrity at work: although not extolled, at least motherhood was not denigrated as in the *vitae* of saints like Margaret of Cortona and Angela of Foligno, as is apparent in their treatment of their children. But Angela of Foligno, though from a relatively well-to-do background, was clearly responsible for her own children's upbringing, as was Margaret of Cortona. In contrast, the *vitae* discussed above reflect the realities of motherhood for the more affluent members of the middle and upper-class in late medieval Italy, which helps to explain the relative invisibility of these women's children. In Tuscany, by the second half of the fourteenth century it was commonplace for wealthy and upwardly-mobile families to send their children to wet nurses in the Florentine countryside.[111] Villana's son Jacopo, therefore, would probably have been away from his parents for the first few years of his life. It is not clear when Jacopo was born – he died in 1418 or 1419 – or at what point in Rosso and Villana's 10-year marriage he was conceived, but even if he was born early in their union, he would at most have been about nine years old when his mother died, well before even male children began to take on a distinct role in a middle or upper-class family.[112]

These lacunae are as much ideological as reflective of social realities, however, and show what difficulty the hagiographers had in developing this paradigm of moderate sanctity. If the *vitae* of these women were to be successful in securing their canonization, it was essential that recognizable qualities associated with sanctity be emphasized. As novel as a concept as holy mediocrity might be, motherhood was not one of them. This may be surprising in view of the burgeoning cult of the Virgin Mary. But Mary was a virgin, and the circumstances surrounding

[111] Klapisch-Zuber, "Blood Parents and Milk Parents: Wet Nursing in Florence, 1300-1530," *Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy,* trans. Lydia G. Cochrane, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 132-164.

[112] Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber, *Tuscans,* 133-136.

her son's conception were not to be duplicated. So, while their role as mothers would doubtless have appealed to other women reading these lives, children were a constant reminder of the women's mandatory sexual activity as wives. Their hagiographers, therefore, decided to minimize their role as mothers by excising their children in order to make their cases for sanctity more convincing. In doing so, however, they shortchanged their own efforts to promote a wifely-motherly image of sainthood for the emulation of other matrons. These saintly women may no longer have been trying to kill their children, but their hagiographers still did not know what to do with them. While Villana's devotees would likely have known that she had been a mother, both by reputation and by legacy since it was her grandson, a friar at Santa Maria Novella, who promoted her cult, the exclusion of her motherly role from the official account of her life undercut the very assertion that a wife and mother could be a saint. While it is true that other mothers had become saints, as we have seen, these women endured the loss or death of their children, and if not, their treatment of them was aloof – very much in the spirit of Christ's comment, "Who is my mother, who are my brethren" (Matt. 12:48) – or downright punitive. Children were, furthermore, a distraction from the kind of interior reflection and piety that clerics put forward as means to reclaim mental virginity. Margaret of Cortona's refusal to feed her son because she did not want to interrupt her prayers is an extreme example of what we might regard as a hagiographer's over-correction for the challenge that children presented in a woman's profile for sanctity.

Marriage and children typically preceded these women's conversions, which tended to follow established patterns in their timing. The hagiography of female saints frequently depicted

their conversions being triggered by events within a marriage.[113] Umiliana de' Cerchi, for example, did not resist being married at the age of sixteen.[114] After a month of married life, however, she stopped wearing cosmetics and lavish clothing, and began to attend mass every day. The loss of a husband could also trigger a spiritual crisis. Elena Valentini's (1396–1458) conversion was triggered by her husband's sudden death. In her fervor, she sheared off her hair, and threw it, along with her jewelry, into her husband's coffin on top of the body, saying "here are your locks and your jewels, take them with you to the grave."[115] Holy mediocrity employed similar tropes. Maria's conversion was triggered by her husband's departure, and was probably a means for her to restore her damaged honor and gain some social leverage after her husband abandoned her.[116] After returning to her parents' home, she began to attend the sermons of Thomas Caffarini of Siena (c. 1350–c. 1430), a Dominican friar with his own talent for mediocrity.[117] Thomas actively promoted the Dominican Observant movement and its tertiary communities throughout Italy, but his intellectual and literary career were undistinguished.[118] Nonetheless, Maria was moved by his sermons and subsequently took up a life of piety and unconditional obedience both to her parents and to Thomas, who had become her spiritual advisor.[119] Their conversions could likewise provide spectacular moments in otherwise mundane

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[113] On this pattern, see especially Weinstein and Bell, 52-53.

[114] *AASS*, May 4, 384-418.

[115] "…huiuscemodi verba dixit. Ecco li toi capelli et ornamenti cum ti sotto terra li porti." BAV Vat. lat. 1223, 9r.

[116] On this, see Daniel Bornstein's introduction to his translation of Maria's *vita* in *Dominican Penitent Women,* ed. Maiju Lehmijoki-Gardner, (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), 105-111.

[117] On Thomas of Siena, see Sorelli, "La produzione agiografica del domenicano Tommaso d'Antonio da Siena: esempi di santità ed intenti di propaganda," in *Mistiche e devote nell'Italia tardomedievale,* ed. Daniel Bornstein and Roberto Rusconi, (Naples: Liguori, 1992): 157-169.

[118] On Thomas's life, see Bornstein's introduction to Maria's *vita.*

[119] On the topic of female saints' lives mediated by male authors, see John W. Coakley, *Women, Men, and Spiritual Power: Female Saints and Their Male Collaborators,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006) and Catherine M. Mooney, ed., *Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and Their Interpreters,* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999).

narratives, even if they still paled in comparison to the flamboyant penitents of the century before. Villana's conversion was prompted by a demonic reflection in the mirror as a response to her vanity.[120] Soon she traded her couture for a hairshirt, bound a tight iron belt around the bare skin of her chest, and resolved to pass the rest of her life in fasting and prayer. Bonacosa, meanwhile, converted in fits and starts. When she was twenty-one years old, she heard a Lenten sermon in the cathedral of Milan that mentioned the Magdalene.[121] A nun, passing by, reminded her of the Magdalene's conversion and how she had washed the feet of Christ with her own tears.[122] Hearing these things, Bonacosa began to weep profusely as she recognized her sins, and she immediately made a full confession. Nevertheless, Bonacosa continued to wear expensive clothing. One day, she went to the house of a noblewoman who was well-known for her piety in order to hear the story of the woman's spiritual conversion. The woman, however, took note of Bonacosa's attire and began to admonish her. The woman explained that wearing such clothing was not itself sinful, but that wearing these clothes in order to be sexually attractive to a husband

[120] See Introduction.

[121] "Abiando ela compio za lo XXI˚ anno de la soa etade e lo III˚ in lo sancto matrimonio, per gratia de la diuina prouidentia, a lo sancto tempo de la quadragesima, in la giexia de sancta Tecla de Milano, odì narrare in uno die in predication de lo euangelio, in de lo qual se fay mention de la sancta Magdalena." Ratti, 8.

[122] "Soura quelo passo, che dixe: 'Magdalena si a balneao li sacrati pey de lo nostro Segnor con le soe lagreme,' et. cet. e alcune altre parole odì dir, le qual recita lo euangelio de la soa conuersion." Ibid. The nun quotes from Luke 7:36-60.

was a sin.[123] Only after being admonished by this other woman for her desire to be sexually attractive to her husband did Bonacosa ask her husband for permission to wear plain clothing. [124]

Bonacosa's conversation with the noble matron, who implies that one cannot be holy and have marital sex, exposes a battleground between the two ideologies of marriage. The matron represents the more austere uncompromising line, in which marriage and sanctity are incompatible. According to this view, Bonacosa cannot fulfill the marriage debt and live a life of piety. This uncompromising line is, significantly, not voiced by the hagiographer, since it would be very much at odds with the ideology of holy mediocrity. Overall, Bonacosa's life itself is evidence of the more liberalizing Dominican discourse, discussed below, in which marriage is viewed as a trial on the way to sainthood. Bonacosa can – and indeed, should – render the marriage debt, both by having sex with her husband and dressing in a way that he finds attractive. Rather than barring her from sanctity, Bonacosa's obedience to her husband and her chastity within her marriage offer proof of her holiness. And yet, the noblewoman's jarring remarks suggest the payment of the marriage debt evoke ambivalence in the hagiographer himself.

These unwilling brides made their critiques through symbolic action, and especially through their attitudes towards clothing. Conflict repeatedly coalesced around the issue of attire

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[123] "Narra quela dona de una altra bona dona nobel, la qual molto ben eo cognosuo, che ela tuti li ornamenti de le soe uestiment deponeua. E alora disse Bonacossa se el'era peccao a portar uestiment ornate: perzò dixeua ela queste parole, perchè ela non periua che peccasse in se ma pur portaua per piaxer al so marito." Ibid., 9-11. Though "piaxer al so marito" could simply mean "to make her husband happy," it seems more likely that the woman means "to please" in the sense of making herself appealing to him, especially since the wearing of clothes for such a reason is considered a sin. On the relationship between clothing and the marriage debt, see Dyan Elliott, "Dress as Mediator Between Inner and Outer Self: The Pious Matron of the High and Later Middle Ages," *Mediaeval Studies* 53 (1991): 279-308.

[124] "Respoxe alora quela bona dona pur che sì. Ma alora Bonacosa reputando de pocho prexio le terrene uestiment a prespecto de le celestiale, solament contenta del conseglio di quela altra dona....Alora fe pregher dolze e piatose a lo Segnor Deo e prega la so marito, e si obtene da lo so marito de deuer deponer tuti li ornament de le vestiment." Ratti, 10-11.

in the lives of wealthy holy women because of its highly charged symbolic value.[125] The proliferation of sumptuary legislation in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries illustrates the symbolism of clothing in late medieval and Renaissance Italian society. From 1281 to 1497, Florence alone enacted sixty-one laws regulating its citizens' attire, and created an office dedicated to seeking out citizens who violated these laws.[126] Likewise, Bologna enacted twenty-one laws between 1233 and 1476, and Venice forty-two between 1299 and 1499.[127] While preachers frequently denounced ostentatious and revealing clothing, formal regulations against such attire originated with civic authorities who targeted it because controlling expenditure on clothing seemed to guarantee a well-functioning society.[128] Laws to control clothing resulted from the entanglement of economics with questions of morality and social order. On one hand, expenditure on expensive clothing was seen as a wasteful use of capital, especially as the commodification of clothing transformed dress into fashion. From a practical standpoint, new fashions made clothing less available for reuse. Garments made from specialty fabrics or pieced together from strips of cloth could not easily be taken apart and remade.[129] This, combined with speed at which fashion changed, made clothing a less durable good than it had once been. Spending money on such disposable fashion, therefore, was seen as a waste of money, which diverted investment from durable goods and property to disposable commodities. As clothing

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[125] Elliott, "Dress as Mediator," 279.

[126] Catherine Kovesi Killerby, *Sumptuary Law in Italy, 1200-1500,* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 28.

[127] Ibid.

[128] Martha C. Howell, *Commerce Before Capitalism in Europe, 1300-1600,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 236-243; Carol Lansing, *Passion and Order: Restraint of Grief in the Medieval Italian Communes,* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 37-47.

[129] Diane Owen Hughes, "Regulating Women's Fashion," in *Silences of the Middle Ages: A History of Women in the West,* vol. II, ed. Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992): 142-143.

became commodified, it also lost its ability to signify status through outward display.[130] A person of any social status with enough money to afford the price of a garment could purchase it.[131] Whereas prior to the commercial revolution of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the ability to afford such a garment typically correlated with social status, increasingly in the fourteenth century people of middle-class status found themselves with enough income to afford the kinds of materials and clothing that previously only members of the nobility could afford to buy. Sumptuary legislation attempted to reestablish this link between appearance and social status by stipulating that certain types of clothing, fabric, and ornamentation be worn only by members of particular social classes. The same market forces, however, that uncoupled appearance and social status also encouraged dress to be reconceived as fashion, which lent an ephemerality to clothing that was manufactured to meet the latest trends rather than – or in addition to – showcasing the material of the garment. The rapid speed at which fashion changed made it increasingly difficult to identify what a particular material, fabric, or style signified in terms of status.[132]

Laws prohibiting certain types of clothing and ornamentation had, until the fourteenth century, targeted women's and men's clothing fairly evenly.[133] By the fourteenth century, however, women's clothing was the primary target of such legislation, which explicitly equated moderation and restraint in clothing to the health of a city's civic life. A 1433 law passed in Florence asserted that "the ornaments of women which are worn in a city, if they are worn in moderation, add to the honor and splendor of the city, but if they are excessive, they are the

[130] Howell, 208.
[131] Hughes, "Distinguishing Signs: Earrings, Jews, and Franciscan Rhetoric in the Italian Renaissance City," *Past & Present* 112, (August 1986): 3-59.
[132] Howell, 256-257.
[133] Killerby, 112.

dishonor and infamy of the city."[134] While legislation concerning clothing used the language of moderation, morality, and frugality, such laws were also tools for the state to raise much-needed funds by allowing citizens to purchase exemptions to the laws, effectively paying a tax to wear clothing that was banned by the laws.[135] A statute enacted in Florence in February 1365 permitted citizens to purchase an annual exemption to the regulations restricting ornamentation for 50 florins, the same amount as the fine for violating the provisions.[136] Similar provisions were enacted in Florence over the next century during times of financial crisis.[137]

Lawmakers frequently equated excessive spending on women's clothing with making marriage too expensive, and thereby preventing marriage and contributing to falling birth rates, as we have already seen. They also feared that women's well-dressed bodies would inspire lust. Popular preachers like Bernardino of Siena agreed, and railed against women's fashion on the grounds that women's obsession with "vanities," and their competition to outdo one another with more expensive and ostentatious clothing compelled men to aquire wealth in order to bear the financial burden for these things. Their mercantile success led to laziness, and, eventually, into the descent into sexual sin. Preaching in Florence in 1424, Bernardino lambasted the Florentines

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[134] "Mulierum ornamenta quamquam in civitate inditia sint, si moderate fiant, ad decus et splendorem civitatis pertinent, si modum excesserint, ad dedecus infamiamque civitatis." ASF, Provvisioni. 124, fol. 128r (23 July 1433) in Ronald E. Rainey, *Sumptuary Legislation in Florence,* Ph.D. dissertation, (Columbia University, 1985), 752.

[135] Carole Collier Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence: Families, Fortunes, and Fine Clothing,* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 179-181.

[136] "Quecumque autem contra predicta vel predictorum aliquod faceret quoquo modo, puniatur et condempnetur pro qualibet vice in florenis quinquaginta de auro…nisi primo solverit camerario gabellarum contractuum comunis florentie pro ipso comuni recipienti de qua solutione constet manu notarii camerarii supradicti, nomine gabelle, florenos quinquaginta de auro, qua gabella sic soluta possit illa, pro qua seu cuius nomine solute fuerit, ipsa ornamenta portare per unum annum a die solutionis eiusdem exclusive posito coninuo numerandum, non ostantibus prohibitionibus supradictis licite et impune." ASF, Provvisioni. 52, fol. 106v (10 February 1365) in Rainey, 706.

[137] For similar Trecento provisions, see Rainey, 41-88.

for their moral depravity, which he saw as a clear result of the city's wealth. "Water that remains stagnant, what happens to it?" asked Bernardino.

> It becomes smelly, and starts producing frogs, lizards, serpents, and other filthy things. If Florence remains immobile in its abundance of food, corpulence, in great profit, and no wars, no pestilence, what a stink of sin there is! How many serpents and scorpions of ill will, how much lust, how much pride, how much sodomy! The stink will reach the heavens themselves.[138]

Excessive wealth leads to idleness, idleness in turn leads to boredom, and boredom leads to sin, particularly of a sexual nature.

Even so, families continued to dress their daughters in expensive clothing in order to display their wealth to prospective suitors. Fiancés, in turn, gave their new wives gifts of clothing as a symbolic and economic counterbalance to the wife's dowry. This clothing became an especially visible symbol of the social status of the woman's new husband as well as his ownership and authority over her and her body. By bearing his gifts on her body for all to see, the new wife was symbolically demonstrating her integration into her husband's household and family. Men outfitted the women in their families with visible symbols of their wealth and power. Despite Alessandro Barbaro's claim that women should practice moderation, especially with regard to their appearance, his discussion of women's clothing belies his own struggle between his moral ideals and the cultural pressures of the day. His inability to reconcile his disapproval of expensive clothing on the grounds of its potential to invite immoral behavior runs at odds with his desire to use clothing as an outward display of wealth. On one hand, he accuses women of wearing expensive clothing in order to attract the attention of men other than their husbands. "Wives wear and esteem all those fine garments so that men other than their own

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[138] Bernardino of Siena, *Prediche volgare*, Florence 1424, Vol. 2, ed. Ciro Cannarozzi, (Pistoia: Pacinotti, 1934), 43. Quoted in Mormando, *The Preacher's Demons,* 131-132.

husbands will be impressed and pleased. For wives always neglect such adornments at home, but in the market square…cannot be sufficiently decked out or adorned."[139] The problem, however, was in reconciling this desire for a wife to dress modestly to avoid the attention of other men with the symbolic value invested in the female body as an emblem of her husband's wealth. A woman who dressed too modestly represented a wasted opportunity to display her family's wealth and power. Therefore, writes Barbaro, "attention must be given…to the condition of the matter, the place, the person, and the time."[140] A woman's clothing should match her status, and they should "care more to avoid censure than to win applause in their splendid style of dress. If they are of noble birth, they should not wear mean and despicable clothes if their wealth permits otherwise."[141] Further, if her husband can afford it, a wife should wear gold, jewels, and pearls as evidence of his wealth.[142] These things, argues Barbaro, are less offensive than ostentatious clothes because they are a more durable form of wealth. After all, "who does not know how useful this sort of wealth was at a certain time to the ancient Romans, who in the time of peril during the Punic War [sold them] to raise money."[143] For Barbaro, as for his contemporaries, anxieties about female fidelity clashed with assumptions about the function of female bodies as emblems of male power and wealth. When families contracted marriages, for example, future husbands were expected to match a significant, but variable, percentage of the woman's dowry by providing her with clothing and jewelry. In her letters to her sons, Alessandra Strozzi, a

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[139] Barbaro, 209-210.
[140] Ibid., 206.
[141] Ibid.
[142] Ibid., 206, 209.
[143] Ibid., 210. This concession, however, had less to do with such patriotic forethought than the laws protecting women's property. In Florence, these laws stipulated that a wife was entitled to keep any clothing provided to her by her husband during their marriage after her husband's death, but that jewelry belonged to the husband or his heirs, unless the husband's will specifically stipulated otherwise (and it rarely did).

fifteenth-century Florentine noblewoman, describes how this exchange took place when her daughter, Caterina, was betrothed. Strozzi writes that Caterina's future husband

> ordered a gown of crimson velvet for her made of silk and a surcoat of the same fabric, which is the most beautiful cloth in Florence....And he had a garland of feathers and pearls made [for her] which cost eighty florins, the headdress underneath has two strings of pearls costing sixty florins or more. When she goes out she'll have more than four hundred florins on her back. And he ordered some crimson velvet to be made up into long sleeves lined with marten, for [her to wear] when she goes to her husband's house. And he's having a rose-colored gown made, embroidered with pearls.[144]

This clothing became an extraordinarily visible symbol of the social status of Catherina's fiancé as well as his "ownership" of his new wife.[145] As Christiane Klapisch-Zuber has shown, such marriage gifts served as a symbolic and economic counterbalance to the wife's dowry, often at significant cost to the future husband.[146] More importantly, by bearing these gifts on her body for all to see, the wife was symbolically integrated into her husband's household and family.[147]

Women, therefore, could further comment on the values of their society, deny the authority of their families and husbands, and renounce their sexuality by rejecting or destroying particular items or styles of clothing.[148] Thus, when Maria's mother found her alone in her room, fervently stripping her clothing of "all their vain and superfluous worldly ornaments," she lashed out at her daughter in anger.[149] Both of Maria's sisters were looking for husbands and had

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[144] Alessandra Strozzi, Letter 1, in *Selected Letters of Alessandra Strozzi*, trans. Heather Gregory, (Berkeley: University of California, 1997), 31.

[145] Elliott, "Dress as Mediator," 279.

[146] Caterina's husband, an exceptional case, spent an amount equal to more than two-thirds the price of her dowry. Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, "The Griselda Complex," in *Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 218-224.

[147] Ibid., 224-231.

[148] Elliot, "Dress as Mediator"; Hughes, "Sumptuary Law and Social Relations in Renaissance Italy," in *Disputes and Settlements: Law and Human Relations in the West*, ed. John Bossy, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983): 69-99, and "Regulating Women's Fashion," 136-158.

[149] Thomas of Siena, "Legend," 118.

planned to wear the cast-off dresses when meeting potential suitors.[150] Instead, by destroying the ornate clothing Maria denied her family an important means for conveying its status. Thomas shrewdly avoids an explicit endorsement of Maria's behavior, but immediately mentions that only a month later the two sisters as well as a teenage brother died from the plague, implying that the mother's reproach and her wordliness had caused her children's deaths, and that Maria had been spared as the result of her piety.[151] Clothing was a marker of social status, so to cast off ornate clothing in favor of plain dress was symbolically to renounce one's place in society. For Maria, this meant denying her secular obligations to both her family and her wayward husband. Because she could not remarry, and yet, as noted above, was husbandless and childless, Maria occupied an ambiguous position in society.[152] Casting off her ornate clothing helped to resolve this ambiguity. Of course, had her husband returned before her death, Maria would have been obliged to obey his will.[153] But though she still remained subject to her husband's authority – Thomas initially refused to grant her the Dominican habit because she did not have his permission – she unambiguously declared her religious vocation, establishing her position in society in her husband's absence.

Bonacosa signaled her spiritual conversion through her clothing by more subtle means. After her conversion, she gave her ornate clothing to her parish church to be made into vestments

[150] Thomas of Siena, "Legend," 118.

[151] Ibid., 119.

[152] See Raymond of Peñafort, *Summa on Marriage*, XIII, 4. "Again, suppose the husband has gone in the army against the Saracens or a faraway region and he does not return, nor is it known whether he is living or dead. What should his wife do?...Regardless of her youth she cannot contract until she is certain of the death of her husband." Trans. and into. Pierre Payer, (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2005).

[153] See Elliott, "Dress As Mediator," 287.

and paraments.[154] This act of piety was a particularly feminine and public one because of the symbolic role of clothing in women's lives.[155] By donating her clothing to the church, Bonacosa rejected the trappings of her social status, but did so in a way that was socially sanctioned. The act of donating clothing would have stood in stark contrast to the well-known trope of a saint like Francis of Assisi stripping naked in the town square to signal the renunciation of his patrimony. These liturgical items made from Bonacosa's clothing – which her fellow parishioners presumably would have seen and recognized – then signaled her conversion to her community. The clothing she once wore as symbols of her social status and her husband's wealth were transferred to her parish church to decorate the altar – the most sacred place within the church – and be worn during the liturgy by the clergy there.

The rejection of clothing also signaled a renunciation of sex. Physical attractiveness, often achieved through clothing, was an integral part of the conjugal debt that spouses owed to one another.[156] This was especially true for women, who were expected to dress in a manner that pleased their husbands in order to fulfill the marriage debt, even as both secular and ecclesiastical authorities condemned female vanity as wasteful and an instigator of sin.[157] Nonetheless, women were expected to obey their husband's will, even if this meant dressing in a manner usually denounced as sinful. In contrast to the moralistic noblewoman in Bonacosa's *vita*, Thomas Aquinas was especially articulate on this point, conceding that a married woman could, without sin, adorn herself in order to please her husband and prevent him from falling into

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[154] "In primament le soe preciose uestiment in parte e li ornament dispers, et conuertit in lo seruicio del diuin ministerio, maximament in la soa giexia parochial, zoè una bella casulina, belle stole, manipuli e frontali donandoghe deuotament. E souenza fiada refaxeua li soi parament." Ratti, 25.

[155] On the distinctly feminine character of clothing donations to churches, see especially Katherine L. French, "'My Wedding Gown to Make a Vestment': Housekeeping and Churchkeeping," in *The Good Women of the Parish: Gender and Religion After the Black Death*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 17-49.

[156] Elliott, "Dress As Mediator," and Klapisch-Zuber, "The Griselda Complex."

[157] Elliott, "Dress As Mediator," 287-289.

adultery.[158] Though the Church ostensibly condoned ornate clothing when it was used in service of the marriage debt or worn at the insistence of a woman's husband, it also condemned women's apparel as vain and even sinful. This contradiction was not lost on wealthy matrons who would have regularly faced this dilemma. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that concern about wealth would accompany anxiety about marriage. Clothing was an insignia of social rank, and, for women, of their marital status. It had particular power to signify publicly a woman's position in the sexual hierarchy of spiritual worth. For women who entered into marriage reluctantly, clothing became a scarlet letter emblematic of their lost virginity.

As Bernardino's sermons – and the popularity of Francis of Assisi – illustrate, Italians were particularly ambivalent about money. Charity, therefore, was characteristic of the piety of Italian women, and it likewise finds a place in these *vitae*.[159] Maria and Bonacosa gave alms and food to the poor, and cared for the sick.[160] Not content to give away her things, Bonacosa also invited the needy and sick into her home to wash their feet, and nursed those suffering from illness.[161] Villana was also devoted to the care of the sick. One day, on her way to the church of Santa Maria Novella, she saw a destitute man who was too sick to walk. Villana picked him up and, aided by her faith, carried him across the piazza to the Hospital of San Paolo.[162] She also

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[158] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2°, 2ae q. 169, art. 2.

[159] Weinstein and Bell, 37-40, 232-233; Vauchez, 204-205, 208-212.

[160] Thomas of Siena, 136-137; Ratti, 25.

[161] "Ancora menaua in caxa sua li poueri, a li quay a le fyade lauaua li pey, a le fiade la testa, a le fiade le plaghe, e le inflature e le alter infirmitae, e tanto più uolenter per amor de Christo, quanto ela podeua trouar piu ascarosi e sozi….Ancora a le soe uexine pouere e inferme auea pietosa solicitudini, ghe oredenaua i lecti, e ghe faxeua tuti li altri obsequij reali e pirsonali li quay ela podeua." Ratti, 25-26.

[162] "Qua ex re non ambigimus in specia pauperis christum eidem sepius occurrisse. Nam cum semel ab ecclesia predicatorum rediret in ipsa ecclesie platea egrotum quemdam pauperem habuit obvium quem longe maiori studio quam ceteros consueverat, refovens, mira cum devotione palam propriis gestavit humeris, quo ad illum debite in hospitali quod de pinzocheris dicitur collocavit." BCNF Conv. sopp. II.IV.167, 76r.

sought to go begging in the streets of Florence, but was restrained by her parents and husband.[163] After being rebuked by her family in these things, Villana's tone towards her parents and family shifts. Villana was briefly endowed with "prophetic inspiration" and predicted that her father's ship would sink at sea during a storm and leave the family in financial ruin. [164] This, she declared, was a fitting punishment for her father's avarice. Villana's prophecy is one of the more rebellious incidents in the lives of the holy moderates, and it exposes the deep anxieties about wealth that often were aligned with the pious woman's preoccupation about chastity.

Moderate saints could also renounce their wealth through food practices, often emulating the celebrated abstemiousness of other holy women without attempting the same excesses.[165] Maria, who actively sought to follow the example of Catherine of Siena, limited her culinary austerity to vegetarianism, but relaxed even that austerity by eating meat when she was sick.[166] Bonacosa began fasting after her conversion, abstaining from wine on Mondays and Saturdays, eating bread and water on Wednesdays and Fridays, and simple meals on Sundays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays.[167] Like Angela of Foligno, Villana lost her appetite for corporeal food when she

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[163] "Artissime paupertatis tanta cupiditate fragravit ut frequenter hostiatim mendicare omnino proposuerit, nisi a parentibus et marito prohibita extitisset." Ibid.

[164] "Unde genitori suo longe antea revelavit quot et quanta adhuc mala et mundi huius infortunia *[sic]* illum pati oportebat. Que sicut dixit impleta sunt. Nempe ut sepe merchatores assolent naufragium passus ex maximis divitiarum copiis ad grandem inediam est reductus. Affinati etiam et cognationi sue que tunc temporis permaxime florebat periodum assignavit. Temporis vite hominis unius naturali cursu in vita mortali degentis quod rei eventus tantem comprobavit nobili illa progenie de boctis omnino extincta." Ibid., 76r-v.

[165] On food and fasting in the spirituality of late medieval women, see especially Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women,* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987).

[166] Thomas of Siena, 124.

[167] "E commo ela aue acomenzao uno zorno per septimana a zazunar, de grado in grado meliorando, tuta la septimana in breve tempo, saluo lo dì dominical, se mete a zazunar: zoè lo mercur dì e lo veneris dì in pane e aqua, e lo lunes dì e lo sabba dì se absteniua dal uino, e li altri dì, zoè lo dominico dì, lo martis dì e lo youis dì molto temperatament piglaua refection." Ratti, 12.

was reading the letters of St. Paul or listening to a sermon.[168] Unlike Angela, however, Villana did not intentionally abstain from food. While women like Villana did not signal their piety through unmitigated abstention from food, they did share somewhat the devotion to the Eucharist that characterizes the spirituality of late medieval saints. Maria "craved and sought to refresh her spirit with the food of sacramental confession," and received communion on the great feast days of the year.[169] Whereas Angela of Foligno frequently became enraptured at the elevation of the host, however, Maria experienced no Eucharistic visions or miracles, and merely "received communion with such devotion that it aroused great admiration in those persons who saw her when she communicated."[170] Villana's *vita,* meanwhile, makes no mention of the Eucharist at all. In a genre that privileged excess, this moderation with regard to food is striking. Although writers since the thirteenth century had been urging moderation in the observance of physical asceticism, many religious women rejected this call for moderation, and instead marked their resistance with grueling fasts and food miracles.[171] The women whose piety was formed by the ideology of holy mediocrity, however, appear to have fully heeded the call. Bonacosa's Eucharistic devotion is particularly illustrative of the way in which these women not only practiced outward moderation in their piety, but also internalized that restraint. Although she received communion in both kinds, and did so during the week as well as on Sundays and on

[168] "Ego cum epistolas pauli lego aut divinis assisto eloquiis, mente sic reficior ut omnino diffuggiat cibi corporalis apetitus." BCNF Conv. sopp. II.IV.167, 75v-76r.

[169] Thomas of Siena, 125.

[170] Ibid. For Angela of Foligno's Eucharistic ecstasies, see *AASS*, January 1, (Paris, 1863), 205. On mystical rapture in the lives of medieval saints, especially with regard to the Eucharist, see Bynum, *Holy Feast*, especially pages 113-149, and Kieckhefer, *Unquiet Souls*, 150-179.

[171] Bynum, 42-47, 237-244.

other major feast days, she did so humbly and obediently.[172] Furthermore, despite her devotion to the Eucharist, "when the host was elevated, she would say to herself 'I desire it'," and would receive it without fanfare.[173] This explicit synchronicity between Bonacosa's intentions and her behavior reflects the extent to which, by the later Middle Ages, intentionality had come to bear on the discernment of sin and spiritual merit. It was not enough for Bonacosa to outwardly practice moderation if, for example, she had inwardly craved to experience the Eucharist in the mode of Catherine of Siena. Instead, she demonstrated the ideal confluence of moderation in intention and action that clerics hoped to promote to women.

The *vitae* of moderate holy women thus offered spiritual guidance for other wealthy women by illustrating how these saints practiced their piety amid the demands of their families and society. Bonacosa's *vita*, for example, includes a long exegesis on her spiritual habits with frequent asides about the alterations she made to her routine prayers in order to accommodate her temporal obligations. She frequently observed the liturgical hours – at least when she had time – and on mornings that she was unable to go to church for Mass, she instead would observe the liturgical office of None in her home.[174] "When she had time," Villana read the writings of the church fathers and the lives of the saints, and especially enjoyed reading the letters of St. Paul.[175] Only Maria, whose absent husband meant that she did not have the obligations of children or household maintenance, was able to devote herself fully to prayer and piety. "Her

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[172] "Omia [sic] dì dominica, regularment se comunicaua del corpo e dei sangue dominical; etiande in le altre feste maiore del anno, e in le sollepnitae de la nostra Dona, e di sancti apostoli, e de pizor altri sancti, e ancora cun spetial deuotion era affecta, per la qual caxon etiamde ale fiade in li dì feriali se comunicaua." Ratti, 31-32.

[173] "…unde ela uedesse leuar lo corpo del Segnor, se properaua digando intra se 'volla'." Ibid., 30.

[174] "Faxeua a l'ora del uespero, de la completa e in le alter hore: si ela podeua auer tempo, ela oraua." "Odando sonar nona de la soa giexia…e se per caso alcuno non auesse alora possuo andar al oration, com piu tosto che ela podeua, dixeua nona." Ratti, 30.

[175] "Si quando autem vacare illi contigisset sacre scripture libros, et patrum collationes ac gesta sanctorum tanta cum aviditate legebat potissime autem pauli epistolas." BCNF Conv. sopp. II.IV.167, 75v.

mother…considered it much better for the household that her daughter dedicate herself to prayer, to which she was evidently so drawn, than to occupy herself with the physical tasks of the household."[176] She recited the office of the Virgin every day, and, as her ability to read improved, she added the offices of other saints and the Passion.[177] The attention to the spiritual minutiae and contemplative practices of these women not only illustrated their piety, but demonstrated how they incorporated the *vita contemplativa* within the context of their temporal obligations. Such lessons may also have reassured unmarried women, as well as the parents of precociously pious girls, that spirituality and marriage were not mutually exclusive, and matrimony would not altogether thwart their daughters' inclinations towards piety.

Similarly, their hagiographers commended their exemplary mode of confession. Bonacosa and Maria's hagiographers are explicit in this regard and offer remarkably similar praise of their thorough and succinct confession:

> [Bonacosa] confessed every week…and did so tearfully and discreetly, always accusing herself, and not omitting any of her sins. She made her confession clearly, and readily confessed all the ways in which she had sinned in thought and in action, and by omission, leaving nothing out….She applied herself diligently to examining her own heart, and always strove to reveal each and every sin.[178]

> [Maria] confessed in the way I had taught her, making her confession in few words with great wisdom, reciting explicitly that in which she felt she had particularly offended her celestial spouse between one confession and the next, and then implicitly including all her general offenses. Thus, she first confessed that in which she had especially sinned, whether in cogitation…or in action…or in omission.[179]

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[176] Thomas of Siena, 128.

[177] Ibid., 123.

[178] "De la soa [Bonacosa's] confession si ne po auer bon exemplo. Seme in la septimana se confesaua…Era adunca la soa confession lagremosa e discreta e sempre accusaua si medesima, e non descouriua le altre colpe, ouer li altruy peccati. Za in ueritae fo ela de euidente e clarissimo ingenio, in tanto che a creder, a far, o deuer omittere non era ignorante, ma era molto attenta, e optimament sauea ben dir, segondo la sua notitia, quele cosse che se requiereuan intra tute le altre done a dir; zoè osia in substantia de acto osia in le circumstantie de la soa confession. Studiando aduncca diligentissimament ad examinar ben lo so cor, sempre se sforzaua per zaschaun odo de mostrarse peccatrixe." Ratti, 20-21.

[179] Thomas of Siena, 125-126.

Their mode of confession emulated the kind of protocol that Giovanni Dominici recommended to women in the 1401 *Regola del governo di cura familiare,* in which he instructs his readers to "confess your sins in your own words, and do not draw out your confession longer than is necessary."[180] Intense scrupulosity was characteristic of late medieval holy women, particularly those who lived outside the cloister, and was encouraged by clerics who saw the confessional as a valuable tool to monitor women's spirituality for signs of unorthodox sentiments, and to control its most extreme qualities.[181] But unlike Mary of Oignies, who offered similary detailed accounts of her own perceived transgressions, these women confessed, at most, weekly rather than daily.[182] Dominici likewise commends such behavior, recommending weekly confession at most, and monthly confession at a minimum.[183] The frequency of Bonacosa and Maria's confession may, like their prayer, have reflected the realities of finding time for such practices alongside the duties of household management. But this was also a convenient way for hagiographers to tacitly recommend a less assiduous, but still rigorous, approach to sacramental confession, a shift that was already underway.[184] Maria's hagiographer, in fact, unambiguously commends her mode of confession as a model for others and includes within his description a

[180] "Di' i peccati con la lingua tua, non gli distendere più che sia di bisogno…" Giovanni Dominici, *Regola del governo di cura familiare,* ed. Donato Salvi, (Florence, 1860), 56.

[181] See especially Elliott, *Proving Woman,* 47-118.

[182] Bonacosa's hagiographer specifies that she confessed weekly. Thomas does not specify how frequently Maria confessed, but he distinguishes between her frequent attendance at sermons and the frequency of her confession, tacitly suggesting that she confessed less often than she heard a sermon. Villana's *vita* does not describe her mode of confession, and mentions only that she confessed when she converted, and on her deathbed. This omission may be the result of authorship; of the three *vitae,* only Villana's was not written by her confessor, as discussed below. On Mary of Oignies' tearful confessions, see Jacques de Vitry, *VMO,* 654, and Elliott, *Proving Woman,* 51-53.

[183] "Alla confessione sacramentale, se ti comunichi una volta la settimana, verrai spesso; e se non ti comunicassi tanto spesso, bastiti la confessione una volta il mese." Dominici, 56.

