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Testimonies of the Life of the Saint in the Context of Canonization

Introduction

The reputation of a late medieval (and early modern) saint was created through the interactions that took place between the holy person and their community; the latter included both official hagiographers and community members who encountered the future saint and interpreted their actions.¹ These actions can be grouped roughly into two categories – life and miracles – which hagiographic material often treated as two distinct aspects of holiness but which in reality commonly overlapped. The virtues that created a holy life, or a life worthy of canonization, were established in legends, liturgies, sermons, plays, and canonization bulls, and were undoubtedly also a topic of discussion in everyday encounters. Holy life was constructed primarily around piety, devotion, abstinence, charity, chastity, patience, and humility. Divine wisdom and the gift of prophecy were commonly attributed to holy men and women, and in many instances such holiness had already manifested itself in childhood.²

When the papal canonization hearings commenced in the early thirteenth century, juridical material concerning the virtuous life of a putative saint started to emerge, just as it did for their miracles. Canonization interrogations re-enforced cultural ideas about what constituted a saintly life, as the questions proposed to witnesses specifically addressed saintly virtues. In most cases, the *articuli*, on which the inquest was supposed to be based, were collected beforehand by the procurator of the hearing; in them, the virtues intermingled with details of the saint's life. There is, however, great variation in the length, detail, and level of organization

¹ See 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), 4–6, 17–19.

² See André Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, transl. Jean Birrell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 505–26, for these virtues in the context of canonization.

in these articles across various processes, and in some cases they were crafted only after the interrogations had taken place or are lacking altogether.³ In any event, the articles demonstrate the saintly profile for which the cult promoters hoped to gain recognition.⁴ Those conducting canonization inquests were preoccupied with ascetic and moral virtues, and chastity was emphasized in all hearings. These elements of a holy life therefore garnered the most attention in witness accounts.

Saints' legends have been a common theme in medieval research for decades,⁵ and studies of miracle testimonies continue to increase in popularity. Medieval canonization testimonies to a putative saint's life, however, are still a very understudied topic, even though they include tremendous potential for enlarging our understanding of sainthood in the past, and particularly of the ways saints' devotees constructed and interpreted their holy lives.⁶ Concerning miracle

³ Thomas Wetzstein, *Heilige vor Gericht: das Kanonisationserfahren im europäischen Spätmittelalter* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2004), 505–6; Laura Ackerman Smoller, “Northern and Southern Sanctity in the Canonization of Vincent Ferrer: The Effects of Procedural Differences on the Image of the Saint,” in *Procès de canonisation au Moyen Âge. Aspects juridiques et religieux*, ed. Gábor Klaniczay (Rome: Ecole française de Rome, 2004), 292–93; Sari Katajala-Peltomaa and Christian Krötzl, “Approaching Twelfth- to Fifteenth-Century Miracles,” in *Miracles in Medieval Canonization Processes*, eds. Christian Krötzl and Sari Katajala-Peltomaa (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018), 23–24. The articles record certain concepts, but at the same time the details of saints' lives are often left quite vague. See, e.g., Vauchez, *Sainthood*, 302, on this aspect regarding St. Thomas Cantilupe's humility.

⁴ See, e.g., Enrico Menestò, “The Apostolic Canonization Proceedings of Clare of Montefalco, 1318–1319,” in *Women and Religion in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, eds. Daniel Ethan Bronstein and Roberto Rusconi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 109.

⁵ It is impossible to list all of the relevant work here. Saints' *vitae* have been particularly popular among historians of medieval gender; see, e.g., Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast. The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988); Peter Dinzelbacher, *Heilige oder Hexen? Schicksale auffälliger Frauen* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 2004); Dyan Elliott, *The Bride of Christ Goes to Hell: Metaphor and Embodiment in the Lives of Pious Women 200–1500* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012); Dyan Elliott, *Proving Woman: Female Spirituality and Inquisitional Culture in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Katherine J. Lewis, “Gender and Sanctity in the Middle Ages,” in *Gendering the Middle Ages*, eds. Pauline Stafford and Anneke Mulder-Bakker (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 205–14; Alastair J. Minnis and Voaden Rosalynn, eds., *Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition c. 1100–c. 1500* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010); and C. Goldy and A. Livingstone, eds., *Writing Medieval Women's Lives* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012).

⁶ For studies analysing testimonies to *vitae*, see, e.g., Nicole Archambeau, “Remembering Countess Delphine's Books: Reading as a Means to Shape a Holy Woman's Sanctity,” in Goldy and Livingstone, *Writing Medieval Women's Lives*, 33–49; Elliott, *Proving Woman*; Kleinberg, *Prophets*; Smoller, “Northern and Southern Sanctity”; Vauchez, *Sainthood*. I have discussed these issues more thoroughly in Jenni Kuuliala, *Saints, Infirmary, and Community in the Late Middle Ages* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020). For the historiography of miracles, see Katajala-Peltomaa and Krötzl, “Approaching Twelfth- to Fifteenth-Century Miracles,” 9–15.

testimonies, Laura Ackerman Smoller and Michael Goodich have pointed out that although the language of the documents belongs to the notaries who recorded the depositions for other civil servants, the messages in them belong to the witnesses.⁷ There is no need to assume that this was not also true of testimonies concerning saints' lives, although in them the preferences of and practicalities for those conducting the inquests may have been even more pronounced. Nevertheless, when analysed carefully, testimonies of life show how witnesses formulated their memories about "their" saint to fit the expected pattern of a holy life. They also offer details and views that demonstrate how each saint appeared unique to their community and how the witnesses attributed their own meanings and messages to holy virtues.

It is worth noting that in analysing canonization testimonies for communal views and memories of saints' lives, the views that emerge are notably elite. Testimonies about the saint's life were usually given by (male) elite members of society and/or members of monastic orders. Lay women are an exception among the witnesses, as are men of lower social status. The commissioners most valued the word of those who had known the saint personally or lived with them.⁸ At the same time, witnesses to the lives of cloistered nuns were most often other sisters in the order, as they – quite obviously – had the most information about these women's lives. Lay women were only summoned to testify about a saint's *vita* if they were of good reputation, but even then they were typically allowed to testify only if they knew the saintly

⁷ Laura A. Smoller, "Miracle, Memory, and Meaning in the Canonization of Vincent Ferrer, 1453–54," *Speculum* 73 (1998): 429–54. See also Michael Goodich, "*Mirabilis Deus in sanctis suis*: Social History and Medieval Miracles," in *Signs, Wonders, Miracles: Representations of Divine Power in the Life of Church*, eds. Kate Cooper and Jeremy Gregory (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2005), 135–56, here 143–44.

