

Saint Margaret of Cortona (1247–1297) and the *Laudario* of the Confraternity of Santa Maria delle Laude in Cortona

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Summary: For his compilation of the *Life* or *Legend* of Saint Margaret of Cortona (1247–1297), the Franciscan friar Giunta Bevegnati (thirteenth century) was guided by texts found in a collection of *laude* belonging to the Confraternity of Santa Maria delle laude in Cortona and the iconography associated with it. The hymns the confraternity sang are to be found in the *Laudario di Cortona*. This article shows that not only is there a strong link between the hagiography of St Margaret and the confraternity's *laude*, but also that the hagiographical text is closely linked with the iconography supported by the confraternity with whom the saint was in contact. In the first part we will compare the text composed by Giunta Bevegnati with the *laude* sung by the Compagnia di S. Maria delle laude to show how the *laude* influenced the saint's *Legenda*; in the second part, we will compare the texts of the *Legenda* with the contemporary iconography of St Margaret.

The *Laudario di Cortona* is the earliest of the only two surviving manuscripts of Italian vernacular *laude* to contain musical notation.¹ It consists of 66 *laude*, 46 of which are set to music. The first sixteen are addressed to the Virgin Mary, while the others concern specific events in the liturgical calendar. The Cortona confraternity of Santa Maria delle laudi was primarily devoted to the so-called Gothic Passion Crucifix or *Crucifixus dolorosus*, that is, to the iconographic representation of the terrible suffering of the crucified Christ, complete with strained face and limbs and the body covered with wounds recalling the plague. This iconography spread throughout Italy thanks, in part, to the presence of artists from north of the Alps.² The sight of these crucifixes was often greatly disturbing for spectators. When Margaret the mystic was going into a state of ecstasy, she would

¹ The *Laudario di Cortona* is held by the Biblioteca del Comune e dell'Accademia Etrusca in Cortona, ms. 91, "Laudario di Cortona". The other *laudario* with musical notation is the *Laudario Magliabechiano* 18 held by the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale in Florence, Ms Magliabechiano II I 122, Banco Rari 18. For an edition and analysis of the Cortona *laudario* see Guarnieri, *Laudario di Cortona*.

² Lunghi, *La passione degli umbri*, 67–75 and *passim*.

speak at length to one such crucifix in front of which the members of the confraternity of Santa Maria delle laudi di Cortona would sing their *laude*.

1. The Mary Magdalene of Cortona

Bevegnati tells how Margaret fled from her father's home at a very early age because she had fallen in love with the young Arsenio da Montepulciano.³ Arsenio, with whom Margaret spent nine years, fathered a child, only to die leaving her to fend for herself.⁴ Margaret subsequently returned to her father's home, begging him to accept her back, but her stepmother did not agree and convinced her husband to reject his disgraced daughter. In despair, Margaret had asked Jesus to take her as His bride, while Satan tempted her to take advantage of her beauty and become a prostitute.⁵ She then underwent a process of conversion, during which she heard a Divine Voice reminding her of all the events of her life up to then and all her previous sins.⁶ This was a cathartic experience that let her to become a tertiary, or penitent laywoman, associated, at least initially, with the Franciscan friars of Cortona.⁷ After her conversion, Margaret experienced several ecstatic phenomena, carefully monitored by a number of spiritual fathers, first by *ser* Badia Venturi then by Giunta Bevegnati. In a way Margaret was adopted by the Franciscans in Cortona, who, after noting her intense mystic life and her popularity caused by the supernatural events involving her, did their best to take charge of her spiritual care (while she was still alive) and then of her body (after her death).⁸ After spending a long period in a cell next to the Franciscan church, Margaret decided to die in a distant church (San Basilio). To overcome their loss of control over Margaret's body and shrine, the Franciscans entrusted Bevegnati, after Margaret's death, with writing a hagiography that would underline, at the risk of historical inaccuracy, the relationship between Margaret and the Franciscans. What they wanted was for the woman who had died in the odour of sanctity to be seen as a Franciscan saint.⁹

Apart from the friars, the Ghibelline family of the Casali, who oversaw Margaret's renown as a living saint, were keen for her to become their

³ Bevegnati, *Vita*, 183 and *Leggenda*, 2, n. 4. For an English translation see Bevegnati, *The Life and the Miracles of St. Margaret of Cortona (1247–1297)*. For the current article, all translations are directly from the Italian text of the *Leggenda* edited by Eliodoro Mariani.