[184] On the discouragement of needless scrupulosity, and its transformation from a virtue to a vice, see Elliott, *Proving Woman,* 211-230.

long digression on sin and confession.[185] This aside paraphrases the standard theological sources, including Aquinas, and Peter Lombard's *Sentences,* and is clearly intended to be didactic, since Thomas classifies the various ways in which it is possible to sin and calls the reader's attention to each point.[186] This emphasis on frequent – but not too frequent – confession, done contritely and concisely was a portent of things to come. By the mid-fifteenth century, Dominici's protégé, Antoninus of Florence, would still call for "frequent" confession but did not specify a schedule for it, advising only that repeatedly confessing the same sin offered no spiritual benefit.[187]

While hagiographers may have encouraged women to confess less frequently, they had no such qualms about their tireless attendance at sermons.[188] Frequent attendance and attentive listening to sermons was established as a hagiographical trope for women in the *vita* of Mary of Oignies.[189] Her hagiographer and confessor, Jacques de Vitry, emphasizes her homiletic devotion and even credits her with giving him advice about his preaching.[190] Rose of Viterbo (c. 1233–1252) was noted for her precocious attentiveness at the sermons of the Franciscans, while the companions of Clare of Assisi (1194–1253) reported that she took great delight in hearing

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[185] Thomas of Siena, 126-127.

[186] Ibid., 126-127, 277n28.

[187] "La quinta conditione sie che sia frequente cioe spessa e piu volte e poi che una volta se confessato bene e diligentemente de suoi peccati posto che non sia necessario di quegli medesimi confessarsi piu volte non dimeno faccendo glie utile assai alla sua salute." Newberry Inc. 6355, Antoninus of Florence, *Confessionale: Curam illius habe,* (Florence: L. Morgiani & J. Petri, 1493), 50v.

[188] On the role of sermons in the lives of female saints, see especially Beverly Mayne Kienzle, "Catherine of Siena, Preaching, and Hagiography in Renaissance Tuscany," in *A Companion to Catherine of Siena,* ed. Carolyn Muessig, (Boston: Brill, 2012), 127-154.

[189] Kienzle, 152-153.

[190] "Divinis autem Scripturis prudens discretaque mulier sufficienter instructa erat; name frequenter divinos sermones audiebat, verba sacrae Scripturae conservans in corde suo, ecclesiae enim sanctae frequentans limina, sacra pectori mandata condebat sagaciter. Et quoniam intellectus bonus omnibus facientibus eum, quod devote audiebat, devotius opera complere satagebat. Unde, cum in ultima aegritudine, iam fere penitus morte vicina deficeret et aliquis in ecclesia ad populum sermonem faceret; tunc spiritu eius ad verbus Dei reviviscente, aures invita morti erigebat, cor praeparabat, circumstantibus etiam de sermone aliqua verba referebat. Adeo autem Praedicatores et fideles animarum Pastores diligebat…" Jacques de Vitry, *VMO,* 654.

sermons.[191] These women, however, not only listened to sermons but engaged in preaching and sermon-like activity of their own. Rose preached publicly, basing her authority to do so on her prophetic ability.[192] Mary sang a sermon-like song on her deathbed, in which she expounded upon theologically complex topics such as the nature of the Trinity, the incarnation and humanity of Christ, and issues related to the Last Judgment.[193] Although Jacques de Vitry stopped short of describing Mary's deathbed speech-song a sermon, there is, as in Rose's *vitae,* a sense that she claimed spiritual authority for herself by virtue of divine inspiration, and thereby was able to instruct those around her, including men. There is also a sense that Mary's singing was scandalous to some, and Jacques writes that the prior of her church was relieved when Mary lost her voice because he was afraid that the male parishioners who attended Sunday morning Mass

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[191] "In pupillari autem aetate coepit haec Virgo dum devota matre sua ad ecclesiam pergere, praedicationes autem Fratrum Minorum frequenter audire et verbum Dei cum intentione mentali devota percipere." *Vita Secunda*, in Giuseppe Abate, *S. Rosa da Viterbo, Terziaria Francescana: Fonti storiche della vita e loro revision critica,* (Rome: Miscellanea Francescana, 1952), 127. There are two *vitae* for Rose's life, the so-called *Vita Prima* written in 1253, and the *Vita Secunda,* composed at the beginning of the fifteenth century; the *Vita Prima* survives only as a fragment. Clare's attentiveness at sermons is mentioned by one of her companions, Sister Agnes, in the process of canonization. *Acts of the Process of Canonization of Clare,* 10:8. See also Joan Mueller, *A Companion to Clare of Assisi: Life, Writings, and Spirituality,* Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition, 21, (Boston: Brill, 2010).

[192] "Et Virgo dixit mulieribus: 'Venite omnes extra domum, quia beata Virgo Maria venit extra.' Et exiverunt post ipsum, et coeperunt omnes sedere; et Virgo sedebat in medio ipsarum, et incoepit dicere mulieribus: 'Audite, quia ego video Sponsam Christi speciosissimam, quam nemo vestrum videt'." *Vita Prima,* in Abate, *S. Rosa da Viterbo,* 120-121. The *Vita Prima* does not use the verb *predicare.* The fifteenth-century *Vita Secunda,* by contrast, devotes an entire chapter to Rose's speech acts, including her preaching. "In simplicitate nempe cordis Christum Iesum quotidie gentibus praedicabat, bonis bona praenuntiando aeterna et malis supplicia sempiterna." *Vita Secunda,* in Abate, 131. On Rose's speech acts, see Darleen Pryds, "Proclaiming Sanctity through Proscribed Acts: The Case of Rose of Viterbo," in *Women Preachers and Prophets through Two Millennia of Christianity,* ed. Beverly Mayne Kienzle and Pamela J. Walker, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 159-172.

[193] "Incepit enim alta voce et clara cantare, nec cessavit spatio trium dierum et noctium Deum laudare, gratias agere, dulcissimam cantilenam de Deo, de sanctis Angelis, de beata Virgine, de Sanctis aliis, de amicis suis, de divinis Scripturis, rithmice dulci modulatione contexere nec deliberabat an sententias inveniret, nec morabatur ut inventas rithmice disponeret…Primo autem summo et supremo tono Antiphonam sua inchoavit ac sancta scilicet Trinitate, Trinitatem in Unitate, et Unitatem in Trinitate diutissime laudans, et mirabilia quasi ineffabilia cantilenae suae interierens. Quaedam etiam de divinis Scripturis, novo et mirabili modo exponens, de Evangelio, de Psalmis, de novo et de veteri Testamento quae numquam audierat, multa et subtiliter edifferens. A Trinitate vero ad Christi descendit humanitatem, dehinc ad beatam Virginem, ab hinc de sanctis Angelis et de Apostolis, et de aliis sequentibus Sanctis multa pronuntians….Dicebat autem inter alia multa, quod ac lumine sanctae Trinitatis sancti Angeli intelligentiam haberent, ac lumine vero corporis Christi glorificati, in sanctis animabus fructum haberent et exultationem. Beatam etiam Virginem iam in corpore glorificatam conflanter asserebat et quod corpora Sanctorum quae in passione surrexerunt, numquam postea in pulverem reversa sunt." Jacques de Vitry, *VMO,* 662-663.

would be scandalized by her singing.[194] Even though Mary was not preaching from the pulpit, her public speech act was close enough to a sermon to be shocking to male ears.

Holy mediocrity, by contrast, dispensed with any such speech acts that might approximate a sermon. Instead, these *vitae* emphasize women's passive listening. As we have already seen, Bonacosa's conversion was precipitated by a Lenten sermon about Mary Magdalene. In Villana's *vita,* hagiographical miracles that are typically associated with women's devotion to the Eucharist, such as physical insensitivity and ecstasy, instead occur when she is reading Scripture or listening to sermons. This conflation of Eucharistic miracles with hearing and reading recalls the monastic emphasis on *lectio divina* and the eating of Holy Scripture.[195] Her hagiographer writes that when she read or heard the word of God in church, "her mind became filled with such passion that her body stiffened and she seemed overcome by the heat of the Holy Spirit. For this reason she often threw off her cape, uncovering her head, as if overcome by intense heat."[196] Villana's behavior was potentially shocking, but casting off her cape and uncovering her head was a very subtle transgression in a genre in which the public doted on scenes like St. Francis stripping in front of his father in the town square, as suggested above. Nonetheless, this moderate act of passion not only signaled Villana's piety, but also drew

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[194] The language here is somewhat ambiguous. Jacques suggests that the men would be scandalized by Mary's singing, and would "think that she was a fool." However, this passage is preceded and followed by an account of the theological subtlety of Mary's song, suggesting that the cause of the scandal was as much the words as the volume and length of the song: "Prior autem domus nostrae gavisus est, eo quod die sequenti, scilicet die Dominica, de diversis partibus solent homines seculares ad ecclesiam nostram convenire, qui si forte tam acuta et sublimi voce eam incessanter audirent cantare, possent inde scandalizari, et quasi fatuam reputare." Ibid., 663.

[195] C.f. Mary of Oignies' description of reading from Scripture as eating: "'Numquam de cetero manducabo, numquam de cetero legani in hoc libro.'" ["'I will not eat again from Scripture, nor read from this book.'"] Jacques de Vitry, *VMO,* 664. On this, see especially Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God,* trans. Catherine Misrahi, (New York: Fordham University Press, 1960); Duncan Robertson, *Lectio divina:* the Medieval Experience of Reading, (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011).

[196] "Tanto insuper ardore replebatur mens eius cum de divinis scripturis sermo occurrisset, aut dei verbum in sanctis ecclesiis proponebatur ut etiam in ipso rigente corpore huiuscemodi spiritus sancti fervor ebullire videretur. Namque illico clamidem abieciens, capud etiam pre torrente estu detegere frequenter solebat." BCNF Conv. sopp. II.IV.167, 75v.

attention to the role of men in the spirituality of women, and in particular, the power of their preaching. Thomas of Siena was explicit on this point. For Thomas, Maria's dutiful attendance in the front row at each of his sermons was akin to Mary Magdalene's tearful conversion at the feet of Christ. Although her spiritual conversion had occurred without waterworks – a notable exception in this genre – she insisted on spending much of her time in church listening to the sermons of the Dominicans. According to Thomas, no one ever saw her fall asleep or begin to doze in church, no matter how long the sermon might be.[197] So great was her thirst to hear the friars' preaching, Thomas tells us, that "this beloved woman was truly another Mary Magdalene, who would have been pleased to remain forever at the feet of the Lord Jesus in order to hear his words."[198] This trope was especially convenient for hagiographers. Not only did this comparison lend the mundane piety of women like Maria a heroic aura as they took on the role of the Magdalene, but clerics like Thomas and his fellow Dominicans could become Christ-like figures. Within this spiritual economy of holy women and their male spiritual advisors and hagiographers, clerics assumed not only the pastoral care of women, but did so by virtue of their Christ-like role in these women's lives.

In Thomas's self-aggrandizing narrative, women like Maria regarded their confessors and spiritual advisors with utmost obedience.[199] He again draws a comparison between himself and Christ with regard to Maria's adherence to the vow of obedience, writing that "she received everything from my mouth as if it had come from the mouth of God himself."[200] He also

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[197] Thomas of Siena, 120.

[198] Luke 10:39. Thomas of Siena, 121.

[199] Of the three *vitae* characterized by holy mediocrity considered in this chapter, Bonacosa and Maria's were written by their confessors, while Villana's was composed two generations after her death by a Dominican friar at Santa Maria Novella, possibly using notes from her confessor, as we will see in Chapter 4.

[200] Thomas of Siena, 130.

distinguishes between Maria's obedience to him and her desire to engage in more public pious practices, such as visiting the sick and destitute, which he forbade on account of her sex and her youth, and because she was beautiful.[201] Maria also desired to continue her physical asceticism – namely frequent kneeling while praying – in spite of her chronic illness, but stopped after being commanded to do so by Thomas.[202] In his self-described role as Christ, Thomas credits Maria with the intention of undertaking more rigorous penitence while simultaneously praising the obedience that stopped her from doing so. The last days of her life, however, permitted her a somewhat greater degree of freedom:

> I went to see what was happening with this beloved woman who had accepted the illness of the plague with great reverence and pleasure, as something given to her by God's special grace. In fact, I found her in such good spirits and with such laughter and celebration that I had never seen her like that, so that she seemed unable to contain or restrain herself.…When I looked at her in amazement and scolded her for such excessive festivity, the more I scolded her, the greater her laughter and celebration seemed to grow.[203]

Thomas, however, excuses Maria's defiance on account of her illness and the divine grace that had made her eager for her own death.

Obedience to a confessor or spiritual advisor is a common theme in the hagiography of female saints. As we have seen, Conrad of Marburg held such authority over Elizabeth of Hungary that she submitted to penance so severe that she died from it. Thomas and Maria's relationship is likewise profoundly hierarchical, but unlike Conrad, Thomas steps in to stop Maria's more excessive tendencies. Furthermore, Thomas seems to derive little spiritual gratification of his own from his affiliation with Maria, unlike typical relationships between hagiographers and living saints. As John Coakley has shown, the spiritual rapport between

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[201] Thomas of Siena, 136.
[202] Ibid., 155.
[203] Ibid., 156.

hagiographers and their mystic companions tended to be symbiotic, and profitable to both parties.[204] The sanctity of visionary women was authorized through a male cleric, while male witnesses benefitted from the charisma of the holy woman.[205] In the case of holy mediocrity, however, this relationship is stripped of its nuance. As much as Thomas might admire Maria as a living holy woman, their relationship is straightforward, and boils down to her obedience to his institutional authority. So secure is his identity in this role that he repeatedly describes himself as a Christ-like figure, as we have already seen.

Even though the relationship between Maria and Thomas remained conventionally hierarchical, they nevertheless had a close rapport. By contrast, Bonacosa and Villana have relatively undeveloped relationships with their confessors. Bonacosa's rapport with her confessor and spiritual advisor is subdued. Unlike Maria, whose spiritual advisor was also her hagiographer, Bonacosa typically confessed to her parish priest, a chaplain at the church of San Nazaro in Brolo, "an honest and courteous man of good reputation."[206] Occasionally, however, she confessed to another priest, from whom she also sought advice and guidance, and who would eventually write her *vita*.[207] Unlike Thomas, however, these men remain shadowy figures in the text. Instead, spiritual guidance is rendered through the voices of other characters, like the noble matron who chastises Bonacosa for wearing attractive clothing to please her husband. Villana's confessor is similarly absent from her life, probably because it was not written by her confessor.[208] Her *vita,* for example, lacks the frequent interjections from a confessor that

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[204] Coakley, *Women, Men, and Spiritual Power*. See also Mooney, ed., *Gendered Voices.*

[205] Ibid., 2-3.

[206] "…se confessaua almen de nanze a un capelano de la giexa de sancto Nazario in Brolio, de bona fama, homo bon e cortexe, in de la qual giexia parochial ela habitaua." Ratti, 20.

[207] "In ueritae ancora ela uiuendo se dignà alcuna fiada de usar lo ministerio de la mia scientia et de piglar per acto de confession, per conseglo e più uolte." Ibid., 21.

[208] On the authorship of Villana's *vita* and its circumstances, see Chapter 4.

intersperse Maria's life. Even though male-directed spirituality is still very much a part of Villana's *vita,* it comes not thorugh the voice of her confessor, but in the form of the sermons and texts discussed above. Her father and husband, meanwhile, stand in as supervisors of her piety. They step in to stop its more extreme expressions, such as when Villana asks to go begging in the streets. But this was unusual for Villana. In the lives of both Villana and Bonacosa, there is an unspoken sense that these women practice such restrained piety already that the oversight of a male spiritual advisor is unnecessary. Instead, regular confession to a parish priest or a local friar is supervision enough.

At the end of these women's lives, however, religious men become active witnesses to the dying saint's final moments, which are described in terms of a sort of bloodless martyrdom.[209] Bonacosa is presented as regarding her final illness as a spiritual trial.[210] Although her illness caused her great pain and made it impossible for her to eat – and eventually to speak – she bore her sickness with patience.[211] Before her death, she confessed and heard Mass, but could not receive the Host.[212] There is also sense of liminality in the account of Bonacosa's convalescence, which is by far the longest of the three *vitae*. In this space between life and death, Bonacosa tacitly addresses some of the tensions between the worldly and heavenly obligations

[209] "Et quia prophetarum cuneis aggregatam dei electam in celis non ambigimus. Intra candidatos martirum exercitus hanc eandem collocare non verebor. Nempe quamvis tyrampnorum [sic] gladiis cum sanguine vitam minime fuderit. Permulto tamen langore ac diutino sui corporis, cruciatum vere substinuit passionis." Ibid., 76v.

[210] Ratti, 49-60. Dauphine of Puimichel (d. 1360) went so far as to suggest that if people knew how useful illnesses were for self-discipline, they would be buying them at the market: "ac eciam dicebat, et dicere consuevit, quod si gentes huius mundi considerarent quantum corporals infirmitates sunt utiles et quantum separant animum ab amore terrenorum, ipsas infirmitates corporeas, si esset possibile, in foro emergent sicut emunt res alias necessarias ad vivendum." Process of canonization, art. 33, in *Enquête pour le process de canonisation de Dauphine de Puimichel, comtesse d'Ariano,* ed. Jacques Cambell, (Turin: Erasmo, 1978), 52. Quoted in Bynum, *Holy Feast,* 388n44. On the role of illness in the lives of women saints, see Bynum, *Holy Feast,* 161-172, 199-201.

[211] "Ancora ela non era querulosa, ben che cun grandi dolori ela fosse afflicta greuement." Ibid., 53.

[212] "Abiando ela, commo è ceta cossa, assay per tempo reçeuuo tuti li sancti sacramenti, che pertenano ali infermi, zoè a dir la eucharistia, ch'è tanto a dir commo bona gratia, ch'è appellate lo corpo de Christo, per cautela del uomito." Ibid., 62.

that suffuse the typology of holy mediocrity. This is especially apparent in her hagiographer's treatment of her interactions with her spouse, Gabriel, and Christ her Spouse. As discussed above, Bonacosa's husband momentarily becomes a Christ-like figure when Bonacosa reaches out for Christ in a vision, yet physically strokes her own husband's face.[213] The symbolic and physical intersection of her spouse/Spouse is a concrete manifestation of holy mediocrity's central contention that even a pious housewife could receive the same celestial reward as that traditionally awarded to virgins.

When Maria became sick with plague in July 1399, she told Thomas, her confessor, of her illness "with remarkable joyousness and both outward and inward expressions of happiness….She reveled in this just the way brides commonly celebrate when the time has come to go to that most welcome husband they have long desired."[214] As noted above, this kind of nuptial imagery featured prominently in the spirituality of fourteenth-century female mystics.[215] Thomas signals Maria's imminent transformation from matron to virgin by the use of this same bridal imagery. After receiving the sacraments, she became like "a bride all adorned and prepared to ascend to heaven for the wedding feast with her desired spouse,"[216] Thomas then turns to Christological imagery to describe her final moments:

> Many times she cried out…saying *'In manus tuas commendo spiritum meum, in manus tuas commendo spirtum meum'* as if she expected at any moment to pass on to those heavenly nuptials….She heaved great sighs and uttered some loud cries because of her great physical pain and the bursting of her heart – resembling in this and in various other things Christ her husband, who, when he was about to expire on the cross, cried out in a

[213] "…eleuando la man sinistra in alto quanto piu ela pode, desiderando de palpare alcuna cossa, poso questo la applica ancora ala barba." Ratti, 92-93.

[214] Thomas of Siena, 155.

[215] See Elliott, *Bride of Christ,* 214-219.

[216] Ibid., 158.

> loud voice several times….And so that blessed soul…entered into the wedding banquet to which it had been invited.[217]

Her body was interred at the Dominican convent of Corpus Domini in Venice, where it began to give off a sweet aroma.[218] In the days after her burial, her companions began to report miracles. One man had been so moved by Maria's odor of sanctity that he vowed to never again eat meat regularly, while another woman took the habit of the Dominican tertiaries – though not until after her husband had died from the same outbreak of plague.[219] At the end of the year, when the nuns at Corpus Domini opened Maria's tomb in order to place another body there, they reported that her corpse was uncorrupted, and emitted no stench.[220] Such incorruptibility of the body was traditionally a quality of virgin saints, and it was, therefore, a sign of Maria's redemption that her body, like that of a virgin, had not decomposed.

In these end-of-life passion narratives, women were able to transcend the mediocrity that had characterized their lives. Villana's hagiographer explicitly characterizes her death as that of a martyr.[221] Fevers and body aches frequently made her ill, but when symptoms occasionally subsided she would pray for them to be redoubled. During one such prayer session, Villana reported that Christ appeared to her as if on the cross, and assured her that the pain from her sickness united her to himself in their shared suffering.[222] Then the Virgin Mary appeared, surrounded by a bright light and accompanied by many saintly virgins, including Catherine of

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[217] Ibid., 158-161.
[218] Ibid., 163.
[219] Thomas of Siena, 164.
[220] Ibid., 172.
[221] "Et quia prophetarum cuneis aggregatam dei electam in celis non ambigimus. Intra candidatos martirum exercitus hanc eandem collocare non verebor. Nempe quamvis tyrampnorum [sic] gladiis cum sanguine vitam minime fuderit. Permulto tamen langore ac diutino sui corporis, cruciatum vere substinuit passionis." Ibid., 76v. On the distinction between red martyrdom, which signified literal martyrdom, and white martyrdom, associated with ascetical suffering and purity, see especially Elliott, *Proving Woman*, 62-74.
[222] "Videbat enim manifeste crucifixum in carne christum sibi assistere cuius doloribus compatiens sue penalitatis oblita videbatur." BCNF, Conv. sopp. II.iv.167, 76r.

Alexandria, who showed Villana the golden crown she would receive as a reward if she persevered in her suffering.[223] This vision consoled Villana, "not so much by easing the pain of her sickness, but because this vision transpired only a short time after a horde of terrible demons had appeared to her."[224] A few days after, on the feast day of St. Lawrence, she begged to experience the pain and suffering the saint had felt when he was roasted alive on a grill. Soon after, she began to burn with fever as if she were on fire.[225] This sickness was rapidly debilitating and led to her complete paralysis. Later, in a scene that recalls Mary of Oignies' deathbed struggle with Satan, she was tormented by a demon who had disguised himself as an anchorite.[226] At last, when she had received the last rites, a group of religious men came to her bedside to read the scriptural story of Christ's Passion.[227] When they reached the passage describing Christ's death, Villana made the sign of the cross with her hands, which had previously been immobile, and died soon after.[228] Her body immediately began to give off an odor as sweet as the smell of an expensive perfume shop, which persisted for weeks in the room where she died, even after her body had been removed.[229] As Villana's death illustrates, in the

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[223] "Subito adesse vidit magna cum luce mariam virginem virginibus innumeris comitatam, inter quas devota illi catherina spetiosissimam coronam manibus gestabat. Ei tandem perseveranti in patientia conferendam. Dicebat enim constans esto dilectissima quia hanc ego tibi coronam in celis reservo." Ibid., 76v.

[224] "Consolabatur siquidem illam non tantum affliction penarum sed quam paulo ante horridam multitudinem conspexerat demonum." Ibid.

[225] "Dum sancti martyris laurentii solempnitatem instare perciperet. Dominum deprecabatur dolorum et penarum sui martyris in craticula patientis proprio in corpore particeps fieri. Unde subito febribus ardentissimis correpta numquam sue carnis talem sensit incendium." Ibid.

[226] "Cui presto antiquus affuit hostis simulato anachorete cuiusdam habitu se sanctum attulisse oleum commemorans. Quem cum apertis parumper oculis agnovit toto in se collecto spiritu voce qua potuit exclamavit 'Recede cruenta bestia sciens dulcissimum anime mee sponsum adesse yhesum christum, alioquin alapa te percutiam.' Qui statim confuses evanuit se seque studiosius ad antiquas temptationum insidias accingit." BCNF, Conv. sopp. II.iv.167, 77r. C.f. Mary of Oignies, *AASS*, June 5, 665.

[227] Ibid., 77r.

[228] Ibid.

[229] Ibid., 77r-v. The *vita* reports that the smell was comforting to Villana's husband, who would go into her room whenever he felt sad about her death. ("Unde dicere solebat sponsus eius quod numquam adeo mestus erat quin predictam cameram ingrediens exilaratum se omnino sentiret.")

liminal time between life and death, these women were able to indulge in a modicum of flamboyant, ecstatic piety, which in turn offered familiar proof of their sanctity to those who witnessed their deaths.

While men stood watch over these dying women, women bore prominent witness to their sanctity after their deaths. A group of hermit women living on the Ponte alle Grazie were the first witnesses to Villana's sanctity after her death.[230] The hermitesses reported that Villana had appeared to them on the night she died, in the middle of their evening prayers, and that she was dressed in regal clothing, shining with an unnatural light, and accompanied by a pleasant smell.[231] At first they mistook her for the Virgin Mary.[232] This mistake would not have been lost on readers familiar with the traditional paradigm of the hundred-fold fruit and the late medieval discourse surrounding mental virginity. The idea that Villana, a matron and mother, was interchangeable with the Virgin Mary is implied by the testimony of other women, but not stated outright by Villana's hagiographer. Equally noteworthy is the parallel between Villana's appearance to the hermit women and Christ revealing himself to Mary Magdalene after the resurrection. As we have seen, clerics justified the rehabilitation of the Magdalene as the *beata peccatrix* in part because Christ had shown her favor by appearing to her before anyone else on Easter morning. In this scene, Villana takes on a Christ-like role, while the hermitesses fill the

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[230] These hermit women on the Ponte Rubiconte were probably the foundresses of the convent of Le Murate. See Giustina Niccolini, *The Chronicle of Le Murate*, trans. and ed. Saundra Weddle, (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2011).

[231] "Nec est silentio transeundum quod in hora transitus sui devote quedam mulieres anachoreticam vitam ducentes super pontem quondam fluminis prope ecclesiam beati Gregorii de florentia vidisse testate sunt. Asserebant nocte ipsa in oratione vigilantibus magna cum luce ac odoris fragrantia mulierum quamdam ornatu regio astitisse…" BCNF, Conv. sopp. II.iv.167, 77r.

[232] "Quam licet primo intuitu beatam dei genitricem crederent diligentius observantes, electam dei villanam esse decernunt." Ibid.

part of the Magdalene as the first to have proof of Villana's sanctity. In both instances, Villana's hagiographer implies the extent of her transformation through the words of women witnesses.

A few days after the events on the bridge the incident of the angel appearing to one of Villana's female relatives occurred. One day while in prayer, an angel appeared to one of Villana's kinswomen and told her that he would reveal to her what had happened to Villana after her death, "not because you are related to Villana by blood, but because you are especially devoted to her."[233] The angel then revealed the story of the late saint's arrival in heaven and her ascent to the throne of God. The scene plays out like an homage to Dante with Villana in the role of Dante being led through a Who's Who of Christian history.[234] (Villana's hagiographer just happened to be a Dante expert at the University of Florence). When she arrived in heaven, Villana was greeted by a crowd of women, at the head of which stood Mary Magdalene.[235] The Magdalene addressed Villana saying "This one is the bride of God almighty, whom I have watched over every day."[236] As two celestial choirs sang and a host of angels joined the crowd of women, Villana continued her journey through heaven, along the way meeting St. Dominic, St. Paul, Thomas Aquinas, and the Virgin Mary, before being greeted by Christ himself. The angel described Villana's reception in heaven as culminating in her rechristening by Christ himself: "Come, my beloved. Because of your immense patience and devotion, you shall no longer be called 'Villana' but will be a precious pearl – in Italian, *margarita* - which I will add to the

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[233] "Subito illi celestium spirituum unus affuit qui diceret. Non quia sanguinis te illi iungat affinitas, sed quoniam tibi magnopere afficitur dei electa villana totam sui exitus seriem et assumptionis gloriam propalabo." BCNF, Conv. sopp. II.iv.167, 77r.

[234] The Dantean tone of Villana's hagiography is explored more closely in chapter 4.

[235] Jansen, 242-244; 286-294.

[236] "Hec est illa dei omnipotentis sponsa quam ego diebus singulis novo semper Christi amore instaurabam." BCNF Conv. sopp. II.IV.167, 77v-78r.

necklace forever worn over my heart."[237] Villana's strange renaming recrafts the familiar story of Margaret of Antioch, the archetypal virgin-martyr, whose legend was traditionally associated with Pelagia, a whore who renounced her ostentatious bearing and fine clothing and became Margaret, a hermitess of such piety that, by the end of her life, she was mistaken for a man.[238] Readers well-acquainted with saints' lives would notice the connection between the Margaret/Pelagia of late antiquity and the contemporary Margaret/Villana. But the story is ambiguous. It is true that Villana the matron was transformed into Margaret, the heavenly virgin, and led by Mary Magdalene and the choir of virgins into heaven. But the hagiographer is also tacitly equating a matron with Pelagia, a whore-saint, pointing once again to the hagiographer's ambivalence about married sex. It is a sad comment on marriage, but a triumph for holy mediocrity.

In one final incident, a Franciscan tertiary was keeping watch over Villana's body when, out of nowhere, a torrent of fresh flowers began to fall on the corpse.[239] The woman took this as a sign from Villana herself, who had promised to send this woman a sign when she had arrived safely in heaven.[240] These flowers evoke the roses and lilies that were well known symbols of martyrdom and virginity, but Villana's hagiographer does not name them as such. Instead, he assured readers that Villana's spiritual program of moderation and obedience had been penitence

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[237] "Veni electa mea. quia propter insuperabilem patientie tue constantiam non amplius villana vocaberis. sed eris una pretiosa margarita in armilla mei pectoris iugiter affixa." BCNF, Conv. sopp. II.iv.167, 78r.

[238] See Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend,* Vol. II, 230-232.

[239] "Nempe inter ceteras devotissima quedam mulier, de penitentia beati francisci que cum ceteris devotis mulieribus sacras vigilias circa dictum corpus observabat rorantem e celis florum multitudinem vidit, super feretrum in quo iacebat." BCNF Conv. sopp. II.IV.167, 77r

[240] "Quapropter gratias altissimo referens innumeras elevatis in celum manibus aiebat. Nunc vere te villana cognovi beata in celo amenitate perfrui. Hec enim verba tua sunt quibus sciscitanti mihi quid de celis missura fores, promisisti dicens. Cum ego ad virentia illa prata celestis ierusalem domino duce pervenero rosarum ac liliorum ad te munera destinabo." Ibid.

enough to outweigh her youthful sinfulness and had earned her a place in heaven, but not enough to put her within the ranks of the celestial virgins.[241]

Thomas of Siena also uses women as important post-mortem witnesses to Maria's sanctity. A young woman named Orsolina, also dying from plague, reported a vision of Maria in heaven, three days before the death of the latter:

> I saw a most beautiful throne, and, marveling at its glorious decoration and its extraordinary beauty, I heard a voice that spoke to me thus: 'This very throne has been made ready and prepared for this Madonna Maria of the habit of Saint Dominic.' And raising my eyes I saw that sister, dressed in a beautiful habit of Saint Dominic, who came and seated herself upon that throne which was so lovely and glorious.[242]

This vision, writes Thomas, inspired Orsolina's own piety as she suffered from her illness, and prompted her to take the Dominican habit before she died.[243] Maria's mother also recounted a vision of her daughter, dressed in the habit of the Dominicans and shining with a divine light, which came to her in a dream.[244] Other women in Maria's circle reported similar visions. Her friend, Sister Astrologia, claimed to have seen Maria multiple times in dreams.[245] Later, an elderly nun at Corpus Domini reported a series of visions of Maria wearing a gilded Dominican habit.[246] Thomas interprets this as a sign of God's approval of Maria's matrimonial chastity, "which she maintained like an entirely virile woman."[247] Perhaps recognizing that it was a liability to have only women who were close to Maria as witnesses to these visions, Thomas

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[241] Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage*, 69.
[242] Thomas of Siena, "Legend," 167.
[243] Ibid., 169-170.
[244] Ibid., 170.
[245] Ibid., 171.
[246] Ibid.
[247] Ibid., 172. On the tradition of the virile woman, see Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist*.

adds a male voice – that of Maria's parish priest – as an additional witness, who likewise attested to this vision of Maria in a resplendent habit.[248]

The prominent role of women as witnesses to the sanctity of moderate holy women suggests that these *vitae* were written with a female audience in mind. The *vitae* deploy these women witnesses to impart a stamp of approval for this model of holy mediocrity, thereby disguising the role of the male hagiographer with female voices. The hagiographer's reliance on female witnesses adds another dimension to their *vitae:* women are testifying for a woman who is, in turn, a model for other women. It is the male hagiographer's clever ploy to disguise masculine authority by simulating a female voice, hence permitting him a greater degree of freedom in describing their transformations from matrons into heavenly virgins. The hagiographers could not go so far as to suggest that their moderate piety had earned them such merit in heaven that they could be confused with the Virgin Mary, but they could imply it through the voices of other women. But this exchange worked two ways. The same female voices that, for example, attested to Villana's sanctity also implicitly endorsed the male hagiographer's typology of holy mediocrity, which, for all of its reassurances to married women of heavenly blessedness, also made female obedience to male authority a critical part of its criteria.

Hagiographers used these supernatural accounts to vindicate the model of holy mediocrity. Villana's heavenly apotheosis gilds her life with a patina of the extraordinary, and proclaims that an average matron who perseveres in her boring piety has the potential to achieve the same status, and be rewarded, just as a virgin martyr. It was a celestial "carrot" that would induce matrons to endure the terrestrial "stick" of holy mediocrity. Such extraordinary moments,

[248] Thomas of Siena, "Legend," 171.

however, could only occur after the death of the saint, when she received her due reward, and her job as an imitable model of matronly piety had ended.

Chapter 3

The Art of Sanctity

> He seemed to relinquish himself as a particular man and become the embodiment of some eternal thing that itself stood outside of time and whose existence as any given person was merely circumstantial.[1]
>
> —Paul Harding, *Tinkers*

In Jacobus de Voragine's *Golden Legend,* an etymological analysis of the saint's name precedes each story. Hence for Villana's new celestial name, Margaret, he writes as follows:

> The name Margaret is also the name of a precious jewel called *margarita,* pearl, which is shining white, small, and powerful. So Saint Margaret was shining white by her virginity, small by humility, and powerful in the performance of miracles. The power of the pearl is said to work against effusion of blood and against the passions of the heart, and to effect the strengthening of the spirit. Thus blessed Margaret had power of the effusion of blood by her constancy, since she was most constant in her martyrdom. She had power of the heart's passions, i.e., in conquering the demon's temptations, since she overcame the devil. She strengthened the spirit by her doctrine, since her doctrine strengthened the spirits of many and converted them to the faith of Christ.[2]

Jacobus' etymologies of the names of saints are based on physical qualities like color, shape, and size, as well as medicinal and alchemical properties. The meaning of a name, however, was never fixed but contained a universe of potential significations. The same was true of things. The physical qualities of things could acquire and change meaning through association with other objects: for example, the pearl can symbolize virginity because of its physical perfection, but it

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[1] Paul Harding, *Tinkers,* (New York: Bellevue Literary Press, 2008), 164.

[2] Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend,* vol. 1, trans. William Granger Ryan, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 368.

could also symbolize vanity because of its expense.[3] Context determined the appropriate meaning.

This chapter explores how the network of friars at the Dominican church of Santa Maria Novella fashioned Villana's cult – first as a popular saint in the traditional mode of Saints Catherine and Margaret, and then as a distinctly Dominican saint. Our story begins with Villana's posthumous appearance to the group of hermit women. It was Villana's disappearance on the tail of a comet that augured her transformation from a devout wife and mother into a saint. Santa Maria Novella, located on the northwest side of Florence had been the focal point of Villana's piety after her conversion. Villana's will stipulated that she be buried in the church, and so in the years after her death the physical space of the church and the images and objects within it formed a nexus for devotion to Villana's cult. The material culture associated with the church offers a lens through which to explore how medieval Florentines interacted with the holy, how physical spaces shaped their experience of holiness and in turn were reshaped by the network of Villana's devotees.

I. Sign Language

As the imagery of the pearl demonstrates, medieval sign theory relied on a remarkably optimistic view of the physical world in which everything – visible objects as well as people, places, times, historical events, and numbers – pointed ultimately to God by virtue of its *sensus spiritualis* (spiritual meaning). As the work of the German philologist, Friedrich Ohly, has shown, the medieval theory of signification not only tolerated, but celebrated, multivalent

[3] Freidrich Ohly, "Dew and Pearl: A Lecture," in *Sensus Spiritualis: Studies in Medieval Significs and the Philology of Culture,* ed. Samuel P. Jaffe, trans. Kenneth J. Northcott, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1958] 2004), 234-250; E. de Jongh, "Pearls of Virtue and Pearls of Vice," *Simiolus* 8, no. 2 (1975-1976): 69-97.

meaning.[4] This liberality of interpretation was permissible because the words of the Bible, as a sacred text, signify the things (*res*) that they name, which themselves continue to signify other things (*"non solum voces, sed et res significativae sunt")*.[5] Whereas in profane literature, writes Hugh of St.-Victor, "the sounds of words signify things only through the medium of comprehension," in sacred Scripture "the things themselves now signify other things."[6] Aquinas writes that "the author of Holy Scripture is God, in whose power it is to signify His meaning, not by words only (as man also can do), but also by things themselves…so that the things signified by the words have themselves also a signification."[7] Words themselves do not have multiple meanings; *things* do. The verbal sounds of words (*vox*) are tools people use to communicate with one another and have only one meaning: they signify the thing (*res*) that they name. For example, the sound of the word (*vox*) "lion" calls to mind the thing (*res*): a large, carnivorous African cat of the *Panthera* genus. By contrast, "every created thing (*res*) has a meaning," and things "have as many meanings as they have properties."[8] The animal that is named by the word "lion" points to a multiplicity of images and meanings: kingship, greed, bravery, cowardice, St. Mark, God, the devil. The thing can signify in so many different – and contradictory – ways

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[4] Ohly, "On the Spiritual Sense of the Word in the Middle Ages," in *Sensus Spiritualis*, 1-30.