⁸ See, e.g., Paolo Golinelli, "Social Aspects in Some Italian Canonization Trials: The Choice of Witnesses," in Klaniczay, *Procès de canonisation au Moyen Âge*, 170–71; Sari Katajalla-Peltomaa, *Gender, Miracles, and Daily Life: The Evidence of Fourteenth-Century Canonization Processes* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), 32–42; Sari Katajalla-Peltomaa & Jenni Kuuliala, "Practical Matters: Canonization Processes in the Making," in *A Companion to Medieval Miracle Collections*, eds. Sari Katajalla-Peltomaa, Jenni Kuuliala, and Iona McCleery (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 78–101; Didier Lett, *Un procès de canonisation au Moyen Âge. Essai d'histoire sociale. Nicolas de Tolentino, 1325* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2008).

candidate personally.⁹ All this leaves open the question of how much information about the holy person's life was known among the general public.

The purpose of this chapter is to establish how people used cultural narratives to relate their memories of the person they venerated, and, further, how testimonies of life were born in the intercourse and collaboration between witness, conductors of the hearing, and established cultural models and norms. Through this discussion, I hope to demonstrate that these testimonies to life not only provide a window into the ways in which details of a saintly *fama* were born, but also what kinds of details and particularities can be uncovered through a careful analysis of the sources. A key concept that underlies this analysis is the saint's corporal suffering, an issue that gained increasing importance in the late medieval era as the view that a human body and mind could imitate the passion of Christ grew in popularity and greatly affected lay piety.¹⁰ The analysis is approached through three specific themes: controlling saintly abstinence, the construction of the suffering of elite male saints, and deviation from the norm in depositions concerning female saints' holy suffering. With these viewpoints, I hope to highlight the diversity of meanings given to saints' bodies and actions in individual communities and to show that although there were clear, culturally established norms around what constituted holiness and holy suffering, individual devotees and communities gave their own meanings to the things they witnessed.

In the past decades, female saints' *vitae* have been used extensively to study their piety and corporality. In more recent years, while a more balanced image of gender and the corporality

⁹ As an example, in the fifteenth-century processes of Saint Frances of Rome, almost all the men testifying about her life were clerics. Anna Esposito, "St. Francesca and the Female Religious Communities of Fifteenth-Century Rome," in *Women and Religion in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, 197–218, here 198.

¹⁰ Sarah McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 3, 11.

of sainthood has started to emerge, studies analysing the piety of male saints remain sparse.¹¹ This reflects the rather unanimous conclusion in the scholarship that medieval culture emphasized the austerity, corporality, and suffering of female saints in particular. My intention is not to say that this conclusion is entirely wrong; rather, what I hope to demonstrate is that careful analysis of austerity and suffering among male saints is needed to complement the larger picture. Indeed, gender was not necessarily as central as has been suggested to devotees of an individual saint who witnessed their holy person's penitentiary practices and suffering. Other cultural and societal factors – such as the saint's background and status – played important roles as well.¹² It is also crucial to remember that medieval (or premodern) gender categories were fluid, as were the gendered ways of performing piety and holiness.¹³ Therefore, there was not just one category of female or male holiness.

¹¹ For collections focusing on both men and women, see, e.g., Sam Riches and Sarah Salih, eds., *Gender and Holiness: Men, Women and Saints in Late Medieval Europe* (London: Routledge, 2011 [2002]); Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Tímea Szell, eds., *Images of Sainthood in Medieval Europe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991); for studies focusing on holy men, see P. H. Cullum, "Feasting Not Fasting: Men's Devotion to the Eucharist in the Later Middle Ages," in *Religious Men and Masculine Identity in the Middle Ages*, eds. P. H. Cullum and Katherine J. Lewis (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2013), 184–200; Marita von Weissenberg, "Generations of Men and Masculinity in Two Late-Medieval Biographies of Saints," in *Men at Home: Domesticities, Authority, Emotions, Work*, ed. Raffaella Sarti, special issue of *Gender & History* 27 (2015): 669–83; and Cullum and Lewis, *Religious Men and Masculine Identity*.

¹² This has been pointedly worded by Sharon Farmer, "The Beggar's Body: Intersections of Gender and Social Status in High Medieval Paris," in *Monks and Nuns, Saints and Outcasts: Religion in Medieval Society; Essays in Honor of Lester K. Little*, eds. Sharon Farmer and Barbara H. Rosenwein (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), 71: "when we fail to incorporate other categories of difference into our analysis of gender constructions, then it is we, and not the authors whom we study, who end up constructing simplistic gender categories." Martha G. Newman, for her part, writes that the corporeality of the Cistercian choir monks and nuns she studied largely depended on their social standing; hierarchies and social status thus defined corporality and spirituality more profoundly than did gender, at least in certain contexts. See Martha G. Newman, "Crucified by the Virtues: Monks, Lay Brothers, and Women in Thirteenth-Century Cistercian Saints' Lives," in *Gender and Difference in the Middle Ages*, eds. Sharon Farmer and Carol Braun Pasternack (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 182–209.

¹³ See also Sari Katajala-Peltomaa, "A Good Wife? Demonic Possession and Discourses of Gender in Late Medieval Culture," in *Gender in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 2012), 83; Raisa Maria Toivo, "Gender Performance in Early Modern Religious Life," in *Revisiting Gender in European History, 1400-1800*, eds. Elise M. Dermineur, Åsa Karlsson Sjögren, and Virginia Langum (London: Routledge, 2018), 172–73; McNamer, *Affective Meditation*, esp. 7, 27.

Controlling Abstinence

Abstinence from earthly pleasures already defined holiness in late antiquity, particularly in the lives of desert fathers and hermits.¹⁴ In the late Middle Ages, denying oneself daily comforts and even torturing one's body were believed to give a special access to the divine, and asceticism was considered to be a sure way to purify one's soul and to avoid sin.¹⁵ Asceticism thus became one of the key virtues of holiness and as such received the most attention in canonization inquests. This is most evident in the lives of Mediterranean eremitical saints and saints who were nuns, but it is clearly visible in all canonization inquests.

At first glance, reports of putative saints' ascetic practices seem quite repetitive. They address diet, harsh sleeping conditions, and the use of a hairshirt. Extreme asceticism was usually attributed to holy women and to hermits. However, closer reading of canonization testimonies reveals that asceticism, like all aspects of holiness, had varying meanings and emphases at the communal level, with the culturally established models for narrating and interpreting holy abstinence often being fluid. Moreover, cultural change intermingled with the development of the canonization process itself. Fasting, most often associated with female saints in its most extreme form, became a common topic in all saints' *Vitae* in the fourteenth century,¹⁶ at the same time that descriptions of extreme fasting and other ways to perform abstinence became more detailed in canonization testimonies. The cultural tendency to highlight extreme fasting and the increasing detail in canonization process records thus went hand in hand.