⁴ Bevegnati, *Vita*, 183 and *Leggenda*, 2–3.

⁵ Bevegnati, *Vita*, 181–182 and *Leggenda* (1978), 3–4.

⁶ See Bevegnati, *Vita*, 204–205 and *Leggenda* (1978), 2–6g.

⁷ Benvenuti Papi, "Margherita da Cortona," 188.

⁸ Mariani, "Introduzione," in Bevegnati, *Leggenda* (1978), xxix–xxx.

⁹ Benvenuti Papi, "Margherita da Cortona," 188.

patron as well as a saint. Her spiritual experience thus acquired political connotations.¹⁰ Furthermore, Margaret, who decided to devote her life entirely to prayer and contemplation, became a model of behaviour for those wishing to provide spiritual assistance to crusaders. Bevegnati's composition of the *Vita* thus has links with the conclusions of the Council of Vienne (1312), during which a crusade was proclaimed. Those who were unable to take part in the liberation of the earthly Jerusalem would have been able to accompany the crusaders in the conquest of an 'inner Jerusalem' through prayer and contemplation, a project that Margaret had decided to take up.¹¹ Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153) had encouraged accompanying crusades by means of *bellum in domibus propriis*, that is, by means of a battle to be fought at home through prayer and penitence.¹²

2. Texts: Hagiography and Laude

2.1 The *Legenda de vita et miraculis* of Saint Margaret of Cortona

The *Legenda de vita et miraculis* of Saint Margaret of Cortona has come down to us in an autograph vellum codex of 108 sheets with red numbers. It is dated 1308 and is housed in the friary of Santa Margherita in Cortona. The autograph consists of eleven chapters, a prologue and a special appendix concerning the miracles as a 12th chapter. The other two codices are copies, one in the archive and another in the municipal library of Cortona, and do not have this extra twelfth chapter.¹³

On his hagiography, Bevegnati grafted the texts in the *laudario* of the confraternity of Santa Maria delle laude di Cortona, which in turn were inspired by the gospels of Luke and John.¹⁴ This is an important observation because the *laudario* that belonged to the confraternity of S. Maria delle Laude that met in the church of San Francesco in Cortona and sang its laude in front of the crucifix that spoke to Margaret.¹⁵ Many of their

¹⁰ Bevegnati, *Vita* (1997), 92–93.

¹¹ On the links between Margaret and the crusades, see Benvenuti Papi, "*In castro poenitentiae*", 117–168.

¹² Benvenuti Papi, "*In castro poenitentiae*", 148.

¹³ For study of the *Legenda* we have the *Processus Remissorialis* (the official diocesan inquiry under the directions of Rome) of the Sacred Congregation of Rites in Cortona, which took place in the pontificate of Urban VIII, between 1629 and 1640. The *Fioretti di santa Margherita da Cortona* derive from this *Processus*. As far as the version of the so-called Bollandists (experts on the details of saints' lives) is concerned the *Acta Sanctorum* have no introduction and no Chapter XII.

¹⁴ Lunghi, *La passione degli umbri*, 78–83.

¹⁵ Bevegnati, 257–258 and *passim* of *Vita* and *Leggenda* (1978), 90–93.

laude sang of Christ's Passion.¹⁶ Since Margaret was a frequent visitor to the church of San Francesco, it is quit likely that she heard, and may even have taken part, in the singing of these laude. Elvio Lunghi suggests that Margaret's lifestyle had much in common with the recommendations to be found in the Cortona manuscript (ms. 91), such as caring for the sick or following the example of Mary Magdalene.¹⁷