[5] Richard of St.-Victor: "Therein is the word of God far superior to worldly wisdom, so that not only the sounds of the word, but also things are the vehicles of meaning." *Excerptiones* II, 3, *De scripturae divinae triplici modo tractandi,* in *Patrologia Latina* 177, 205B. Quoted and translated in Ohly, 4. Likewise Hugh of St.-Victor: "For sacred eloquence has a certain characteristic feature that differentiates it from all other writings, namely, that therein, first of all, particular things are presented by means of the words mentioned, things which, however, are in their turn propounded to function exactly like words in signifying other things" [Habet enim sacrum eloquium proprietatem quemdam ab aliis scripturis differentem, quod in eo primum per verba quae recitantur de rebus quibusdam agitur, quae resum res vice verborum ad significationem aliarum rerum proponuntur"]. Hugh of St.-Victor, *De scripturis et scriptoribus sacris,* cap. 3, in *Patrologia Latina* 175, 12A. Quoted and translated in Ohly, 4n6.

[6] "In libris autem ethnicorum voces tantum mediantibus intellectibus res significant. In divina pagina non solum intellectus et res significant, sed ipsae res alias res significant." Hugh of St.-Victor, *Speculum ecclesiae,* in *PL,* 177, 375B.

[7] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica,* I.1.10.

[8] "Res…tot figuras quot naturas et quot habent proprietates tot significationum habent diversitates." Alain de Lille, *PL,* 210, 53A; Hugh of St.-Victor, *Speculum ecclesiae, PL,* 177, 375D.

because it has been created by God as a sign of himself in order to make his will known to humanity.[9] Medieval theologians followed St. Paul who wrote that "ever since the creation of the world his [God's] eternal power and divine nature…have been understood and seen through the things he has made."[10] Hugh of St.-Victor affirmed that "words signify by virtue of human institution, things by divine institution. For just as a human being makes its will known to another through words, so does God make his will known through the things He has created."[11] Words, therefore, are only able to signify in multiple ways because the things they represent have multiple meanings. Each of God's creatures, therefore, serves to draw humanity to God by signifying something higher than itself – the *sensus spiritualis.*

Medieval sign theory posited three parts of the *sensus spiritualis* of a word. All of these parts were based on the foundation of the historical or literal meaning of the word.[12] Jerusalem, for example, is a city. Next followed the typological meaning. This was sometimes called the allegorical meaning, but its sense differed from poetic allegorization in which an idea is treated figuratively under the disguise of a thing through personification or reification. The typological meaning concerned the doctrine of salvation and the relationship between prefiguration and

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[9] "The signification of things is, after all, by far more excellent than the signification of words, since the latter was established by usage, the former dictated by nature. The latter is the word of men, the former the word of God to men. The latter [*vox*], once brought forth, perishes, the former, creature of God's creation, persists" ["sed excellentior valde est rerum significatio quam vocum, quia hanc usus instituit, illam natura dictavit. Haec hominum vox est, illa vox Dei ad homines. Haec prolata perit, illa creata subsistit"]. Hugh of St.-Victor, *Speculum ecclesiae,* in *Patrologia Latina* 177, 375C. Idem, *Eruditio didascalica* V, 3. Quoted and translated in Ohly, 14n.

[10] Romans 1:20. See also Hugh of St.-Victor, *Eruditio didascalica* VI, 5, in *Patrologia Latina* 176, 805C: "All of nature speaks of God. All of nature teaches man. All of nature brings forth reason, and nothing in the universe is unfruitful" ["Omnis natura rationem parit, et nihil in universitate infecundum est"]. Quoted and translated in Ohly, 5; Aquinas, *Summa,* I.1.10: "Since the literal sense is that which the author intends, and since the author of Holy Writ is God, Who by one act comprehends all things by His intellect, it is not unfitting…if, even according to the literal sense, one word in Holy Writ should have several senses."

[11] "Words signify by virtue of human institution, things by divine institution. For just as a human being makes its will known to another through words, so does God make his will known through the things He has created." *Speculum ecclesiae, PL,* 177, 375C. Quoted and translated in Ohly, 13-14.

[12] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica,* I.1.10

fulfillment: Jerusalem as a figure of the Church, or the prefiguration in the Old Testament of the Gospel.[13] The tropological or moral meaning was next. Here, Jerusalem might symbolize the life of the individual soul and its path to salvation. Finally came the anaogical meaning, which revealed what would be fulfilled in the afterlife: Jerusalem as God's heavenly city.[14]

The relationship between objects and meaning, however, was not fixed but determined by the context in which the thing existed.[15] Things had the potential both to signify a multitude of meanings and to change in meaning depending on the context in which and by whom they were viewed and used. The boat-shaped metal object called the *Nef of St. Ursula,* for example, was originally created as a serving dish before being transformed into a reliquary to hold the relics of St. Ursula.[16] The physical qualities of an object could gain and shift meaning through association with other objects: the *Nef* became a sacred object because it held the relics of a martyred saint; the color red could signify martyrdom because it is the color of blood. These contextual associations could also be made within a text, or through the physical space an object inhabited: the *Nef* became a symbol of sacred kingship when it was given to the cathedral of Reims by Henri III.[17]

The meaning of a thing, therefore, was dynamic and changed over time and place, and from viewer to viewer. While the color red may have signified martyrdom to medieval viewers, it could also connote charity on account of the redness of the blood that Christ shed on the cross for the sake of his love for humanity. Likewise, it signified chastity on account of the virgin

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[13] Hebrews 1:10: "For the law having a shadow of the good things to come, not the very image of the things; but the selfsame sacrifices which they offer continually every year."

[14] "But so far as [things] signify what relates to eternal glory, there is the anagogical sense." Ibid.

[15] Ohly, 9-15. See also Aden Kumler and Christopher R. Lakey, "*Res et significatio:* The Material Sense of Things in the Middle Ages," *Gesta* 51 no. 1 (2012): 1-17.

[16] Christina Normore, "Navigating the World of Meaning," *Gesta* 51 no. 1 (2012): 19-34.

[17] Ibid., 28-29.

martyrs (who could also be depicted in white because of their purity); wealth because medieval color theory associated red with gold, and accepted the former as a suitable substitute for the latter, while red cloth dyed with carmine was particularly expensive; the Holy Spirit because of the flames that descended on the Apostles at Pentecost; earthliness and humanity because red was opposite blue, the color of the heavens, in the medieval spectrum of colors; light because, once again, red was seen as a substitute for gold.[18] Within the medieval system of signification, none of these various connotations would have been wrong, nor were they necessarily contradictory. The color red – the *res,* or thing – derived its multivalent significations from a universe of potential associations with other things. Red could be used to connote any of these things, but its particular meaning became apparent by the context in which it appeared. An artist's depiction of Judas with a red beard and hair signified greed rather than chastity because his betrayal of Christ was predicated on the money he received in exchange from the Jewish Sanhedrin. Similarly, though the lion could symbolize both God and the devil, it could not symbolize both at the same time.

To medieval Italians, a saint like Villana existed within this universe of signification, and the context in which people interacted with a purported saint affected their characterization of the person's holiness. From a sociological point of view, sanctity is not an objective quality. Instead,

[18] These are only the most commonly stated meanings of the color red, which could extend *ad infinitum,* as Ohly has shown. For discussions of color theory by medieval authors, see especially Innocent III, "De quatuor coloribus principalibus," in *De Sacro altaris mysterio, Libri sex,* Lib. I, c. 65, *Patrologia Latina* 217, 799-802; William Durandus, *Rationale divinorum officiorum, Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis* 140, Books I and 3; Ludolph of Saxony, *De vita Christi,* ed. L.-M. Rigollot, 4 vols. (Paris: Palme 1870): II, 574-582. The iconography of color in medieval and Renaissance art has been best addressed in the work of Peter Dronke, "Tradition and Innovation in Medieaval Western Colour-Imagery," *Eranos Yearbook* 41 (1972): 51-107; John Gage, *Color and Culture: Practice and Meaning from Antiquity to Abstraction,* (Boston: Bulfinch Press, 1993), and Michel Pastoreau, *Blue: The History of a Color,* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001) and "Les couleurs médiévales: systèmes de valeurs et modes de sensibilité," in *Figures et couleurs : études sur la symbolique et la sensibilité médiévales*, (Paris: Léopard d'or, 1986): 35-49.

it is something assigned to an individual by the people around her who have interpreted her actions, behavior, and speech as saintly.[19] The thirteenth-century Franciscan tertiary, Margaret of Cortona, for example, was rejected by some of her contemporaries as a madwoman while her supporters saw her as a saint in the mode of Mary Magdalene who had been redeemed from a life a sin by divine grace. Margeret's actions, behavior, and speech were not set in their meanings. Like lions or the color red, Margaret's life offered a universe of potential significations, but the context – the growth of the Franciscan third order – meant that Margaret the saint won out over Margaret the madwoman.

Contagious Sanctity

Sanctity, however, was unique from other things like colors and animals because it had an active, contagious quality. The meaning of the color red might shift depending on where it was used, but it could not transfer the quality of 'redness' to another thing. By contrast, sanctity could be transmitted. As Durkheim has argued, the sacred is contagious because it is not an inherent property of the thing in which it resides.[20] It is "superimposed" on something tangible and can borrow the external and material forms of these things, "but [it] owes them none of [its] power."[21] Since the sacred is not bound to the material, it is likely to become contagious and spread from one object to another.[22]

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[19] Aviad Kleinberg, *Prophets in Their Own Country: Living Saints and the Making of Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

[20] Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Carol Cosman, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 240.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid., 241.

While medieval writers did not explicitly use the language of pollution and contagion to describe sanctity, the work of modern anthropologists on the topic of purity and pollution is useful to our appreciation of the ways in which medieval people understood and interacted with saints and sanctity. As Mary Douglas has shown in her landmark study of concepts of pollution and rituals of purity, pollution does not exist as a tangible substance; it is not synonymous with bacteria or modern germ theory.[23] Rather, pollution is anything that does not fit within society's system of classification, and that thereby transmits danger by contact.[24] Societies seek to construct order out of the chaos of quotidian experience through systems of classification, which unify a society.[25] Because pollution is intangible, this transmission can only occur where structural lines are clearly defined. Sanctity operates in a similar way. Like pollution, the sacred is contagious because it is not an inherent property of the thing in which it resides. It is also a God-given quality, beyond humankind's capacity to fully understand. Therefore, it cannot be fully constrained by socially constructed systems of classification, such as the tomb of a saint or a reliquary, which are created to give sanctity a tangible place in which to reside. It has the potential to spill over from these physical sites and infect others with its power.

The prototypical instance of infectious sanctity derived from Christ himself. The Gospels of Luke, Matthew, and Mark recount that Jesus was walking through the streets of Galilee when a woman who had suffered from hemorrhages for twelve years came up behind him and touched the hem of his clothes, and instantly her bleeding stopped.[26] "Then Jesus asked, 'Who touched

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[23] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo,* (New York: Routledge Classics, 2010), 3.

[24] "There is no such thing as dirt; no single item is dirty apart from a particular system of classification in which it does not fit." Ibid.

[25] Douglas, xvii-xviii, 3-5, 117-118.

[26] Luke 8:42-47; Matthew 9:18-22; Mark 5:25-34

me?' When all denied it, Peter said, 'Master, the crowds surround you and press in on you.' But Jesus said, 'Someone touched me; for I noticed that power had gone out from me'."[27] At last, the woman came forward and confessed to touching Christ's cloak, to which he responded by assuring her that she had been made well by her faith.[28] Christ's reaction to the sick woman suggests that the flow of "power" from him to her happened without his knowledge or consent – even though, of course, an omnipotent God would know and have to consent to all of this, Christ does not do so in the moment. Instead, his healing power has a contagious quality that can be transferred through proximity alone. Furthermore, the woman receives Christ's power in a secondhand way: she does not touch his body, but his cloak – according to two of the Gospel accounts, only the fringe of his cloak – which in turn touches his body. This, the writers tell us, is enough for Christ's power to flow to the woman, in turn stopping her own flow of blood and healing her.

The medieval church, however, did not explicitly describe sanctity as something contagious, preferring instead to use the overt language of contagion to refer to the spread of heresy. Nonetheless, the sense that sanctity could spread from one person to another was implicit in the rhetoric of the church. As early as the sixth century, Gregory of Tours argued that the importance of a saint derived from the relationship that the saint shared with all other holy people – and ultimately with Christ – as a champion of the faith across space and time. "It is better," he wrote, "to speak of the 'Life of the Fathers' rather than the 'Lives of the Fathers'…since there is a diversity of merits and virtues among them, but the one life of the body

[27] Luke 8:45-47.
[28] Mark 5:34; Luke 8:48; Matthew 9:22.

sustains them all in this world."[29] In this metaphor of the body, new saints did not become new limbs of the body. Instead, they were absorbed and incorporated into it, becoming one with the *corpus Christianorum.* By the eleventh century, English and French kings were part of this body, by virtue of which they had the power to heal their subjects of the disease of scrofula through touch – one of the more overt instances of infectious sanctity in the Middle Ages. Opinion was divided on whether this power was hereditary, by virtue of royal blood, or if it resulted from being anointed on the hands with holy oil during the coronation ritual.[30] Regardless, the source of this sanctity derived ultimately from Christ, was transmitted to the king through sacred blood or oil, and whose touch in turn transmitted the sacred from the monarch to the subject. The dynastic saints of eastern Europe bear out the idea that sanctity was thought to be transmissable by blood. By the thirteenth century, lineages of holy princesses graced the royal houses of Hungary, Bohemia, and Poland, giving the impression that sanctity "was a hereditary trait specific to certain dynasties."[31] These saints transmitted an aura of holiness to their families, which in turn granted legitimacy to the ruling dynasty.

The infectious quality of sanctity was pervasive, and outlasted even the most profound reforms of the church. In the seventeenth century, Carlo Borromeo, the bishop of Milan, described the same telescopic collapse of saintly lives through the course of human history. Explaining the significance of a minor local saint, Simpliciano, on the occasion of the translation of Simpliciano's remains, Borromeo claimed that his importance derived from his role as a

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[29] Gregory of Tours, Introduction to *Life of the Fathers,* trans. Edward James, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1991), 2.

[30] Marc Bloch, *The Royal Touch: Sacred Monarchy and Scrofula in England and France,* trans. J. E. Anderson, (London: Routledge, 1973); Stephan Brogan, *The Royal Touch in Early Modern England,* (Martlesham: Boydell & Brewer, 2015).

[31] Klaniczay, *Holy Rulers and Blessed Princesses: Dynastic Cults in Medieval Central Europe,* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 227.

champion of the faith across space and time, a relationship that the saint shared with the more renowned Milanese bishop saint, Ambrose:

> San Simpliciano brought such salutary benefits to the whole church, contributing to the church of Milan with his exemplary life and very holy deeds, and having increased its Rites and divine offices and other ornaments of Christian piety, which had been instituted by St. Ambrose only a short time before.[32]

Saints, whether of greater or lesser *fama sanctitatis* (reputation of sanctity), embodied the same sacred truths.[33] The conflation of individual saints, enacted by means of exegetical association, confirmed the unending unity of Catholic sanctity that was perpetually reiterated through the deeds of the saints and reaffirmed by their virtues. New holy people, therefore, could be inserted into this telescopic vision of sanctity through the use of hagiographical tropes in order to bolster a new saint's reputation for holiness.

All saints might share in a greater lineage of sanctity, but the transfer of the quality of holiness from one saint to another person required some sort of proximity. This could occur directly from one person to another or through vectors like relics – pieces of the saint's body or objects that had touched it.[34] Examples of the miraculous efficacy of relics in the later Middle Ages abound. In Prato, about fifteen miles northwest of Florence, the miraculous image of the Virgin, known as *Santa Maria delle Carceri,* effected miracles when her sanctity was transferred through the creation of secondary relics. These objects, usually lead figures and copies of the image printed on paper, were first touched against the miracle-working fresco, then brought to

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[32] Carlo Borromeo, *Acta ecclesiae Milano,* III, 699.

[33] "Ma s'egli [san Simpliciano] apportò così salutari giovamenti alla chiesa tutta, certamente con essempi et fatti santissimi giovò alla chiesa di Milano, havendola accresciuta di Riti et officii divini et altri ornamenti di pietà Cristiana, che poco avanti santo Ambrogio havea insituiti." Carlo Borromeo, *Acta ecclesiae Milano,* III, 699. On this passage, see Simon Ditchfield, "San Carlo and the cult of saints," *Studia Borromaica* 20 (2006): 152. I am grateful to Ruth Noyes for bringing this passage to my attention.

[34] Caroline Walker Bynum, *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe,* (New York: Zone, 2011); Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger,* 42-43.

the sick person and touched to their body.[35] This act of touching hoped to capitalize on the contagious nature of sanctity by creating a conduit between the source of saintliness - in this case, the miraculous image - and the sick person, through the medium of the object, and in turn transferred the power inhering in sanctity from the fresco to the devotee. While the image as the source of the miraculous was typically unique to images of the Virgin, primary and secondary relics – that is, fragments of the saint's body and objects, usually clothing, that had touched the saint – were vehicles for the transmission of the saintly power inherent in all holy people.[36]

Conversely, an ordinary person in search of a miracle could create proximity between herself and a saint through an *ex voto* presented at the site of the saint's cult. Such *ex votos* not only represented the supplicant, but were surrogates for her or the ailing body part and literally made the afflicted person present before the miracle-working image or saint.[37] One of the most well-known sites demonstrating this process in late medieval Florence was the miraculous image of the Virgin Annunciate at the church of the Santissima Annunziata in Florence, where the number and weight of the wax *ex votos* donated to attest to the miracles performed by the image threatened the structural integrity of the building.[38] *Ex votos* attest to the importance of proximity

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[35] See especially Robert Maniura, "Persuading the Absent Saint: Image and Performance in Marian Devotion," *Critical Inquiry* 35 (Spring 2009): 629-654.

[36] Maniura argues that devotion to the Virgin was especially disposed to such decentered devotion because it was generally assumed that Mary's body had been assumed into heaven after her death, and thus no corpse remained around which a cult could center. Thus the cult of the Virgin relied more heavily on secondary relics than did the cults of saints whose bodies and tombs were the focus of more centralized cults. Maniura, "Persuading the Absent Saint," 639.

[37] Maria Alessandra Chessa, "The Substance of God's Grace: Paper *ex votos* in Renaissance Italy," talk given at the Annual Meeting of the Renaissance Society of America, New York City, 27 March 2014; Mary R. Laven, "Wax versus Wood: The Material of Votive Offerings in Renaissance Italy," talk given at the Annual Meeting of the Renaissance Society of America, New York City, 27 March 2014. See also Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 297-310; Michael P. Carroll, *Madonnas That Maim: Popular Catholicism in Italy Since the Fifteenth Century*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

[38] Laven, "Wax versus Wood." Trexler makes a similar argument about how *ex votos* served a dual purpose, both as objects that stood in for the penitent who sought a cure from the Annunziata, and whose quantity

for the transfer of saintly power, hence bringing about a cure. It was not enough simply to pray to a saint for healing: proximity to the miracle-working saint was essential for the cure. Miraculous cures were effected through the transfer of saintly power to the person afflicted. The artificial proximity created by the *ex voto* between the person represented by the object and the miracle-working saint or image facilitated the transfer of saintly charisma. The use of *ex votos,* therefore, points to a tacit understanding by Villana's contemporaries of the holy as something that could invade or infect in a positive way.

The contagious quality of sanctity also operated in literary representations of saints through the use and reuse of paradigmatic miracles, tropes, and images. These recognizeable signs of sanctity helped transfer sanctity from a recognized holy person to a new figure by creating virtual proximity through shared symbols. The supporters of Rose of Viterbo (c. 1233–1251), for example, recycled stories and images from the life of Elizabeth of Hungary (1207–1231) to shore up Rose's own claims to sanctity. As we have seen, Rose was a thirteenth-century teenage saint who came to be associated with the Franciscans, and who was eventually canonized in the 1450s.[39] She was noted for her asceticism, her mystical visions, and her outspoken opposition to the presence of the Holy Roman Emperor and his Ghibelline supporters in Viterbo. In 1251, Pope Innocent IV (1243–1254) initiated a process of canonization for Rose because of her opposition to his Ghibelline enemies. In the *vita* commissioned for the process,

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attested to the power of the Virgin. Without these *ex votos,* the Virgin would become displeased and would withdraw her favor. *Public Life,* 98-99.

[39] Giuseppe Abate, *S. Rosa di Viterbo, Terziana Francescana: Fonti Storiche della Vita e loro Revisione critica,* (Rome: Miscellanea Francescana, 1952); Darleen Pryds, "Proclaiming Sanctity Through Proscribed Acts: The Case of Rose of Viterbo," in *Women Preachers and Prophets Through Two Millennia of Christianity,* eds. Beverly Mayne Kienzle and Pamela J. Walker, (Berkeley: University of California, 1998), 159-72; Joan Weisenbeck and Marlene Weisenbeck, "Rose of Viterbo: Preacher and Reconciler," in *Clare of Assisi: A Medieval and Modern Woman,* Clarefest Selected Papers, Vol. 8, ed. Ingrid Peterson, (St. Bonaventure, New York: Franciscan Institute, 1996), 145-55.

Rose's hagiographer praises her youthful piety and describes how Rose was especially charitable towards the poor. "One day she was taking bread that she had sneaked out of her parents' house to give to the poor…but was stopped by her father who demanded to know what she was hiding in the folds of her skirt."[40] Obediently, Rose lifted the hem of her skirt, revealing dozens of roses in different colors where the bread had been. This story replicates almost exactly a scene that frequently appeared in popular variations of the life of Elizabeth of Hungary. According to these accounts, Elizabeth would secretly bring food to the poor during a famine. One day when she was sneaking bread out of the castle she encountered her husband. Her cloak fell open and she expected to see the bread tumble out and her smuggling operation revealed. Miraculously, however, the bread she had been hiding in the folds of her skirt had been transformed into red and white roses.[41] By the time Rose's *vita* was written in 1251, Elizabeth was already a popular and well-known saint. Rose, by contrast, had garnered a moderate local following, which failed to spread beyond central Italy despite the pope's support of the cult. The reuse of the story of the transformed bread from Elizabeth's *vita* would have been familiar to readers of Rose's life, and created a sense of connection between the two saintly women through this hagiographic trope.

Saints' supporters also employed images and visual tropes to link a new saint to a more illustrious predecessor. One especially striking example can be found in Montefalco, an Umbrian hill town between Perugia and Spoleto, in the church of San Francesco. Built between 1333 and 1338, the church was owned by the Franciscans and, like Santa Maria Novella in Florence, much

[40] AASS Sept. II, 434.

[41] This miracle does not appear in any of the authoritative accounts of Elizabeth's life. On these, see Kenneth Baxter Wolf, ed. and trans., *The Life and Afterlife of St. Elizabeth of Hungary: Testimony from Her Canonization Hearings*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

of the space was open to the public.[42] There, on the ceiling of the cappella maggiore of Saint Jerome in the church of San Francesco, are a series of six frescoed lunettes depicting Francis of Assisi surrounded by Anthony of Padua, Catherine of Siena, Saint Bernard, Rose of Viterbo, and Saint Louis by the artist Benozzo Gozzoli, painted in 1452.[43] In the lunette with the figure identified as Rose, Gozzoli depicted a haloed woman wearing a crown and holding dozens of roses in the lifted edges of her skirt.[44] A large inscription informs us that this woman is Saint Rose of Viterbo. The fading paint of the fresco, however, belies this identification by revealing that the figure was originally conceived as Elizabeth of Hungary. Just as Rose's hagiographer had borrowed the story of the miracle of the roses from Elizabeth's *vita,* so too did a later artist cast Rose in the guise of a more famous saint with the application of a few brushstrokes. Perhaps this act of renaming the image was a reactive one, offering a formal imprimatur on a popular identification of the image as Rose, despite the original inscription. More likely, however, this was a proactive change. In 1455, Pope Callixtus III (1455–1458) opened a second canonization proceeding for Rose, supported by the Franciscans, who had posthumously admitted her to their Order. Especially in the context of a church affiliated with a religious order and largely literate viewership, the new inscription was designed to promote Rose's cult by encouraging through the image the same kind of transfer of sanctity that her hagiographer had employed in the *vita,* and literally imposing Rose's identity on Elizabeth's.

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[42] Diane Cole Ahl, "Benozzo Gozzoli's Cycle of the Life of Saint Francis in Montefalco: Hagiography and Homily," in *Saints: Studies in Hagiography,* ed. Sandro Sticca, (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1996), 191-213.

[43] On these frescoes see especially Ahl, *Benozzo Gozzoli: Tradition and Innovation in Renaissance Painting,* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), 48-64; and "Benozzo Gozzoli's Cycle of the Life of Saint Francis in Montefalco"; Anna Padoa Rizzo, *Benozzo Gozzoli: un pittore insigne, "pratico di grandissima invenzione,"* (Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 2003), 65-75 [though the text is beautifully illustrated with color reproductions of the frescoes, including a pre- and post-restoration view of the ceiling frescoes, figure 13 on pp. 66-67, showing a detailed view of the frescoes has regrettably been incorrectly reversed].

[44] For this image, see Bynum, *Holy Feast,* figure 9.

The reuse of such literary and visual tropes created a virtual relationship between the established saint, whose *cultus* had already received official approval or popular support, to a fledgling saint. Rose, whose outspoken preaching in the streets of Viterbo made her contemporaries suspect she was insane, was not widely recognized as a saint. Although her reputation would grow in the two centuries after her death, initially the nuns at the Franciscan convent in Viterbo refused to admit her as one of their number. [45] Their resistance makes little sense if the nuns believed that Rose was a living saint. Even the pope's immediate enthusiasm for Rose's sanctity – she had prophesied the death of Frederick II, the Holy Roman Emperor and Pope Innocent IV's chief political rival – did little to increase the popularity of her cult. It was only after Rose's reputation underwent a sort of public-relations campaign with a *vita* that recast her strange behavior within recognizable saintly tropes borrowed from more popular figures like Elizabeth of Hungary and Francis of Assisi that the nuns welcomed Rose's relics into their convent. So effective was the effort to link Rose with other famous saints that in 1453 the Franciscan nuns commissioned Benozzo Gozzoli, the same artist who a year earlier had painted the chapel of St. Jerome in Montefalco, to paint a cycle of frescoes illustrating Rose's life. [46]

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[45] Near the end of her life, Rose sought to enter the Franciscan convent of St. Clare. An enclosed order, the sisters denied her request, claiming that they had no room for her. Aware that this was untrue, Rose responded with acrid words, declaring that "what you disdain in me, God accepts in everyone, so that because of Him the wise people of the world might be made fools, and the fools might be made wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness to God." ["Sacra Virgo ait: 'Scio, namque scio, quod non ista est causa, sed quia despicitis in me, quae Deus acceptat in omnibus, ut scilicet propter Ipsum sapientes mundi sint stulti, ut fiant sapientes. Nam sapientia huius mundi stultitia est apud Deum. Sed hoc vobis notum sit, quia quam contemnitis habere viventem, gaudebitis habere defunctam; quam et habebitis'."] The nuns, however, continued to refuse Rose's request, perhaps because of her family's low social status, but more likely due to her unsanctioned preaching campaign. Having been denied admittance to the convent, Rose spent the remainder of her life as an anchorite in her family's home where she died in March of 1251. Rose's prediction that the Franciscans would adopt her as one of their own came to pass only a few years after her death when she appeared to Pope Alexander IV, who ordered her incorrupt body moved to the Franciscan convent and began the first canonization proceeding. Abate, *S. Rosa da Viterbo*, 117-136.

[46] The frescoes were destroyed in the middle of the 19th century when the convent was renovated, but the content of the images survives in a series of drawings made by a local Viterban artist, Francesco Sabatini, in 1632, nine of which are now held by the Museo Civico in Viterbo, and a tenth by the British Museum. See Rizzo, 83-86.

These frescoes were exacting illustrations of events described in Rose's second *vita,* which was being written as the frescoes were designed, and which in turn borrowed heavily from the stories and miracles of prominent saints of the Franciscan Order.

Not all attempts to link a new saint with a noteworthy predecessor were successful. Such was the case of Margherita Martelluzzi (d. 1473), a companion of Francesca Romana (1384–1440), who enjoyed her own brief period of fame as a holy woman following Francesca's death.[47] Whereas Francesca, a Benedictine tertiary, was noted for her ecstatic piety and visions, and was recognized as a living saint, Margherita, by contrast, epitomized the restrained piety expected of Roman matrons, and demonstrated her virtue through works of charity.[48] Margarita's piety would likely have gone undocumented had her relationship with Francesca not lent her an aura of sanctity. During Francesca's canonization process, she testified repeatedly on the life and miracles of her companion, whose family she had known for many years, and with whom she had a close friendship.[49] This relationship in turn gave Margarita the necessary spiritual prestige to establish a religious community of her own. Her own pious reputation, however, was not

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[47] The Latin *vita* written by Francesca's confessor, Giovanni Mattiotti, the vernacular account of her visions, and her canonization process have been published. See *Acta Sanctorum,* March, vol. 2, (Antwerp, 1668): 93-178; Alessandra Bartolomei Romagnoli, *Santa Francesca Romana: Edizione critica dei trattati latini di Giovanni Mattiotti,* (Vatican City, 1995); Maria Pelaez, "Visioni di S. Francesca Romana: Testo romanesco del sec. XV," *Archivio della Società romana di storia patria* 14 (1891): 365-409; Placido T. Lugano, ed., *I processi per Francesca Bussa dei Ponziani (Santa Francesca Romana), 1440-1453,* (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1943).

[48] Anna Esposito, "St. Francesca and the Female Religious Communities of Fifteenth-Century Rome," in *Women and Religion in Medieval and Renaissance Italy,* ed. Daniel Bornstein and Roberto Rusconi, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996): 207-209. See also Arnold Esch, "Tre santé ed il loro ambiente sociale a Roma: S. Francesca Romana, S. Brigida di Svezia, e S. Caterina da Siena," in *Atti del Simposio internazionale cateriniano-bernardiniano, Siena 17-20 aprile 1980,* ed. Domenico Maffei and Paolo Nardi (Siena, 1982): 89-120, and Joyce Pennings, "Semi-Religious Women in Fifteenth-Century Rome," *Mededelingen van het Nederlands Historisch Instituut te Rome* 47 (1987): 115-145.

[49] "Quia ipsam matrem b. Francisce cognovit et pro tali reputata fuit. Nam ipse testis eciam annis XXX ante obitum b. Francisce ipsam b. Franciscam cognovit et secum conversationem habuit specialem." Lugano, *I processi*, 222.

enough to spark the formation of a cult, and she and her community faded from memory after her death.

Infectious sanctity could also be dangerous. Sometime in the early eleventh century, a nobleman named Hugh sent his henchmen to steal wine from some of the monks who tended to the cult of St. Foy at Conques in southeastern France. Despite the pleas of peasants in the area who implored them to stop, the henchmen continued on their task, "unaware that those who offend the servants of the saints show that they have insulted the saints themselves. They do injury not only to the saints but even to Christ the Lord, Who feels the pains in the body of another."[50] Thus, when the first of these men tried to kick down the door of the storeroom, St. Foy intervened on the monks' behalf and cursed the man, causing him to become paralyzed. "His mouth was stretched back to his ears and gaped obscenely, and the filth that streamed foully from his entrails manifestly revealed how harshly and distressingly he had been afflicted."[51]

The contagious quality of sanctity could also be dangerous to the cult of the would-be saint. In 1260, a woman named Guglielma arrived in Milan and adopted the life of a religious tertiary. She soon earned a reputation as a holy woman and by the time she died in August 1281 had attracted a circle of devotees.[52] She was buried in the local Cistercian abbey, and the monks began to try to have her canonized. Little did they know that her sanctity had "infected" a group of mostly upper-class lay people with a penchant for heresy. Led by a layman named Andrea Saramita, and a nun of the Umiliate order, Sister Maifreda da Pirovano, the group came to believe that Guglielma was the incarnation of the Holy Spirit who had come to reform the

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[50] Pamela Sheingorn, ed. and trans., *Liber Miraculorum Sancte Fidis,* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 60-61.

[51] Ibid., 61.

[52] Barbara J. Newman, "The Heretic Saint: Guglielma of Bohemia, Milan, and Brunate," *Church History* 74, no. 1, (March, 2005): 4.

corruption of the Church.[53] Two decades after Guglielma's death, her followers were brought before the Dominican inquisitors in Milan. At least three, including Maifreda and Andrea, were executed. Guglielma as posthumously condemned as a heretic, and her body was exhumed and burned.[54] Holy contagion had changed Guglielma, once a possible saint, into a heretic of the worst ilk when her holiness spilled beyond the frameworks that contextualized it as sanctity and created new and unintended meanings.

As we have seen, medieval Italians implicitly understood the contagious quality of sanctity. Moreover, they recognized that the context of a saint's cult – both physical and literary – could direct the power of sanctity by shaping its meaning. This was especially apparent at sacred sites, including saint's tombs and the repositories of saintly relics, as outline above. The physical context of a cult was rarely the result of chance. Instead, saints' supporters actively designed the context of cults in order to shape their meaning. Medieval people recognized the potentially disruptive power of sanctity, and therefore attempted to structure the inherently chaotic experience of holiness by framing saints with art and architecture that created a context in which certain characteristics of the saint were highlighted or minimized.

II. She Was Framed

The contextualization of Villana's sanctity began immediately after her death in January 1361. Villana had insisted on being buried in the habit of the Dominican tertiaries on her deathbed, even though she had not taken vows. Such a request was not unusual, and pious people who were not necessarily known for holiness in life frequently asked to be buried in the habit of

[53] Newman, 4.
[54] Ibid., 4-5.

their preferred order.[55] St. Bridget of Sweden's husband, Ulf, entered the Cistercian monastery at Alvastra as a layman late in life and was buried in the garb of the order in recognition of his piety.[56] Some people, however, thought that assuming the habit – even at the last possible moment – offered a better chance at heavenly salvation. These *ad succurrendum* conversions, like deathbed baptism in the early church, were thought to erase earlier sins and give the dying person all the spiritual benefits of dying as a monk or tertiary.[57] As we have seen, Maria Sturion took the habit of the Dominican tertiaries shortly before her death in 1399.[58] In spite of Villana's insistence on being buried in the habit of the Dominican tertiaries, therefore, her association with the order was not a foregone conclusion in the early years of her cult. In the decade after Villana's death, the friars did their best to shore up the association between Villana and the Dominican Order and to show that she was not merely a rich matron with a whim.

Dead and (Not Quite) Buried

Villana also requested to be buried in Santa Maria Novella, the Dominican's principal church in Florence.[59] The Dominican community at Santa Maria Novella was established in

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[55] Duane J. Osheim, "Conversion, Conversi, and the Christian Life in Late Medieval Tuscany," *Speculum* 58, no. 2 (April, 1983): 368-390.

[56] Birger Gregersson and Thomas Gascoigne, *The Life of Saint Birgitta,* ed. and trans. Julia Bolton Holloway, (Toronto: Peregrina Publishing, 1991).

[57] Giles Constable, *The Reformation of the Twelfth Century,* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998): 82-83; Katherine Allen Smith, *War and the Making of Medieval Monastic Culture,* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2011): 61-63.

[58] Thomas of Siena, "Leggenda di Maria da Venezia," in Fernanda Sorelli, *La Santità Imitabile: "Leggenda di Maria da Venezia" di Tommaso da Siena,* (Venice: Deputazione Editrice, 1984): 161.

[59] The Dominican community was initially based at the church of Santa Maria delle Vigne under the leadership of the first prior, Giovanni da Salerno. The earliest mention of this church is from 983 which notes that its named derived from its location among the vineyards outside the Florentine city walls. Santa Maria delle Vigne was not the friars' first choice; they first tried to gain control of San Pancrazio and San Paolo (i.e. San Paolino), both located on the west side of the city, but were rejected by the secular clergy at both churches. Walter and Elizabeth Paatz, *Die Kirchen von Florenz: Ein kunstgeschichtliches Handbuch,* vol. III, (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Kostermann, 1955), 664; Giuseppe Richa, *Notizie istoriche delle chiese fiorentine,* vol. 3, book 1, (Florence: Pietro

Florence in 1221, and over the course of the thirteenth century had become a major center of Dominican education in Italy.[60] Santa Maria Novella was not only one of the largest Dominican chapters in Europe, but a hub of Dominican education and theology.[61] By 1305, it had been named a *studium generale*, a regional school offering advanced theological and philosophical study, serving all of central Italy.[62] The convent also boasted an extensive library, which necessitated the construction of a separate building in 1338.[63] Alongside its role as a *studium generale* for the Roman Province of the Dominican Order, Santa Maria Novella also began to draw devotion and donations from Florence's wealthy merchant families almost as soon as it was founded. The patronage of these families made Santa Maria Novella one of the richest Dominican houses in Europe by the turn of the fourteenth century.[64] The convent's membership also included the sons of some of Florence's most prominent families.[65] Furthermore, Santa Maria Novella became a hub for groups of religious women. A number of Dominican tertiaries,

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Gaetano Viviani, 1755): 1-80; Timothy Verdon, *Alla riscoperta delle chiese di Firenze, vol. 2: Santa Maria Novella,* (Florence: Centro Di, 2003).

[60] The church was originally located outside the city walls until it was enclosed in the 1284 expansion of the walls. In 1246, construction began to enlarge the original church. This was followed in 1279 with major additions, including the nave and transept, which comprise most of the present structure. Paatz, 664-667; Richa, 32-59.

[61] Daniel R. Lesnick, *Preaching in Medieval Florence: The Social World of Franciscan and Dominican Spirituality,* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989), 64. By 1300, there were ninety-six friars in residence at Santa Maria Novella. By comparison, contemporary Dominican houses in England and Germany averaged thirty-seven friars.