¹⁴ Andrew Crislip, *Thorns in the Flesh: Illness and Sanctity in Late Ancient Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), has analysed this extensively.

¹⁵ Esther Cohen, *The Modulated Scream: Pain in Late Medieval Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 27–28; Mari Hughes-Edwards, *Reading Medieval Anchoritism: Ideology and Spiritual Practices* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 59–71; Vauchez, *Sainthood*, 191.

¹⁶ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 146.

One aspect of abstinence in which the fluid and negotiable nature of the narratives is clearly visible is that of *discretio*. Although asceticism was valued and valorized, there nevertheless was a constant need to control it: if abstinence and self-inflicted suffering went too far, they could signal hypocrisy, weaken the body to the point that the devil could enter, or, at the most extreme, become a form of suicide and thus a mortal sin.¹⁷ Testimonies of life therefore frequently refer to *discretio* to demonstrate that the saintly candidate was abstinent enough without going too far. There were certain established phrases that gave such claims credibility, but the depositions also demonstrate that what was considered to be discretion varied from one situation to another. Furthermore, regulating austerity was not simply a duty of the holy person alone, but also of their entire community.

A common way to testify about discretion was to report that the saint had fasted or performed other ascetic practices *unless* they were infirm. This was specifically pointed out, for example, in the *articuli* of the process of St. Clare of Montefalco (1268–1308), conducted in Spoleto (Italy) in 1318–19. Clare is one of the late medieval female saints in whose *fama* suffering is most notable. She is particularly famous for the discovery made by the nuns of her cloister after her death: when embalming their late abbess, they found the objects of Christ’s passion in her heart and the symbol of the trinity in her gallbladder. According to the canonization inquest, Clare herself had said that she had Christ’s cross in her heart.¹⁸

Clare’s canonization process carefully investigated her strict asceticism and very corporeal *imitatio Christi* in addition to her ongoing health problems and her devoted patience in dealing

¹⁷ Hughes-Edwards, *Reading Medieval Anchoritism*, 72–73; Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 42–46, 84–85, 196, 239; Vauchez, *Sainthood*, 333, 340, 350.

¹⁸ For a summary of Clare’s canonization inquest, see Menestò, “The Apostolic Canonization Proceedings of Clare of Montefalco,” 104–29; and for the discovery, Katharine Park, “Relics of a Fertile Heart: The ‘Autopsy’ of Clare of Montefalco,” in *The Material Culture of Sex, Procreation, and Marriage in Premodern Europe*, eds. Anne L. McClanan and Karen Rosoff Encarnación (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 115–33.

with them. To investigate the appropriate level of asceticism, the *articuli* specify that Clare fasted “almost always” (*quasi continue*), but she did eat more when “very infirm” (*tantum infirmata*) because the physicians, her confessor, and the abbess told her that she must.¹⁹ Similar statements were made in the inquests of male saints, regardless of whether they were laymen or clerics. For instance, the servants of Charles of Blois, duke of Brittany (1319–64), reported in his 1371 canonization inquest that they had noticed the lesions and wounds on his skin, which were caused by his use of a hairshirt, as well as his “inflated eyes” (*oculos inflatos*) caused by constant prayer.²⁰ At the same time, witnesses to his life, the same servants included, reported how strictly he fasted on holy days, unless he was infirm. According to one of them, the duke eased his diet only when his physicians told him that he was too weak to do great fasting.²¹

References to physicians are by no means a coincidence, as they were important witnesses in late medieval and early modern canonization inquests. This aspect of their expertise has been more closely studied concerning miraculous healing, but their advice was also commonly referred to in testimonies about life.²² Their words, even when paraphrased, gave credibility to the physical marks of sainthood, and in some canonization processes the putative saint’s personal physician was one of the key witnesses to their life.²³ As the testimonies of Charles of

¹⁹ *Il processo di canonizzazione di Chiara da Montefalco*, ed. Enrico Menestò (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1984), 4–5.

²⁰ BAV MS Vat. lat. 4025, fols. 14v, 32v, 36v, 50r, 67r. Charles and his canonization process are more thoroughly discussed below.

²¹ BAV MS Vat. at. 4025, fol. 13v: “[...] nisi esset prohibitus per suos medicos qui ipsum asserebant impotentem ad ampliora ieiunia facienda.”

²² See also Joseph Ziegler, “Practitioners and Saints: Medical Men in Canonization Processes in the Thirteenth to Fifteenth Centuries,” *Social History of Medicine* 12 (1999): 191–225, esp. 216–17.

²³ This is notable particularly in the hearings of Delphine of Sabran, whose process is discussed in Nicole Archangeau’s chapter in this volume, St. Peter of Luxembourg, and Charles of Blois. The testimony of Charles’s physician will be discussed below; for St Peter’s physician see Ziegler, “Practitioners and Saints,” 217.

Blois's servants demonstrate, witnesses knew how to use physicians' words to prove the proper level of asceticism.

The other group that is frequently mentioned as controllers of asceticism is, perhaps unsurprisingly, the confessors. The importance of individual confessors as recorders and delineators of female saints' lives – or at least of their *Vitae* – is a well-studied topic.²⁴ Confessors were important figures in saintly candidates' spiritual lives, and, particularly for lay saints, their role was crucial for the formulation of saintly *fama*.²⁵ The confessor was usually mentioned in a similar light as the physician: his role was to control rather than to accelerate ascetic behavior. Obedience to one's confessor was equally used to prove the candidate's modesty, although the methods of doing so varied from context to context, and here the particularities of the saint's cult and especially the saint's gender played a role.

Confessors played an extremely important role in the *fama* and canonization of St. Frances of Rome, a lay female saint. Originally known as Francesca Bussa di Ponziani (1384–1440), she was the daughter of a Roman elite couple. At the age of twelve, Frances was married to Lorenzo Ponziani, the son of a wealthy family from Trastevere, later a commander of the papal troops. The couple had three children. Following Lorenzo's death in 1436, Frances moved to the convent of Tor de' Specchi, the home of the Oblates of St. Frances, which she had founded and which were named after her. She had earned a reputation as a holy woman even before her widowhood, since she was a well-known pious figure – particularly in Trastevere and

²⁴ See, e.g., John Coackley, *Women, Men, and Spiritual Power: Female Saints and Their Male Collaborators* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); Catherine Mooney, ed., *Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and Their Interpreters* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999).