2.2 A laudario for a legenda

In analysing a number of texts, we see how Bevegnati's work and the verses in the Cortona Laudario interact. The first point to note is that Margaret had a vision in which Christ's Passion came to life before her very eyes in a sequence, one after the other as if part of a theatrical performance. Margaret's ecstasy takes place, not by chance, in the church of San Francesco, something that should be seen as an attempt by the friars to lay claim to the Saint's cult. In ms. 91, the laude of the Easter cycle follow the same pattern: communicating to the reader or listener a sequence of images or words, closely comparable with the text of fra Giunta Bevegnati, which, as already mentioned, appeared after the laude. In chapter five of the *Legenda*, we read how the speaking Crucifix allowed Margaret, during her prayers, to share the pain felt by the Virgin Mary at the foot of the Cross.¹⁸ Shortly afterwards, before Margaret's eyes, the scenes of the Passion appeared in sequence, in the words of Lunghi, a kind of "film sequence."¹⁹ Before the eyes of the ecstatic woman the scenes appeared as follows: the betrayal of Christ; the Jews falling upon Jesus and yelling; His figure as in the iconography of the *Ecce homo*, beaten, tied up surrounded by torches and lanterns, and scourged at the pillar. In brief, Margaret saw "in rapid succession the cross, the lance, and the mercenary, false witnesses against Christ."²⁰

After the celebration of Mass, at about the hour of Terce, Margaret's soul was overwhelmed by ecstasy and her thirst was quenched by the vinegar mixed with gall of the Passion and she saw in a vision the betrayal, the assault by the Jews, she heard their cries and brutal demands in preparation for the martyrdom of Christ. She saw Christ greeted by the kiss of betrayal; led bound amid torches and lanterns; denied by Peter and deserted by the Apostles, his face covered with bruises. She saw him being cruelly scourged at the pillar, scorned, covered with a cloak, spat upon, struck, his

¹⁶ Guarnieri, *Laudario di Cortona*, 112–113.

¹⁷ Lunghi, *La passione degli umbri*, 79.

¹⁸ Bevegnati, *Vita*, 242–243 and *Leggenda* (1978), 74.

¹⁹ Lunghi, *La passione degli umbri*, 81.

²⁰ Bevegnati, *Leggenda* (1978), 75.

hair pulled, subjected to mock adoration. Then she saw one after the other, the cross, the nails, the lance and the mercenary, false witnesses against Christ.²¹

The vision of what today is known as the Stations of the Cross unfolded before Margaret's eyes for a whole day (from Terce to Vespers). She even heard the cries from the crowd who had condemned Jesus to death: "When she heard the cries: *Behold your King*, and: *We have no other King but Caesar*, and *I find no fault with him*; or *Take him yourselves and crucify him*."²² The sequence of the Stations of the Cross continued without interruption: first she saw the Virgin Mary and the women, together with the three Marys and Mary Magdalene; then she saw Jesus tormented and led out from the Palace, then Simon who was carrying the Cross; the thieves on either side of our Lord; Jesus offered vinegar mixed with gall and, last of all, the arrival of Longinus. Seeing that she felt the same pain as that of the Crucified Christ, as a result of the magnitude of His suffering, the people of Cortona saw Margaret twist like a snake and gnash her teeth: from Nones to Vespers she looked like a corpse to the local inhabitants, who, leaving their places of work, even leaving their little children in their cots — as Bevegnati tells us — ran to the oratory of the friary to witness this prodigy, during which Margaret, by now a well-known figure, experienced the torments of Christ's Passion on her own body.²³

Another aspect has thus emerged, apart from the text-image interface, and that is the spectacular theatricality of the event: passionate and bodily involvement typical of female Franciscan Mystics (and not only Franciscans) already observable in St. Francis himself.²⁴

Let us now turn to the organisation of the theme of Christ's Passion in the laude of the Easter Cycle in ms. 91. Before Giunta, the author had organised the description of the Passion listing the scenes in a sequence, as can be noted in the first laude of the Easter Cycle, in which we have in a sequence: the arrival of Judas, who betrays Jesus with a kiss; Jesus being

²¹ Bevegnati, *Vita*, Iozzelli, p. 75: "Finitis itaque missarum sollempniis, prope horam tertiam anima illa Deo deuota, felle passionis potata et in Deum absorta, uidere cepit proditionis processum, Iudeorum impetum et audire Iudeorum clamores et dira concilia, que Christi supplicia conspirabant. Nunc uidebat eum duci cum facibus et lanternis ligatum, nunc a Petro negari et ab apostolis deseri, nunc facie liuidum, nunc ad columpnam sine misericordia flagellari. Nunc eum contemplabatur illudi, nunc uelatum in facie, nunc conspui, nunc eius genas et capillos conuelli, nunc derisorie adorari, nunc cum stupenda celeritate crucem, clauos, lanceam testesque falsos et subornatos contra Christum parari." Bevegnati, *Vita*, 242–243.