[62] In 1281 the convent's *schola,* or school providing basic education to friars as well as secular clergy and laymen, was upgraded to a *schola particularis theologiae,* a provincial school of theology. Marian Michèle Mulchahey, *"First the Bow is Bent in Study": Dominican Education Before 1350,* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1998), 132, 386-387; Rita George Tvrtković, "The Ambivalence of Interreligious Experience: Riccoldo da Monte Croce's Theology of Islam," (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 2007), 32-34.

[63] Tvrtković, "The Ambivalence of Interreligious Experience," 34.

[64] Ibid., 64-65.

[65] Lesnick argues that the Dominicans in Florence tended to attract a large percentage of their membership from among the *popolo grasso,* while the Franciscans, across town at Santa Croce, attracted recent immigrants and members of the *popolo.* The Dominicans, therefore, were "an urban order, a Florentine patrician order, a markedly popolo grasso order" (p. 65). This striking contrast in membership between the two mendicant orders in Florence in turn, he argues, resulted in distinctly different styles of preaching as the friars at each monastery tailored their preaching to fit their audiences.

often called *pinzochere* or *vestite,* were already associated with the monastery by the middle of the thirteenth century.[66] Many of these women made donations to the convent in their own wills, and were the mothers and sisters of many of the friars.[67]

Villana's desire to be buried at Santa Maria Novella was a tacit claim to her own understanding of herself as a living saint. Prior to Villana's burial, neither her own family, the Delle Botti, or her husband's family, the Benintendi Rossi, had any formal connection to Santa Maria Novella. Both families, in fact, were patrons of the Franciscans across town at Santa Croce, and had familial tombs there, as Chapter 4 will show. Villana also rejected her parish church, Santa Felicità in Piazza in the Ferza gonfalon of the Oltrarno (after 1343, Santo Spirito) where both the Delle Botti and the Benintendi Rossi families lived.[68] Villana, therefore, broke with family tradition by insisting on a burial site with the Dominicans at Santa Maria Novella. This decision not only asserted her affinity for the Dominicans, but implicitly affirmed her understanding of herself as a saint by rejecting her temporal family in favor of the spiritual community of the friars.

It soon became apparent that a tomb would not be immediately necessary as Villana's body began to emit a sweet odor: a sure sign of sanctity. The friars at Santa Maria Novella laid Villana's body in the chapel dedicated to Catherine of Alexandria, now called the Rucellai Chapel, where it would remain incorrupt for thirty-seven days. Villana's devotees and Florentines hoping for miraculous cures came to view and touch the corpse. Many people took

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[66] In 1257, Lottaringo del fu Orlandino di Monte Aguto left 40 soldi in his will to the Dominican tertiaries: "Item dominabus de penitentia platee S. Marie Novelle, scilicet domine Clare, Albane et eius sotiis solidos 40." Quoted in Orlandi, *La Beata Villana*, 23n1.

[67] Ibid.,18-23.

[68] Anthony Mohlo, *Marriage Alliance in Late Medieval Florence,* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994): 365-410.

home macabre souvenirs, stealing pieces of Villana's body and clothing, which miraculously remained intact.[69]

In the 1360s a massive *ponte,* or screen, would have separated the first four bays of the church from the northern portion, which included the high altar, choir, transept, and Rucellai Chapel (fig. 1).[70] This space was ostensibly reserved for the friars, and allowed them to access the choir from the cloister while maintaining *clausura.*[71] The southern portion included the majority of the nave, from the entrance to the church on the south wall to the middle of the fourth bay, and comprised the liturgical space of the laity. Two steps led up from this space to the *ponte,* which stretched between the eastern and western walls of the nave, extended over eight meters (26.5 feet) deep, and rose high enough to support a second level balcony above the choir.[72] The size of the *ponte* was such that the space behind the structure would have been almost completely obscured to the laity, and the physical and visual separation of the church created by the *ponte* would have been reinforced through ritual and the liturgy.[73] The distinct

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[69] "Fuerunt autem qui ob firmissimam eius sanctitatis opinionem partim vestes partim membra ipsa abscinderent. Que sane membra tanta est sanctitatis eius virtus etiam hoc tempore intacta atque inviolate existunt." BCNF Conv. sopp. II.IV.167, 77v.

[70] This huge structure remained in place until Giorgio Vasari's renovation of Santa Maria Novella, which began in 1565. Marcia B. Hall, "The Ponte in S. Maria Novella: The Problem of the Rood Screen in Italy," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 37 (1974): 157-173. The church is not oriented towards the liturgical east because the original church on the site, Santa Maria delle Vigne, which the friars took over in 1221, was incorporated into the current structure in the second half of the thirteenth century and now forms the transept. Walter and Elizabeth Paatz, *Die Kirchen von Florenz: Ein kunstgeschichtliches Handbuch,* vol. III, (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Kostermann, 1955), 664; Giuseppe Richa, *Notizie istoriche delle chiese fiorentine,* vol. 3, book 1, (Florence: Pietro Gaetano Viviani, 1755): 1-80; Timothy Verdon, *Alla riscoperta delle chiese di Firenze, vol. 2: Santa Maria Novella,* (Florence: Centro Di, 2003).

[71] That *clausura* was still important for the mendicant friars of Santa Maria Novella is attested by the provision in Vasari's renovation of the church that a passageway be constructed from the cloister to the choir after the removal of the *ponte* in the 1556 reconstruction. See Hall, "The Italian Rood Screen: Some Implications for Liturgy and Function," in *Essays Presented to Myron P. Gilmore,* ed. Sergio Bertelli and Gloria Ramakus, (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1978): 213-218; Ibid., "The Tramezzo in Santa Croce, Florence, Reconstructed," *Art Bulletin* 56, no. 3 (Sept. 1974): 325-341.

[72] Hall, "The Ponte in S. Maria Novella," 159.

[73] For the liturgical uses of the *ponte,* see ASMN I.A.29, Vincenzo Borghigiani, *Cronaca Annalistica del Convento di S. Maria Novella.*

liturgical use of the two spaces to the north and south of the *ponte* would have impressed upon contemporary Florentines the functional and ritual separation of most of the nave from the friars' choir behind, including the transept, high altar, and the Rucellai Chapel. Even if, as anecdotal evidence suggests, laypeople were sometimes allowed access to the friars' section of the church, typically only men were permitted to access the aisles and transept around the choir (i.e. the east side of the church), while women were restricted to the space to the west of the screen only.[74]

The placement of Villana's body in the chapel of Catherine of Alexandria was intentional. Located to the right of the high altar on the east arm of the transept, the proximity of the chapel to the high altar accorded the space significant prestige. The position of the *ponte,* however, would normally have obscured the Rucellai Chapel from view. Even if the division of the church between lay and monastic worshippers was somewhat permeable, the north and south ends of the church were visually and functionally distinct. The use of the Rucellai Chapel to house Villana's body, therefore, would have necessitated a temporary relaxation of the prescriptions regarding access to the space behind the *ponte,* which in turn would have reinforced the exceptionality of Villana and her body. When Villana's devotees came to Santa Maria Novella to view – and touch – the holy woman's body, they would have passed under the *ponte* and into the friars' liturgical space. The sources, however, indicate that both men and women came to view Villana's body, and thus the traditional separation of men and women in the choir was suspended. Displaying Villana's body in a liturgically masculine space downplayed her sexuality, in effect neutralizing her femininity. Placing a woman's body in a

[74] Hall, "The Ponte in S. Maria Novella"; Ena Giurescu Heller, "Access to Salvation: The Place (and Space) of Women Patrons in Fourteenth-century Florence," in *Women's Space: Patronage, Place, and Gender in the Medieval Church,* ed. Virginia Chieffo Raguin and Sarah Stanbury, (Binghamton, NY: SUNY Press, 2006): 161-184; Catherine King, "Women as Patrons: Nuns, Widows, and Rulers," in *Siena, Florence, and Padua: Art, Society, and Religion, 1280-1400,* ed. Diana Norman, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), vol. 2, 243-266.

male, clerical space was a tacit assertion by the friars that Villana's sanctity was venerable enough to justify breaching the ritual gender division of the church. In effect, this equated Villana with one of the friars whose access to the space behind the *ponte* was predicated on their masculinity and clerical chastity. As a married woman with a child – obvious proof that she was not a virgin – Villana was neither male nor chaste. In death, however, the friars began to erase her identity as a wife and mother through this symbolic placement, transforming her into a quasi-virginal saint whose sanctity transcended gender norms.

An impressive fresco cycle adorns the Rucellai Chapel, and was completed around 1356, about twenty years after the chapel was constructed.[75] The frescoes on two of the three walls remain intact (figs. 3-6); on the third wall on the north side of the chapel, only the architectonic frescoed frames that would have enclosed the frescoes within remain. The surviving frescoes on the east wall of the chapel depict the crucifixion in the center, flanked by St. Dominic on the left, and Thomas Aquinas on the right (fig.4). The southern wall has two frescoes: The Martyrdom of St. Ursula, and the Massacre of the Innocents on the left and right, respectively, of the remains of a bifurcated window (fig. 6). The images on the north wall have been lost, and were replaced in the sixteenth century with a substantial oil painting depicting the Martyrdom of Catherine of Alexandria, probably copying the subject if not the form of the original fresco (fig. 5).

The content of the images in the Rucellai Chapel, therefore, were both iconographically feminine and Dominican. The Massacre of the Innocents, and the Martyrdoms of Sts. Ursula and Catherine were frequently the topics of sermons preached to women, to whom the subjects

[75] The chapel was originally commissioned by a Florentine noblewoman, Guardina, the daughter of Guardi di Rustichino, and the widow of Cardinale dei Tornaquinci, in her 1325 will. ASF Conv. sopp. 102.105, 12r-15r. Her family was unable to retain rights to the chapel, and ownership passed to the Rucellai family. The fresco cycle was commissioned by Bencivenni di Nardo di Giunta dei Rucellai, of the San Pancrazio neighborhood, and was completed between 1355 and 1356. ASMN I.A.3, *Liber recordationum novus,* 31v.

seemed to have a particular appeal.[76] In the depiction of the Massacre of the Innocents, mothers found a reflection of their own maternal sorrows. The martyrdoms of the early Christian virgin saints were also popular topics for images and sermons, and highlighted the fortitude of feminine faith. If the now-lost fresco on the chapel's north wall did depict the Martyrdom of St. Catherine of Alexandria – probable given that the chapel was dedicated to her – Villana's body would have been flanked by images of two of the most prominent and popular virginal female saints.

Villana's temporary burial in the Rucellai Chapel, therefore, linked her with the chapel's dedicatee, St. Catherine of Alexandria, and contextualized her as a saint. Like St. Margaret, Villana's new namesake in the vision reported by the hermit women on the Ponte alle Grazie, St. Catherine was a celebrated early Christian virgin-martyr. The physical proximity of Villana's body to a space dedicated to St. Catherine would have visually reinforced the association between the two women. Villana's body was literally framed by the walls of the chapel and created a visual link between the established holiness of St. Catherine and Villana's still inchoate sanctity. All saints, no matter how popular or obscure, derived their holiness from their relationship with Christ, and therefore were linked to one another by virtue of this shared relationship. Christ was the root of the Church, and therefore of all the saints. New holy people like Villana could be incorporated into this ahistorical lineage of sanctity. Physical settings like the Rucellai Chapel made such a lineage concrete by representing visually what was otherwise an intangible theological concept. The friars at Santa Maria Novella made use of this saintly

[76] Clarissa W. Atkinson, *The Oldest Vocation: Christian Motherhood in the Middle Ages,* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 156-167; Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, *Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy,* trans. Lydia Cochrane, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); Roberto Rusconi, "Women's Sermons at the End of the Middle Ages: Texts from the Blessed and Images of the Saints," in *Women Preachers and Prophets through Two Millennia of Christianity,* ed. Beverly Mayne Kienzle and Pamela J. Walker, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 173-195.

lineage and the chapel's pictorial program in order to assert Villana's holiness, not by commissioning a new fresco within the chapel, but by placing her corpse among a cycle of frescoes that depicted other saints, thereby creating a snapshot of the lineage of sanctity into which Villana now fit.

Recasting Villana as a virgin saint had the further benefit of downplaying her untraditional saintly background as a wife and mother and reinforcing more traditional tropes of women saints, an intentional consequence of the framing of Villana that I discuss below. The trio of women saints – Villana, Catherine, and Ursula – would have created a context in which Villana became a virgin by association. The many valences of her life – a wife, mother, sinner, convert, Dominican, tertiary, Florentine – all offered potential meanings for her sanctity. But the context of the chapel, with its iconography that privileged female chastity, emphasized Villana's conversion and subsequent spiritual marriage and thereby signified her redeemed virginity.

The frescoes on the east wall depicting Thomas Aquinas and St. Dominic complemented this visual framing of Villana as a female saint of the likes of Catherine and Ursula. These depictions of the Dominican Order's two most important members would have stood behind Villana's body as her devotees entered the chapel, flanking her like attendants. Villana's body would have been framed by these two figures whose black and white habits matched her own, and created a second triad of linked figures, this time associating Villana with the Dominican Order. These two triads of figures complemented one another in framing Villana's sanctity. Both asserted her holiness by visually linking her with other, established saints. The linkage with the early Christian virgin martyrs raised Villana's reputation above other Florentine women, while the assertion of Villana's association with the Dominicans asserted not only the friars' claims to

Villana's body and her cult, but also garnered for Villana the status and authority of one of the most powerful religious communities in the city of Florence.

A fresco of the Crucifixion, as well as a small sculpture of the Madonna and Child by Nino di Andrea Pisano, finished around 1350, completed the chapel's pictorial program and the framing of Villana's body. Villana had been noted for her intense devotion to the crucified Christ, who reportedly appeared to her – an incident I will return to below. That there was already a fresco of the crucifixion in the Rucellai Chapel at the time of Villana's death was a fortuitous accident. The placement of her body before this fresco, however, like the choice of the Chapel of Catherine of Alexandria as the space in which to display her body, was intended to frame Villana as a saint within a lineage of established holy people. A devotee entering the chapel to view Villana's body would have been confronted by a visual trinity of figures: Christ's body on the cross, below, the sculpture of the Virgin and child, and in front of them, Villana's body laid out before the altar. Here was a polemical display of the ultimate lineage of sanctity, with Christ and the Virgin, depicted as a mother holding her child, standing over the body of a fledgling saint. Furthermore, the ensemble also drew a connection between Villana's motherhood and that of the Virgin, implying that Villana had been purified through her devotion.

That these frescoes were already in place in the chapel at least two decades before Villana's death hardly diminishes their contextualizing effect. Any one of a number of chapels could have been chosen for the temporary display of Villana's body after her death; that the friars opted to use the Rucellai Chapel and its iconographical program is meaningful in itself. The iconographic program created a context that emphasized Villana's conversion, spiritual marriage, charity, and affiliation with the Dominicans.

A Tomb of One's Own

Emphasizing one signification over others could, however, have unintended consequences. Although many of her companions reported that Villana appeared to them in visions, her cult failed to catch on in the days and months after her death and never produced an abundance of miracles. After lying in repose for sixty days, Villana's body was removed from the Rucellai Chapel and interred in a nondescript tomb on the west side of the church, in the fourth bay, just before the steps that led up to the *ponte* (fig. 1).[77] The most visible sign of Villana's association with the order – the habit of the Dominican tertiaries – was now hidden from sight, and the frescoes of the Rucellai Chapel no longer framed Villana's body. That the friars did not immediately commission an elaborate monument to mark Villana's grave suggests that their enthusiasm for their newest saint had waned, probably because her relics failed to produce a steady supply of miracles and the cash that followed. The disillusionment with Villana's cult was directly linked to the very contextualization of her sanctity according to standard tropes that the friars sought by displaying Villana's remains in the Catherine of Alexandria chapel. The homogenization of Villana's claims to sanctity were so effective that she lost the characteristics that had made her holiness unique and appealing in the first place.

Adjacent to Villana's new tomb, however, rested the body of another local Dominican holy woman. There has been some confusion about the identity of this other holy woman because of the eighteenth-century description of the tomb by Brocchi. He wrote that the tomb held the bodies of two different holy women, both named Giovanna, because two skeletons had

[77] Anne Schulz, in her description of this tomb, states that Villana was buried in the pavement. I have not found any evidence that this was the case, either in my own research or in the sources she cites. Anne Markham Schulz, *The Sculpture of Bernardino Rossellino and his Workshop,* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), 108-109.

been found when the tomb was opened during the Vasari renovations in the late sixteenth century.[78] According to Brocchi, the first Giovanna at Santa Maria Novella had come to Florence from Orvieto under the guidance of the Dominican Remigio de' Girolami (1235–1319), and had died in 1333.[79] She was noted for her asceticism and piety, and worked miracles both while living and after her death.[80] In Brocchi's time, her relics were venerated publicly in Santa Maria Novella.[81] I have been unable to find any other sources for Brocchi's Giovanna from Orvieto, nor any evidence indicating that there were two distinct cults prior to the sixteenth century, and I suspect that this earlier figure may have been invented in the late sixteenth century to explain why two skeletons were found in the tomb. The second of Brocchi's Giovannas left stronger documentary evidence, and I believe that this woman alone was the object of a public cult in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. She is listed in the monastery's *Libro dei Morti* on November 11, 1357: "Domina Johanna vestita nostra de populo nostro. MCCCLVII – Beata."[82] This *beata* is also mentioned in a brief biography on fol. 2r of the *Necrology* of Santa Maria Novella:

> Blessed Giovanna of Florence, a virgin who took the habit of the Dominican tertiaries, is buried in the church of Santa Maria Novella….The *beata* began to work miracles in 1333 when there was a great flood [in Florence]. At that time, she lived on Via Valfonda,

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[78] Giuseppe Maria Brocchi, *Vite de' Santi e Beati fiorentini,* 3 vols., (Florence: Gaetano Albizzini, 1742), I: 559.

[79] This Giovanna was different from the Giovanna/Vanna of Orvieto who died in 1306. For Giovanna of Orvieto, see the translation of her Legend in *Dominican Penitent Women,* ed. Maiju Lehmijoki-Gardner, 59-86. These Giovannas should also not be confused with another Trecento Florentine *beata,* Giovanna Soderini (1301–1367), who was a Servite nun.

[80] "Continue mortificazioni, continue astinenze, e continue lagrime erano il più gradito cibo, e la più dolce bevanda della Beata Giovanna, la quale sempre assidua nell'orazione assisteva continuamente con grandissima divozione a' Divini Ufizi, Messe, e altre sacre funzioni, che si facevano nella detta Chiesa di S. Maria Novella: laonde meritò dal Signore, in ricompensa del suo fedele servizio, d'essere spesso ricreata con celestiali consolazioni, facendo inoltre indubitata fede della sua santità moltissime grazie, e miracoli, tanto in vita, che in morte da Dio operati per intercession della medesima." Brocchi, *Vite de' Santi e Beati fiorentini,* 3 vols., (Florence: Gaetano Albizzini, 1761), II: : 31-32.

[81] Brocchi, (1761), II: 32.

[82] Carlo Celso Calzolai, ed., "Il libro dei morti di Santa Maria Novella (1290-1436)," *Memorie Domenicane* 97 (1980): 172-173. 15-218.

> which had been completely inundated by water. But the *beata* prayed humbly to be preserved from danger, and indeed not even one drop of water entered her home. [83]

According to the fourteenth-century Florentine poet Franco Sacchetti, the Dominicans depicted Giovanna of Florence holding a jar of oil, "saying that even when she gave away some of the oil as an offering to God, the amount of oil in the jar always seemed to increase."[84] "Perhaps," he adds snarkily, "because it was July and the heat made the oil expand."[85] Brocchi suggests that this Giovanna was born in Florence, and may have been a contemporary of Villana.[86] She, along with other pious women, frequented Santa Maria Novella, and received spiritual direction from the friars there. After "having come to know a great fervor in her spirit," she took the habit of the Dominican tertiaries and "was one of the most observant and saintly women who flourished in that Order at that time."[87] Her relics, according to Brocchi, were the object of a public cult "*ab immemorabili*," and her reputation was such that she was depicted in an early Quattrocento altarpiece commissioned by Thomas Caffarini of Siena for the church of Corpus Domini, which, as we saw in the previous chapter, was the "home base" of the Dominican tertiaries in Venice, including Maria Sturion.[88] This altarpiece was painted by the Sienese artist Andrea di Bartolo (c.

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[83] "Beata Joanna de Florentia virgo ordinis predicatorum tertii habiti sepulta est in ecclesia S. M. Novelle….Ipsa cepit corruscare miraculis anno Domini 1333 quando fuit inundation aquarum tunc habitabat in via que dicitur Gualfonda: que tota fuit sub aquis ipsa autem beata oratione humili impretravit a domino jesu christo evasionem a periculo ita quod nec una aque gutta in domum suam intravit." Orlandi, *Necrologio di S. Maria Novella,* 2 vols., (Florence: Olschki, 1955), I: xl. Via Valfonda, or Via Gualfonda, ran north from the northeast corner of the church of Santa Maria Novella to the city walls (where the Fortezza de Basso was built in the sixteenth century).

[84] "Predicatori hanno Beata Giovanna con l'orcio dell'olio dipinta, dicendo, che quando dava dell'olio per Dio, sempre parea che crescesse nell'orcio." Franco Sacchetti, "Letter to Jacomo di Conte," in *Opere di Franco Sacchetti,* vol. 1, ed. Ottavio Gigli, (Florence: Felice Le Monnier, 1857): 217. Franco's brother, Giannozzo, was a follower of Catherine of Siena.

[85] "Forse di luglio quando per lo caldo ribolliva." Sacchetti, 217.

[86] Brocchi, (1761), II: 95-96. Giovanna's entry immediately follows Brocchi's entry for Villana.

[87] "…dopo aver conosciuto il gran fervore del suo spirit, ammessa nel numero delle Donne dette dell'Ordine della Penitenza, o vogliam dire Terzerie Domenicane, e fu una delle piu osservanti, e santé femmine, che in quel tempo fiorirono in quell'Ordine." Ibid., 96.

[88] Ibid.

1385–1428) and depicts Catherine of Siena alongside other four other female luminaries of the Dominican Order: Giovanna of Florence, Giovanna of Orvieto, Margherita da Città di Castello, and Daniela da Orvieto (fig. 19).[89]

The tomb of Giovanna of Florence was situated in the fourth bay of the nave near the middle of the church. Placed high on the wall and sculpted from marble in bas-relief, it depicted the *beata* in repose. Giovanna's devotees adorned the sides of the tomb with votive images made of painted wax.[90] Adjacent to this was the tomb of Giovanni da Salerno, the founder of Santa Maria Novella and the Dominican Order in Florence, who was already revered as a *beato* by the Dominican community within a decade of his death in 1242.[91] The removal of Villana's body to this new location thus put her very near two other Dominican saints and created a new context that underscored Villana's link with the friars. No longer an extraordinary figure in her own right, Villana was now one of many local Dominican holy people. Clustered within the church's fourth bay, just before the steps to the *ponte*, the three tombs were framed by the fourth and fifth piers and the arched vault above. These architectural elements visually separated the tombs of these local *beati* from the other images and spaces within the church, creating a clear visual link between Villana, Giovanna of Florence, and Giovanni da Salerno.[92] The spatial relationships

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[89] See Conclusion.

[90] "Sepulcrum eius erat depictum in pariete sinistro sub 4 testudine circa medium ecclesie prope altare quod hedificatum est sumtibus andree paschalis. Et ipsa erat effigiata super sepulcrum velut mortua. Et hinc et inde erant dipicte immagines ceree votorum." Orlandi, *Necrologio,* vol. 1, XL. See also Borghigiani's description: "Deposito della beata Giovanna fiorentina, terziaria nostra, con suo simulagro [sic] giacente a basso rilievo di marmo, alto alquanto da terra, con voti attorno. Stava sceso gli scalini poco più là." Archivio di Santa Maria Novella I.A.30. *Cronaca Annalistica del Convento di S. Maria Novella,* vol. iii, 358-365.

[91] Orlandi, *Il B. Giovanni da Salerno domenicano: Fondatore del convento di S. Maria Novella,* (Florence: Il Rosario, 1943); Emilio Panella, "Fra Giovanni da Salerno 'fondatore di SMN', o le origini domenicane in Firenze," Convento domenicano Santa Maria Novella in Firenze, http://smn.it/comnita.htm, (accessed March 24, 2014). Giovanni was officially beatified in 1753. The fate of his tomb in the fifteenth century is closely linked to Villana's.

[92] On the increasingly representative style of tombs in the second half of the fourteenth century, see Samuel K. Cohn, Jr., *The Cult of Remembrance and the Black Death,* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

between the tombs emphasized the heritage of the Dominican Order. By itself, Villana's tomb would simply have marked the burial place of a local holy woman. In conversation with the two other tombs, however, Villana became part of an assembly of Dominican saints. The intentional positioning of her tomb in this space was intended to assert not her wealth, which could have bought her a tomb within the church regardless of any saintly reputation, but her sanctity.

The Dominican sponsorship of Villana's new resting place was attested to by two other architectural structures. The first was a door offering a secondary entrance to the monastery's cloister. It pierced the center of this wall, with the implication that the friars would have passed by the tombs of these local holy people whenever they left the church via this door. Furthermore, sometime in the early 1400s an altar dedicated to Catherine of Siena was constructed in the space between the right side of the door and the tombs of the *beati*.[93] Catherine, the Dominican Order's newest and arguably most prominent female saint, held a special place for the Florentine Dominicans despite her Sienese origins. In 1377 she had intervened between the Florentines and Pope Gregory XI after the outbreak of the War of the Eight Saints, which had occurred two years earlier. In a move motivated both by finances and polemics, in 1376 the Florentine government had ordered the liquidation of local clerical properties.[94] The Dominicans at Santa Maria Novella along with the city's other mendicant orders were especially affected because they derived much of their wealth from their property holdings. Catherine, therefore, was seen as a heroine by the Florentine Dominicans for her role in negotiating a truce between the city and the papacy.[95]

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[93] ASMN I.A.30, Borghigiani, *Cronaca*. The altar was later moved to the fifth bay, just behind the *ponte*.

[94] David S. Peterson, "The War of the Eight Saints in Florentine Memory and Oblivion," in *Society and Individual in Renaissance Florence,* ed. William J. Connell, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002): 172-214.

[95] F. Thomas Luongo, *The Saintly Politics of Catherine of Siena,* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006).

The friars' recontextualization of Villana as a distinctly Dominican saint had incalculable effects. When Villana's body was moved to the west wall of the church, the friars also relocated a painted wooden cross with a life-size figure of Christ, probably made by an English artist in the early 1300s, from a chapel on the east wall of the nave to the west wall above Villana's tomb (fig. 7).[96] This crucifix had not been placed in the Chapel of St. Catherine with Villana's body, and was moved because of construction work on the eastern side of the church that necessitated the relocation of a number of objects to other places in the church.[97] At this point, the crucifix does not seem to have been associated with Villana's cult, nor was it especially noteworthy. By the time Villana's relics were moved to a new tomb in the mid-1400s, however, the cross had begun to perform miracles, and was reputed to have come to life and spoken to Villana in a vision.[98] Although her *vita* mentions a vision of Christ crucified, it does not specify that it occurred at Santa Maria Novella, nor even in front of a crucifix. Surprisingly, even though the cross would eventually be linked with Villana's cult, none of the cross's miracles were clearly associated with Villana. Instead, the saintly charisma that inhered in the holy people buried in the church's fourth bay created an environment in which the sacred became indiscriminate, and either the collective sanctity or the sanctity of at least one of the holy people rubbed off on the painted crucifix.

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[96] On the history and provenance of this crucifix, see especially Joanna Cannon, *Religious Poverty, Visual Riches: Art in the Dominican Churches of Central Italy in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries,* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013): 169-170.

[97] Orlandi, *Santa Maria Novella e i suoi chiostri monumentali. Guida storico artistica,* (Florence: Il Rosario, 1956). The crucifix now hangs in the Cappella della Pura, tucked into the corner of the intersection of the nave with the transept on the northeast side of Santa Maria Novella.

[98] Ibid.

Spanish Chapel

Images commissioned by the friars reinforced Villana's Dominican identity. The earliest depiction of Villana, which became the model for all future portraits, is found in the so-called *Allegory of the Church Militant and Church Triumphant,* or the *Via Veritatis* (fig. 9). This fresco was commissioned by the friars around 1367 from Andrea da Firenze as part of the pictorial program for the chapterhouse of Santa Maria Novella, now known as the Spanish Chapel.[99] The chapterhouse was constructed between 1355 and 1365 with funds provided to the monastery by the Florentine merchant Buonamico di Lapo Guidalotti in his 1355 will.[100] There is evidence that laymen joined the friars in the chapterhouse for meetings about the business of the monastery.[101] The chapterhouse also included a chapel dedicated to Corpus Domini, which was unusual for such a space, and there is evidence that laymen used the chapel alongside the friars.[102] The fresco cycle covers the entirety of the room's four walls and vaulted ceilings (fig. 8), and depicts the *Passion* on the north wall and the *Allegory of the Church Militant and Church Triumphant* on the east wall. On the south wall, with the entrance to the chapterhouse, is the *Life of St. Peter Martyr,* and on the west wall, the *Triumph of St. Thomas Aquinas.* The north vault shows the *Ascension of Christ*, the east vault, above the *Allegory of the Church,* depicts the *Navicella*, while the *Resurrection* is shown on the south wall, and the *Pentecost* on the west wall.

The *Allegory of the Church* fresco is divided horizontally into a tripartite hierarchy, and reads like an encyclopedia of prominent Italian Dominicans within an eschatology of the

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[99] Millard Meiss, *Painting in Florence and Siena After the Black Death,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 97-100.

[100] Joseph Polzer, "Andrea di Bonaiuto's *Via Veritatis* and Dominican Thought in Late Medieval Italy," *Art Bulletin* 77 no. 2 (June 1995): 262.

[101] Julian Gardner, "Andrea di Bonaiuto and the Chapterhouse Frescoes in Santa Maria Novella," *Art History* 11 (1979), 107-114.

[102] Ibid., 109-111; Polzer, 262-264.

Dominican Order. The fresco depicts dozens of figures, including Dominicans, prelates, laypeople, and Jews. The then partially-constructed Florentine cathedral dominates the left half of the fresco. In front of it sit figures of temporal authority: the pope in the center flanked on his left by the emperor, a king, and a knight, and a cardinal, and bishop, on his right, who all look ahead impassively. Meanwhile various Dominicans, identified as the *domini canes* by the white and black spotted dogs who attack the sheep-stealing wolves along the bottom edge of the fresco, minister to the laity. To the right, three other Dominicans confront two groups of unbelievers and heretics, distinguished by their features and gestures: one man with a long, white beard turns his back to the preaching Dominican, while another, dressed in yellow, raises his fist and shouts. Above them in the fresco's middle level, men, women, and children dance, and enjoy music and food, but remain subdued amid these earthly pleasures. To the left, a Dominican hears the confession of a kneeling figure in green, while a second Dominican, nimbed with a halo, gestures toward the gate of Heaven. There, the souls of the faithful, dressed in white and unusually diminutive in stature, are given garlands of flowers by two angels and are ushered into Paradise by St. Peter. Within Heaven stand the Old Testament patriarchs and saints. These figures gaze upward toward Christ, who sits enthroned in the center of the upper third of the fresco, and is and set off by a golden mandorla. Three rows of angels assemble on both sides of Christ's throne, while the Virgin, dressed in white, stands with the angels on the left side of the image. Christ holds the key of the Church in his left hand, a book in his right, and gazes directly ahead, seemingly unaware of the scene around him. At his feet lays the *Agnus Dei,* and the base of the throne is encircled by the symbols of the four evangelists.

Photographs of the fresco artificially distort the scale of the figures in the bottom register of the image, which appear diminutive and undifferentiated when viewed from the perspective of a camera lens positioned in the middle of the room, raised a yard above the eyelevel of the average viewer, and illuminated with consistent lighting (fig. 10). Much like the tiny, subtle details of a manuscript illumination calling the viewer to closely inspect the image before them, so too did the frescoes in the friars' chapterhouse use intricate details to invite their monastic viewers, habituated to these images, to repeatedly look closely at the frescoes.[103] This is especially true of the figures crowded into one of the four groups along the lower frame: in the left corner, clerics, monks, nuns, and prelates, in the center-left, pious laypeople, in the center-right, irreverent laypeople, and in the right corner, Jews. These figures are also distinguished by a variety of facial features and expressions, and diverse clothing. This combination of detail and accessibility invites closer inspection even today, but must have been all the more engaging in the fourteenth century when the chapterhouse and the fresco would have been illuminated by candles after dark. This dimmer, less ambient light would have intensified the focus on the bottom register of the fresco.

In this image swarming with people, a figure traditionally identified as Villana stands in the center of the fresco among the faithful in the habit of a Dominican tertiary, just above the viewer's eyelevel (fig. 11). The identification of this figure as Villana is not without problems. It would be nearly impossible, after all, to identify all of the figures in the image, many of whom were likely intended to represent social ranks rather than individuals.[104] Apart from the

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[103] William Hood, "Eloquence and Contemplation: Frescoes in the Clerics' Dormitory," in *Fra Angelico at San Marco,* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 209-236; Georges Didi-Huberman, *Fra Angelico: Dissemblance and Figuration,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

[104] Gardner, 122-123.

Dominican habit, there is little about the black-garbed woman to positively identify her. Millard Meiss's identification of Villana in his 1979 work on the Spanish Chapel frescoes is based largely on local tradition.[105] Most art historians have been content to agree with this attribution, or overlook it altogether.[106] The identification is further complicated by the persistence of Vasari's attribution of the woman in the green dress to the right of Villana as Petrarch's Laura.[107] This in turn has led some art historians to name the hooded figure to the left of Villana as Dante's Beatrice, and the blonde woman in profile wearing a crown, also to her left, as Boccaccio's Fiammetta.[108] Such identifications tend to ignore the figure in black altogether. And yet the identification of the three young, blonde-haired laywomen as the women loved by the greatest of late medieval Tuscan writers is tenuous at best within the otherwise overtly Dominican theme of the fresco. The fresco has no obvious connections to any of the aforementioned humanist writers, nor does it draw upon themes from their writing. The identification of these literary figures is thus out of place in a fresco so clearly concerned with Dominican themes and the legacy of the Order in Florence.

Instead, this group of three should really be interpreted as a group of five, which includes both the old, hunched woman and the crowned figure to the left of the triad described above, and together represent the possible states of a woman's life: virgin, bride, matron, widow, and religious. The woman with long blonde hair and wearing a crown, who stands second from the

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[105] Meiss, *Painting in Florence and Siena After the Black Death,* 97-100.

[106] Gardner, "Andrea di Bonaiuto," 107-138; R. Offner and K. Steinweg, "The Fourteenth Century: Andrea Bonaiuti," in *A Critical and Historical Corpus of Florentine Painting*, sec. 4, VI, (New York, 1979); Polzer, "Andrea di Bonaiuto's *Via Veritatis*," 262-289.

[107] Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists,* trans. Julia Conway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 39-40. Vasari mistakenly attributed the chapterhouse fresco cycle to the Sienese artist Simone Martini.

[108] Andrea Bonaiuto, *La Chiesa Militante,* Opera per Santa Maria Novella, Florence, Italy, gallery label, June 3, 2013.

left, represents the status of virgin, and her presence among the living rather than in the register above among the heavenly virgins calls special attention to this group. The woman at the far right wears the clothing of a young woman soon to be married: a refined dress – once bright blue dress but now faded to green – and her blonde hair wrapped into a bun and woven with pearls. Matrons are represented by the figure in the middle, who wears a heavy cloak, which now appears brown, and *cappoccio* that extends around her chin and covers her neck, leaving just the front of her wavy reddish hair visible.[109] A bent old woman wearing the dark clothing and white veil of a widow leans on her walking stick at the group's left. Villana, dressed in the habit of a Dominican tertiary, kneels between the young woman and the matron: a nod to her role as a model to women of both statuses. The image also draws a connection between Villana and the virgin, who are both visible only from the shoulders up – perhaps a subtle nod to the mental aspects of virginity so prized by holy mediocrity.

Comparing the Spanish Chapel fresco with other, later portrayals of Villana reinforces the assumption that the figure clad in the Dominican habit is Villana. She appears first in an altarpiece called the *Lamentation Over the Dead Christ*, which was commissioned in 1436 by Villana's nephew from Fra Angelico for the confraternity of Santa Maria del Croce al Tempio (fig. 12), and to which we will return in the next chapter.[110] A golden-rayed halo superimposed with the name "VILLANA" written in red leaves no doubt of Villana's identity in this image (fig. 13). Like the Spanish Chapel fresco, her body is turned slightly towards the viewer so that

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[109] On headcoverings for married women, see Carole Collier Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence: Families, Fortunes, and Fine Clothing*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 157.

[110] The Tempio confraternity's charitable activities included escorting the condemned on their way to be executed and providing spiritual comfort. See Nicholas Terpstra, ed., *The Art of Executing Well: Rituals of Execution in Renaissance Italy*, (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2008); Samuel Y. Edgerton, *Pictures and Punishment: Art and Criminal Prosecution during the Florentine Renaissance* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985); Adriano Prosperi, "Il sangue e l'anima, richerché sulle Compagnia di Giustizia in Italia," *Quaderni storici*, 51 (1982): 960-999.

we can see all of the left side of her face and both eyes. Once again she wears the black habit of the Dominican tertiaries, and just as in the earlier fresco she appears youthful, with no wrinkles to connote age. Likewise, later depictions of Villana show her in partial profile wearing a habit (see Chapter 4). Although arguments based on facial verisimilitude are always fraught with speculation, especially in the case of women, many of the first viewers of this fresco would have been familiar with Villana's appearance both in life and death since she had died only four years before the fresco was commissioned. Further, her incorrupt body was displayed in Santa Maria Novella for sixty days after her death, which would have reinforced her appearance in the memories of the viewers. Given that the *Church Militant* fresco was commissioned and completed so soon after Villana's death, I believe that her iconography – the Dominican habit and depiction in profile – was created in the Spanish Chapel fresco, and that this portrait became the model for all of the later works.