²⁵ Maiju Lehmijoki-Gardner, *Worldly Saints: Social Interaction of Dominican Penitent Women in Italy, 1200–1500* (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 1999), 54.

Campitelli – who had, for example, transformed the family’s palazzo into a hospital and practiced charity and healing activities in her community.²⁶

Frances’s first hearing was conducted in August 1440, only five months after her death. The second hearing was conducted in 1443 and the third in April 1451. A few additional testimonies from 1453 are included in the dossiers.²⁷ The first hearing presents the articles and the depositions in a somewhat vague form, with the witnesses being recorded primarily as having confirmed the contents of the article. The later hearings were recorded in a more conventional way, with each deposition recorded individually. The first process specifically mentions that several people had known Frances personally and could testify about her virtues, including her spiritual daughters and female members of her own social circles as well as her second confessor and hagiographer, Johannes (or Giovanni) Matteotti. Many of these same people also testified in the later hearings.²⁸

The ninth article of the 1440 inquest pertained to Frances’s obedience toward her two confessors; to prove this point, the article records an instance in Frances’s youth when she was gravely ill and ordered to drink wine by her first confessor, Antonius de Monte Sabelli. Frances obeyed but vomited the wine up, which the witnesses confirmed.²⁹ The article and witness

²⁶ For Frances’s biography, see Arnold Esch, “Francesca Bussa, santa,” in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, XLIX (1997), www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/santa-francesca-bussa_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/

²⁷ Arnold Esch, “I processi medioevali per la canonizzazione di santa Francesca Romana (1440–1451),” in *La canonizzazione di santa Francesca Romana. Santità, cultura e istituzioni a Roma tra medioevo ed età moderna*, eds. Alessandra Bartolomei Romagnoli and Giorgio Picasso (Florence: Edizione del Galluzzo, 2013), 39–52. On Frances’s canonization and cult, Alessandra Bartolomei Romagnoli, ed., *Francesca Romana. La santa, il monastero e la città alla fine del Medioevo* (Florence: SISMEL, 2009); Arnold Esch, “Die Zeugenaussagen im Heiligsprechungsverfahren für S. Francesca Romana als Quelle zur Sozialgeschichte Rom im frühen Quattrocento,” *Quellen und Forschungen aus italienischen Archiven und Bibliotheken* 53 (1973): 93–151.

²⁸ The background of all witnesses in Frances’s processes has been extensively analysed by Arnold Esch. He has concluded that the witnesses come from a politically specific group of people; most were members of the pro-Colonna nobility who participated in governing the last free commune of Rome (1395–98) and/or from families who had belonged to the popular party who lived in Trastevere and Campitelli. Esch, “Die Zeugenaussagen,” esp. 96–97, 107–8; see also Esposito, “St. Francesca and the Female Religious Communities,” 197–99.

²⁹ *I processi inediti per Francesca Bussa dei Ponziani (Santa Francesca Romana) 1440–1453*, ed. Placido Tommaso Lugano, Studi e Testi 120 (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1945), 26–27.

statements portray Frances's mind and body as doing everything that was proper to demonstrate her discretion, obedience, and willingness to practice austerity. While her mind followed the ideal of obedience, her body – which always aimed at holiness – solved the contradiction.³⁰ The way the witness statements are recorded leaves an impression that they had heard about the matter from the saint herself. What is obvious here is that Frances's devotees saw her body as a protector of her saintly ambitions. No such narrative appears in the later investigation in 1451, however. The article and statements therein are much more conventional in their portrayal of Frances giving up her habit of flagellation and sleeping in linen clothes or a hairshirt because her confessor Giovanni Matteotti had told her to do so due to infirmity caused by old age.³¹ This demonstrates again how the conductors' preferences influenced the nature of the proof given by the witnesses to life.

Frances of Rome was an exceptional and even controversial saint, since she was a married (widowed) woman with children and had lived her holiness in a very secular setting. There are also indications in her canonization hearings that suspicions were raised regarding the orthodoxy of her healing activities. Quite a few witnesses to her *miracula in vita* were asked whether any incantations were used, an exceptional question for late medieval canonization inquests.³² All this presumably influenced the way Frances's obedience and discretion were

³⁰ In a similar manner, Frances's first inquest, for example, records a bodily reaction to being married; she became gravely ill and was healed only after witnessing a vision of St. Alexis: *I processi inediti per Francesca Bussa dei Ponziani*, 10. See Paolo Golinelli, "Velut alter Alexius: The Saint Alexis Model in Medieval Hagiography," in *Church and Belief in the Middle Ages: Popes, Saints, and Crusaders*, eds. Sari Katajala-Peltomaa and Kirsi Salonen (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016), 141–52, on St. Alexis and later saints.

³¹ See also Agnes Pauli Lelli's testimony on Frances using a hairshirt until she gave it up because of her infirmity and old age. *I processi inediti per Francesca Bussa dei Ponziani*, 240–41.

³² See, e.g., *I Processi inediti*, 263, 265, 266, 267. "Incantations" was an umbrella term covering prayers, recipes, and secrets. Mary O'Neil, "Magical Healing, Love Magic and the Inquisition in Late Sixteenth-Century Modena," in *Witchcraft, Healing, and Popular Diseases. New Perspectives on Witchcraft, Magic, and Demonology*, ed. Brian B. Levack (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 172–99, at 175. I have discussed Frances's healing activities more thoroughly in Jenni Kuuliala, "The Saint as Medicator: Medicine and the Miraculous in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Italy," *Social History of Medicine* (2020): <https://doi.org/10.1093/shm/hkaa053>

investigated, and why the first hearing in particular offers such tangible, corporeal proofs of these aspects of her sainthood.

Making reference to physicians' and confessors' roles in controlling austerity gave the witnesses the opportunity to admire and highlight the saintly candidates' otherworldly asceticism and highlight their obedience and discretion. These professionals acted as markers of proper behavior while simultaneously providing legally credible evidence of the saintly candidate's acts. The witnesses to saints' lives knew how to mention these men in a way that would properly highlight their message. The devotees interpreted their saints' actions on the grounds of corporeal signs, while a physician and/or a confessor could intermediate these observations. Sporadic pieces of evidence demonstrate that other members of the saints' communities could also participate in describing their ascetic practices, although that is very rare if the person in question was not a member of the holy person's household.³³

Thus, the way discretion was proved was not uniform, but it could be constructed by different means. Another, albeit less common, way of doing so was through reports of miraculous survival during extreme asceticism. It was believed that such survival was possible only through the grace of God,³⁴ and that he thus sanctioned it. An illustrative example appears in the materials related to Clare of Montefalco concerning the change of mind of a physician called Phylippus de Spoleto, who had visited the infirm saint. Phylippus had heard that Clare practiced extreme fasting and was incredulous that she could survive the ordeal. On his way home, a storm rose and upon arriving he was "almost dead" (*semivivus*). The following night

³³ See Kuuliala, *Saints, Infirmary, and Community*, 145–46, for discussion on such an example in St. Nicholas of Tolentino's canonization process.