²² Bevegnati, *Leggenda* (1978), 75.

²³ Bevegnati, *Leggenda* (1978), 75–77.

²⁴ For the 'theatricality' of St Francis, see *Actus beati Francisci*, where the Saint picks up two pieces of wood and mimes a musician playing a violin: Ugolino da Boniscampi, *Actus beati Francisci* XL, 2168–69.

stripped; as a condemned criminal, he is sent by Caiaphas to Pilate, and by the latter to Herod.

Let us lament that cruel kiss / that led to God being crucified for us. / Judas the traitor came / a kiss that gave great pain / what we do for love / for him was a gesture of great suffering/ he made a sign for the Jews who did not know Jesus / Judas showed them who He was and with a kiss had Him captured / to Prince Annas they took Him / they stripped Him naked / they scourged Him brutally and bound Him / and covered Him with blood / Annas sent Him to Caiaphas the Chief Priest / who sent Him to Pilate / to have Him further scorned / Pilate sent Him to Herod for more questions / he tried hard but received no replies / then he showed Him to the people.²⁵

The description of Margaret's vision/passion and the account in the lauda both begin with Judas' betrayal. In the *Legenda* we read: "the soul devoted to God [i.e., Margaret] was overwhelmed by ecstasy and her thirst was quenched by the vinegar mixed with gall of the Passion, and she saw in a vision the betrayal."²⁶

The same mechanism of splitting up the Passion into several scenes following each other is even more noticeable in the next laude:

Over the cruel death of Christ / Let every man weep bitterly / When the Jews / captured Christ / on every side they surrounded Him / His hands / they bound tight / like a common criminal / Thirty pieces of silver / was the price / which Judas asked / and was given / better for him / never to have been born / than commit a sin / so grievous / At the pillar / He was stripped / and on all His body / scourged / and from every part of His body / the blood flowed / like a

²⁵ Guarnieri, *Laudario di Cortona*, 99–100: "Plangiamo quel crudel basciar[e] / Ke fe' per noi Deo cruciare. // Venne Iuda, traditore, / bascio Li dié gran dolore; / lo qual fac[c]iam noi per amore / a Lui fo signo di penare. // Quel fo signo a [l]i Iuderi: / non cognoscevan Suo misteri, / Iuda li feci v[id]eri, / per un suo bascio 'L fe' pi[g]liare. // Ad Anna principe El menaro; / inudo nato Lo spoliare, / battirLo forte e sí 'L legaro / e fêrLo tutto insanguinare. // Anna sì L'ebbe mandato a / Cayfàs so[m]mo prelato, / quelli ke 'L mandò a Pilato / per Lui più vituper fare. / Pilato ad Arode El mandò, / perké molto El domandò, / cercò molto e nol trovò, / poi Lo fe' rapresentare. n

²⁶ Bevegnati, *Leggenda* (1978), 75: "quell'anima devota a Dio fu rapita in estasi e, abbeverata nel fiele della Passione, ebbe la visione del fatto del tradimento." On this close relationship between the two texts see: Lunghi, *La passione degli umbri*, 81.

deceitful / fraudulent man / Then they took Him / before
 Pilate / and before the Council / He was questioned / by the
 Jews / He was condemned / by those false / guilty people / All
 cried out / in a loud voice / “ Death / to the false man / let
 Him die / quickly / hasten / His death on the Cross / that He
 cease to trouble / all the people” / In His face/ they spat / and
 pulled at his beard / mockingly / they accused Him / of
 claiming / to be God / When onto the cross / He had been
 nailed / the Jews / called upon Him / If you are Christ / sent by
 God / come down /without fail / From the Holy Side / blood
 gushed forth / and all of us / were redeemed / from the en-
 emy / deceiving / with the forbidden fruit / so treacherous-
 ly / Saint John / the Evangelist / when he saw his Master / saw
 Him on the Cross/ he was very sad / and suffered / in his
 mind / His companions /abandoned Him / all fled / and left
 Him / in his suffering / so strong and bitter / in His body / for
 all people / So unhappy was / Saint Mary / when her Son / on
 the Cross she saw / With great sadness / she wept/ Saying
 “Sad / desperate and in pain am I /”²⁷