The Spanish Chapel fresco, therefore, contextualizes Villana as distinctly Dominican, and her black garb is juxtaposed against the colorful clothing of the figures that surround her. The picture, however, belies reality; though Villana asked to be buried in the Dominican habit, she never wore it while alive.[111] The lower register of the fresco depicts the Church Militant, or the workings of the church on earth and within time. Villana, however, had been dead over five years when the fresco was painted, and, if the painter was adhering to salvific expectations, should have been included among the figures in the fresco's upper register, depicting the Church Triumphant. The positioning of Villana in the lower register is made all the strange by the gazes of two men standing behind her (fig. 11). On the right, St. Dominic twists his head and shoulder to look behind him and to the left as he directs the black and white dogs symbolizing the

[111] BCNF, Conv. sopp., MS II.IV.167, 77r.

Dominicans towards a group of impertinent laypeople. As he turns, his gaze falls diagonally, coming to rest on the back of Villana's head. This visual connection between the two figures seems appropriate, given not only that Villana reported experiencing visions of St. Dominic on multiple occasions, but also the friars' fledgling attempts to frame Villana as Dominican. Meanwhile, above Villana and slightly to our left, a man with a red beard, dressed in brown and wearing a blue hat, looks downwards directly at Villana, ignoring the three other men who surround him. The man's gaze creates a second diagonal directed toward Villana, further setting her apart from the two other women in the group. Perhaps this man, with his red – *rosso* – beard, is Villana's husband, Rosso di Piero di Stefano Benintendi, who died in 1367, the same year the fresco was completed. Although painters had significant imaginative leeway in such large-scale projects, the decision to include Villana among the living, but in the garb of a Dominican – an ostensibly minor costume change – bears considerable symbolic weight. The friars were willing to make the enormous sacrifice vis-à-vis Villana's sanctity and forego putting her in God's presence in heaven in order to pursue a more pragmatic agenda by gesturing toward her status as a pious matron, and portraying her as living as a Dominican alongside the friars depicted in the fresco's lower register. It is a calculation that seems to have worked since this depiction of Villana became the prototype for all future portraits.

At first glance, the depiction of Villana as such a small figure within a monumental fresco packed with people would seem insignificant. After all, the chapterhouse was the heart of the convent and far removed from the public spaces of the church, and therefore hardly the best location to broadcast Villana's sanctity to a wide audience. The chapterhouse, however, served a dual function. This was where the friars met to discuss matters of governance that affected the

community at Santa Maria Novella, and it would also have been used to host the friars' most prominent – and wealthy – guests, whose status afforded them more intimate access to the church. The iconographic program of the frescoes, therefore, would have had multiple resonances for these different audiences. For the lay viewer who received access to the chapterhouse, the frescoes would have been a visual feast. Villana's prominent and visually accessible position in the fresco would have aided and encouraged viewers to look and remember the identity of the impassive figure dressed in black. Provincial and general chapters of the Dominican Order were also held in Santa Maria Novella's chapterhouse, where the frescoes proclaimed to other Dominicans the saintly legacy of the order, and of the Florentine Dominicans in particular.[112]

For the friars of Santa Maria Novella, whose daily, repeated interaction with the images on the walls of the chapterhouse risked making the frescoes familiar and forgettable, the highly detailed content invited continual reinspection of the images. The chapterhouse was used daily for meetings, during which the friars would have sat lining the walls of the room, while the prior sat on a chair in the middle.[113] This quotidian ritual called upon the friars to reflect on the history of the Order and the chapter of Santa Maria Novella, and offered the frescoes on the walls of the chapterhouse as an aid to memory. Repeated reexamination of the frescoes in turn called to mind the identities of the figures within the painting and reinforced their memory. The placement of Villana in the center of the fresco's lower register enhanced this effect by keeping her at eye level, and thus immediately in view of every person who passed by the image. Villana received a

[112] Gardner, "Andrea di Bonaiuto," 119-121.

[113] Ibid. This arrangement accounts for the lack of foreshortening and perspectival depth in the *Church Militant* and the *Triumph of St. Thomas* on the opposite wall, since the normal viewpoint for these frescoes would have been from the opposite wall.

prominent placement that would have encouraged and aided the Dominican viewer in remembering her identity, in effect creating a mental frame that reinforced her sanctity.

The Spanish Chapel fresco, therefore, succeeded in contextualizing Villana as a distinctly Dominican saint. Depicted among a visual litany of saints in a unified composition, the un-beatified Villana is represented as a full member of the Church Militant, but nonetheless very much a part of the Dominican milieu. In turn, this imagined alternate reality, in which St. Dominic, Thomas Aquinas, and Peter Martyr all coexist, means that Villana is "infected" by the saintliness transferred from these more notable saints. It was through this repeated contextualization of Villana as Dominican that the friars would eventually transform her from a minor holy woman into a prominent local saint with a cult that outlasted the fabric of the church of Santa Maria Novella itself.

Chapter 4

Private Sanctity

> Memory believes before knowing remembers. Believes longer than recollects, longer than knowing even wonders. Knows remembers believes a corridor in a big long garbled cold echoing building…[1]
>
> —William Faulkner, *Light in August*

Here we turn to the memory of Villana's sanctity. At the outset of her cult, her moderate piety was representative of a major trend in late medieval spirituality, and Dominican pastoral writing in particular. The previous chapter explored why the friars at Santa Maria Novella pursued Villana's canonization. This chapter considers the period between roughly 1420 and 1450 and the profusion of artworks around Villana's cult, as well as the related architectural renovations to Villana's tomb and its space in Santa Maria Novella. The chapter uses these physical expressions of devotion to Villana's cult to consider whether it was possible to privatize the cult of a saint, and under what circumstances. Given the inherently unstable and contagious nature of sanctity, as discussed in the previous chapter, sanctity could never be completely controlled, and its charisma could and did leak beyond the boundaries that groups like the friars at Santa Maria Novella, or Villana's grandson, attempted to impose upon it. This chapter explores the rationales behind these implicit attempts to control sanctity as well as the physical evidence they left behind. In particular, it traces the interventions of Villana's family as an example of an attempt to privatize Villana's sanctity as a means for social, political, and legal power. I argue that Villana's grandson drew on his grandmother's sanctity by patronizing his grandmother's cult as a way to rehabilitate his reputation after an earlier scandal. His efforts were successful but had unintended consequences for the meaning of Villana's sanctity in the

[1] William Faulkner, *Light in August*, (New York: Random House, 2012), 110.

century after her grandson's death.

I. Private Sanctity

Medieval saints could be both public and private figures. Cults like Villana's were public in the sense that they were publicly available: anyone could pray to a saint and hope for a miracle or some spiritual benefit in return. Even though a saint's cult might be concentrated in a particular church or city, devotees could still petition the saint from afar.[2] The relics of saints were also often accessible to the public. Relics were, however, geographically situated, and pilgrimage to the site of a saint's cult remained preferable to prayers from afar in the public imagination.[3] The power of a saint was not necessarily contained in one place, but it did have a tendency to converge around the saint's relics, and the saint looked favorably on those who journeyed to visit him or her in person. The contagious nature of sanctity ensured that proximity to a saint's relics imbued the place and the people around them with an aura of holiness, which in turn could offer social prestige.[4] Religious orders were associated with the relics of the local saints in their possession, and reaped the benefits of the donations that poured in as a result. The

[2] See for example the cult of Catherine of Alexandria, whose relics were scattered around Europe. Katherine J. Lewis, "Pilgrimage and the cult of St. Katherine of Alexandria in late medieval England," in J. Stopford, ed., *Pilgrimage Explored* (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 1999), 145-60; Tracey Renée Sands, *The Company She Keeps: The Medieval Swedish Cult of Saint Katherine of Alexandria and Its Transformations,* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010); Anne Simon, *The Cult of Saint Katherine of Alexandria in Late-Medieval Nuremberg: Saint and the City,* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012); Cynthia Stollhans, *St. Catherine of Alexandria in Renaissance Roman Art: Case Studies in Patronage,* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014).

[3] Such petitions were encouraged in the later Middle Ages as theologians increasingly attacked pilgrimages as disruptive and undermining of the authority of parish clergy. See Caroline Walker Bynum, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond,* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 36-45; Charles Zika, "Hosts, processions and pilgrimages: controlling the sacred in fifteenth-century Germany," *Past and Present*, 118 (Feb. 1988), 25-64.

[4] For example, the belief that organic matter could absorb the miraculous power of a relic, as in the case of the wood of saints' tombs or the earth around them, or the miraculous power of the blood of Christ seeping into the altar cloth. See Caroline Bynum, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Northern Germany and Beyond,* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 77, 293-294n121.

Dominicans at Santa Maria Novella, unsurprisingly, actively worked to maintain custody of Villana's relics for the social and financial benefits of having a local saint associated with the monastery. Sanctity, therefore, could be privatized in that the material benefits and spiritual prestige of the public's devotion to a saint accrued to the church or monastery that held the relics.

The cults of royal saints in the high and late Middle Ages offer an example of this dichotomy of public and private sanctity. As Gábor Klaniczay has shown, royal dynasties in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries promoted members of their own families as saints, and in turn used these saints as evidence of the dynasty's supernatural legitimacy. To do so was to straddle the line between public and private sanctity. On one hand, the public needed to share some reverence for these royal saints in order for the dynasty's claims of saintly legitimacy to hold up. This was accomplished especially through the mendicant orders, which saw their own values of poverty, chastity, and obedience especially embodied in royal women saints and promoted figures like Elizabeth of Hungary and her niece, Margaret, as exemplars of these virtues.[5] On the other hand, the ruling dynasty accrued the benefits of spiritual and temporal power from a holy relative (though this holiness could spill over, as we have seen). Rulers sought private access to their saintly ancestors and used the material culture of their cults to create symbolic reminders that royal saints were not just any holy people, but a part of the ruling dynasty's family tree. The Holy Roman Emperor Charles IV (1316–1378), for instance, commissioned a public series of sculptures of his family's royal saints to adorn the triforium of the Cathedral of St. Vitus in Prague. He retained their relics, however, for his own private devotion, ensconcing them in the Holy Rood Chapel in Karlstein Castle, outside Prague, alongside thorns from the Crown of

[5] Gábor Klaniczay, *Holy Rulers and Blessed Princesses: Dynastic Cults in Medieval Central Europe*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 195-294.

Thorns and a piece of the True Cross, and icon-like portraits of each of the saints whose relics he possessed.[6]

Despite dynastic efforts to appropriate the charisma of their holy ancestors, there were sometimes awkward slippages between the public and private. For instance, critics of the ruling regime called upon the dynasty's saints to criticize a less than holy descendant.[7] In such instances, the configuration of public and private ensured that these failings were not simply personal, but a comment on whether the ruler was living up to his saintly legacy and, ultimately, challenged his worthiness. The expansion of the cult of a royal saint could also confuse the public and the private. Saintly princesses, like Elizabeth of Hungary, were especially susceptible to this phenomenon. Elizabeth, whose piety was inspired by the Franciscans, was initially lauded as a dynastic saint, a role that cemented her private role as an exemplary member of the Thuringian dynasty. Her cult was widely publicized by the mendicants, however, and her renunciation of power and wealth alongside her extreme piety made her popular among Italian patrician women.[8] In this role, her identity as a royal saint became secondary to her exemplary life as a wealthy woman who had rejected the trappings of her privileged life in favor of one of profound asceticism.[9]

Initially, Villana was not a popular saint. As with other moderate holy women in the later Middle Ages, public recognition of and devotion to Villana's cult followed the Dominican assertion of Villana's sanctity and the placement of her physical remains within their church. Yet

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[6] Klaniczay, *Holy Rulers*, 349. See also the relic collection of Philip II of Spain. Guy Lazure, "Possessing the Sacred: Monarchy and Identity in Philip II's Relic Collection at the Escorial," *Renaissance Quarterly* 60, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 58-93.

[7] Ibid., 157-158; 367.

[8] Ibid., 367-399.

[9] Ibid., 367-386.

some of Villana's earliest devotees were other women unaffiliated with the Dominican order. But there was a tacit *habeas corpus* to the cult of a saint. Possession of a saint's relics implied that the saint had given her approval to her caretakers, devotees, and resting place.[10] In fact, there was a widespread belief that relics could not be moved against the saint's will.[11] Those who possessed a saint's relics flaunted this approval by physically adorning the cult. The addition of things like reliquaries, altarpieces, and tombs linked the saint's cult with the physical space that held her remains by incorporating the material culture of the cult into the fabric of the space.[12] In fourteenth-century Prato, for instance, civic authorities commissioned a new chapel with an elaborate mural program in the cathedral to house the Holy Belt of the Virgin after wresting control of the relic from the provost and canons of the cathedral.[13] The relic, which had always been controlled by the cathedral canons but accessible to the public, was refashioned as a civic object. Ostensibly this move made the relic's power more public in the sense that it now belonged to the entire commune, but it also ensured that the rich stream of offerings made by the faithful would flow into the city's treasury instead of the church's.[14] The successful transfer of the relic from one space to another sanctioned the right to possess the relic, and the new chapel asserted the relic's role in the civic identity and functioning of the commune while providing a physical site where devotion to the Holy Belt could intersect with displays of civic identity.

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[10] Geary, *Furta Sacra*, 76; Heinrich Fichtenau, "Zum Reliquienwesen im früheren Mittelalter," *MIÖG*, vol. 60 (1952): 60– 89.

[11] Patrick J. Geary, *Furta Sacra: Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages*, rev. ed., (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 37-41; R.W. Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages*, (New York: Penguin, 1990), 31; Richard C. Trexler, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), 57-59.

[12] Holiness resided in relics and could be transferred to the physical space where the relic was held. Removing a relic from this space did not diminish the sacrality of the object, but prolonged separation from the visual identifiers that gave a relic its symbolic meaning (such as a reliquary, image, or local tradition) could cause that meaning to be lost over time. Geary, *Furta Sacra*, 5-9; Trexler, *Public Life*, 53-58.

[13] Jean K. Cadogan, "The Chapel of the Holy Belt in Prato: Piety and Politics in Fourteenth-Century Tuscany," *Artibus et Historiae* 30, no. 60, (2009): 107-137.

[14] Ibid., 107-109.

II. Family Matters

Physical and familial proximity to a holy person, therefore, offered potential social and political power. Having a saint in the family was useful, and buttressed its prestige. It is interesting, however, that Villana's immediate family was slow to seek these benefits.[15] There is no indication that Villana's immediate relatives, including her father, brothers, or husband provided financial support for her cult or were active in its promotion.[16] Perhaps Villana's behavior was embarrassing to her family, and they did not wish to associate themselves further with a woman whose *brutta figura* outweighed her sanctity.[17] Endowing a cult was also an expensive project, and the Delle Botti family, though members of the merchant middle class, was not particularly wealthy. It is possible that the family made modest contributions: the records of Santa Maria Novella do not record small donations. But it is noteworthy that Villana's husband, siblings and siblings-in-law persisted in using their existing family tombs in their parish churches

[15] The only evidence of an early affinity between Villana's family and her cult is the naming of two girls after Villana: Villana di Francesco Benintendi – Beata Villana's niece – whose support of her aunt's cult in the fifteenth century was critical to its success, as we will see below – and Villana, the daughter of Baldo di Piero Altoviti, whose family was very loosely related to the Benintendi by marriage. In the subsequent generation, Villana's son, Jacopo, named his first daughter Villana. On the significance of given names in Quattrocento Florence, see Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, "The Name 'Remade': The Transmission of Given Names in Florence in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries," in *Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy,* trans. Lydia G. Cochrane, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 283-309.

[16] The size of Villana's immediate family is not clear. Her *vita* mentions her siblings only in passing: "Quamobrem cum operibus manuum illius velud rectissimi job benedississet dominus ut rebus huius seculi ditissimus foret filiorumque germine plurima felicitate polleret ceu negotiator evangelicus ad conquerendam pretiosam margaritam se tandem nisus est totum contulisse." Villana probably had two brothers. One, Niccolò, was a novice at Santa Maria Novella who died of plague on July 1, 1363. The other was imprisoned in 1378 but released during a riot. [*Vita,* 75r; *Necrology,* I, 97n432, 551, 553; Ammirato Scipione, *Istorie fiorentine,* (Florence: Marchini e Becherini, 1824), V, 1, XIV, 153.]

[17] Villana's *vita* alludes to her family's concern that her behavior would threaten the family's image, particularly with regard to her activities in public: "Who, having heard how Christ sometimes disguises himself as a poor person, can blame this most virtuous woman for wishing go out among the poor? So ardent was her love of the poor that she decided that she would go out begging door to door, and would have done so if her parents and husband had not stopped her." [BCNF Conv. sopp. II.iv.167, 76r.] For the *brutta* and *bella figura* in Quattrocento Italian culture, see especially the work of John Jeffries Martin on Renaissance self fashioning: *Myths of Renaissance Individualism,* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

in the Oltrarno, and the Franciscan church of Santa Croce.[18] And yet, this is not really surprising. The cost of building a new tomb combined with the inertia of tradition meant that families typically reused established family tombs, and only relocated when someone had the means and motivation. Villana's reputation for sanctity was not yet a compelling reason for her family to abandon the existing tombs. It would take another generation for the family's focus to shift to Santa Maria Novella. By then, other people – mostly women – had already donated money and property to help establish Villana's cult and feast day. Within three generations, however, Villana's cult would shift from that of a local, public saint to one that had been reappropriated and privatized by her family.

The early years of Villana's cult were marked by donations from devotees who were not part of Villana's family. Women were the primary financial backers. The earliest recorded donation was made by Silvestra degli Altoviti around 1362.[19] In her will, Silvestra left a house on the northeast corner of the piazza in front of Santa Maria Novella to the Laudesi confraternity. Silvestra stipulated that profits from the property should be used to fund an annual

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[18] Villana's father-in-law, Piero di Stefano Benintendi (active 1318-1367) went outside his parish church of S. Felicità in the Oltrarno and instead installed a tomb in the Franciscan church of S. Croce around 1330. According to Brocchi, Piero decided to build a tomb outside of his parish church because of his great devotion to St. Francis and the Franciscans. This tomb was located in the cloister, and included the Benintendi coat of arms and an inscription that indicated it was for him and his children: "S.[tefani] Petri Stefani Benintendi & filiorum." [See Giuseppe Maria Brocchi, *Vite de' Santi e Beati fiorentini,* 3 vols., (Florence: Gaetano Albizzini, 1761), II: 92. The tomb was still intact in Brocchi's time, and his account includes the inscription and a sketch of the coat of arms.] The *sepoltuario* records to not indicate which, if any, of Piero's four sons were buried in their father's tomb, but I have found no evidence to indicate that any of the sons were buried elsewhere. Information about the tombs of Villana's relatives comes in part from Anne Leader and her work on the Digital Sepoltuario project. I am grateful to her for sharing her research with me.

[19] "Domina Silvestra uxor quondam domini Ugonis de Altovitis domisit sotietati laudum sancte Marie novelle medietatem pro indiviso unius domus posite in populo nostro iuxta vel prope angulum cimiterii in platea nova. cui a I via. a II et III zenobii. a IIII domine hermelline. Et voluit de pecunia que haberetur de possessione dicte medietatis dicte domus pro rata et concedi in pictantiam que fiat annis singulis in perpetuum in festo beate Villane. quod festum est dies XXVIIII januarij." *Liber recordationum novus,* ASMN, I.A.3, 34r. Silvestra's donation was recorded in Santa Maria Novella's records in 1363, but the donation was likely made the previous year since the proceeds were used to fund the celebration of Villana's feast in January 1363.

commemorative meal (*pietanza*) on Villana's feast day, which had already been set on January 29, the anniversary of her death. The Compagnia dei Laudesi, founded around 1343, met at Santa Maria Novella and was one of the major confraternities associated with the Dominicans in Florence.[20] Multiple *laudesi* confraternities met in Florence and across Italy to sing hymns in honor of the Virgin Mary and the saints.[21] Silvestra's donation to the Laudesi was spurred by multiple factors. Both Silvestra and Villana may have been members of the confraternity, which included both women and men as members. It is not clear whether Silvestra was affiliated with the Dominican tertiaries, but she was buried in Santa Maria Novella when she died on June 11, 1363.[22] Although Silvestra and her husband, Ugo, lived in the *Vipera* neighborhood in the Santa Maria Novella quarter, the Dominican church would not have been their parish church, so her decision to be buried there was a deliberate one.[23] Furthermore, the Altoviti and Benintendi families were very loosely related by marriage, so family ties may have motivated Silvestra's donation. [24] This loose familial relationship makes it even more likely that Silvestra and Villana

[20] Luciano Artusi and Antonio Patruno, *Deo gratias: storia, tradizioni, culti e personaggi delle antiche confraternite fiorentine,* (Rome: Newton Compton, 1994), 446-448.

[21] See especially Giovanna Casagrande, "Confraternities and lay female religiosity in late medieval and Renaissance Umbria," in *The Politics of Ritual Kinship: Confraternities and Social Order in Early Modern Italy,* ed. Nicholas Terpstra, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 48-66; Nicholas A. Eckstein, *The district of the Green Dragon: neighbourhood life and social change in Renaissance Florence,* (Florence: L.S. Olschki, 1995), 66-67; Ronald F. E. Weissman, *Ritual Brotherhood in Renaissance Florence,* (New York: Academic Press, 1982); Blake Wilson, *Music and Merchants: The Laudesi Companies of Republican Florence,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

[22] *Delizie degli Eruduti Toscani,* vol. IX, (Firenze, Gaetano Cambiagi, 1777), 155.

[23] ASF, Catasto, vol 74, 211.

[24] Villana was the great-granddaughter of Bertrando Altoviti: "un figliuolo d'Andrea delle Botti nipote di Bertrando Altoviti." Scipione, *Istorie fiorentine,* V, 1, XIV, 153. According to Molho, the Altoviti were of elite status, but it is unclear how closely connected the branch affiliated with Villana's family was to the core of the Altovitis. See Anthony Molho, *Marriage Alliance in Late Medieval Florence,* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 365, 377. Silvestra's son, Fr. Lionardo de Altoviti, was also a friar at Santa Maria Novella. Orlandi, *Necrologio,* I, 551-552.

would have shared a similar social circle, and perhaps would have known one another personally.[25]

The same year that Silvestra made her donation to the Laudesi, a woman named Angela, described only as the wife of Ghino de' Bonciani, left 140 florins to the friars to fund the purchase of a piece of land, the yearly profits from which would also be used to fund an annual *pietanza* on January 29, the day of Villana's death.[26] Angela's will also stipulated that a sung mass in honor of the Virgin and a commemorative mass for Angela herself should be held on the same day. Whereas Silvestra's will endowed the Laudesi confraternity, Angela's donation went directly to the friars, and presumably both groups would have enjoyed a commemorative meal on Villana's feast day. Angela and Silvestra's donations were stewarded by Fr. Tommaso di Cionellino de' Cavalcanti, a lecturer in logic and philosophy at Santa Maria Novella, who organized the first celebration of Villana's feast in 1362.[27] Despite Tommaso's untimely death in June 1363, the feast day was celebrated annually through at least 1365.[28]

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[25] On female friendships in the early modern world, see especially Alexandra Verini, "Medieval Models of Female Friendship in Christine de Pizan's *The Book of the City of Ladies* and Margery Kempe's *The Book of Margery Kempe*," *Feminist Studies* 42, no. 2 (2016): 365-391; Amanda E. Herbert, "'Small Expressions of My Passionate Love and Friendship to Thee': The Idioms and Languages of Female Alliances," in *Female Alliances: Gender, Identity, and Friendship in Early Modern Britain,* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 21-51. On familial friendships, see Laura Gowing, Michael Hunter, and Miri Rubin, eds., *Love, Friendship and Faith in Europe, 1300-1800,* (New York: Palgrave, 2005); Daniel T. Lochman, Maritere Lòpez, and Lorna Hutson, eds., *Discourses and Representations of Friendship in Early Modern Europe, 1500-1700,* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011).

[26] "Domina Angela uxor ghini de boncianis dimisit conventui in suo testamento florenos auri CXL. ut de hiis emeretur una possessio de cuius fructibus fieret omni anno in perpetuum una pictantia toti conventui nostro sancte marie novelle in die quo obiit beata Villana. et cantaretur illa die missa de beata virgine et iretur cum candelis ad sepulcrum dicte domine angele cantando divinum officium sicut est consuetum." *Liber recordationum novus,* ASMN, I.A.3, 34v-35r.

[27] Orlandi, *Necrology*, I, 99-100. P. Calvelli, who published an edition of Villana's *vita* in the 1820s, claimed that Cavalcanti was Villana's confessor, but this is unlikely given how young Cavalcanti would have been in the 1360s. Orlandi, *Beata Villana,* 40.

[28] Villana's grandson, Sebastiano, formalized the arrangements for the feast day in 1452, but it is not clear whether the celebration of the feast had died out, or if these arrangements were codifying a tradition that had continued since 1362. See below.

Florentines took note of the popularity of Villana's cult. In 1365, the Florentine poet Franco Sacchetti wrote to his friend decrying the myriad new saints which had sprung up in Florence. The problem, he argued, was not that their cults had not been approved by the pope, but that the fervor of the devotees of these new saints detracted from the devotion that should have belonged to Christ and the Virgin Mary. Among these upstart saints was Sacchetti's neighbor, Villana, whom he described disparagingly as "a young Florentine girl [who] always went about dressed just like the other girls."[29] Worse still, as mentioned earlier, the Dominicans at Santa Maria Novella had already established a feast day for Villana, a move that was not entirely licit since Villana's cult had not been officially approved.

By 1367 and the completion of the Spanish Chapel frescoes, however, evidence for Villana's cult dries up. This does not necessarily mean that devotion to her cult had ceased; the friars at Santa Maria Novella typically did not record small donations, so we do not know if people continued to give modest gifts to the monastery in Villana's honor. But the lack of evidence after 1367 suggests that Villana's popularity had waned. This is not altogether unsurprising; as Sacchetti wrote to his friend,

> The Franciscans in Florence have the body…of San Gherardo da Villamagna, and Santa Umiliana de'Cerchi….The Dominicans have Beata Giovanna…and Beata Villana…while the Eremitani have San Barduccio….Likewise, the Carmelites and the other orders stuff their churches full of saints, and the people run all over town to see each new saint.[30]

As much as Sacchetti might have been exaggerating, the market for new saints in fourteenth-century Florence was saturated. The friars must have struggled to keep attention on Villana,

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[29] "E'Predicatori...hanno Beata Villana, che fu mia vicina, e fu giovane fiorentina, pur andava vestita come l'altre, e fannone già festa." Franco Sacchetti, "Letter to Jacomo di Conte," in *Opere di Franco Sacchetti,* vol. 1, ed. Ottavio Gigli, (Florence: Felice Le Monnier, 1857): 217.

[30] "Gli frati Minori nella città di Firenze hanno il corpo di…San Gherardo da Villamagna, e quello di Santa Miliana de'Cerchi….E'Predicatori hanno Beata Giovanna…hanno Beata Villana….Li Romitani hanno San Barduccio, e degli altri e' Carmelliti e le altre religioni ne sono di simili tutte piene, e la gente corre tutta alle cose nuove." Ibid., 216-217.

especially given the boring quality of her sanctity while alive, and her scarce posthumous miracles. By this point, it seems that the Dominicans had done all they planned to do to promote Villana's cult, and – when it was clear that their efforts were not yielding results – they stopped actively sponsoring the cult.

But after disappearing from the historical record for over fifty years, Villana's cult was suddenly reinvigorated beginning in the 1420s when Villana's niece, Villana di Francesco Benintendi – who, for the purpose of clarity, I will refer to as Villana the Younger – began bankrolling the artistic production and liturgical celebrations for her aunt's cult. Villana the Younger was Villana delle Botti's niece by marriage (see fig. 2). She was the daughter of Villana's brother-in-law, Francesco di Piero Benintendi. It is unlikely that she ever knew her aunt in person. It is also unclear whether they shared a name because of family tradition, or because Villana the Younger was named in honor of her illustrious ancestor. In February 1421, Villana the Younger commissioned a reliquary for her aunt, enlisting Villana's grandson, Fra Sebastiano di Jacopo di Rosso, as the executor of the transaction.[31] Villana the Younger and Sebastiano would continue to collaborate on the promotion of Villana's cult in the subsequent decades until Sebastiano's death in 1456.

Villana the Younger's donation marked a turning point in the development of Villana's cult. Prior to this donation, the earliest devotional materials produced in veneration of Villana had been commissioned by the Dominicans, and were likely funded by numerous small donations. The gifts of property and money from Silvestra and Angela, described above, were probably some of the largest designated for Villana's cult. Villana the Younger's donation

[31] The details for this commission are in a now-lost copy of Villana the Younger 's February 17, 1421 will. Stefano Orlandi, the editor of Villana's *vita* and of the *Necrology* of Santa Maria Novella, had access to this document but did not transcribe it. See *Beata Villana,* 41; *Necrologio* II, 228-229.

outpaced them both, providing enough money and property to fund artworks from the most prominent artists of the day. From this point on, Villana's descendants picked up her flagging cult from the Dominicans, and refashioned it into a tool of social and political prestige.

The timing of Villana the Younger's 1421 donation provides insight into the family's renewed interest in the cult. Villana the Younger's gift followed shortly after the arrival at Santa Maria Novella of Fra Sebastiano di Jacopo di Rosso, Villana's grandson by her only child, Jacopo, in 1419.[32] Fra Sebastiano was born in 1389. He was admitted to the Dominican Order sometime between 1404 and 1406 by Giovanni Dominici, whose role in the development and promotion of the saintly model of holy mediocrity, epitomized by Villana, was discussed in Chapters 1 and 2. He entered the novitiate in Cortona alongside the future bishop and saint, Antoninus of Florence, and by 1419 was a member of the community at Santa Maria Novella where in January he was named sacristan and in October was made procurator. [33] In April of 1421, he became subprior of the monastery.[34]

Within a short time of Sebastiano's arrival at Santa Maria Novella, activity around Villana's cult intensified. In addition to Villana the Younger's donation to pay for a reliquary, Villana's relics were also publicly displayed in Santa Maria Novella in the same year. Most importantly, sometime between 1420 and 1422, Girolamo di Giovanni (1387–1454), a fellow friar at Santa Maria Novella, wrote Villana's *vita*. The preparation of a *vita* implied a formal effort to secure Villana's canonization, something the friars had not done immediately after Villana's death. Given that so much time had passed between Villana's death in 1361 and the

[32] Orlandi, *Necrologio,* I, 163.

[33] That same year, Sebastiano's father, Jacopo, had died, and it seems that Sebastiano entered into legal disputes over his patrimony. Orlandi, *Necrologio,* II., 229, 563.

[34] Ibid., 562.

composition of her *vita* in the 1420s, Sebastiano and Villana the Younger must have had some role in spurring the friars into action. If having a local saint in the family tree was prestigious, an officially canonized one was all the better.

An aside about the authorship of Villana's *vita* is necessary here. The Bollandist editors of the *vita* were certain that the text was written by Giovanni Caroli (1428–1503), another Dominican at Santa Maria Novella to whom we will return later, based on Girolamo di Giovanni's notes.[35] Stefano Orlandi, however, argues that Girolamo "undoubtedly" wrote the *vita,* which was later copied by Caroli, a view shared by Elena Corbari and Alison Frazier.[36] Aviad Kleinberg, meanwhile, suggests that Girolamo wrote the *vita* using Caroli's notes.[37] The argument over authorship is based on the meaning of the word "scripta" in Caroli's note at the end of the text: "Explicit vita beate Villane de Florentia scripta per me fratrem Johannem Karoli de florentia ordinis predicatorum. Anno domini 1452 completa die, 9, augusti feliciter."[38] As Frazier has shown, the participle "scripta" would have left open some sense of ambiguity even in the Quattrocento; while the common usage of related words like "scrivere" and "scriptor" typically implied transcription rather than authorship, even in the fifteenth century, some disapproved of this meaning as unclassical.[39] My analysis of the events and timeline surrounding the promotion of Villana's cult by Sebastiano further support Girolamo's authorship and Caroli's role as the copyist. This would mean that the August 9, 1452 date in the explicit refers to the date that Caroli copied the text, not the date that it was composed.

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[35] *AASS* Aug. V (Paris, 1867): 864.

[36] Orlandi, *La beata Villana*, 33-35; Corbari, *Vernacular Theology: Dominican Sermons and Audience in Late Medieval Italy*, (Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2013), 154-156; Alison Knowles Frazier, *Possible Lives: Authors and Saints in Renaissance Italy*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 363-364.

[37] Aviad M. Kleinberg, *Prophets in Their Own Country: Living Saints and the Making of Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 173.

[38] BCNF, Conv. sopp. II.iv.167, 78v.

[39] Frazier, 364n86.

Girolamo di Giovanni was especially well suited to write a *vita* for Villana.[40] He was a close friend of Sebastiano, and testified on his behalf during his legal troubles in the 1440s, as we will see below.[41] This personal relationship likely spurred Girolamo to write the *vita.* In addition to Villana's *vita,* Girolamo wrote a number of sermons and was an active and popular preacher in Florence. He wrote a Latin sermon series for the Lenten cycle, *De Rothimatibus,* which survives in two copies that were originally held in the libraries of Santa Maria Novella and Santissima Annunziata, the church of the Servites in Florence.[42] The sermons are written in a scholastic style with references to Dante's *Divine Comedy* sprinkled throughout, and were probably not intended for a popular audience.[43] This manuscript also contains two Latin sermons: *Contra malitias mulierum* and *De ornatu mulierum.*[44] It would not have been unusual for a Dominican to write Latin sermon collections, which would have been intended as models for fellow preachers, as well as to preach and write vernacular sermons. Not all friars did so, however, and that Girolamo did is a subtle indication that his interests straddled both lay spirituality and clerical pastoral concerns.

Furthermore, there is no doubt that Girolamo knew Thomas Caffarini of Siena and other Dominican proponents of holy mediocrity. Girolamo studied and taught in the Dominican

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[40] For Girolamo's biography, see Orlandi, *Necrologio,* I, 161-163; II, 219-227.

[41] Girolamo and Sebastiano entered the community at Santa Maria Novella in c. 1401 and c. 1404, respectively. In the *Liber dierum lucensium,* Giovanni Caroli describes them together as luminaries of the prior generation of friars at Santa Maria Novella: "Siquidem plurimos ipsi nos vidimus qui eorum monita et exempla prosequi decreverunt hos vel doctissimos vel devotissimos extitisse. Quales fuerunt Ieronimus Johannis, Andreas Ducci, Sebastianus Jacobi qui nuper e vita sublati sunt et is cuius supra totiens mentionem feci licet plurimum sciem minimum conscientie semper habuerit eorum plantula fuit." [BCNF Conv. sopp. C.8.279, 38r.] See ASF CRSGF 102.106, fol. 1, 12r-14v for Girolamo's testimony in Sebastiano's legal case.

[42] Both manuscripts are now held by the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale in Florence: Conv. sopp. G.I.400 and B.8.1514. On such sermon series, see Carlo Delcorno "Medieval Preaching in Italy (1200-1500)," in *The Sermon,* Typologie des Sources du Moyen Âge Occidental, fasc. 81-83, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), 501-511.

[43] BCNF Conv. sopp. G.I.400, 7r, 31v, 69r, 71r.

[44] Unfortunately for this project, this manuscript was undergoing restoration and unavailable during my time at the BCNF.

schools in Florence and Bologna.[45] In 1414 he was sent for specialized theological training in Bologna, the site of the friars' preeminent school, and in 1418 he was made regent of the Dominican *studium* there.[46] While still in Bologna, Girolamo was elected prior of Santa Maria Novella in Florence at the suggestion of the Master General of the Dominican Order, and likely at the behest of Pope Martin V.[47] He held the position from 1419 to 1421, and would hold the post two more times, from November 1440 to June 1442, and again from April 1444 to July 1445.[48] In 1419 he was also admitted to the theological faculty at the University of Florence, and rose to the position of dean of the theological college in 1429.[49] A decade later, on October 13, 1439, Girolamo was elected by the University as the *Lettura di Dante* to give lectures on the *Divine Comedy* in the cathedral during the academic year, for which he was paid forty florins.[50] He would hold this position again in 1450.[51] While I have not found conclusive evidence that Girolamo personally knew other Dominicans who were active in the promotion of the typology of holy mediocrity, he very likely crossed paths with them and their protégés. In 1401, the same year that Girolamo entered the Dominican Order, Giovanni Dominici, had returned to Santa Maria Novella after establishing the community of Dominican tertiaries in Venice, which he left in the care of Thomas Caffarini in 1398. Dominici also preached the Lenten cycle at Santa Maria Novella in 1401 and 1402, and remained at the monastery between 1404 and 1407.[52] He and Girolamo were, therefore, part of the same community during the formative years of the latter's

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[45] Thomas of Siena, the author of the *vita* of Maria Sturion of Venice, was in Bologna in 1380, and again between 1390-93. It is unclear whether he was studying or teaching. Fernanda Sorelli, *La Santità Imitabile: "Leggenda di Maria da Venezia" di Tommaso da Siena*, (Venice: Deputazione Editrice, 1984), 5.