³⁴ Vauchez, *Sainthood*, 192. See also Hughes-Edwards, *Reading Medieval Anchoritism*, 73. This view is clearly visible in the witness account of one of the brothers in John Buoni's inquest, discussed in Saku Pihko's chapter in this volume. He testified that that the Holy Ghost must have fed the hermit or he would not have remained alive. AASS, Oct. IX, 830.

Clare's voice spoke to him, saying that the change of weather had happened because of his incredulity; as a result, he changed his mind.³⁵ While the incident only survives in Bérenger de Saint-Affrique's *Vita* of Clare, I have chosen to paraphrase it here because it is most likely that Phylippus's canonization testimony reported the incident. The *Vita*, after all, is based on the diocesan hearing of Clare conducted by Bérenger and, although his testimony does not survive, Phylippus is listed as a witness in Clare's canonization inquest, which repeated large parts of the diocesan hearing. The physician's conversion was undoubtedly an effective way of highlighting Clare's supernatural endurance to ensure that her asceticism was of the proper type and specifically favored by God.

In her discussion of the miracles of St. Vincent Ferrer, Laura Ackerman Smoller notes witnesses' tendency to highlight their own role in the course of events.³⁶ People like Phylippus de Spoleto most likely did the same thing when testifying about their role in proving a holy life. Like them, nuns living in the same convent as a female saint, such as Clare of Montefalco or Margaret of Hungary (1242–70), reported the intimate knowledge they held about the holy women's ascetic and devotional practices and the bodily signs of them.³⁷ This kind of closeness with the saint boosted the testifying person's role within the community while also providing much needed information for the commissioners. And, as with miracle narratives, these encounters and experiences undoubtedly kept being reminisced about and retold among the devotees, ultimately securing their position in the communally established narrative of the saint's life.

³⁵ *Vita sanctae Clarae de Cruce, ordinis eremitarum s. Augustini: ex Codice Montefalconensi saeculi XIV desumpta*, ed. P. Alfonsus Semenza (Vatican City: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1944), 26.

³⁶ Smoller, "Miracle, Memory, and Meaning," 434–40.

³⁷ As an example of testimonies regarding St. Margaret, a sister in her convent reported that Margaret often reported that she had pain in her knee, and the said sister had seen how swollen the knee was. This was due to her extensive genuflections. *The Oldest Legend. Acts of the Canonization Process, and Miracles of Saint Margaret of Hungary*, eds. Ildikó Csepregi, Gábor Klaniczay, and Bence Péterfi (Budapest: CEU University Press, 2018), 324–25.

Masculine Suffering and Warrior Saints

To further analyse the way gender, earlier models of holy suffering, and culturally established ideas framed interpretations of saintly suffering, I will now discuss the sanctity of the warrior-rulers Charles of Blois (duke of Brittany) and Louis IX of France (1214–70). The sanctity of these two figures intersects with historical events of their time, but with different emphases.

Louis IX is famous for his leadership of the seventh and eighth crusades; he died in the midst of the latter one. During the seventh crusade, he fell ill with dysentery and was captured in the course of the fall of Damietta.³⁸ Although the crusade was a military disaster for his army, Louis's patience and devotion during his illness and captivity were a prominent feature in his hagiography. The documents of Louis's canonization hearing held at Saint-Denis in 1282–83 are unfortunately mostly lost, but we have a fairly good picture of their contents because Guillaume de Saint-Pathus, a Franciscan friar who acted as the confessor of Louis's widow and daughter, wrote his *Vie et miracles de Saint Louis* around 1303 based on those documents.³⁹ Louis's illness and suffering is also described in detail in the surviving witness account of his brother Charles of Anjou (1227–85), king of Sicily.⁴⁰

³⁸ For Louis's captivity, see, e.g., M. Cecilia Gaposchkin, "The Captivity of Louis IX," *Quaestiones Medii Aevi Novae* 18 (2013): 85–114.

³⁹ For materials related to Louis IX's canonization, see M. Cecilia Gaposchkin, *The Making of Saint Louis: Kingship, Sanctity, and Crusade in the Later Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), 19–65. The section concerning miracles has been edited in Guillaume de Saint-Pathus, *Les miracles de saint Louis*, ed. Percival B. Fay (Paris: Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion, 1931) and the part concerning his life in Guillaume de Saint-Pathus, *Vie de saint Louis*, ed. H.-F. Delaborde (Paris: Alphonse Picard et Fils, 1899). Paraphrasing the testimony of Louis's longtime servant Yzembarz, Guillaume wrote a detailed description of the king's illness, explaining, for example, how Louis's teeth were rickety, his skin was blotchy and pale, he had severe flux, and he was so thin that his spine appeared to stick out. Furthermore, Yzembarz had to carry the king "to his necessities." Guillaume de Saint-Pathus, *Vie de saint Louis*, 54–58, 112–19.

⁴⁰ *Déposition de Charles d'Anjou pour la canonisation de saint Louis*, ed. Le comte Riant (Paris: Renouard, 1884); for an English translation, see Peter Jackson, *The Seventh Crusade 1244–1254: Sources and Documents* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009), 115.

Thirty-nine witnesses to Louis's life appeared at his hearing. Only three were women. Among the thirty-six male witnesses were members of the king's family, other noblemen, clerics, and members of his staff.⁴¹ Many of these men had accompanied Louis on the crusades, and undoubtedly their experiences were a prominent memory for them and therefore something they reminisced about and reported on. It is impossible to investigate the views of each witness, but it is safe to say that Louis's devoted suffering was, together with his pious rule, a key element of his *fama*. Guillaume reorganized the material from the canonization inquests according to specific saintly virtues, using Bonaventure's *Legenda major* of Francis of Assisi and Franciscan ideals as his guides. He also emphasized events that took place during the crusades.⁴² The Franciscan liturgy of Louis, which most efficiently distributed his official sainthood, also give Louis's experiences profound meaning, on par with the *stigmata* of St. Francis and the sufferings of Christ.⁴³

As a Franciscan favorite and a French ruler, Charles of Blois's sanctity was in many ways modeled after the sainthood of St. Louis IX.⁴⁴ There are, however, intriguing differences in these men's military campaign experiences. Charles, a nephew of Philip VI of France who inherited the title of the count of Blois from his father and the duchy of Brittany through his wife, Joan of Penthièvre (ca. 1319–84), was involved with the Breton War of Succession fought between those supporting Joan and Charles and those supporting Joan's uncle, John of Montfort; the latter's quest for the inheritance of the duchy was supported by England's Edward III. Charles was taken prisoner at the Battle of La Roche-Derrien in 1347 and sent to the Tower of London for five years. A treaty signed in 1353 gave Charles the ducal title. The

⁴¹ Guillaume de Saint-Pathus, *Vie de saint Louis*, 7–10.