In the first part of the composition the author asks for tears to be shed over the Passion of Jesus, subsequently recalling a number of scenes, ‘photographing’ them before the eyes of his listeners: the Lord in prison; the thirty pieces of silver given to Judas Iscariot; Stripping and scourging; and Jesus condemned by the Jews before Pilate. The second part of the laude, on the other hand, concentrates on other scenes from the Passion: the insults against the condemned prisoner; the crucifixion; and, finally,

²⁷ Guarnieri, *Laudario di Cortona*, 105–107: “De la crudele morte de Cristo on’ omo pianga amaramente. // Quando e’ Iuderi Cristo pigliaro, / da ogne parte Lo circondaro, / le Süe mane stretto legaro / como ladrone villanamente. // Trenta denari fo lo mercato / ke fece Iuda, e fo pagato: / meglio li fora non esser nato, / k’aver peccato sì duramente. // A la colonna fo spoliato / Per tutto ’l corpo fo flagellato, / e d’ogne parte fo ’nsanguinato / commo fals’omo fraudolente. // Poi ’L menaro ’nanti a Pilato; / e nel consiglio ademandato, / da li Iuderi fo condannato, / da quella falsa [e] ria gente. // Tutti gridaro ad alta voce: / “Moia el falso, moia el veloce; / sbrigatamente sia posto en croce / k’e[lli] non turbi tutta la gente.” // Nel Süo vulto Li sputaro / E la Sua barba sì depelaro; / facendo beffe [el]li ’ mputaro / ke Dio s’è fatto [e] falsamente. // Poi ke ’n croce fo kiavellato, / da li Iuderi fo designato: / “Se tu se’ Cristo, da Dio mandato, / discende giù sicuramente.” // Lo santo lato sangue manò / E tutti noi recomparò / Da lo nemico ke [ne] ’ngannò / Per uno pomo sì vilemente. // Santo Iovanni lo vangelisto, / quando guardava al suo maistro, / vidieLo ’n croce: molt’era tristo / e doloroso [in]de la mente. // Li Soi compagni L’abandonaro, / tutti fug[g]iero e Lui lasciaro, / stando [n] tormento forte ed amaro / de lo Suo corpo per tutta gente. // Molt’era trista santa Maria / Quando ’l suo figlio en croce vedea. / Cun gran dolore forte piangea, / dicendo: “Trista, lassa, dolente.”

the scene in which the Virgin Mary and John the Apostle weep at the foot of the Cross, using a popular refrain of the period present in texts and also illustrated in images, that is, the so-called “compassion”, sharing Christ’s suffering on the part of the faithful, along the lines of the bereaved ‘par excellence’: the Virgin Mary and John.

Bevegnati’s work also built its narrative of Christ’s Passion in the hagiography of Saint Margaret on another relevant medieval text, the *Meditationes de passione Christi* compiled in a Franciscan context in the early fourteenth century.²⁸ This thus sets up an interaction between several texts: the *Legenda* of Saint Margaret, the laude of the Compagnia di Santa Maria delle laudi, and the *Meditationes de passione Christi*.

The close link between the *Vita* and the laude can also be seen in another passage in the hagiography. It has already been pointed out that Bevegnati treats Margaret in a fashion reminiscent of Mary Magdalene (and arguably of the Samaritan woman at the well) since in both instances we are dealing with the case of a redeemed female sinner. For example, the very day on which Margaret saw the scenes of Christ’s Passion, she searched for Our Lord, asking if anyone had seen Him. Bevegnati thought he was repeating the famous scene in St. John’s Gospel (20,1–15), in which Mary Magdalene had arrived at the Sepulchre on the Day of the Resurrection and, when seeing that it was empty, had despaired and asked the guardian whether he knew the place in which the body of Our Lord had been taken — the guardian was actually Jesus, but Mary Magdalene had not recognised him. In the *Vita* of St. Margaret we find the following passage:

In the evening, I, Friar Giunta, left Margaret, who returned to her cell. She was like a new Mary Magdalene, who, after seeing Christ on the Cross in her mind, believing that He had been taken from her, overwhelmed by pain, weeping ceaselessly, and in a loud voice asked all those near her for news of her Crucified Lord and thus with such a pitiable demeanour, that all those nearby and those encountered along the road were moved to tears. With ardent desire and full of love for Christ, she exclaimed: “Have you seen my Lord? Where can I, in my desperation, find Him? Oh, if only I could see you, Lord, how endless my joy would be! I search, sigh, cry, desire, I am breathless, and my heartbeat ceases, because I cannot

²⁸ There has been much discussion over the name of the author of the *Meditationes* and their date. Here we accept the hypothesis of Dàvid Falvay and Péter Tóth, who suggest the name of Giacomo da San Gimignano. In their view, the composition came about in the context of the Spiritual Franciscans: D. Falvay — P. Tóth, *L'autore e la trasmissione delle Meditationes Vitae Christi*, 406–407 e 430.

find you, and you have been taken from me by an atrocious death! Angels, all beings, tell me where my Crucified Lord is. Him who I search for and cannot find. Alas, what have you done, Lord, to have your goodness treated so treacherously? Why have you abandoned me, my Love, and where have you hidden? I want to see you and listen to you, but I cannot see or hear you! Oh how unhappy I am, why am I still alive?"

Overwhelmed by this longing, she neglected her food and sleep until the morning of the following Sunday.²⁹

This scene, apart from Mary Magdalene in John's Gospel, recalls passages from the Song of Songs. In a famous passage that in the Middle Ages had been much glossed, especially in books for women, the bridegroom hides and cannot be found, while the bride searches for him, asking guards and sentries, in the desperate attempt to find him. A part of the *laudario di Cortona* is also close to Bevegnati, where there are two *laude* dealing with Mary Magdalene³⁰. In one of them we have the scene in which she, on the Day of the Resurrection, having gone to the Holy Sepulchre, with the pious women bearing oils, begins to despair when she sees the empty tomb³¹: "Alone Mary Magdalene left / who was so full of love for Him / binding her tightly with a chain / which her heart could not pass / she was looking for her love/ weeping and wailing / about Jesus she asked / any she found upon the road." ³² Thus, once again, Bevegnati sets up a dialogue between several

²⁹ Bevegnati, *Leggenda* (1978), 77-78: "Sero itaque facto, Margarita, licentiata per fratrem I. suam remeavit ad cellam et ueluti nova Magdalena que Christum in cruce mentaliter uiderat, credens eum sibi sublatum, ebriata doloribus, incessanter cum fletibus, alta uoce, ab omnibus quod uidebat suum crucifixum Dominum requirebat tam pie, quod omnes astantes uel sibi obuiantes prouocabat ad fletum ardensque desiderio Christi, amore plena, dicebat: "Vidistis uos Dominum meum? Quo ibo, infelicissima, ut inueniam eum? O si te possem uidere, Domine mi, quam infinito gaudio me repleres! Quero, suspiro, clamo, uigilo, laboro et deficit cor meum nec te inuenio, quia sublatum per duram mortem michi fuisti. O angeli, homines et creature omnes, docete me Dominum meum crucifixum, quem quero et inuenire non possum! Heu! Heu! Quid fecisti, Domine mi, ut tam utiliter et crudeliter tractaretur tua benignitas? Cur me dereliquisti, amor meus, ubi modo absconditus es, quia te uidere et audire desidero, nec audio neque uideo? Heu! Heu michi! Cur uiuo?" Et in hac siti sic anxia, in qua cibum dimisit et sompnum, stetit ab hora dicta usque ad mane sequentis dominice."

³⁰ Varanini, *Laude cortonesi*, 274.

³¹ Lunghi, *La passione degli umbri*, 83-85.

³² Guarnieri, *Laudario di Cortona*, 227, vv. 135-142: "Sola se partio la Magdalena / quella k'era del Suo amor sì piena: / sì la stenge cun forte catena, / ke 'l suo core non potea passare. // Del sũo amore andava-n cercando, / tuttora già piangendo e lagrimando; / di Iesũ andava dimand[and]o / kũunque per via potea trovare."

texts in his *Legenda* of Saint Margaret: the laude, the Gospels and the *Song of Songs*, even the same glosses on the *Canticum canticorum*, such as the *Sermones super Cantica* by the Benedictine monk William of St. Thierry (d. 1148), which were widely read at the time.