[46] Orlandi, *Necrologio,* I, 161.

[47] Ibid., 161-162.

[48] Girolamo also served as sacristan from 1422-1423, and rector in 1435. Orlandi, *Necrologio,* II, 549-579.

[49] Ibid., 220-221.

[50] Orlandi, *Necrologio,* I, 162-163.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Orlandi, *Necrologio,* II, 92-93.

training as a Dominican.[53] Girolamo was also prior of Santa Maria Novella during Antoninus of Florence's tenure as the leader of the Dominican Congregation of Tuscany, of which Santa Maria Novella was a part. At this time, Florence had a population of roughly 40,000, of which the Dominicans were a tiny subset. As Guido Ruggiero has shown, Florence was very much a small town in which everyone knew everyone else, especially among the city's intellectual communities. It would have been nearly impossible, therefore, for Girolamo not to have known figures like Dominici and Antoninus and other proponents of holy mediocrity, and, as a result, he would have been immersed in the currents of influence from which holy mediocrity emerged.

Throughout Villana's *vita,* Girolamo minimizes the role of her family, as we have seen. Where the *vita* draws attention to Villana's family, it does so primarily to highlight her role as a Florentine wife and mother. This was, as discussed in previous chapters, critical to framing her within the new mode of spirituality promoted by the Dominicans that privileged moderate piety within the confines of family life. But despite Girolamo's minimization of Villana's family in her *vita,* there was a growing connection between her family and her cult. Although Girolamo is somewhat critical of Villana's father, Andrea, he is one of the few figures mentioned by name in the *vita,* and he appears throughout the text.[54] The final vignette of the *vita* also links Villana to her family. After ascending to the throne of Christ, Villana returned to Florence, first to bid farewell to her fellow tertiaries on the Ponte Rubiconte, and then to bestow a blessing on her family and on the inhabitants of Florence before returning to heaven.[55]

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[53] On the education of Dominicans, see M. Michèle Mulcahey, *"First the Bow is Bent in Study": Dominican Education Before 1350,* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute, 1998).

[54] BCNF, Conv. sopp. II.iv.167, 74v-75r.

[55] "Cum splendore quo prediximus devotis supra pontem feminis heremiticam ducentibus se ostendit. Deinde impertito benedictionis munere domum eius et civitatem hanc florentiam habitantibus revertebatur ad celestia." BCNF, Conv. sopp. II.iv.167, 78r.

In order for a family to accrue the benefits of prestige and power from a saintly relative, the saint needed to be revered by the public. There was little point in having a holy person in the family tree if no one outside the family recognized her sanctity. And yet in order to make a claim for the sanctity of a woman known for her moderate piety, Girolamo needed to use Villana's family as a plot device, characterizing them as the primary impediment to her religious vocation. If Villana was to be a saint of imitable piety, so too her struggle to overcome her family's objections to her newfound spirituality needed to be relatable to potential readers. To do so was to cast Sebastiano and Villana the Younger's ancestors in an undesireable light. For Villana's later descendants, however, this paradox may have worked in their favor. If Villana's immediate family was responsible for her fall from piety into worldly pleasures, her sanctity could also be a source of distinction for her descendents.

The efforts to promote Villana's sanctity and to link her reputation for holiness to the Benintendi family abruptly ceased in 1423 when Sebastiano disappears from the records of the records of Santa Maria Novella. The monastery's *Necrology* notes only that he left the monastery sometime after February 1423 "for legitimate reasons" ("legiptimis [sic] causis") that are left otherwise unexplained.[56] Later records indicate that Sebastiano had traded his Dominican habit for that of the Benedictines, supposedly going to S. Maria di Mamma in Casentino, in the diocese of Arezzo. In fact, he had remained in Florence and may even have been living in a private home, as we will see. He remained absent from the records of Santa Maria Novella until 1436.

[56] "Nam anteaquam habitum nostri ordinis, quem legiptimis causis dimisit, reliqueret." Orlandi, *Necrologio,* I, 163.

Undertaking a monastic *transitus,* or a transfer from one religious order to another, was not unheard of. It was, however, a fraught topic. The idea of *stabilitas,* or stability in a religious vocation, was an integral part of monastic life by at least the time of St. Benedict.[57] Transfer from one order to another, however, was permissible if it was made out of a desire for a stricter adherence to the ideals of austerity.[58] In all other cases, such a transfer was apostasy and considered illegitimate. In the early thirteenth century, Pope Innocent III (1198-1216) had allowed for monks to transfer between orders, as long as he was leaving a laxer observance for a stricter community, and as long as he had requested permission from his own superior, even if it had not been granted, as proof of good intentions.[59] In 1281, in light of the growth of the mendicant orders, Pope Martin IV revised this rule and strictly forbade any mendicant to transfer to another order without a special license from the Apostolic See.[60] This rule remained in effect until the Council of Trent.

Events within Sebastiano's family offer the most likely explanation for his transfer to the Benedictines. In 1413, his father, Jacopo, died.[61] Jacopo's will, written in 1390, left the bulk of his estate to Sebastiano.[62] It also provided dowries for his daughters, Villana[63] and Maria, who

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[57] On the history of monastic *transitus* and the theological debates surrounding it, see Douglass Alfred Roby, "'Stabilitas' and 'Transitus': Understanding Passage from One Religious Order to Another in Twelfth Century Monastic Controversy," PhD dissertation, Yale University, 1971.

[58] The austerity of an order or monastery was typically defined by the amount of property it held, and whether its members were allowed to hold property of any kind in their own name. See Roby, "'Stabilitas' and 'Transitus'."

[59] Roby, "'Stabilitas' and 'Transitus'," 239.

[60] Mendicants were, however, allowed to transfer to the Carthusians without special permission. Roby, "'Stabilitas' and 'Transitus'," 240.

[61] Orlandi, *La beata Villana,* 31n11.

[62] ASF CRSGF 102.106, fol. 2. Jacopo left a second will, written in 1407, which upheld the provisions of the 1390 document. ASF CRSGF 102.104, fol. 3, 25r.

[63] The Villana listed in Jacopo's will is the third of four Villanas in the Delle Botti-Benintendi family. This Villana was the granddaughter of Villana delle Botti, and the niece of Villana the Younger. See Figure 2.

would receive 200 gold florins each regardless of whether they married or not.[64] If the children were not adults when Jacopo died, his father-in-law, Filippo Buoni, would become the children's guardian or, if he had died or did not want to take on these duties, Jacopo's cousin-by-marriage, Stoldo di Lorenzo Lensi would fill the role.[65] Paola, his wife, would have her dowry returned to her, and would retain the use of Jacopo's estate as long as she did not remarry.[66] In 1419, however, Paola married Stefano di Baldo Altoviti, forefeiting her rights to Jacopo's estate. Their son, also named Stefano, was born a year later.[67] This left Sebastiano's brother, Rubino di Jacopo di Rosso, in a precarious position.[68] No longer under the financial or legal protection of his mother, he was also not old enough to inherit his portion of his father's estate.[69] Sebastiano,

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[64] "Alle dette Villane e Maria maritate o non maritate e a ciascheduna altra sue figluola femina fiorini d'oro dugento…avuto in dota…" Ibid.

[65] "Anchora volle dispose racomando che li dette Villana Maria Sebastiano e ciascheduno altro suo figluolo fu miturato tenuto per Filippo di Bono in caso che esso Filippo morto o non volente gli lascio al governo di Saoldo [sic] di Lorenzo in fine alla eta di xviii anni et le femine infine che le si maritaranno." Ibid. Stoldo di Lorenzo Lensi was the husband of Villana di Francesco Benintendi (Villana the Younger).

[66] "A mona Paola…figluola di Filippo di Bono la dota sua. Item lascio che laica mona Paola fusse veduta di vest bruni la richeza del detto testatore." Ibid. The "vesti bruni" is almost certainly a reference to the dark colored clothing worn by widows, thus, "as long as she is seen wearing the brown dress [of a widow], I leave her my riches." On the color of widows' clothing, see Carole Collier Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence: Families, Fortunes, and Fine Clothing,* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 89-90, 174-175. Paola was also given the use of and profits from Jacopo's properties in the Marignolle region south of Florence only if all of the couple's children had died before the age of twenty-five without children of their own. "Et in caso che i detti suoi figluoli morissono innanzi alla eta di xxv anni senza figluoli maschi legimptimi et naturali allora in quello caso e non altrimenti…lascio di beni suoi alla detta moni Paola in sufructo di fiorini d'oro dugento e quinto viene e sara in sufructo di poderi da marignolla del detto testatore." ASF CRSGF 102.106, fol. 2.

[67] A seven-year-old Stefano Altoviti is listed in the 1427 catasto as living in the Vipera gonfalone in the neighborhood of Santa Maria Novella. This is almost certainly Paola and Stefano di Baldo's son. [ASF, Catasto, vol 74, 208.] This half brother, Stefano Altoviti, shares a name with one of the early donors to Villana's cult, Silvestra degli Altoviti (see above and n. 26). The Altoviti were a prestigious Florentine family (classified as high status by Molho); I have not found any direct relationship of lineage between Silvestra and Stefano that would imply that Silvestra's donation had been motivated by family ties.

[68] It was not uncommon for women to remarry in this period, but second (or third) marriages often left the children of the previous marriage in a precarious position. Mothers were often forced to choose between remaining unmarried widows, or remarrying and leaving the children of their previous marriage behind. See Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, "The 'Cruel Mother': Maternity, Widowhood, and Dowry in Florence in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries," in *Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy,* trans. Lydia G. Cochrane, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 117-131.

[69] Jacopo's 1390 and 1407 wills mention only one child, Sebastiano, who had already entered the Dominican Order by 1407. Rubino, therefore, must have been born after 1407, and therefore could not have been more than 5 or 6 years old when his father died. ASF CRSGF 102.106, fol. 2; ASF CRSGF 102.104, fol. 3, 25r.

therefore, may have left Santa Maria Novella in 1423 and joined the Benedictines to watch over his younger brother, though it is unclear whether his intentions were paternal or nefarious. This would explain why, after receiving the Benedictine habit, Sebastiano did not go to Casentino, instead remaining in Florence in his own home where he could be near his brother and relatives.[70] This decision to stay in Florence would later create a scandal, as we will see.[71]

Furthermore, the Benedictines may have allowed greater manipulation of property than the mendicants, and Sebastiano may have hoped to gain greater freedom to manage his inheritance by switching orders. On September 1, 1413, Sebastiano was given permission by the prior of Santa Maria Novella to accept his patrimony.[72] From the end of the fourteenth century it had become increasingly common for Dominican friars to retain some property or wealth earmarked for their own personal use, even after their admission to the order.[73] Sebastiano's acceptance of his paternal inheritance, therefore, would not have been out of the ordinary.[74] Nevertheless, he seems to have encountered some kind of impediment in receiving the property and wealth from his father's will, because in July 1419 he was given permission to enter into

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[70] "Qui fr. Bastianus numquam in dicto claustro [S. Maria de Mamma in Casentino], moram traxit, sed continuo in domo propria cum attinentibus suis stetit, in eademque abbatia nec tunc, nec nunc memoria fuit vel est, quod steti vel fuerit aliquis monachus, seu viguerit observantia regularis, ymo prefactus dominus abbas ob paupertatem dicti monasterii, florentie vitam suam degebat sumtibus alienis." ASF CRSGF 102.101, 264-265.

[71] See n80, below.

[72] Orlandi, *La beata Villana,* 31n11.

[73] Although the early Dominican constitutions prohibited the friars from any ownership of property, by the thirteenth century, large donations from wealthy devotees increasingly threatened the Order's commitment to poverty. Later constitutions relaxed these prohibitions to the point that it was all but licit for friars to retain individual property. See Simon Tugwell, *The Way of the Preacher,* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1981); Ibid., ed., *Early Dominicans: Selected Writings,* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 1-47; J. G. Gøgsig Jakobsen, " 'Beggars in silky robes and palaces': Dominicans Preaching and Practicing Poverty in Medieval Scandinavia," in *Poverty and Devotion in Mendicant Cultures, 1200-1450,* ed. Constant J. Mews and Anna Welch, (New York: Routledge, 2016), 170-177.

[74] After the issue of Sebastiano's inheritance had been settled, he used his private wealth to fund a number of donations to Santa Maria Novella, in addition to promoting Beata Villana's cult. These included shirts and red brocaded *peviale* for the acolytes, as well as a palium and other linens for the altar, as well as an annuity to support the education poor students. These donations were considered especially noteworthy because they were funded while Sebastiano was still living. See ASF CRSGF 102.106, fol. 1, 14r and 16r; Orlandi, *Necrologio,* I, 163-164.

litigation regarding his father's will on behalf of Santa Maria Novella.[75] In 1423, however, he transferred to the Benedictines. Two years later, on January 24, 1425, the abbot of the Benedictine monastery in Casentino granted Sebastiano permission to accept power of attorney regarding his patrimony. This, however, seems only to have complicated an already complex situation. Because of a technicality, Sebastiano the Benedictine could not receive the inheritance that Jacopo's will had allocated to Sebastiano the Dominican.[76] This bureaucratic stalemate dragged on for another decade. Only after his mother's death in 1435 was the situation finally settled when Sebastiano reached a compromise with his relatives and Santa Maria Novella by agreeing to pay twenty florins every year to his half-brother, Stefano, who was now also a friar at Santa Maria Novella.[77] Sebastiano himself would remain absent from Santa Maria Novella until 1444.

In 1436, a year after his inheritance was settled, Sebastiano reappears in the convent's records as the executor of a contract between Villana the Younger and the Dominican artist Fra Angelico for an altarpiece for the Tempio confraternity.[78] Here, the saintly Villana makes her first appearance in an image since the Spanish Chapel fresco nearly seventy years earlier. This painting, the *Lamentation,* depicts the dead body of Christ supported by the Virgin Mary and surrounded by saints, including Mary Magdalen and St. Dominic, beneath a blood-stained T-shaped crucifix.[79] The scene is set in a sparse Tuscan landscape outside the crenulated walls of a

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[75] Orlandi, *Necrologio,* II, 228. I have not been able to locate the archival document cited by Orlandi.

[76] Ibid., 230.

[77] ASF CRSGF 102.106, fol. 2, 1r-v. Stefano must have joined the Dominicans before March 16, 1435, when the Ufficiali dei Pupilli ed Edulti dei Quartieri di S. Giovanni e SMN declared that he was no longer under their jurisdiction because he had professed at SMN. This means he would have been about 15 when he entered the order, which was an unusually young age, but not unheard of. Orlandi, *Necrologio,* II, 191.

[78] See Orlandi, *Fra Angelico,* 187 for the contract for this altarpiece.

[79] For scholarship on this painting, see Carissa Dicindio, "Fra Angelico's Tempio *Lamentation:* A Consideration of Its Function and Meanining," M.A. thesis, University of Georgia, 2004; Stefano Orlandi, *Beato*

city – probably Florence. The Virgin and Mary Magdalene cradle Christ's head and feet while a dozen other saintly figures look on. Among these, on the right side of the painting, is a woman dressed in black, her arms crossed over her chest, with the words "Christo Jesu l'amor mio crucifisso," ("Jesus Christ, my beloved, crucified") written in gold, trailing from her mouth. Superimposed over the rayed nimbus that surrounds her head, the name "VILLANA" is written in red capitals. Villana's position adjacent to and, because of the two-dimensional nature of the picture plane, touching Mary Magdalene emphasizes the connection between these two women, as in Villana's *vita.* Next to Villana kneels a haloed woman dressed in blue, wearing a jeweled crown, and identified as St. Catherine of Alexandria by the palm frond in her right hand. Catherine was one of the first saints that the friars sought to associate with Villana, and they did so, as we have seen, by placing Villana's body in the chapel dedicated to St. Catherine, now called the Rucellai Chapel. Two other women, dressed in red and nimbed with rays instead of solid haloes, kneel just in front of the cross. These unidentified holy women are, perhaps, the two other Dominican holy women alongside whom Villana was interred in Santa Maria Novella.[80]

The role of the Tempio confraternity was unique in Florence. The society, formally called the Compagnia di Santa Maria della Croce al Tempio and known informally as the Neri because of the black robes worn by the brothers, had been founded around 1336 with the purpose of aiding people condemned to death.[81] The confraternity was responsible for the spiritual well-being of the condemned, and in particular for helping those convicted who were about to be executed to prepare for a good death. Members of the confraternity would spend the night at the

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Angelico: Monografia storica delle vita e delle opere con un'appendice di nuovi documenti inediti, (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1964); John Pope-Hennessy, *Fra Angelico,* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974), 199.

[80] These two women have not be identified in any of the scholarship on this painting.

[81] Luciano Artusi and Antonio Patruno, *Deo gratias: storia, tradizioni, culti e personaggi delle antiche confraternite fiorentine,* (Rome: Newton Compton, 1994), 244-249.

Bargello or the Stinche with the condemned prisoner, praying with them and comforting them in the prison's chapel. On the day of the execution, the Tempio brother would accompany the condemned on their procession from the prison to the city's execution grounds outside the Porta delle Giustizia. On the walk, the brother would hold a *tavoletta,* or small painting depicting the Crucifixion on one side and a saint's martyrdom on the other, walking directly in front of the prisoner, close enough to his face to block his vision of the crowds of spectators and, eventually, the gallows.[82] Societies like this existed across Italy.[83] The Tempio confraternity was connected with Santa Maria Novella, but met at an oratory just outside the Porta di Giustizia or Porta San Francesco, the eastern city gate just north of the Arno that led to the Florentine execution grounds.[84] It was this space for which the altarpiece Villana the Younger commissioned was intended. The route taken through the streets of Florence by condemned prisoners took them past the Tempio's oratory. There, the prisoner was chained to a post and forced to kneel before the altar that the *Lamentation* adorned.[85]

The choice of a scene of the Crucifixion for a confraternity dedicated to comforting the soon-to-be executed was not unusual, but Villana the Younger's decision to commission the altarpiece for the Tempio confraternity in the first place merits further exploration. The membership of the Tempio was limited to men, so Villana the Younger herself was almost certainly not a member of the group. Nor does Sebastiano seem to have had any connection to the Neri before becoming the executor of the contract for this artwork. Nor was Villana likely to

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[82] See Kathleen Falvey, "Scaffold and Stage: Comforting Rituals and Dramatic Traditions in Late Medieval and Renaissance Italy," and Massimo Ferretti, "In Your Face: Paintings for the Condemned in Renaissance Italy," both in Nicholas Terpstra, ed., *The Art of Executing Well: Rituals of Execution in Renaissance Italy,* (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2008), 13-30; 79-97.

[83] Adriano Prosperi, "Il sangue e l'anima: richerche sulle Compagnia di Giustizia in Italia," *Quaderni storici* 51 (1982): 960-999; Terpstra, ed., *The Art of Executing Well.*

[84] Artusi and Patruno, *Deo gratias,* 244-245.

[85] Dicindio, 29.

have been a member, even though the confraternity was founded in her lifetime. She had, however, expressed a desire to care for the sick and the dying, and her devotions and visions had coalesced around the Crucifixion.[86] Villana described how the crucified Christ appeared to her when she was sick and, after gazing on his wounds and suffering, forgot about her own afflictions.[87] As mentioned in the previous chapter, according to tradition, an actual life-size painted wooded crucifix, its torso covered in red welts and its abdomen sunken, was also said to have come to life and spoken to her one day while she was in prayer at Santa Maria Novella (fig. 7). The *Lamentation* scene, therefore, may well be a depiction of Villana's vision of the Crucifixion. Such a scene would have been especially relevant to a condemned person who might imagine themself in Villana's place, contemplating the suffering of Christ as a distraction to their own impending execution.

Villana the Younger's donation to the Tempio confraternity is also an indication of her joint project with her nephew, Sebastiano, to reassociate Villana's sanctity with their family. Both Orlandi and Pope-Hennessy have argued that the faces of Villana and St. Dominic were painted to resemble Villana the Younger and Sebastiano, respectively.[88] Such projections would not be out of the ordinary. Villana's family not only implied their own participation in the Crucifixion by including their portraits in the altarpiece, but sanctified themselves along with their holy ancestor.[89] By contrast, it was unusual for images of the era, and especially those by

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[86] BCNF Conv. sopp. II.IV.167, 76r.

[87] "Videbat enim manifeste crucifixum in carne christum sibi assistere cuius doloribus compatiens sue penalitatis oblita videbatur." BCNF Conv. sopp. II.IV.167, 76v.

[88] Orlandi, *La Beata Villana,* 42-33; Pope-Hennessy, 199.

[89] Compare, for example, Fra Filippo Lippi's altarpiece for the Florentine convent of Sant'Ambrogio altarpiece, commissioned in 1439 by Francesco Maringhi, a cleric from an upper-middle class merchant family like the Benintendi, who had himself depicted in the image kneeling in prayer. On this image, see Megan Holmes, *Fra Filippo Lippi: The Carmelite Painter,* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 221-223. Most of the scholarship on the meanings of donor portraits in religious scenes focuses on Netherlandish painting. Of these, see

Fra Angelico, to include inscriptions like that identifying Villana.[90] Such an inscription draws particular attention to Villana, and leaves little doubt of her identity. This is especially important when we consider the dual audiences of the painting. The first, the condemned, were forced to kneel before it as part of their procession to the execution grounds, and Villana's devotion to the Crucifixion may have resonated with some of them. The second audience for the painting was the brothers of the Neri confraternity, who were members of prominent Florentine families. The explicit identification of Villana, the depiction of her vision of the Crucifixion, and the inclusion of Villana the Younger and Sebastiano was intended for the members of the Tempio confraternity as a visual statement of the Benintendi family's close connection to an illustrious ancestor.

By 1441, the *Lamentation* altarpiece was complete. The same year, Villana the Younger entrusted Sebastiano with another contract, this time to commission a chapel or an altar for Villana. To fund the project, she gave a house on Via Valfonda, in the neighborhood of Santa Maria Novella, worth 250 florins.[91] The new chapel was to be built along the *ponte* of Santa Maria Novella on the east side of the church, within feet of the Benintendi tomb at Santa Maria Novella, directly opposite Villana's tomb on the west wall of the church (fig. 1).

The construction of a chapel for Villana augmented the Benintendi presence in Santa Maria Novella. By about 1390, the Benintendi had acquired a tomb at Santa Maria Novella.[92]

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especially Barbara Lane, *The Altar and the Altarpiece: Sacramental Themes in Early Netherlandish Painting*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1984); Laura D. Gelfand and Walter S. Gibson, "Surrogate Selves: The 'Rolin Madonna' and the Late-Medieval Devotional Portrait," *Simiolus* 29 (2002): 119-138.

[90] Pope-Hennessy, 17.

[91] Orlandi, *La Beata Villana*, 41.

[92] I have been unable to find a contract for Jacopo's tomb to confirm its date of construction. Jacopo's father, Rosso, died in 1367, making him the heir and executor of his father's estate. This is thus the earliest possible date for the tomb at Santa Maria Novella. More likely, however, the tomb was installed sometime around 1390, after Jacopo's marriage to Paola di Filippo Buoni in 1387/88 and around the time his will was written. It could have been

The saintly Villana's son, Jacopo, had abandoned the family tombs at the Franciscan church of Santa Croce and the parish church of Santa Felicità and installed a new tomb in Santa Maria Novella.[93] He was influenced, it seems, by his mother's decision to become a Dominican tertiary and her later reputation for sanctity.[94] Jacopo's tomb was located on the east side of the nave in the fourth bay, just before the *ponte* (figs. 1 & 15). Villana the Younger situated the new chapel an arm's length away from Jacopo's tomb. Her donation, therefore, created a concentrated familial space within Santa Maria Novella. As we have seen, the body of Villana was repeatedly framed and reframed by the friars in strategic locations in Santa Maria Novella in the years following her death. While Villana's body would remain on the west wall of the church, opposite this familial space, the new chapel dedicated to the Benintendi family saint emphasized her relationship with her family. The architectural features of the space, framed as it was by the piers of the bay on the south side, the wall of the church on the east side, and the *ponte* to the north, would have created an intimate and semi-private space within Santa Maria Novella. Meanwhile, Villana's unassuming tomb on the west wall of the fourth bay near the other holy women would have been dwarfed by this new chapel. This renovation, therefore, visually disrupted the clear link between Villana and the other local holy women, and created a new one between Villana and her family. This desire to link Villana's sanctity with that of her family is highlighted by Villana the Younger's own decision to be interred next to Jacopo in the Benintendi family tomb at Santa Maria Novella when she died in 1444.[95]

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built as late as the 1410s, prior to Jacopo's death in 1418/19. CRSGF 102.104 and 106. I am grateful to Anne Leader and the Digital Sepoltuario project for the invaluable information about the Benintendi tombs in this section.

[93] On the Benintendi tomb at Santa Croce, see n. 20, above.

[94] Brocchi, 93.

[95] ASF, Manoscritti 628, 353, no. 39; ASF, Manoscritti 812, p. 105-6; ASF, Manoscritti, 625, 692, no. 39; Brocchi, 93.

Villana the Younger's will of 1444 also named Sebastiano as her heir and left him in possession of her entire estate.[96] She stipulated that if Sebastiano was unable or unwilling to accept the conditions set forth in the will, the estate would be transferred to Fr. Girolamo di Giovanni, Sebastiano's fellow friar and the author of Villana's *vita*. The will provided for a silver gilded reliquary to hold Villana's skull, while the rest of her body remained in her tomb.[97] Sebastiano would commission this reliquary from Lorenzo Ghiberti in 1445 at a cost of 182 florins.[98] Villana the Younger also left two hundred florins to the Tempio confraternity to support their annual celebration of Villana's feast day on January 29, as well as a house on the Chiasso dei Velluti in Borgo Santo Spirito on the south side of the Arno. From this point on, the Tempio confraternity became closely affiliated with Villana's cult. Villana the Younger's will, therefore, designated all of her possessions for the support of Villana's cult, and provided the financial foundation for the future augmentation and privatization of Villana's sanctity.

Scandal!

Throughout this period, 1436–1444, Sebastiano remained absent from Santa Maria Novella, despite these donations from Villana the Younger being placed under his charge.

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[96] Orlandi had access to Domina Villana's will when he began editing the Necrology, but the document was lost sometime during the second World War or its aftermath when much of Santa Maria Novella's archive was transferred to the Florentine State Archive and National Library. Orlandi, *Necrologio,* II:231n22.

[97] Some eighteenth-century sources mention that Villana's hand was held in a reliquary, but I have been unable to find earlier evidence of this object. These later sources cite a 1421 donation from Federigo di Niccolò Gori, the husband of Villana the Younger (see n. 123, below) for a silver reliquary, and I suspect that the later writers conflated the records for the commission for the skull reliquary with one of the many other reliquaries kept in the sacristy of Santa Maria Novella. ASF CRSGF 102.506, 660r; ASF CRSGF 102A.128.

[98] Orlandi, *Necrologio,* II, 231. Though no longer one of the most sought after artists working in Florence, Ghiberti's reputation would have allowed him to charge a premium on such a commission. In 1401, Ghiberti had won the competition to make a series of bronze doors for the Florentine Baptistery, beating out six other artists including Filippo Brunelleschi. In the 1410s and 1420s Ghiberti had also received commissions from the Arte di Calimala and the Arte del Cambio for life-size bronze statues to adorn the guilds' respective niches on the exterior of Orsanmichele.

Within a year of being named her heir in 1444, however, Sebastiano left the Benedictines and returned to Santa Maria Novella as a Dominican. In February 1445, Lodovico di Francesco Benintendi, Sebastiano's uncle and Villana the Younger's brother, filed charges against Sebastiano with Pope Eugene IV calling for Sebastiano's rights to Villana the Younger's estate to be revoked.[99] Lodovico, who was living in Rome and working for the Roman Curia, accused Sebastiano of mismanaging and misspending Villana the Younger's money and depriving Lodovico and his family of their inheritance, and added that his age prevented him from supporting his large family, which had been reduced to poverty.[100] The case went as far as the papal chaplain and the auditor of causes at the apostolic palace. On May 14, 1445, Sebastiano was informed of the charges against him by the Florentine notary Piero di Giovanni Baldini. The charges were brought by Lodovico's wife, Margherita, and his son-in-law, Antonio da Roma.[101]

Sebastiano responded four days later with a public declaration of his innocence. In the May 1445 document, Sebastiano attested that contrary to the accusations brought against him, he had followed Villana the Younger's will, and had used the goods from the will – as well as his own – to provide numerous charitable contributions.[102] First, he swore that he had commissioned a silver-gilded pyx from Lorenzo Ghiberti for the sacristy of Santa Maria Novella. He also asserted that he had commissioned an altarpiece from Fra Angelico for the Tempio confraternity, in accordance with Villana the Younger's instructions, and that he himself had consecrated the altarpiece. In addition, he funded the celebration of the feast of St. Catherine of Alexandria in Santa Maria Novella (in whose chapel Villana had initially been buried). He also provided an

[99] Orlandi, *Necrologio,* I, 235.
[100] Ibid., 234.
[101] Ibid., 235.
[102] Orlandi, *Necrologio,* II, appendix LXV, 482-483.

annual annuity of 15 florins to the Tempio confraternity in perpetuity, which the confraternity would use to fund the celebration of the feast of the Virgin Mary in Santa Maria Novella every year. The testimony goes on to describe Sebastiano's charity from his own funds, including dowries for young women in the town of Marignolle, where his ancestors were from, to enable them to marry. Further, he swore that he had invested 900 florins in the Florentine *Monte delle doti* to provide dowries for Lodovico's daughters, as well as provided gifts of bread, wine, oil, and other goods totaling more than 300 florins to Lodovico and his family.

Sebastiano's testimony was co-signed by twenty-six witnesses, including fellow friars from Santa Maria Novella, secular priests, and eminent laypeople, a litany that suggests Sebastiano was well connected and well liked in Florence. Among the signatories were Fra Girolamo di Giovanni, the author of Villana's *vita*, the artist Lorenzo Ghiberti from whom Sebastiano had commissioned a reliquary for Villana's relics, and Piero di Giovanni Baldini, the notary responsible for registering Villana the Younger's will with the Florentine *comune*.[103] Sebastiano's confessor, Niccolo Mazzuoli, and Lodovico's own grandson, Giacomo, were also among the signatories. In addition, 14 other Dominicans signed the testimony in Sebastiano's defense, including professors at the Florentine *studium*. Four other clergy from non-Dominican establishments, to whom Sebastiano may have provided charitable support, were also witnesses in Sebastiano's case: the rector of the church of Santa Maria a Argiano in San Casciano, a small town within the diocese of Florence, Paulo Giovanni de Alamannis; Girolamo, rector of the church of Sant'Ilario a Colombaia just outside the walls of Florence at the Porta Romana; Paolo Jacopo, rector of the church of San Pier Gattolino on the south end of the via Romana; and Antonio Francesco of the Florentine parish church of San Giorgio alla Costa, now near the Forte

[103] Orlandi, *Necrologio,* II, appendix LXV, 483-486.

de Belvedere. All four denounced the accusations against Sebastiano and attested to the truth of Sebastiano's defense.

While the legal case concerning Villana the Younger's will seems to have been settled – there are no further records about it after the 1444 document submitted to the pope – the accusations of scandal raised in Lodovico's complaint continued to beleaguer Sebastiano. In 1445, Sebastiano, "on account of his conscience," had returned to the Dominicans and was again living at Santa Maria Novella.[104] In June of the same year, Pope Eugene IV charged Antoninus, the future archbishop of Florence, and Fr. Benedetto Dominici with investigating Sebastiano's case. The pope instructed the Dominican authorities in Florence to thoroughly examine Sebastiano's actions in the twenty years since he had left the Dominicans, and ascertain the veracity of the scandalous accusations against Sebastiano.[105] He also gave Antoninus and Benedetto the authority to punish Sebastiano if he was found guilty of the accusations, or to punish those who had brought false charges if he was found innocent. Eugene's letter provides our only insight into the nature of Lodovico's allegations against Sebastiano. In addition to the charge of apostasy for transferring from the Dominicans to the Benedictines without permission, Lodovico alleged that after taking the Benedictine habit, Sebastiano had never gone to live at the Benedictine monastery in Casentino. Worse still, after leaving Santa Maria Novella, Sebastiano "had continued to wander from place to place, taken multiple concubines," – one of whom became pregnant with a son – "engaged in sodomy and usury, and also had known several nuns

[104] "Qui frate Bastianus iam sunt anni duo vell circa consciam motus dimisso prefacto habitu monachali et reassumpto habitu predicatores ad suum pristinum conventum predicatores reversus est." ASF CRSGF 102.101, 264r.

[105] "Lettera di Eugenio IV a Fr. Antonio di A. Pierozzi e a Fr. Benedetto Dominici," in Orlandi, *Necrologio,* II, appendix LXVI, 486-487.

carnally."[106] Finally, contended Lodovico, even after Sebastiano had returned to Santa Maria Novella and taken up the Dominican habit anew, he still continued to live in his own home with his son and his son's wife and supported himself by squandering the money left to him in Villana the Younger's will.[107]

Unfortunately, there are no records of Antoninus's and Benedetto's findings. In 1447, however, legal experts in Florence formally examined Sebastiano's case, this time only on the charge of apostasy, suggesting that the more serious accusations of stealing, which had created a scandal, had not been corroborated. As for the charge of apostasy, although the Benedictines at S. Maria de Mamma in Casentino had received permission from Pope Martin V to admit members of any of the mendicant orders in order to bolster their own numbers, which had been reduced by plague, Sebastiano had not received the requisite permission from his own superiors to transfer from Santa Maria Novella.[108] The lawyers' report does support the allegation that Sebastiano had never actually gone to the Benedictines in Casentino, but instead had remained in Florence in his own home.[109] By not moving to the monastery he had professed to join, Sebastiano was unable to claim that his transfer was motivated by a desire to join a stricter religious order. His return to Santa Maria Novella in 1445 on account of a guilty conscience offered the lawyers further evidence that his transfer to the Benedictes had been invalid.[110] The

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[106] "Per decem et octo annos in Monasterio aliquot non permanserat sed vagabundus incesserat ac concubinas tenuerat, vicium quoque sodomie ac usuris commiserat, necnon plures moniales carnaliter cognoverat." "Lettera di Eugenio IV," 487.

[107] "Et licet de novo habitum fratrum predicatorum ut dicebatur assumpsisset, tamen in domo aliqua…sed cum filio suo ac eius uxore residebat et cum illis bona occupata predicta dissipabat." Ibid., 487.

[108] ASF CRSGF 102.101, 264r.

[109] "Qui fr. Bastianus numquam in dicto claustro, moram traxit, sed continuo in domo propria cum attinentibus suis stetit, in eademque abbatia nec tunc, nec nunc memoria fuit vel est, quod stetit vel fuerit aliquis monachus, seu viguerit observantia regularis, ymo prefactus dominus abbas ob paupertatem dicti monasterii, florentie vitam suam degebat sumtibus alienis." Ibid.

[110] See n. 108 above.

lawyers found that Sebastiano had not received the requisite permission when he left Santa Maria Novella for the Benedictines, and had not joined the monks in Casentino. Therefore, Sebastiano's transfer from the Dominicans to the Benedictines was not valid, and he was guilty of apostasy.[111]

In September 1447, therefore, Sebastiano sought formal absolution for his apostasy.[112] The case came before Cardinal Giovanni Morinense, the Cardinal Protector of the Dominican Order, and was presented on Sebastiano's behalf by Girolamo di Giovanni, Zenobio Jacopo, Biagio de Guasconi, and Rolando de Bonarli.[113] The petition appealed to the cardinal's power to act on behalf of the pope, and asked for Morinense's approval of Sebastiano's return to the Dominicans, as well as a dispensation for the irregularities incurred in between Sebastiano's departure from Santa Maria Novella in 1423 and his return in 1445. Morinense granted Sebastiano's request. He also imposed on him public penance: Sebastiano was required to go barefoot from Santa Maria Novella to the church of Santissima Annunziata in Florence.[114] This

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[111] "An dictus transitus, ut supra factus per fratrem Bastianum de ord. pred. ad ord. monasticum valuerit necne….Ex quibus omnibus clare et manifeste concluditur, dictum transitum factum de ord. pred. ad dictum ord. monasticum per dictum fratrem Bastianum non valuisse et non tenuisse, et non valere et non tenere." Ibid. Sebastiano's transfer is not called apostasy in the lawyers' decision, but it is referred to as such in the document outlining Sebastiano's penitence: "habitum sancti Dominici dimictendo et sic apostatando a suo ordine." "Giudizio del Card. Giovanni, detto Morinense," in Orlandi, *Necrologio,* II, appendix LXVIII, 489.

[112] In 1450, Pope Nicholas V would issue a bull permitting anyone who had left the Dominican Order to retake the friars' habit. "Et postea…fr. Bastianus penitentia ductus ad cor revertens…volens exonerare conscientiam suam, reversus est ad dictum ordinem et religionem propriam sancti Dominici ord. pred. ubi fuit benigne acceptus a suo superior scilicet a supradicto frater Jeronimo de Florentia magistro et tunc priore dicti conventus et fuit absolutus ab omni vincula excommunicationis in quo fuisset incursus propter huiusmodi apostasiam." Ibid.

[113] Ibid., 489.

[114] "Iniugens sibi quod loco penitentie [Santa Maria Novella] discalceatus pedibus debeat ire crastino die tunc proximo future ad ecclesiam servorum de Florentia." Ibid. The record of the judgment does not indicate why Sebastiano was instructed to go to Santissima Annunziata, the Florentine Servite church. At the time, a fresco of the Annunciation inside the church was considered the most potent cult image in Florence. I suspect, therefore, that Morinense expected Sebastiano to complete his penance in front of this image. On the Annunciation fresco and its cult, see Chapter 3, and Megan Holmes, "The Elusive Origins of the Cult of the Annunziata in Florence," in *The Miraculous Image In the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance,* eds. E. Thunø and G. Wolf, (Rome: Analecta Romana Instituti Danici in collaboration with L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2004), 97-121.

penance was relatively light, suggesting that the scandals of which Sebastiano was accused by his uncle, Lodovico, were exaggerated.