⁴² Gaposchkin, *The Making of Saint Louis*, 37–39.

⁴³ M. Cecilia Gaposchkin, "Louis IX and Liturgical Memory," in *Memory and Commemoration in Medieval Culture*, eds. Elma Brenner, Mary Franklin-Brown, and Meredith Cohen (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2013), 261–76.

⁴⁴ Jean-Christophe Cassard, "Les coulisses de la sainteté? Charles de Blois vu par son entourage," *Annales de Bretagne et des Pays de l'Ouest* 116 (2009), <http://abpo.revues.org/165>

war resumed, however, in 1363, this time with John's son John IV opposing Charles and Joan. After some initial success with his troops, Charles died in 1364 at the Battle of Auray, which ended the conflict, and John IV of Montfort was appointed as the new duke.⁴⁵ Charles's canonization, then, was promoted strongly by his political supporters, including Breton Franciscans, and, not surprisingly, fiercely opposed by John IV. The inquest was held in the Franciscan church of Angers in 1371.⁴⁶ Charles's inquest is one of those in which no *articuli* was used (they were penned afterwards); furthermore, the witnesses were not allowed to recite their memories about his life freely, but rather were asked to answer specific questions similar to other inquests into saintly candidates' lives. As with the *Lives* of other secular rulers, Charles's piety appears to have been the most prominent virtue throughout the inquiry.⁴⁷

Although there is some symmetry in Charles's and Louis IX's military experiences, war was investigated quite differently in the two men's inquests. Admittedly, almost all witnesses to Charles's life mentioned the losses he suffered during the war when testifying about his *patientia* and *humilitas*,⁴⁸ but these testimonies lack detail and focus primarily on his piety and devotional practices. When reading the testimonies of some of those closest to Charles during the war, however, it is evident that a personal relationship with the duke and memories of shared war experiences were prominent features of their memories of his reign.

⁴⁵ See, e.g., Christopher Allmand, *The Hundred Years War: England and France at War c.1300–c.1450*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 14–21, for details.

⁴⁶ For Charles's cult and canonization, see Laurent Héry, "Le culte de Charles de Blois. Résistances et réticences," *Annales de Bretagne et des Pays de l'Ouest* 103 (1996): 39–56; André Vauchez, "Canonisation et politique au XIVe siècle. Documents inédits des Archives du Vatican relatifs au procès de canonisation de Charles de Blois, duc de Bretagne (d. 1364)," in *Miscellanea in onore di Monsignor Martino Giusti, Prefetto dell'Archivio Segreto Vaticano II*, *Collectanea Archivi Vaticani* 6 (Vatican City: Archivio Vaticano, 1978), 381–404.

⁴⁷ See Marita von Weissenberg, "'What man are you?' Piety and Masculinity in the *vitae* of a Sienese Craftsman and a Provençal Nobleman," in Cullum and Lewis, *Religious Men and Masculine Identity*, 112–25.

⁴⁸ For example, BAV MS Vat. at. 4025, fols. 11v, 13v, 16r, 23v, 33v, 37r.

Three witnesses to Charles's final battle at Auray reported that he had been severely infirm beforehand. Here, again, the household members' willingness to control the saint's actions becomes visible. One of Charles's servants reported that the servants had rebuked the duke for wanting to go into the battle while suffering such "debility" (*debilitate*), but the duke had responded that he wanted to defend his people.⁴⁹ This statement portrays Charles's final moments as (political) martyrdom, reflecting contemporary cultural ideals of a knight who heroically faces his death.⁵⁰ Yet, this narrative was not emphasized in Charles's *fama* and seems instead to have been a prominent memory for only a small selection of witnesses. The same holds true for the wounds he had suffered earlier at La Roche Derrien. Charles's *medicus* Georgius de Lesnen, the canon of Nantes, was the only witness who offered detailed information about the event. In his testimony about Charles's *patientia*, Georgius recalled that the duke had suffered seventeen wounds before being captured by the English in 1347 and was lying on a bed with a feather mattress. A knight named Thomas Dagorne (Sir Thomas Dagworth, d. 1352) had the mattress taken away to cause Charles indignity, leaving the duke lying on straw. Charles reportedly thanked God for this.⁵¹ The wounds are well reported in other sources of the period: *Les grandes chroniques de France* states that Charles was wounded in seven locations, with more than one of the wounds being sufficient to have been fatal;⁵² they were also included in Richard Lescot's chronicle.⁵³

⁴⁹ BAV MS Vat. at. 4025, fol. 38r. The other witnesses reporting this infirmity were presbyters: BAV MS Vat. at. 4025, fols. 23v, 35r.

⁵⁰ See Miikka Tamminen, "The Crusaders' *Stigmata*: True Crusading and the Wounds of Christ in the Crusade Ideology of the Thirteenth Century," in *Infirmity in Antiquity and the Middle Ages: Social and Cultural Approaches to Health, Weakness and Care*, ed. Christian Krötzel, Katariina Mustakallio, and Jenni Kuuliala (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2015), 103–17.

⁵¹ BAV MS Vat. at. 4025, fol. 11v. See Ziegler, "Practitioners and Saints," 216, on Gerogius de Lesnen.

⁵² *Les grandes chroniques de France*, ed. Jules Viard (Paris: Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion, 1920–53), vol. IX, 304: "si li demanderet qu'il se rendist, ausquieix il respondi que ja à Anglois il ne se rendroit, et qu'il avoit plus chier à souffrir mort, ja soit ce qu'il fust navré de VII plaies."

⁵³ *Chronique de Richard Lescot. Religieux de Saint-Denis (1328–1344) suivie de la continuation de cette chronique (1344–1364)*, ed. Jean Lemoine (Paris: Librairie Renouard, 1896), 79.