3. The Confraternity, the Third Order and the Crucifix

Since we do not know the date of the founding or the statutes of the Confraternita di Santa Maria delle laudi, the *Laudario di Cortona* allows us to infer that the confraternity followed the Third Order of St. Francis. For example, the lauda *Sia lodato san Francesco* (Saint Francis be praised), refers to the three orders planned by St. Francis of Assisi: “friars minor, poor Clares and the third order” each with its own tasks: study and preaching; prayer and contemplation; secular service to God.³³

Another characteristic of the confraternities in thirteenth-century central Italy is the veneration of the iconography of the sufferings of Christ, part of which is the wooden crucifix that spoke to Margaret. It was these confraternities linked with the Franciscan and Dominican orders that venerated the suffering Christ, unlike those linked with the Servite order who preferred to direct their devotion to the Virgin Mary.³⁴ This iconography was imported by artists from beyond the Alps (English, Spanish, French, and German) and, in the case of Margaret’s crucifix, it could well have been the work of an English artist as Joanna Cannon suggests.³⁵ The Gothic iconography of the suffering Christ often encouraged violent ecstatic spasms, owing to the realism with which Jesus was represented. He was shown in a pitiable state suffering so greatly “that it is not difficult to imagine how prayer and meditation in the face of such a vision could result in an intense religious experience,” like that of Margaret.³⁶

Angela of Foligno (1248–1309), a Franciscan mystic and a contemporary of Margaret, was particularly sensitive to the iconography of the Passion, as we can read in her autobiography dictated to a Franciscan friar. In the face of the Gothic Passion crucifix, Angela, like Margaret, felt the same pain as St. John and the Virgin Mary at the foot of the Cross.³⁷ Since Angela’s autobiography does not appear to have been influenced by the Cortona laude, we can assume that, on occasion, the ecstasy experienced by both Margaret and Angela was not caused by listening to the laude, but rather by the iconography. For example, observing the famous *Crucifix*

³³ Lunghi, *La passione degli umbri*, 84.

³⁴ Lunghi, *La passione degli umbri*, 85–86.

³⁵ Cannon/Vauchez, *Margherita of Cortona and the Lorenzetti*, 5.

³⁶ Lunghi, *La passione degli umbri*, 68.

³⁷ Angela of Foligno, *Liber Lelle*, 10–12.

of S. Alò, attributed to an unknown master of the School of Cimabue or Cavallini, the scenes familiar to Margaret (and Angela) can be seen. On the back the following scene is visible: Christ crucified between two groups of soldiers; Longinus and other bystanders; the Virgin Mary, St. John — who, as already mentioned, are to be considered the models for Margaret's *compassio*. Crucifixes of this type were very widely produced in central Italy, since they were in great demand by the faithful, by various religious houses, and by confraternities; it is thus likely that, apart from the laude, it was also the crucifixes that were available to the female mystics that stimulated their imagination to the point of causing ecstasy.³⁸

Conclusion

After considering all the material we have analysed, one might think of the *Vita* of Margaret of Cortona composed by Giunta Bevegnati as a meeting point for more than one cultural and literary strand: preaching,³⁹ books of popular piety such as the *Meditationes Vitae Christi*, the iconography of the *Crucifixus dolorosus*, and the laude of the Cortona confraternity of Santa Maria delle laudi. These various media interact, giving rise to a complex, deep-rooted text. Subjecting the analysis of the hagiographies to an interdisciplinary approach indicates that the experience of the female mystics, especially when dealing with penitents and not nuns, is often doubly connected to the rich cultural patrimony of the confraternities. These, in turn, can be better investigated through the texts composed or dictated by female mystics that reveal interesting data concerning paraliturgical representations of confraternity groups, which, otherwise, would go unnoticed. By combining the study of confraternities with that of female mystics we can restore a history of words and images that has been split and studied separately for too long, but which in the Middle Ages was directly and profoundly interconnected.

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TRANSLATED BY JOHN DENTON

³⁸ Bassetti/Toscana, *Dal visibile all'indicibile*, 210.

³⁹ Bevegnati, *Vita*, 249 and *Leggenda* (1978), 78.

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