Building a Legacy

By 1451, Sebastiano's legal troubles had been resolved, and he had secured possession of his patrimony, but the stigma of scandal still remained. It was for this reason that Sebastiano renewed his efforts to promote Villana's cult, and ensuring in the process that her sanctity would be linked to his own reputation and that of his family. Sebastiano's first order of business was to commission a new tomb for Villana's remains. This would replace the humble tomb on west wall of the church, positioned near the ground just before the stairs that led up to the *ponte,* and which depicted Villana in repose, carved in low relief.[115] On July 18, 1451, he received permission from Fr. Guida di Michele, the prior of Santa Maria Novella, to sign a contract with the artist Bernardo Rossellino for the project.[116] Bernardo agreed to finish the tomb by December of the same year or pay a 20 florin fine. Sebastiano guaranteed payment by putting up his property in Marignolle as collateral, which would revert to Bernardo if Sebastiano failed to make payment. This new tomb would be installed on the east wall of the fourth bay of Santa Maria Novella, in the same space as the Benintendi tomb and the chapel commissioned by Villana the Younger.

The following year, Sebastiano formalized arrangements for the celebration of Villana's feast. These efforts were supported by Sebastiano's sister, also named Villana, who provided

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[115] The most recent study of Villana's tomb inexplicably states that she was buried in the pavement on the west side of the church in the fourth bay. On this, see Chapter 3, p. 29. Anne Markham Schulz, *The Sculpture of Bernardino Rossellino and his Workshop,* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), 108-109.

[116] ASF CRSGF 102.101, 195r-197v. On Bernardo Rossellino and this tomb, see Schulz, 107-111, and illustrations 96-105.

money to buy a house in the Sant'Apollinare parish for 300 florins.[117] The profits from renting out the house as well as from another property on via Maestra in the San Pier Gattolini parish would be given to the Tempio confraternity to fund Villana's feast. Sebastiano's arrangements for the feast stipulated that the celebration be held annually on the last Sunday of January. The Tempio confraternity was required to spend 64 lire (about 15 florins) annually on the feast: 40 for the *pietanza* for the friars and celebrants, and 24 lire for wax.[118] Finally, the confraternity was required to invite Sebastiano and Federigo di Niccolò Gori, the husband of the donatrix, to the feast as long as they were living, and after their deaths, two of their closest relatives.[119]

Sebastiano also endowed the confraternity of Gesù Pellegrino, which celebrated Villana's feast alongside the Tempio. The Pellegrino confraternity was a flagellant group founded in 1333, and had grown from sixty-three members in 1338 to 316 by 1446.[120] The confraternity originally met in the Chapel of San Niccolò at Santa Maria Novella, a space adjacent to the monastery's pharmacy. This location was incongruously public given the confraternity's emphasis on anonymity as an essential quality of true penitence.[121] Thus in the second half of the fourteenth century they built a private oratory within the cloister of Santa Maria Novella, and commissioned paintings of the crucifixion to adorn the space and inspire devotion to Christ's suffering on the

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[117] ASMN I.A.30, Vincenzo Borghigiani, *Cronaca annalistica di S. Maria Novella,* t. III pp. 34-35. Orlandi mistakenly refers to this Villana as another of Sebastiano's aunts – an understandable error in a tangled family tree. Orlandi, *La beata Villana,* 44-45, and Ibid., *Necrologio,* II, 240.

[118] Ibid. Calculations based on Goldthwaite, Economy, 609-611, 613.

[119] The Gori family also had a tomb in Santa Maria Novella, adjacent to the Benintendi tomb installed by Villana's son, Jacopo (see fig. 15). I have not been able to determine which member of the Gori family had this tomb built, nor whether Federigo and Villana were buried in it, but the proximity of the Gori and Benintendi tombs to one another, and to Beata Villana's tomb, implies that Federigo and Villana's interest in Beata Villana's cult did not begin or end with these donations to the Tempio and Pellegrino confraternities. ASF, Manoscritti, 812, p. 49, cap. 7.

[120] John Henderson, *Piety and Charity in Late Medieval Florence,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 199n18.

[121] Kathleen Giles Arthur, "Cult Objects and Artistic Patronage of the Fourteenth-Century Flagellant Confraternity of Gesù Pellegrino," in *Christianity and the Renaissance: Image and Religious Imagination in the Quattrocento,* ed. Timothy Verdon and John Henderson, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1990), 340.

cross.[122] The group kept its membership anonymous, but members – all men – came from across the city.[123] It is not clear whether Sebastiano himself was a member. Nonetheless, his endowment stipulated that the Pellegrini were to provide an additional 24 pounds of wax on Villana's feast day, and after Sebastiano's death were to celebrate an annual mass for his soul. To this end, the Pellegrini would receive 5 florins annually from the Ospedale di San Gallo.[124]

To coincide with the inaugural celebration of Villana's feast under these new arrangements, in 1452 Giovanni Caroli, a friar at Santa Maria Novella, copied the text of Villana's *vita* that Girolamo di Giovanni had written thirty years earlier. Caroli was deeply involved in the religious and intellectual milieu of Dominican spirituality, and humanism in Florence over the course of his career.[125] This copy of Villana's *vita* is the first known text associated with Caroli, who would become a prolific author, writing biblical exegeses, a history of Florence, and polemical tracts against Pico della Mirandola and Savonarola.[126] He also wrote a *vita* of Giovanni Dominici, whom he considered an exemplar of the previous generation of

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[122] Henderson, *Piety and Charity*, 144.

[123] Ibid.

[124] 5 florins was about 50 days pay for a worker making an average wage in 1450 (Goldthwaite, *Economy*, 613). The Tempio and Pellegrino confraternities, therefore, received the same amount of money for wax, but the Tempio was given extra to fund the pietanza.

[125] Edelheit has argued that Caroli "should be regarded as the most authoritative Dominican theologian in the city at that period." Ibid., 49-50. For scholarship on Caroli's life and role within the humanist community in Florence, see, in addition to Edelheit, the work of Salvatore I. Camporeale, including "Giovanni Caroli: dal *Liber dierum* alle *Vitae fratrum*," *Memorie domenicane* 16 (1985): 199-233; "Giovanni Caroli, 1460-1480: Death, Memory, and Transformation," in *Life and Death in Fifteenth-Century Florence*, ed. Marcel Tetel, Ronald G. Witt, and Rona Goffen, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1989), 16-27; "Humanism and the Religious Crisis of the Late Quattrocento: Giovanni Caroli, O.P., and the *Liber dierum lucensium*," in *Christianity and the Renaissance: Image and Religious Imagination in the Quattrocento*, ed. Timothy Verdon and John Henderson, (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1990), 445-466.

[126] Caroli's works include the *Liber dierum lucensium* (1461-1462), a dialogue in three parts decrying the decline of the Dominican Order, the *Vitae non nullorum fratrum beate Mariae Novellae* (1470-1480) – Caroli's principal work – a compendium of biographies of prominent friars at Santa Maria Novella reflecting on the history of Florence and the monastery's place in it, a vernacular version of the *vita* of Vincent Ferrer (c. 1490), a treatise on the Office of the Dead (1498), written for a group of nuns, and a number of sermons and works of biblical exegesis.

Of these, only the *Liber dierum lucensium* has been published, in part, in Amos Edelheit, *Ficino, Pico and Savonarola: The Evolution of Humanist Theology 1461/2–1498*, (Boston: Brill, 2008). For Caroli's complete bibliography, see Orlandi, *Necrologio*, II, 360-380.

friars at Santa Maria Novella, and which had now fallen into a spiritual decline as the result of lax discipline.[127] Caroli was almost certainly encouraged by Sebastiano to transcribe Villana's *vita*. Like Girolamo, Caroli was a close friend of Sebastiano, and regarded him as a mentor during his early years as a Dominican.[128] Caroli's copy of the text does not seem to have been intended for a canonization process.[129] The manuscript containing the *vita* is recorded in the fifteenth-century catalog of the library at Santa Maria Novella, suggesting that it had not traveled beyond Florence.[130] This manuscript also contains the vernacular *reportationes* of Giordano da Rivalto's (1260–1311) sermons on Genesis, preached during the 1304 Lenten cycle.[131] As Corbari has noted, both the *vita* and the *reportationes* are written in the same hand, and the relatively large size of the manuscript differs from the traditionally smaller size of manuals for itinerant preachers.[132] This manuscript, therefore, was more likely intended to remain in the monastery's library to be studied by the friars, and perhaps read by members of the Tempio and Pellegrino confraternities. In this context, this manuscript may have been intended as an allegory of the Dominican Order at Santa Maria Novella. Giordano da Rivalto's sermons on Genesis

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[127] *Vita del B. Giovanni Dominici,* in *Vitae non nullorum fratrum beate Mariae Novellae,* ASMN VIII.C.4, 272r-299v.

[128] "Sebastiani cuius ego memoriam, quandiu superero postquam retinebo, cum una ut sepe solebat aut de nostrorum temporum inopia eo maxime quereretur quo superiorem etatem, ipse vidisset aut certe me ad literrarum stadium provocaret." [BCNF, Conv. sopp. C.8.279, 36v.] Like Sebastiano, Caroli had switched monastic orders; he initially joined the Cistercians, but transferred to the Dominicans at Santa Maria Novella in 1448 when the Cistercian community was dissolved for failing to observe the rules of the order. [Orlandi, *Necrologio,* II, 353-354.] For Caroli, the death of Sebastiano and other Dominican luminaries of his generation – including Girolamo di Giovanni – marked a precipitous decline in the devotion and learning at Santa Maria Novella. [BCNF, Conv. sopp. C.8.279, 36v-38r.]

[129] It is unclear whether Girolamo di Giovanni's original text ever made it to Rome either.

[130] BCNF, Conv. sopp. F.6.294.

[131] Giordano's *thema* was the first verse of the book of Genesis. See Delcorno, *Per l'edizione delle prediche di frate Giordano da Pisa,* (Florence: Sansoni, 1964), 44-47. On *reportationes,* see Ibid., "Medieval Preaching," 497-501. For Giordano's life and Lenten preaching, see *Quaresimale fiorentino: 1305-1306,* ed. Carlo Delcorno, Autori classici e documenti di lingua, (Florence: Sansoni, 1974).

[132] Eliana Corbari, *Vernacular Theology: Dominican Sermons and Audience in Late Medieval Italy,* (Boston: De Gruyter, 2013), 99-100. Corbari is at pains to show that Villana's *vita* is representative of what she calls "vernacular theology." To that end, she uses this manuscript as evidence that the Dominicans were interested in vernacular theology and that this trend was not something that was limited to the laity. [Ibid., 102].

represented the beginning of time, while Villana's *vita* represented the present day, and the contemporary work of the Dominicans in Florence. Her star-studded apotheosis, featuring saints from across Christian history, and the history of the Dominican Order – the Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene, Paul, Dominic, Aquinas, and Peter Martyr – neatly bookended the narrative of the manuscript. By pairing Villana's *vita* with Giordano's sermons on Genesis, therefore, Caroli was not just doing a favor for a friend with a famous grandmother. More than that, he was positioning Villana within a broader narrative of history at the same moment that her cult was becoming an official part of the physical and ritual fabric of the community at Santa Maria Novella.

In 1452, Sebastiano's legal problems were literally buried with Villana in a spectacular tomb. The project had cost 250 lire. The white marble tomb features a nearly life-size image of Villana, positioned in partial profile, and carved in medium relief (figs. 16-18). Her depiction here is similar to her depiction in the first tomb commissioned by the friars: she lays in repose, her arms gently folded across her chest, dressed in the habit of the Dominican tertiaries, and wearing sandals on her feet.[133] Two putti at her head and feet pull back a carved curtain with one hand, and hold one end of an unfurled scroll with the other. The text, written by Sebastiano, and incised and painted in red oil, spans the length of Villana's body, and reads:

OSSA VILLANE MVLIERIS SANCTISSIME
IN HOC CELEBRI TVMVLO REQVIESCVNT[134]

Above the scroll, two disembodied hands hold a radiant crown. The white marble elements seem to rest upon a framed red marble panel. The other elements of the tomb are now lost. Originally,

[133] The contract between Sebastiano and Bernardo stipulated that the effigy on the new tomb should be about the same size as that on the first tomb: "…la figura della beata Villana a giacere intaglata di mezzo rilievo di lunghezza di braccia tre come sta quell ache v'è di poco rilievo. E questo ae a essere di mezzo rilievo." ASF CRSGF 102.101, 196r.

[134] "The bones of Villana, a woman most holy, rest in this distinguished tomb."

a black marble base, about 20 centimeters high, and a thin, white marble cornice filled the space between the floor and the bottom of the red marble panel.[135] The fringe of the white marble canopy was gilded, and brocaded on the inside in black and gold, and brocaded in a different pattern on the outside.[136] The wooden crucifix that had hung above Villana's first tomb was reinstalled above this new edifice.[137]

The tomb was installed on schedule and was the gleaming centerpiece of the inaugural celebration of Villana's feast under Sebastiano's new arrangements. On Sunday, January 30, 1452, the arches and walls of the fourth bay on the east side of the church and the altar of the chapel commissioned by Villana the Younger in 1441 were draped with silks, candles were lit around the new tomb, and Villana's skull in its reliquary was put on view on the chapel altar.[138] The members of each of the confraternities processed together – the Pellegrini in white robes, and the members of the Tempio in regular clothes – alongside fourteen friars, all carrying lit candles.[139] Together, they walked to the steps of the presbytery, where another priest was holding the relics of Villana's hands. Each of the celebrants went forward to kiss the relics.[140]

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[135] "…lla [sic] detta sepoltura cominci in terra una fregio di marmo nero alto uno terzo. Lungho braccia e tre e sette ottavi di sopra a questo una basa di marmo biancho lungha braccia tre e mezzo crossa uno sesto scorniciata pulita di sopra una tavola di marmo rosso. Lungha braccia tre e uno quarto alta uno braccio e uno terzo recinta la detta tavola d'una corniciuzza morta dolce e bene pulita." ASF CRSGF 102.101, 196r.

[136] "El detto drappo sia frangiate intorno isbrizzato d'oro. E poi dentro nel campo del padiglone di drieto brocchato d'oro e d'altro colore nero e brocchato di fuori variata da quello di dentro." Ibid.

[137] On January 27, 1452 – the Thursday before the inaugural celebration of Villana's feast under Sebastiano's new arrangements – Sebastiano and Bernardo executed a supplement to the contract for Villana's tomb. This provided for a tabernacle for the crucifix, to be completed by the following Easter, at a cost of 100 lire. It was to consist of two white marble shafts, 2½ *braccia* high by ½ *braccio* wide, supporting a semicircular arch with moldings like those of an architrave. The entire opening was to measure 2 *braccia* wide by 4 *braccia* high. The background was to be painted blue. This tabernacle was almost certainly never made, because none of the descriptions of Villana's tomb or of Santa Maria Novella mentions it. ASF CRSGF 102.101, 196v.

[138] "La Cappeletta del Sepolcro è parata con setini all'Arco e muraglia attorno, con Altare, e lumi, e con la Testa della Beata esposata." ASMN I.A.30, Borghigiani, *Cronaca,* p. 36.

[139] ASMN I.A.30, Borghigiani, *Cronaca,* p. 36.

[140] "…tutti si portano a baciare le mani della Beata a' gradini del presbiterio, che son date loro a baciare da un Padre parato con cotta e stola e due Novizi ai lati contorci accesi." ASMN I.A.30, Borghigiani, *Cronaca,* p. 36.

This part of the ritual was public, and the faithful crowded into the church to watch.[141] After the procession, the friars, the members of the confraternities, and Sebastiano and Federigo di Niccolò Gori – the husband of Sebastiano's sister, Villana – ate a celebratory meal together.

With the installation of the tomb and Villana's relics, the small space in the fourth bay of Santa Maria Novella was now replete both with symbols of the Benintendi family, and public reminders of their saintly foremother. The Benintendi family's association with Villana's sanctity, however, was short lived. Sebastiano's arrangements for Villana's feast, which put the confraternities in charge of its celebration, effectively ensured that ownership of her cult would be transferred to the Tempio and Pellegrini after his own death. Even though the confraternities were required in perpetuity to invite relatives from Sebastiano and Federigo's families to the annual *pietanza*, the public ritual did more to display the relationship between Villana and the confraternities. It was their members who would process and who would have the privilege of touching Villana's relics, and who would be seen doing so by the public. The symbols of the Benintendi family would remain in place for over a century, but their meaning would be passively reframed by this ritual and its participants after Sebastiano's death in 1456.

A Hostile Takeover Thwarted

In 1565, Duke Cosimo orderded Giorgio Vasari to begin massive renovations of Santa Maria Novella and Santa Croce, the two great Mendicant churches of Florence. These changes sought to modernize the churches in the wake of the Council of Trent, and profoundly changed

[141] ASMN I.A.1, *Cronica fratrum Sancte Marie Novelle de Florentia,* fol. 61r.

the liturgical and aesthetic appearance of Santa Maria Novella.[142] The *ponte,* or rood screen, was demolished, tabernacles were constructed in new chapels along the nave, and the high altar was moved forward (south) to make space behind it for a new choir. Villana's tomb was one of many casualties of these renovations. Although the original marble tomb sculpted by Rossellino was preserved, it was moved from its place in the fourth bay of the church, forever dismantling the carefully-constructed relationship between it and the Benintendi family.

On August 26, 1569, in advance of the renovations, Villana's tomb was opened and members of the Pellegrino and Tempio confraternities accompanied her bones as they were processed from the tomb to the sacristy of Santa Maria Novella, where they would be kept for the duration of the renovations. The bones were placed in a chest that was locked with two keys, one for the prior of Santa Maria Novella, and one for the Compagnia delle Pelegrino.[143] By November 1570, the renovation work was complete, and Villana's relics were transferred back to her tomb, now located in the newly constructed chapel of the Pellegrino in the second bay of the church. The reinterrment of Villana's bones was accompanied by a public outpouring of devotion, including reports that the box holding her relics emited an odor of sanctity.[144] To satisfy the public's desire for access to the relics, the prior of Santa Maria Novella decided to display the relic of Villana's skull, which was kept in the silver reliquary that had been commissioned in 1445 by Sebastiano from Lorenzo Ghiberti. This was placed in the Pellegrino

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[142] Marcia B. Hall, "The Ponte in S. Maria Novella: The Problem of the Rood Screen in Italy," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 37 (1974): 157-173; Ibid., *Renovation and Counter-Reformation: Vasari and Duke Cosimo in Sta. Maria Novella and Sta. Croce, 1565-1577,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979).

[143] ASF CRSGF 102.506.

[144] "Nell'anno sequente 1570 sotto di novembre essendo terminato il muramento del nuovo Altare di dette Compagnie in detta chiesa di Santa Maria Novella e del sepolchro della Beata Villana collocato allato ad esso altare con grandissima solennità e concorso di popolo fossero con devote processione riportate le sacre ossa riposte in una cassetta ripiena di varie cose odorifere." ASF CRSGF 102.506, p. 662.

chapel, along with a detailed description of the translation of her bones, and remained on view until 1579 when the reliquary was again returned to the sacristy.[145]

The translation of Villana's relics in 1570 would be only a footnote to our story if not for an incident that followed, which illustrates the extent to which Villana's sanctity had been privatized through Sebastiano's efforts. In 1579, Catherine de' Medici, the widow of Giovan Battista Botti, approached the friars with a proposal.[146] Catherine believed – mistakenly – that her husband was related to Villana, and wished to donate 50 scudi to pay for a bronze reliquary made to look like a bust of Villana and which would hold her skull.[147] This reliquary would replace the silver Ghiberti reliquary, would have Catherine's name and coat of arms prominently displayed on it, and would remain on view to the public in the Pellegrino chapel.

As soon as the Pellegrino and Tempio confraternities caught wind of this, they publicly denounced the plan on the grounds that neither of the confraternities had been consulted, and that the imposition of Catherine's name and coat of arms on Villana's relics and tomb flew in the face of tradition and their rights.[148] It is significant that the confraternities did not object to Catherine's plan for the reliquary itself. There is no sense in any of the documents that the original silver reliquary by Ghiberti should not be replaced, nor that it ought to be preserved on

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[145] "Le sacre ossa…per mano del molto reverendo P. Priore Alessandro Capocchi fosse in esso sepolchro collocata insieme con una scrittura che narra nimutamente tutto il seguito di detta translazione per sodisfare alla devozione dell'popolo fosse allore lasciato fuori il capo di essa beata a fine di chiuderlo in una testa di argento onde nell'anno 1579." Ibid.

[146] This is not the same Catherine de' Medici who was married to the king of France.

[147] "La Signora Caterina de' Medici vedova del'Signore Giovan Battista Botti indotta per avventura della similitudine del casato di suo marito con quello della Beata Villana (benche inverità fossero famiglie diversissime) per sua devozione dessero alla sagrestia di S. Maria Novella scudi cinquanta con i quali i padri facessero fare una testa a suo busto di rame rappresentante la beata Villana nell'quale opponesseri le armi ed il Nome della detta pia gentildonna ed in essa testa collocassero il sudetto capo della Beata Villana." Ibid., pp. 662-663.

[148] "Intesosi ciò da fratelli delle dette dice venerabili Compagnie del Pellegrino e del Tempio ne facessero grandissimo risentimento e deputassero alcuno di loro acciò con ogni premura operassero che la detta reliquia fosse leveta da detto ornamento e testa di rame, tanto più che contro ogni conenienza della compagnie sudette fosserò in essa testa state poste l'armi ed il nome di detta gentildonna." ASF CRSGF 102.506, p. 663.

the grounds of its material and historical value; silver was a more precious material than bronze, and Ghiberti's reputation as one of the foremost artists of the Renaissance had only grown over the course of the sixteenth century with the publication of Vasari's landmark *Lives of the Artists.*[149] Instead, their objection focused on Catherine's plan to impose her name and coat of arms on relics that had traditionally been the purview of the confraternities. The Pellegrino and Tempio confraternities has been entrusted with guardianship of Villana's cult when Sebastiano formalized the arrangements for Villana's feast. Catherine's proposal now threatened this status quo. The imposition of her name and coat of arms on the physical space of Villana's cult would have been a hostile takeover enacted visually, breaking the association between Villana and the confraternities, and transferring that connection to Catherine and her own family.

Privately, the confraternities reached an agreement with the friars that secured their rights to Villana's relics. The agreement reads like thinly veiled blackmail exacted by the friars. The confraternities agreed to pay to have the reliquary regilded, and to give the friars 50 scudi to commission a silver chalice for the friars to use for Mass. In exchange, the friars agreed that no one would be allowed to alter Villana's relics, now or in the future.[150] The silver reliquary would stay in the church and would remain there unless both confraternities gave permission to move,

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[149] On the transformation of the role of the artist in the perceived value of an artwork over the course of the long Renaissance, see especially Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance,* (New York: Zone Books, 2010).

[150] "Reverendus Prior F. Alexander Capocchius et Patres conventus S. Marias Novellas ordinis predicatorus de Florentia inierunt pactus conventionemque fecerunt cum nobilissimis societatibus Sanctissimi Peregrini et S. Marias Crucis de Templo ut patres prenominati conventus tribuant et concedant dictis societatibus caput aureus pro retinendo et includendo capite Beatae Villanae de Bottissii [sic] legibus et conditionibus. In primis ut predetti societates suis expensis ipsum caput aureus deaurari faciant insuper ut fratribus et conventui S. Marie Novelle tribuant pro elemosina et cognitione quinquaginta scuta pro calice argenteo pro predetto fratres faciendo demum ut supra dictum caput aureus iure oblationis perpetuo ad eosdem fratres conventus et ecclesiam spectat et pertineat sempre que sit apud predettos fratres et in conventu ecclesia et sacrario S. Marie Novelle permaneat eis insignibus tamen dictarus societatus appositis in memoria di oblationis quae quidem insignia nunquam est dicto capite aureo deleari possint pro ut neque etiam ex illo unquam amoveri possit caput Beate Villane." ASF CRSGF 102.506, p. 665-666. There is another copy of this agreement in ASF CRSGF 102.101, 197r.

open, or alter it. The confraternities' coats of arms would also be added. The contracts omit any mention of Catherine or the circumstances that made this new agreement necessary, and note only that the reliquary and the new chalice should be on view in the church as reminders of the confraternities' generosity. Although "ownership" of Villana's cult had implicitly belonged to the Pellegrini and Tempio since 1451, when Sebastiano delegated the celebration of Villana's feast to the two groups, the addition of the coats of arms of the confraternities made that ownership explicit. While the public could venerate Villana's relics, they could do so only with a reminder that the confraternities were in charge of those relics and Villana's cult, and enjoyed the unique privileges that proximity to sanctity granted.

By 1579, therefore, Villana's sanctity had been privatized to such an extent that, ironically, her cult was being patronized almost exclusively by men. Although the commemoration of her feast day would continue annually until the suppression of religious organizations under Emperor Leopold II in the late eighteenth century, it would be celebrated by a group of devotees who could not have been further from the audience intended by the Quattrocento proponents of holy mediocrity.[151]

[151] ASF CRSGF 102.506, 658-660.

Conclusion

Moderation and Its Discontents

Almost 500 years after Villana's death, on March 27, 1824, Pope Leo XII beatified Villana in a ceremony held in St. Peter's Square in Rome: framing a wife and mother as a saint, it turns out, was easier in theory than in practice. The popular success of holy mediocrity as a trope was hindered by the very fact that it was so ordinary. As we have already seen, casting off her cape in church was one of the more shocking scenes in Villana's *vita,* but laughably subtle in a genre that privileged the extraordinary, and to readers who would have been more familiar with the image of St. Francis stripping naked in the town square of Assisi. For all but a niche few, the stories of these moderate saints were simply not broadly compelling enough to supplant the fantastic tales of saints noted for their exceptional spirituality. This was as much a shortcoming of the genre as of the theology that underpinned the typology of holy mediocrity. Saints attested to the active role of God in the workings of the world through their piety, miracles, and ministry, and by virtue of their spiritual heroics served as intercessors between Christians and God after their deaths. People prayed to these saints because they sought the help of individuals whose character and holiness was different from their own, and had earned them a special place in heaven.[1] Matrons like Villana were meant to be imitable models of virtue and piety within the world, but their very imitability stripped them of the extraordinary quality that made them effective intercessors. As much as clerics may have tried to provide imitable models of sanctity, few women were interested.[2]

In some instances, the hagiographers of these women apparently recognized this

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[1] Richard Kieckhefer, *Unquiet Souls: Fourteenth-Century Saints and Their Religious Milieu,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 191.

[2] On women's rejection of moderation, see Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women,* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987), 237-244.

shortcoming and tried to enliven their narratives by illustrating the celestial rewards that a pious matron might expect after her death. Villana's hagiographer used his subject's heavenly apotheosis as a setting to leave moderation behind. As we saw in Chapter 2, most of the *vita* emphasizes her role as a wife and mother, but Girolamo concludes with Villana in the company of the saints, the Virgin, and Christ himself: an image that gilds her life with a patina of the extraordinary. Elena Valentini's hagiographer, meanwhile, enlisted famous figures across the history of Christianity to add dramatic luster after death to her otherwise unremarkable life.[3] To welcome Elena into heaven, God directs the archangel Michael to raise a group of famous pagans from hell, including Aristides, Plato, Demosthenes, Lysias, Aeschines, Hyperides, Nestor, Cicero, Varro, Cato, Livy, and Sallust.[4] He then restores the souls of eleven early Christians: Basil, John Chrysostom, Gregory of Nazianzus, Origen, Cyprian, Ephrem, Jerome, Lactantius, Hermas, John Cassian, and Pope Leo.[5] Each of these prominent men offer speeches attesting to Elena's piety. When they have finally finished, God takes Elena's hand and welcomes her into heaven.[6] She receives a halo and a tour of heaven before being told in vivid detail the events of the Last Judgment.[7]

These posthumous tales, however, were not just a tactic to add drama to an otherwise boring narrative. Crucially, they vindicated the model of holy mediocrity by illustrating that an

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[3] I have not included Elena among the women discussed in Chapter 2 because her *vita* is so idiosyncratic, and was probably not written for a female audience. On the peculiar quality of the text, see Alison Knowles Frazier, *Possible Lives: Authors and Saints in Renaissance Italy,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 252-267.

[4] "Omnipotens deus Michaeli iussit ab inferis excitare Aristidem, Platonem, Demosthenem, Lysciam, Eschynem, Hyperidem, Nestorem, Ciceronem, Varronem, Titum Liuium, Catonem, Salustium." BAV, Vat. lat. 1223, 2v.

[5] "At ego ipse inquit iubebo Basilii, Grisostomi, Nazanzeni, Origenis, Cypriani, Hephren, Hieronimi, Lactantii, Hermoys, Cassiani, Leonis pape…animas ad eorum corpora reverti." Ibid.

[6] "Tunc omnipotens deus alto ac sublimi solio surrexit et dexteram helene sua retinens dextra sic cepit orare. Per lustra Helena paradise delitias. Ostendam tibi digito et ac nominabo quanta est domus nostre felicitas." BAV, Vat. lat. 1223, 71v.

[7] "Accipe hoc regnum meum hoc diademam de manu mea….Haec est aeterna Hierusalem terram in quam repromissionis lacte et melle plenitudineque bonorum omnium emanantem. Haec sunt palatial illa vere virentia. Hic est fons ille peremnis vitae ac foelicitatis aeterne qui ac largissimos divinorum munerum latices spargitur." Ibid., 71v-72r. The description of heaven continues 72r-74r. The description of the Last Judgement follows on 74r-76v.

unremarkable matron who persevered in her lackluster piety would achieve the same status, and be rewarded, just like a virgin martyr. Such extraordinary moments, however, could only occur after the death of the saint, when her job as an imitable model of matronly piety had ended. These extravagant, celestial welcoming parties were an editorial commentary on the part of the hagiographers, who demonstrated the remarkable reception in heaven that these holy women received as a reward for their piety and moderation while alive. Such over-the-top scenes offered a necessary imprimatur on the lives of moderate saints by exemplifying the very premise of the typology of holy mediocrity: if marriage, with its quotidian and unspectacular pieties, was dutifully and uncomplainingly endured, then it was up to the hagiographer to demonstrate that these matrons were capable of transcending the thirtyfold reward of their mundane lot to obtain the hundredfold fruit of vicarious virginity.

Yet this promise was something of a holy swindle. For even though their hagiographers depicted them as virgin martyrs in heaven, the cults of these unremarkable matrons were still not in the same league as those of virgins. A fifteenth-century Venetian altarpiece (fig. 19) illustrates the slippage between the status of reclaimed virgin that hagiographers imagined for these matrons in heaven, and how these women were perceived even by the communities for whom their cults were intended. The rectangular panel measures about two feet tall by about three feet wide, and depicts five female luminaries of the Dominican Order dressed in the Dominican habit: (from left to right) Giovanna of Florence (d. 1357) – who we encountered in Chapter 3 – Giovanna of Orvieto (1264–1306), Catherine of Siena, Margherita of Città di Castello (1287–1320), and Daniella of Orvieto (active 1378). Each woman is identified by an inscription in Italian below her feet. A crucial moment in each woman's life is depicted in the predella below:

Giovanna of Florence kneels in prayer outside her home, Giovanna of Orvieto, Catherine, and Margherita pray in front of crucifixes as they prepare to receive the stigmata, and Daniella appears at the moment of her death in a state of ecstatic prayer.[8] Notably, all five women were virgins, and each holds a lily signifying her status in one hand, and a cross in the other. Each of the women are dutifully identified as *beate* by the inscription below their feet and the gold-rayed nimbus around their head.[9] The altarpiece was commissioned from the Sienese artist Andrea di Bartolo (active 1389–1428) by Thomas Caffarini of Siena – Maria Sturion's spiritual advisor and hagiographer, and the leader of the Dominican tertiaries in Venice – sometime between 1394 and 1398 for the church of Corpus Domini in Venice.[10] As we saw in Chapter 2, Corpus Domini had been founded as a Dominican convent by Giovanni Dominici in 1394, and included adolescent girls, young unmarried women, and widows.[11] It was also the focal point of the Dominican tertiary community in Venice.[12] It was for this diverse audience that Thomas commissioned the altarpiece, which was probably intended for the oratory built inside the church in 1398 to house Catherine of Siena's relics, including some of her letters, a finger, a tooth, and her first habit.[13]

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[8] Gaudenz Freuler, "Andrea di Bartolo, Thommaso Caffarini, and Sienene Dominicans in Venice," *Art Bulletin* 69 (1987): 574-575; Jane Tylus, *Reclaiming Catherine of Siena: Literacy, Literature, and the Signs of Others,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 107-108, 220.

[9] None of these women had been beatified when the altarpiece was painted; Catherine of Siena would be canonized in 1460, and the other women would be beatified in the seventeenth century. Depicting them as *beate,* however, indicates that they already had a public cult. So-called "beatification by image" was not uncommon; see André Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages,* trans. Jean Birrell, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 86-89.

[10] Freuler, 583-584.

[11] On the founding and history of Corpus Domini, see Daniel Bornstein, introduction to *Life and Death in a Venetian Convent: The Chronicle and Necrology of Corpus Domini, 1395–1436,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 3-10.

[12] Ibid., 4-5.

[13] Thomas describes his efforts in procuring these relics in Catherine's canonization proceedings. *Il processo Castellano,* ed. M.-H. Laurent, *Fontes vitae S. Catharinae senensis historici,* vol. 9, (Siena: Università di Siena, 1942), 58-66. The community at Corpus Domini was suppressed in 1810, and the church was later demolished to make way for railroad offices. The altarpiece is now held by the Museo Vetrario on the island of Murano.

It is striking, therefore, that even here, at one of the epicenters from which the Dominicans promoted their paradigm of holy mediocrity, in an altarpiece commissioned by one of its most ardent proponents, married women are absent in favor of virgins. Villana's absence is especially conspicuous. She was, as we saw in Chapter 3, a contemporary of Giovanna of Florence, and a member of the same Florentine Dominican milieu. Giovanna appears in the left panel of the altarpiece with a scene depicting the miracle of the flood, described in Chapter 3, in the predella below. Of the five women pictured in the altarpiece, Giovanna's miracle is the most incongruous; the other four, as mentioned above, are portrayed in prayer, in an interior space, and three of them are shown praying in front of a crucifix. Villana's miracle of the crucifix, described in Chapter 3, was one of the few miracles that occurred while she was alive and would, therefore, have been a more iconographically consistent choice than the image of Giovanna praying outside her home.[14] Furthermore, given Thomas's own role in promoting the typology of holy mediocrity, it is surprising that he did not include Villana in this altarpiece. As we have seen, he championed Maria's holy mediocrity to members of the Dominican community in Venice, even going so far as to recommend explicitly that her life could be a model for other women. In addition to promoting the sanctity of Maria Sturion, he also had a close relationship with Giovanni Dominici, who, as described in Chapter 1, was an early proponent of the typology of holy mediocrity. Dominici was in Venice between 1394 and 1399, and, with Thomas, admitted Maria to the Dominican tertiaries.[15] He was, moreover, a spiritual director to a number of pious matrons, and would later admit Villana's grandson, Sebastiano, to the Dominicans at

[14] This miracle was closely associated with Villana from the earliest years of her cult (see Chapter 3). It is plausible, therefore, that people familiar with Villana's cult would have been familiar with this miracle, even before Girolamo di Giovanni wrote her *vita* in the 1420s. On the authorship of Villana's *vita*, see Chapter 4.

[15] Thomas of Siena, *The Legend of Maria of Venice*, trans. Daniel Bornstein, *Dominican Penitent Women*, ed. Maiju Lehmijoki-Garnder, (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2005), 149-154.

Santa Maria Novella, where he himself had entered the Dominican Order. As the earliest and most prominent exempla of holy mediocrity, Villana, therefore, should have been an obvious figure for Thomas to include in the altarpiece.

On one hand, the exclusion of a saintly matron in favor of virgins makes sense for the conventual setting, where many of the nuns would have been virgins. But the community also included widows, and married tertiaries often visited the church.[16] Nor is this only a matter of Villana being too ordinary to excite the devotion of the women who might gaze upon her likeness. The women pictured at each end of the altarpiece were comparatively unremarkable figures for the era. Daniella of Orvieto, for instance, exchanged letters with Catherine of Siena and was inspired by her to join the Dominican tertiaries, but there are no records of any miracles associated with her, nor any evidence of a cult.[17] Giovanna of Florence, meanwhile, was noted as much for her virginity as her miracles. By contrast, the piety of Margherita of Città di Castello and Giovanna of Orvieto was extreme, not unlike that of Catherine of Siena.[18] The altarpiece, therefore, depicted women noted for their ecstatic piety next to those who were more restrained. Even so, the most moderate of the five were still virgins.

Maria Sturion's life offers some insight into the shortcomings of the typology holy mediocrity. Maria may have been familiar with Villana's story, most likely through Giovanni

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[16] Although the nuns at Corpus Domini were technically subject to strict enclosure, the chronicle of Sister Bartolomea Riccoboni suggests that the nuns had frequent contact with their family and other women outside the cloister. ["The Chronicle of Corpus Domini" in *Life and Death in a Venetian Convent: The Chronicle and Necrology of Corpus Domini, 1395–1436*, ed. Daniel Bornstein, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 25-63.] Maria's *vita* likewise illustrates the permeability of the cloister with her frequent visits to the church at Corpus Domini and her interactions with the members of the community there. See Thomas of Siena, *Legend*, 135, 149.