Given that the wounds were reported in a number of chronicles, it is somewhat surprising how little attention they received in the canonization inquiry. After all, wounds are often portrayed in medieval literature in the context of Christ's passion and as objects of meditation and *imitatio Christi*;⁵⁴ they therefore would have provided excellent proof of Charles's *patientia*. The few references to them resemble those made to St. Louis IX's illness and captivity in relation to his patience and devotion during the hardships he faced; in this sense, there was an existing model on which to base these narratives. However, the different emphases on suffering during military campaigns in the two saints' processes are most likely explained by the fact that, unlike for Louis IX, Charles's military campaigns were primary secular in nature. It is also possible that the cult promoters felt the need to downplay them due to the tense political situation with the new duke. Furthermore, Charles's wounds did not fit well into the established medieval narrative of a knight's injuries, in which wounds usually were mentioned only if fatal.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, it is no coincidence that it was Georgius de Lesnen who provided the exception. Charles's injury must have been a significant memory for him, given that he was the duke's physician and remained in his company throughout his captivity; presumably his testimony about the matter was also considered to be substantial.

These reports of suffering are very masculine and reflect activities reserved for elite men. They were not, however, the norm for the way *patientia* was constructed for non-eremitical male saints. More common among witnesses to these saints' lives was the type of patient suffering related to arguments or scorn received from peers.⁵⁶ Aside from the tendency to construct female sainthood in more corporeal terms, another factor in the gendered *patientia* was male

⁵⁴ Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 302–6.

⁵⁵ Constance Bouchard, *Strong of Body, Brave and Noble: Chivalry and Society in Medieval France*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 117.

⁵⁶ von Weissenberg, "What man are you?" 112–13; Vauchez, *Sainthood*, 171.

saints' ability to participate actively in the world and to perform their holiness in more secular settings.⁵⁷ Yet, a closer look at elite male saints' canonization processes in particular reveals that witnesses did give importance to suffering that was more corporeal, or even feminine. It is difficult to ascertain whether the lesser emphasis placed on these reports during the processes reflected the weight witnesses gave them or the commissioners' preferences. Most likely both these aspects influenced the way such suffering was portrayed in the canonization documents.

Despite the fact that testimonials about Louis IX's suffering were so thoroughly coloured by the crusades, his devotees did report other incidents in which suffering was a key element. The description of Louis's infirmity in Guillaume de Saint-Pathus's *Vie* is based on testimony by the knight Pierre de Laon and possibly others – at least, the incident was witnessed by several *chevaliers* and one or two chamberlains who slept in the king's room. According to the text, Louis suffered from a malady that troubled him several times a year. It was so painful that the king wailed and could not get up from his bed; his foot also became red and swollen.⁵⁸ Once, an elderly servant named Jehan la Guete, who had been in the service of Louis's grandfather Philip II, let a burning drop of oil fall on the king's ailing leg, making him stretch across his bed and cry out in pain. Still, the king did not “hold anything against” the servant.⁵⁹

This mention of the king's reaction to his illness – wailing – is atypical; saints typically are not described as complaining when in pain. However, Guillaume and undoubtedly the witnesses used the malady to highlight the saintly king's kindness towards his household staff, another

⁵⁷ See Meri Heinonen, “Henry Suso and the Divine Knighthood,” in *Holiness and Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, eds. P. H. Cullum and Katherine J. Lewis (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 79–92.

⁵⁸ Guillaume de Saint-Pathus, *Vie de saint Louis*, 116: “La quele maladie estoit tele que, quant ele prenoit le benoiet roy, il n'entendoit pas bien ne n'ooit endementieres que la dite maladie le tenoit, et ne pooit mengier ne dormir et se compleignoit en gemissant. Et einsi la dite maladie le tenoit iij jours, aucune foiz plus aucune foiz moins, si que il ne pooit issir par soi du lit.”

⁵⁹ Guillaume de Saint-Pathus, *Vie de saint Louis*, 117.

frequent theme in medieval hagiography.⁶⁰ Louis's unsaintly reaction to his pain thus highlighted its severity and his patience and kindness towards the old servant, rather than his inability to be stoic in the face of adversity. As in many other cases, Louis's household members and those closest to him were the main, if not only, sources of this information; their testimonies about the event are an illuminating example of the varying meanings devotees could give to suffering, and how they knew how to use it to highlight different aspects of elite male sainthood.

Feminine Suffering and Authority

Late medieval hagiography emphasized suffering, but the meanings given to the suffering of female saints in particular are not as straightforward as they may appear. Clare of Montefalco, for example, was a suffering saint in every aspect of the word, and close reading of the testimonies given by nuns of her cloister reveal that her suffering and *imitatio Christi* were important parts of their memories. Yet they also reported other aspects of her life that give quite a different image of how they remembered their saintly abbess.

Clare was the abbess of a small, poor convent and therefore did not have as much economic and political power as her colleagues who were ruling large and wealthy establishments.⁶¹ Even though she was a cloistered nun, she was a visible figure in her community – not just as a miracle worker or a spiritual sufferer but as an adviser and leader as well. Several testimonies given at her inquest spoke to the spiritual advice she gave to her (lay) devotees, men and women

⁶⁰ Charles of Blois was also frequently reported as a good master. See also Cassard, "Les coulisses de la sainteté?" 4.

⁶¹ A thorough analysis of abbesses' rule and responsibility is found in Jennifer C. Edwards, *Superior Women: Medieval Female Authority in Poitiers' Abbey of Sainte-Croix* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019). Abbesses were supposed to be in office for life; for their resignation and misbehaviour, see Graciela S. Daichman, *Wayward Nuns in Medieval Literature* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1986), 17–20.

alike.⁶² Her wisdom and gift of prophecy, both important elements in late medieval canonization processes, were asserted by the nuns of her convent, who explained how she knew their inner faults and reprimanded them in private.⁶³ Here, the sisters occasionally used Clare's ill health not to highlight suffering per se, but rather to emphasize her other characteristics. This is shown in sister Marina's testimony: she stated that when Clare was so *debilis et infirma* that she could no longer perform her tasks, she "helped the said sisters with her advice and sweet words."⁶⁴ Marina therefore drew a parallel between Clare's helping the sisters in acts and in words, while also specifying that she continued to be useful for the convent even when she was physically incapacitated.

Clare's canonization process put a great amount of weight on her mental faculties, her wisdom, and her theology.⁶⁵ A mystic who possessed divine wisdom was a common theme cultivated particularly in Italy;⁶⁶ Clare's process is therefore not an exception, but it nevertheless is illuminating given the amount of detail recorded. Her brother Franciscus, a Franciscan friar, spoke specifically to these issues and explained how Clare managed to turn wrongdoers into virtuous people simply by talking with them. He also remarked that she had divine knowledge and seemed to possess a "most profound intelligence" (*intellectum profundum et profundissimum*).⁶⁷ Clare's spiritual wisdom was also linked to one of the most famous episodes of her life: her connection with heretics of the free spirit, specifically with Bentevenga

⁶² *Il processo di canonizzazione di Chiara da Montefalco*, 228–29, 316–17, 391–92, 447, 449.

⁶³ *Il processo di canonizzazione di Chiara da Montefalco*, 42–45, 47–48, 333. Before 1350, this pertained to the ability to read hidden secrets and faults, but later on the gift was directed toward solving the problems of the Church. Vauchez, *Sainthood*, 524–25.

⁶⁴ *Il processo di canonizzazione di Chiara da Montefalco*, 107: "iuvabat dictas sorores in consiliis et dulcibus verbis." Sister Thomassa testified to the same article (p. 179) but made no reference to the time Clare was infirm. Interestingly, Sister Francesca's testimony does not include a deposition to this article; this may be because she had only known Clare for the two final years of her life.

⁶⁵ The relevant articles are LIX and LX.

⁶⁶ David Burr, *Spiritual Franciscans: From Protest to Persecution in the Century after Saint Francis* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 320.

⁶⁷ *Il processo di canonizzazione di Chiara da Montefalco*, 275–78. See also Burr, *Spiritual Franciscans*, 320, for Clare's relationship with scholarship.

da Gubbio. The process investigated this matter thoroughly, apparently to remove any suspicions about her relationship with the man. According to the articles and witness statements, Clare revealed to the friar the errors in his thinking and urged officials to punish him.⁶⁸

The sisters' testimonies to Clare's *patientia* are further proof of the significance they gave to her role as the abbess. When asked about the matter, sister Marina explained that Clare did not complain in her infirmity or tribulations but took them all patiently, thanking the Lord. This was a standard response, but the follow-up question perhaps reveals something about her thinking. The commissioners inquired whether she was referring to any special or grave tribulations. In response, Marina did not comment on Clare's illness at all but instead reported an instance when Clare was abbess and two local brothers came into their convent against the sisters' will and said improper words to them, defaming them, apparently because they were angry that their own sister had joined the convent.⁶⁹ According to Marina, Clare took all this abuse patiently, encouraged the sisters, and did not want to involve secular authorities in punishing the wrongdoers.⁷⁰ Sister Thomassa also reported the same incident.⁷¹

It seems obvious that a presumably traumatic incident in which Clare saved the community under her rule was a vivid and important memory for the sisters, as they eagerly reported it to the commissioners – perhaps even ignoring more conventional demonstrations of Clare's patience. It also seems plausible that they had a model on which to construct their memory. There is a similar but more famous event recorded in the documents concerning Saint Clare of

⁶⁸ *Il processo di canonizzazione di Chiara da Montefalco*, 17–18, 57–59.

⁶⁹ The sister is identified in the edition of Clare's process as Caterina da Montefalco; she was witness number 3 in the inquest, but her deposition is missing. *Il processo di canonizzazione di Chiara da Montefalco*, 610.

⁷⁰ *Il processo di canonizzazione di Chiara da Montefalco*, 109–10.

⁷¹ *Il processo di canonizzazione di Chiara da Montefalco*, 40–41, 135, 210.

Assisi (1194–1253). One of the sisters of her convent testified in the 1253 canonization inquiry about an incident during which Clare, holding a monstrance, expelled the Saracen mercenaries of Frederick II who had attacked her convent. The sister referred to Clare's infirmity – she was another known sufferer – stating that she was ill at the time yet managed to bravely take on the invading men.⁷² The story found its way into Thomas of Celano's *Vita* of Clare of Assisi and was a topic commonly depicted in iconography;⁷³ it is plausible that the sisters of Clare of Montefalco's convent were aware of the story and used it to frame their own testimonies. All in all, these depositions clearly demonstrate the weight the sisters gave to their holy abbesses' heroic deeds.

As the examples of the two Clares show, a female saint's community members could frame saintly patience around the injustice they faced and the power they used. As with male saints, female saints' patience and resourcefulness in the face of trouble was a common element of their holiness. Analysis of female saints should thus move beyond any discussion of exception: female saints, like male saints, were more than simple epitomes of the significance that medieval culture attributed to them. It is, however, noteworthy that in most of these narrations, women faced trouble and indiscreet behavior from members of the opposite sex, not from other women. At the same time, the writers of the *articuli* and some of the witnesses connected these activities to the female saints' bodily infirmities. A culturally established female trait of sainthood thus underlined or justified a seemingly male element of holiness, thereby highlighting the fluidity of gender categories while also demonstrating that hagiographic conventions related to gender did not prevent witnesses or theologians from considering other aspects of saints' lives essential.

⁷² *Santa Chiara di Assisi. I primi documenti ufficiali. Lettera di annunzio della sua morte, processo e bolla di canonizzazione*, ed. Giovanni Boccali (Santa Maria degli Angeli: Edizioni Porziuncola, 2002), 215.

⁷³ Nirit Ben-Aryeh Debby, "St. Clare Expelling the Saracens from Assisi: Religious Confrontation in Word and Image," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 43.3 (2012): 643–65.

Conclusions

Rereading testimonies about saints' lives reveals connections and relationships between small details and cultural models of a holy life, thus offering a fruitful way to study late medieval devotion, lay piety, and the communal formation of saints' cults. Suffering and corporality, themes of great importance in late medieval hagiography, provide illuminating windows into the way saintly *fama* and virtues were constructed. The testimonies can also be read as demonstrations of the fluidity of gender categories. Analysis of gendered – or non-gendered – suffering allows a more versatile exploration of gendered sainthood than has been the traditional approach. Regardless of their saint's gender, devotees could reflect their own memories as well as their own devotion through the bodily manifestations of holy women and men's abstinence and patience. Although female and male saints largely operated in different fields and their cults had different emphases, their bodies and the way they lived their bodies and their suffering through them conveyed similar messages.

The (usually elite) witnesses who testified about their awareness of a saintly candidate's virtues knew how to use small details alongside personal relationships and recollections to highlight and give proof to their declarations. Furthermore, analysis of these documents shows that although the established cultural model of a holy life shaped the devotees' memories of their saints, their personal views and encounters were ever present in the recollections. Personal relationships with a saint served the canonization process but also enhanced the witnesses' status among the devotees. Just as stories about miracles were a common topic for discussion, so, too, must have been the little details about the saint's life.

An analysis of the details and even deviations from the norm in canonization testimonies further shows that although there were culturally accepted and internalized models of holiness, and although people were well aware of the virtues that a saintly candidate must demonstrate, at the communal level sainthood was a versatile, multifaceted phenomenon. Born in a communal setting, a holy life was always situated somewhere, in a distinct time and place. The saint's actions and the demonstrations of their holiness had to speak to the community of devotees. Without this, a saintly *fama* could not be born.