[17] George Kaftal, *Iconography of the Saints in Tuscan Painting*, (Florence: Sansoni, 1952), 303-304.

[18] Margherita's two *vitae* have been edited and published: Maria Cristiana Lungarotti, *Le Legendae di Margherita da Città di Castello*, (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo, 1994). For Giovanna of Orvieto, see *The Legend of Giovanna of Orvieto*, in *Dominican Penitent Women*, ed. and trans. Maiji Lehmijoki-Gardner, (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2005), 59-86. On the piety of these women, see especially Lehmijoki-Gardner, *Worldly Saints: Social Interaction of Dominican Penitent Women in Italy, 1200-1500*, Bibliotheca Historica 35, (Helsinki: Suomen Historiallinen Seura, 1999).

Dominici. Even so, the story of a fellow pious matron had little influence on her imagination. Thomas tells us that Maria purchased a painting of Catherine of Siena, and later that she commissioned an image of herself in the guise of Catherine, wearing the habit of the Dominicans, and surrounded by saints of the Dominican Order. In this second image, Maria was depicted praying before a crucifix while holding her heart in her hand to offer it to Christ.[19] She would later lament that this painting inadequately portrayed her devotion because it depicted her holding her heart in only one hand, and not in both, which, she felt, would have better conveyed the depth of her devotion.[20] I suspect that Maria commissioned her own panel before she saw Thomas's altarpiece, which was installed sometime in 1398 – at least six months before her death in July 1399 – and regretted her own painting after seeing this image of Margherita lifting up her heart with both hands. Her disappointment reinforces the persistent theme in her *vita* that she was not interested in the examples of other pious matrons, but in virgin saints like Margarita of Città di Castello and Catherine of Siena. In addition, even though Maria was semi-literate in the vernacular, her education about the saints came as much from images as texts.[21] After she acquired the image of Catherine of Siena, she began to imitate her by wearing a hairshirt and a white tunic.[22] She also used the icon she commissioned of herself dressed in the Dominican habit as a contemplative tool, and would meditate on the image to satisfy her desire to take religious vows.[23] If Maria was looking at the altarpiece Thomas commissioned, therefore, she would have

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[19] "She eventually had herself depicted in another icon, wearing that habit [of the Dominicans] among some images of saints of our order set before the image of the crucified Jesus, holding her heart in her hand and offering it always and in every way to the Lord Jesus…" Thomas of Siena, *Legend,* 139.

[20] Ibid., 144.

[21] Thomas says that Maria knew how to read "somewhat," and read the Divine Office from a Dominican Rite breviary purchased for her in Siena. Ibid., 123, 128.

[22] Ibid., 139.

[23] Ibid., 148.

seen exemplars of virginal sanctity, and not matrons like herself.[24] Even if she knew about Villana from Dominici or Thomas, Villana's life would not have been reinforced in her imagination through iconography. Thus, even for a woman who was the ideal audience for holy mediocrity and who would herself be lauded for conforming to a model of boring piety, exemplars of the paradigm were neither prevalent nor appealing.

It was not enough, therefore, to be pious and unremarkable. To become a saint of any popularity in late medieval Italy, matrons and mothers had to undergo arduous ordeals to prove their holiness. Francesca Romana (1384–1440), a Benedictine tertiary, illustrates what it took for a matron and mother to succeed as a saint. Like Villana, Maria, and Bonacosa, she was born into a wealthy family, and was a precociously pious child who resolved to enter the religious life.[25] When she was eleven or twelve, however, she was married to a wealthy Roman nobleman, Lorenzo Ponziani, and the couple had at least three children.[26] Like the women noted for their holy mediocrity, Francesca remained in her household for most of her life, and was lauded for her piety and charity.[27] Her life, however, was also marked by the assaults of palpable demons, and she experienced horrific visions of the torments of hell and ecstatic visions of Christ, Mary, and the saints.[28] She also performed miracles, and founded Tor de'Specchi, a community of Benedictine oblates, and was recognized as a living saint for her efforts.[29] Her *vita,* written in the vernacular by her confessor, Giovanni Mattiotti, was so popular that it was translated into Latin,

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[24] The iconography of the Corpus Domini altarpiece was not only formative for Maria; its depiction of Catherine became canonical. See Freuler, 577.

[25] AASS, March 2, (Antwerp, 1668), 92. On Francesca's life and cult, see especially Guy Boanas and Lyndal Roper, "Feminine Piety in Fifteenth-Century Rome: Santa Francesca Romana," *Disciplines of Faith: Studies in Religion, Politics, and Patriarchy,* (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul Inc., 1987), 177-193.

[26] AASS, March 2, 93.

[27] Ibid., 93-94.

[28] Ibid., 103-152.

[29] Ibid., 94-95, 95-98.

and circulated widely.

While holy mediocrity did not change the profile of sanctity in the late Middle Ages, it was a indication of the trend towards curtailing women's spirituality that would come to fruition in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The emphasis on restraint in the *vitae* that employ the typology of holy mediocrity points towards broader cultural trends that emphasized moderation and its more sinister counterpart, obedience. The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries saw the rapid curtailing of women's spirituality in Italy and a growing suspicion of religious women. This trend towards imposing obedience on women was most visible in the tightening of rules of *clausura,* or enclosure, on both cloistered and tertiary women's religious communities, which accelerated over the course of the fifteenth century. The enclosure of cloistered religious communities had been an ideal of monastic life since being formalized in the *Regula ad moniales* of Caesarius of Arles and the *Rule* of St. Benedict, and prescriptions limiting the movement and visibility of religious women are found as early as the fourth century with Augustine and Jerome.[30] However, Pope Benedict VIII's decretal *Periculoso,* issued in 1298, marked a theoretical shift in attitudes towards *clausura,* mandating stricter enclosure for female monastic communities and initiating a trend of both physical and theoretical boundary formation that would continue to be revised and reemphasized until reaching its strictest formulation at the Council of Trent in the sixteenth century.[31] In the century before Trent, ecclesiastical officials

[30] Elizabeth Makowski, *Canon Law and Cloistered Women:* Periculoso *and its Commentators, 1298-1545,* Washington, DC: Catholic University Press, 1997), 9.

[31] The efficacy of *Periculoso* on enforcing strict claustration continues to be a matter of historiographical debate. See Silvia Evangelisti, "'We Do Not Have It, and We Do Not Want It': Women, Power, and Convent Reform in Florence," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 34 (Fall 2003): 677-700; Makowski, *Canon Law;* Katherine Gill, "*Scandala:* Controversies Concerning *Clausura* and Women's Religious Communities in Late Medieval Italy," in *Christendom and Its Discontents: Exclusion, Persecution, and Rebellion, 1000-1500,* ed. Scott L. Waugh and Peter D. Diehl, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 177-203; Sharon Strocchia, *Nuns and Nunneries in*

began to regulate female religious life with greater regularity by imposing claustration on communities of female tertiaries. In 1566, Pope Pius V struck another blow to the autonomy of religious women when he made the unprecedented mandate that all women who were affiliated with a religious order were now required to profess solemn vows.[32] This move was particularly directed at women affiliated with tertiary communities. Since all women who had taken solemn vows were bound by strict enclosure, this move forced women who had entered the religious life under the looser restrictions of a tertiary community to abide by the same rules as cloistered nuns, and therefore to live a profoundly different form of religious commitment than the one they had signed up for. By the end of the sixteenth century, the autonomy of women's religious communities had been effectively curtailed, clear boundaries established which delineated the acceptable limits of female religious life, and convents transformed from centers of relative female autonomy to virtual prisons. It is hardly a coincidence that when the convent of Le Murate in Florence, whose name came from the exceptionally high walls erected for the purposes of enclosing the women inside, was suppressed in the early nineteenth century, it was transformed with few changes into the state prison of Florence.[33]

In the end, it is not at all surprising that women were not interested in holy mediocrity. These women were not naïve and, though perhaps not mystics, still dreamed about the lives of defiant virgin martyrs, visionary mystics, and extreme ascetics. They were not about to venerate

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Renaissance Florence, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009); Gabriella Zarri, *Recinti: Donne, clausura, e matrimonio nella prima età moderna*, (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2000).

[32] Evangelisti, 681.

[33] Saundra Weddle, Women in wolves' mouths': Nuns' Reputations, Enclosure, and Architecture at the Convent of the Le Murate in Florence," in *Architecture and the Politics of Gender in Early Modern Europe,* ed. Helen Hills (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003): 115-130.

something that, on some level, they must have instinctively sensed was a strategy of containment – a prison wrought by rhetoric instead of stones.

Illustrations

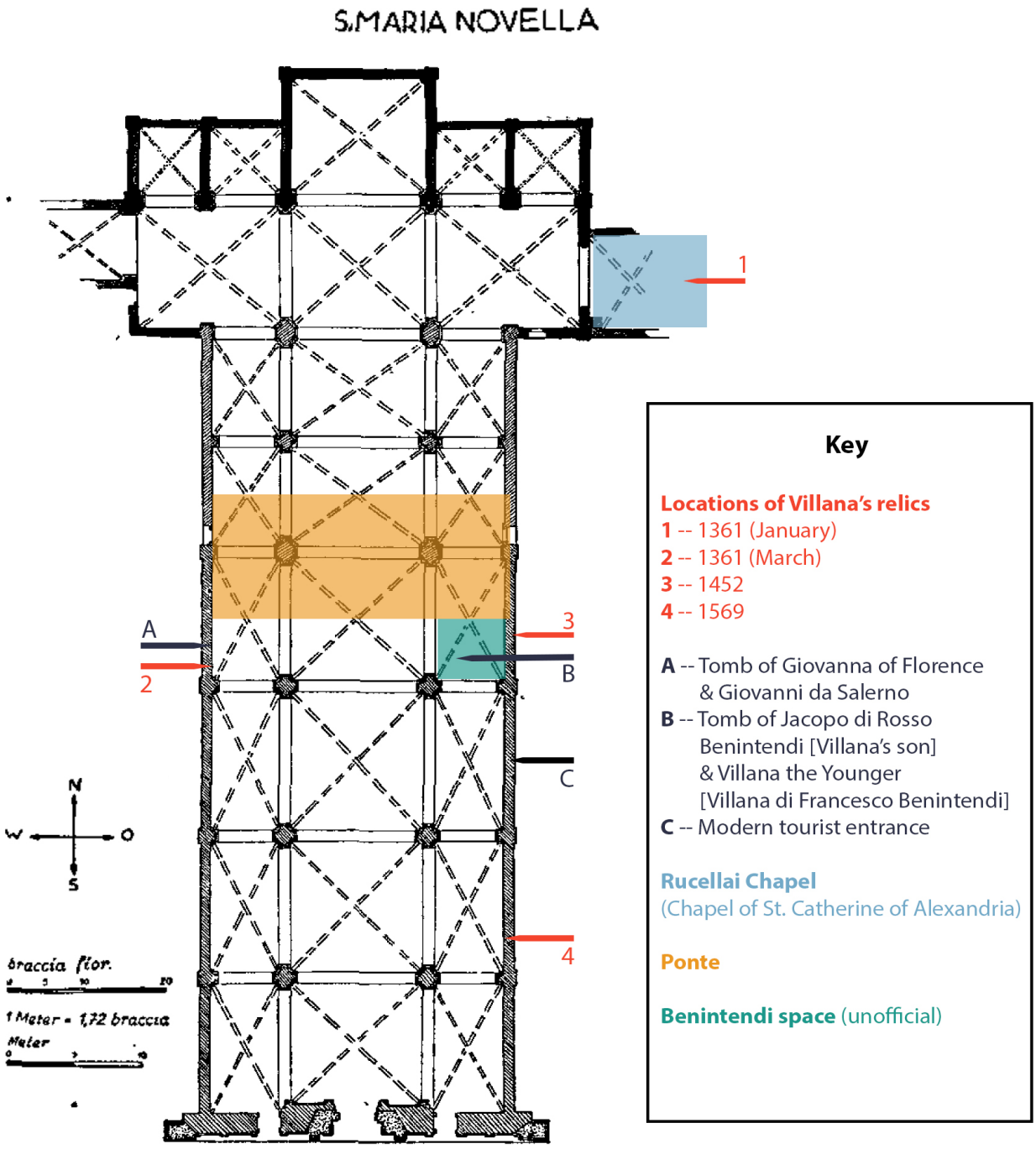

Figure 1
Map of Santa Maria Novella

Adapted from Walter and Elizabeth Paatz, *Die Kirchen von Florenz*, vol. III, p. 664.

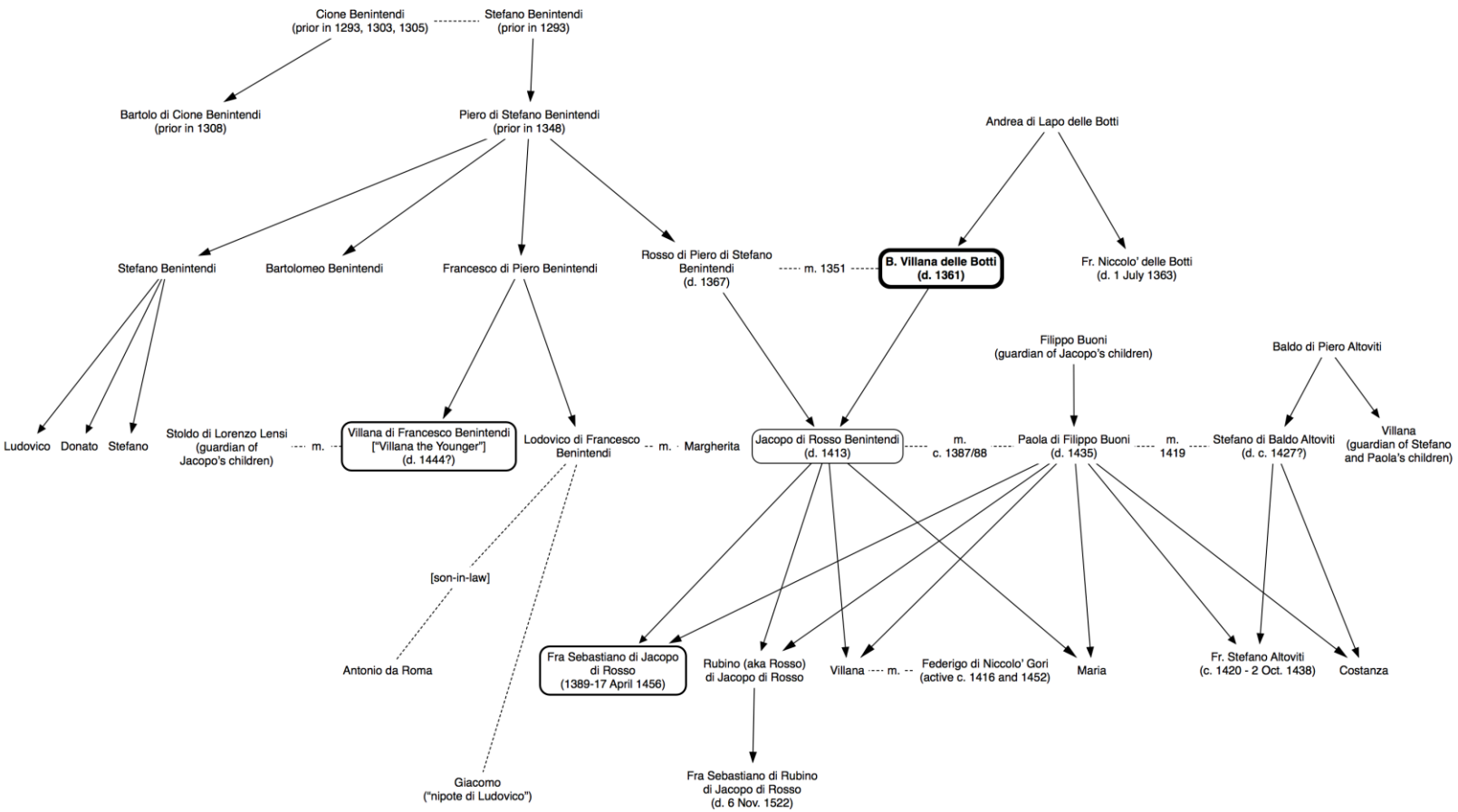

Figure 2
Family Tree of Villana delle Botti

Figure 3
Rucellai Chapel, Santa Maria Novella, Florence
(view from high altar looking southeast)

Figure 4
East wall, Rucellai Chapel, Santa Maria Novella, Florence

Frescoes (L-R): *St. Dominic*, *Crucifixion*, *St. Thomas Aquinas*
All attributed to workshop of Giotto, c. 1330-40.
Sculpture (center): *Madonna and Child*, Nino di Andrea Pisano, c. 1350.

Figure 5
North wall, Rucellai Chapel, Santa Maria Novella, Florence

Painting: *Martyrdom of St. Catherine of Alexandria*, Giuliano Bugiardini, 1530-40.

Figure 6
South wall, Rucellai Chapel, Santa Maria Novella, Florence

Frescoes (L-R): *Martyrdom of St. Ursula, Massacre of the Innocents*
Both attributed to Master of St. Cecilia, c. 1310

Figure 7
Crucifix of Villana delle Botti, detail
English(?), c. 1300, Cappella della Pura, Santa Maria Novella, Florence

Image courtesy of the Archivio di Santa Maria Novella

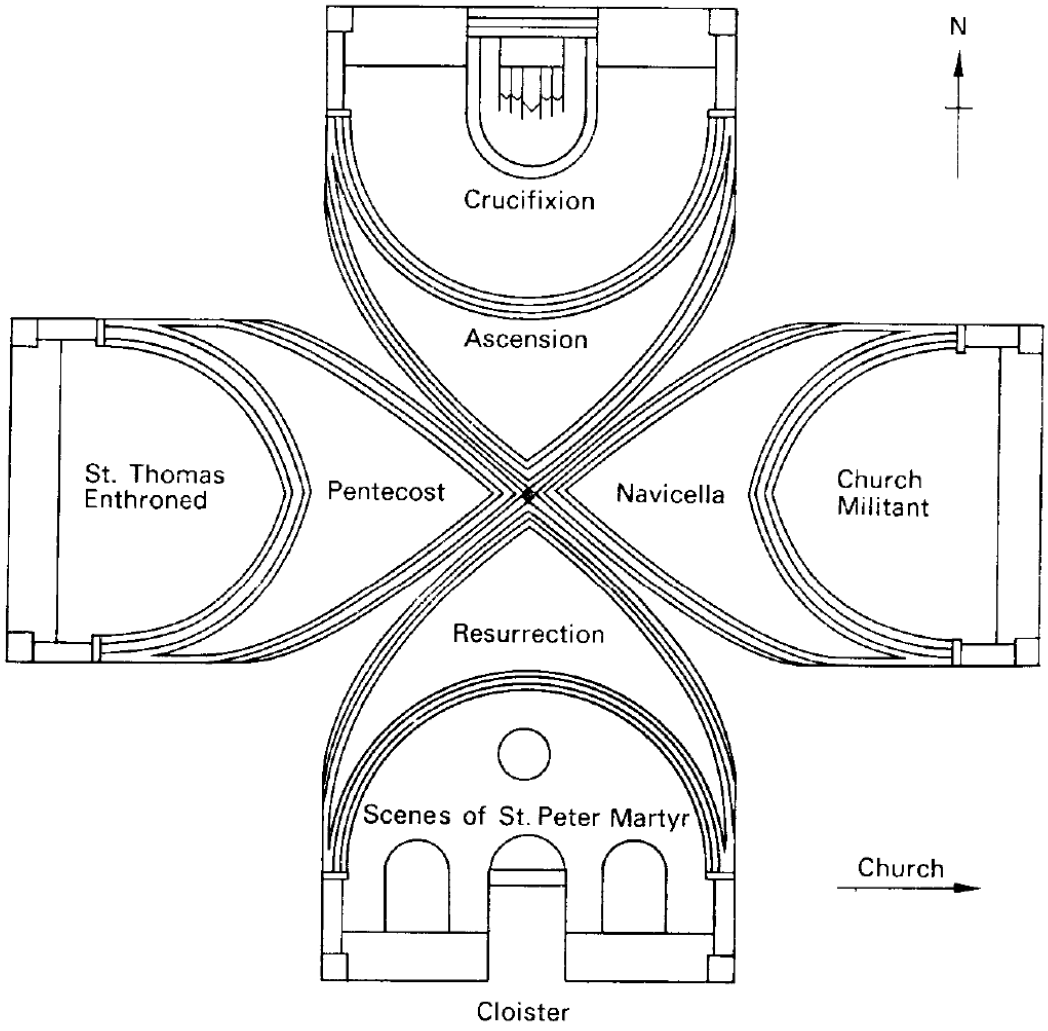

Figure 8
Diagram of Frescoes in the Spanish Chapel

Image from Julian Gardner, "Andrea di Bonaiuto and the Chapterhouse Frescoes in Santa Maria Novella," *Art History* 11 (1979), 110.

Figure 9
Allegory of the Church Militant and Church Triumphant
Andrea da Firenze, c. 1365-67, S. Maria Novella, Florence

Image from Artstor.

Figure 10
Allegory of the Church Militant and Church Triumphant, view from eyelevel
Andrea da Firenze, c. 1365-67, Santa Maria Novella, Florence

Figure 11
Allegory of the Church Militant and Church Triumphant, detail of Villana delle Botti
Andrea da Firenze, c. 1365-67, Santa Maria Novella, Florence

Figure 12
Lamentation Over the Dead Christ
Fra Angelico, 1436-1441, Museo di San Marco, Florence

Image from Artstor

Figure 13
Lamentation Over the Dead Christ, detail of Villana delle Botti
Fra Angelico, 1436-1444, Museo di San Marco, Florence

Image from Artstor.

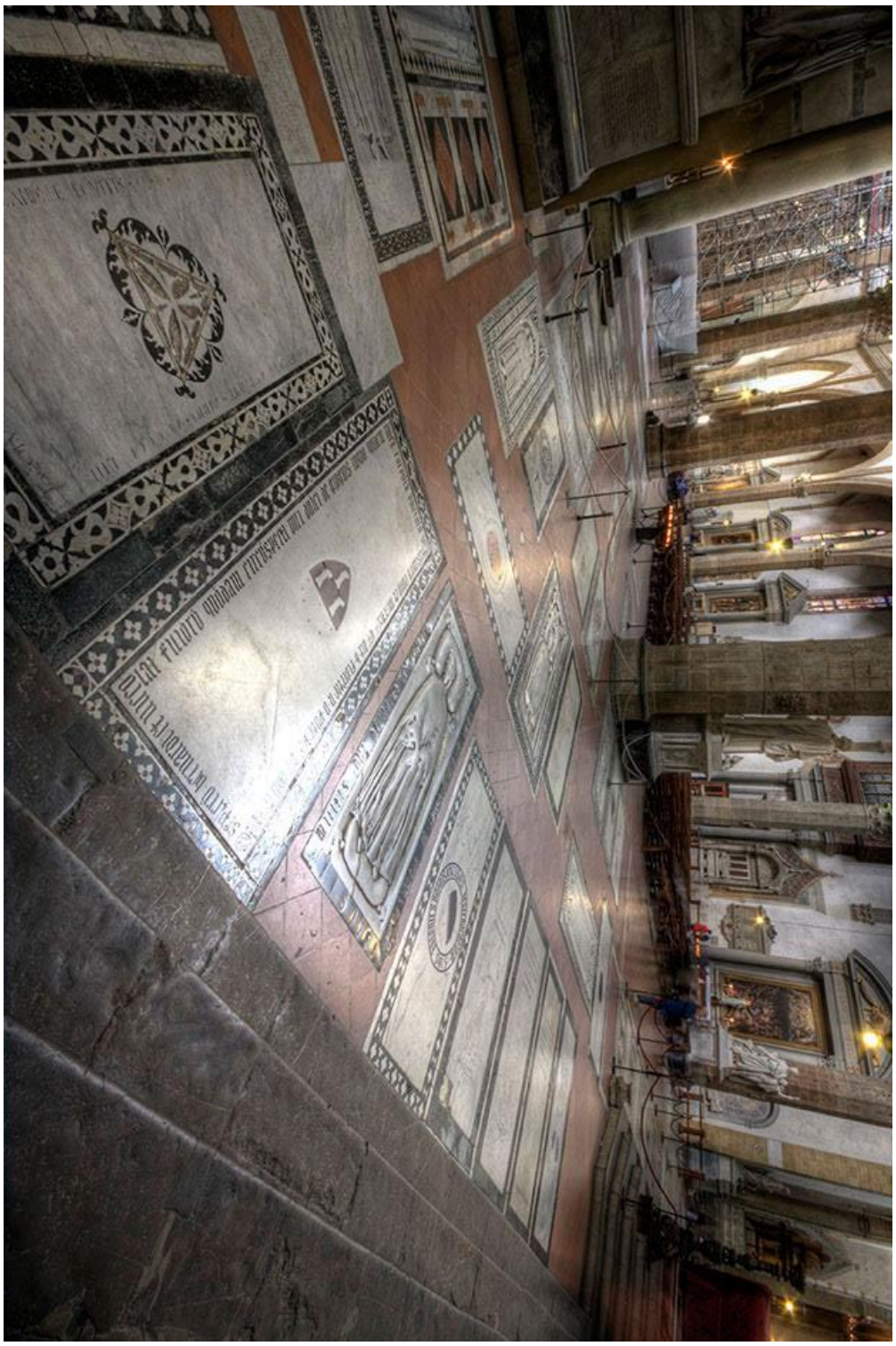

Figure 14
Floor tombs in Santa Croce, Florence

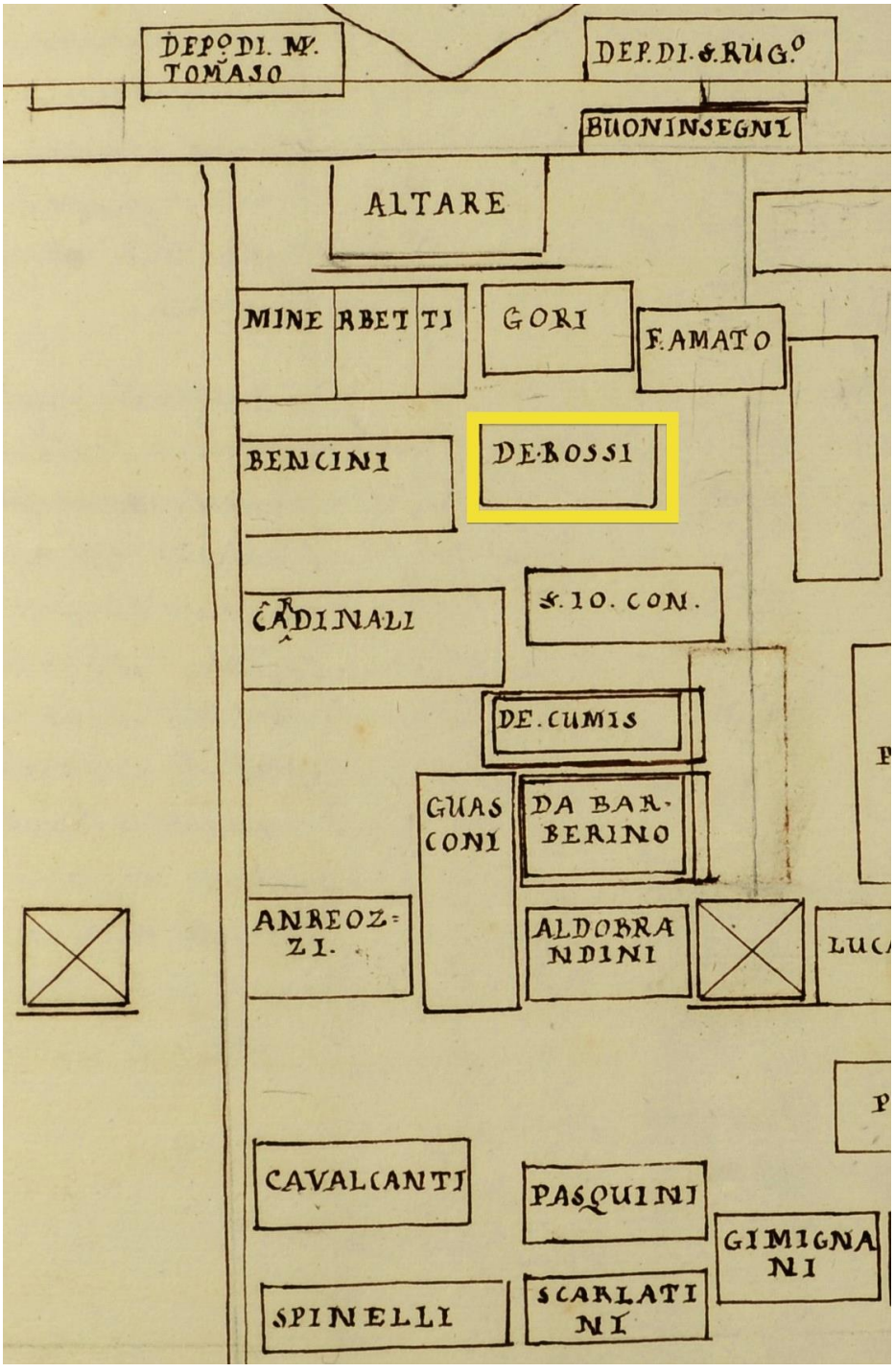

Figure 15
Sepoltuario plan, Santa Maria Novella, showing the location of the De Rossi tomb
ASF Manoscritti 812, 105-106

Courtesy of Anne Leader

Figure 16
Tomb of Villana delle Botti
Bernardo Rossellino, 1451-1452, Santa Maria Novella, Florence

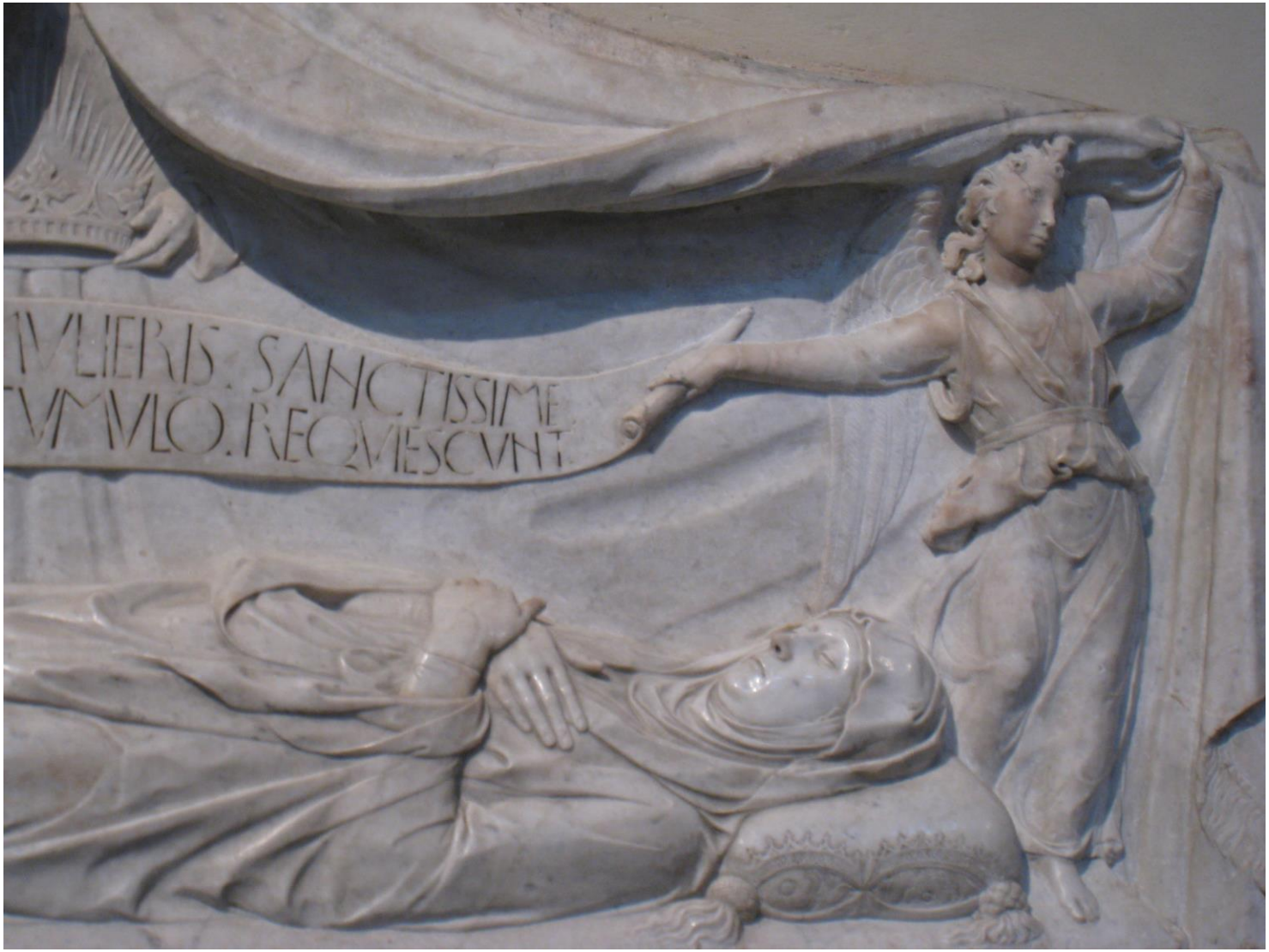

Figure 17
Tomb of Villana delle Botti, detail
Bernardo Rossellino, 1451-1452, Santa Maria Novella, Florence

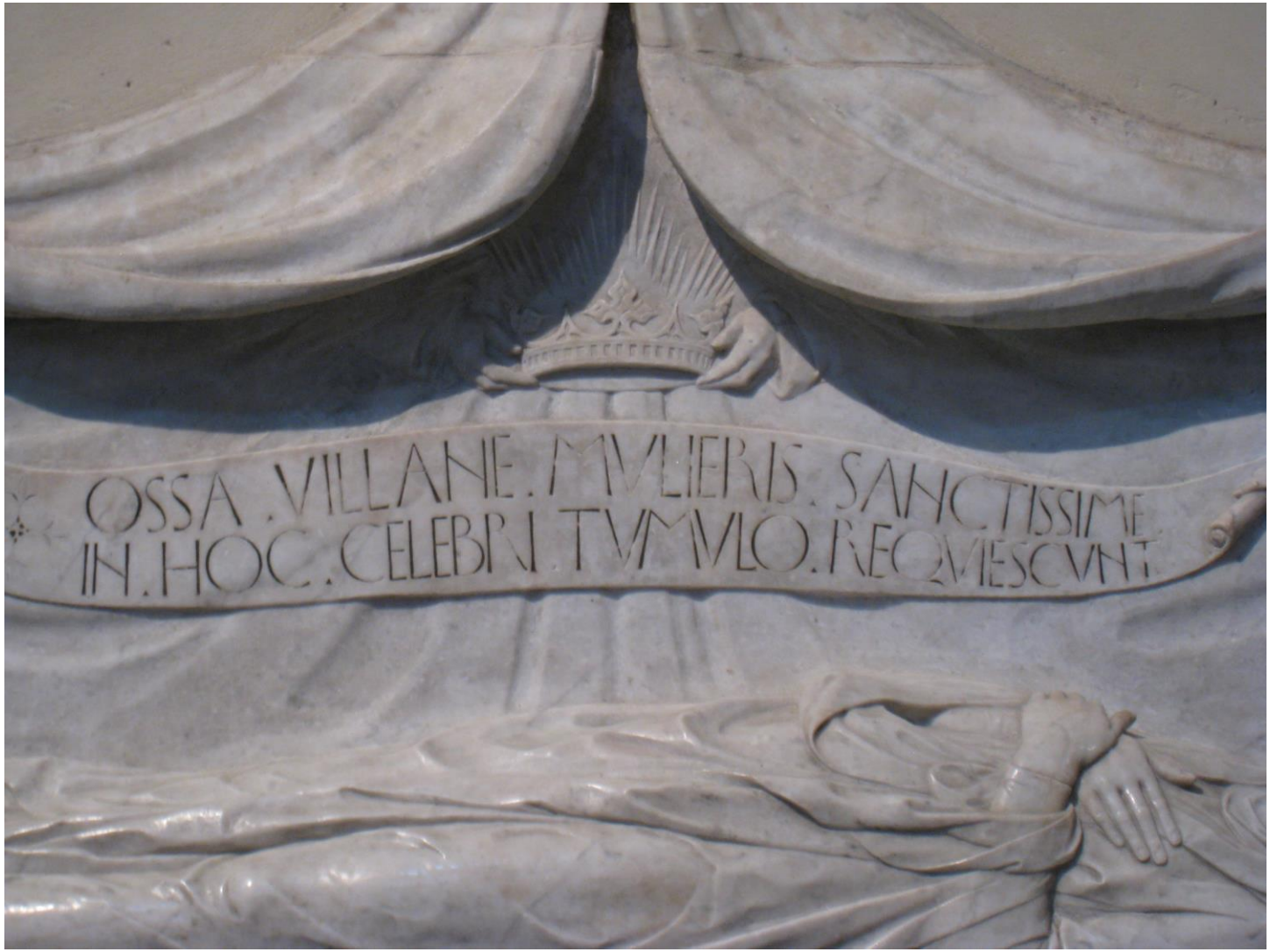

Figure 18
Tomb of Villana delle Botti, detail
Bernardo Rossellino, 1451-1452, Santa Maria Novella, Florence

Figure 19
Saint Catherine of Siena and Four Dominican Tertiaries
Andrea di Bartolo, 1394–1398, Museo Vetrario, Murano

Image from Frick Art Reference Library negative number 22976

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