

Fonte de Pietade: Blood Devotion and Blood Consumption in the *Laudari* ‘Illuminati’ and ‘Fronдини’

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Summary: The following article analyses episodes of blood devotion in two fourteenth-century *laudari* written by the members of the confraternity of the Disciplinati di Santo Stefano in Assisi, otherwise known as the ‘Fronдини’ and ‘Illuminati’ *laudari*. Through the analysis of a selection of *laude* celebrating Good Friday and Corpus Domini, this article explores how the holy blood of Christ is adored, poured, and metaphorically “consumed” in the narratives adopted by the flagellant confraternity. In doing so, the article also highlights the relationship with other cultural trends active in medieval Italy, in particular hagiographical episodes of bloodshed and blood consumption, and the iconographical tradition of the *crocifissi dolorosi*.

Introduction

One of the most striking visions that animate the legend of Umbrian mystic Angela of Foligno (1248–1309)¹ can be found in the third chapter of the *Instructions* — one of the most relevant premodern biographical works dedicated to the mystic. In this vision, Angela sees her spiritual sons eagerly kiss, one by one, the wound in Christ’s side. “There seemed to be varying degrees of intensity in the way her sons were embraced and placed at Christ’s side,” she says. “He thrust some of them into his side more, some less, some more than once, and some he absorbed deep into his body. The redness of his blood colored the lips of some and the whole face of others, according to the varying degrees mentioned.”² To a modern reader, Angela’s vision may appear to be extremely gruesome and, perhaps, shocking. However, the idea of a bleeding Christ forcing his devotees to push their heads into his side and repeatedly kiss his gaping wound, specking their lips or covering their entire face with blood, reveals a singular religious sensibility very well attuned to medieval forms of blood devotion.

There are many iconographical and textual cases in the Middle Ages where devotion towards the crucified Christ is turned into what we might perceive as heterodox forms of piety, with believers touching, kissing,

¹ Contemporary bibliographical remarks on the mystic can be found in Angela da Foligno, *Angela of Foligno: Complete Works*, Introduction. See also Lunghi, *La Passione degli Umbri*, Chapter 1.

² Angela of Foligno, *Complete Works*, 246–247.

and adoring the body of Christ while partaking of his blood. In late medieval Italy, two of the strongest catalysts for such forms of devotion were the flagellant confraternities and the mendicant orders around which such confraternities orbited.³ Their public and private rituals of flagellation, which often involved group flagellation and chanting, were a highly theatrical form of religious devotion conceived with the intent of reviving the suffering of Christ's passion. Very often these rituals demanded the presence (real or imagined) of a crucified, bleeding Christ, to act as a witness to their pain.⁴

This article will focus on forms of blood devotion found in the religious chants handed down by one of the most influential flagellant confraternities in Umbria: the *Fraternita dei Disciplinati di Santo Stefano di Assisi*. It will show how these forms of devotion to the blood of Christ were used in their public and private rituals of flagellation, and how such chants reveal a form of physical and metaphorical exaltation for the consumption and shedding of blood. The two collections of laude related to the confraternity of Santo Stefano in Assisi, better known as *Laudario 'Illuminati'* and *Laudario 'Fron dini'*, will be the focus of our attention. The outstanding philological work of a series of experts has recently provided us with critical editions that so far have received only limited attention by the academic world outside of Italy.⁵ In highlighting the important relations that such laudari had with the development of late medieval forms of blood devotion, this article also seeks to demonstrate the importance of these texts as a witness to a wave of devotional experimentation that well represented the Catholic world in the late Middle Ages.

Medieval Blood and Flagellant Devotion

In the last twenty years, medieval accounts of blood devotion have been addressed and analysed by several scholars. The writings of Bettina Bildhauer, Peggy McCracken, Caroline Walker Bynum, and David Biale all have provided meaningful interpretations of medieval blood narratives in various fields of research.⁶ Most of the emerging attention of scholars towards medieval blood has been devoted to Northern Europe, and not the Mediterranean world. Such special attention to the Northern European

³ Cecchini, "Raniero Fasani et les flagellants," 347.

⁴ See Peter Damian in Niklaus Largier, *In Praise of the Whip*, 92 and 37–41.

⁵ Mancini, *Il Laudario 'Fron dini'*; Terruggia, *Il Laudario 'Illuminati'*. Worthy of mention are also the other works published under the series "Testi e documenti della Fraternita dei Disciplinati di S. Stefano di Assisi" such as Perugi/Scentoni, *Il Laudario Assisano* 36 and Casagrande (ed.), *Statuti, matricole e documenti*.

⁶ Bildhauer, *Medieval Blood*; McCracken, *The Curse of Eve*; Biale, *Blood and Belief*.

context might be attributed to Caroline Walker Bynum's research, converging in her pivotal *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond*. In her book, Bynum argued that the blood piety found in poetry, visual media, and public forms of devotion was mainly a "northern European phenomenon," in contrast with "less bloody" southern European narratives.⁷ Although her point on the German visual imaginary regarding blood devotion is compelling,⁸ her book takes only partially into account how the entire European imagination in medieval and early modern times saw blood as a primary source of inspiration and devotion.⁹

A clear instance of this trend is the enduring tradition at the centre of my article, that of the *flagellanti*, *vattienti*, or *disciplinati* that originated in Italy and reached German lands only later, bringing with it the fears, prophecies, and rituals of the Italian practice.¹⁰ Allegedly first organized in Perugia by the Franciscan hermit Raniero Fasani (d. 1281) in 1260,¹¹

⁷ Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, 5–7.

⁸ This statement could be easily put into question by — for example — Fra Angelico's pictorial work in the Florentine church of San Marco. Hood, *Fra Angelico at San Marco*. See also Morachiello, *Fra Angelico*.

⁹ It is important to note that, although Bynum seems to build part of her argument on a divide between northern and southern blood devotion, the author herself agrees with the fact that there are, in fact, similarities between Italian and German forms of blood devotion. See Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, 266, n. 39: "I do not intend to make an argument for northern particularism here, but only to be careful about evidence, since I have not studied Italy in any detail. Historians have tended to see north-south differences. But I would be the first to admit that some of what I discuss below, especially in Chapters 5, 7, and 8, shows similarities."

¹⁰ See Dickson, "Flagellants"; Kieckhefer, "Radical Tendencies in the Flagellant Movement"; Delaruelle, *La piété populaire au Moyen Age*; Henderson, "The Flagellant Movement"; Dickson, "Revivalism as a Medieval Religious Genre" and "The Flagellants of 1260 and the Crusades." On this subject, see also Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, chapt. 7, and Harris, *Cows, Pigs, Wars, & Witches*, chapt. 10. For relevant literature in Italian, see Rubini, Ghisisi/Arcari, *I disciplini* and Ferlino, *Vattienti*.

¹¹ As one might expect, the flagellants did not come from nowhere. Fasani's movement originated from an area renowned for the presence of several hermitic movements like Fonte Avellana and Monterone. Just like the hermits in Fonte Avellana, it is likely that Fasani and his devotees would have followed the example of the eleventh-century Benedictine monk Peter Damian (1007–1072) who spearheaded flagellation as a form of penance in the Catholic Church and its monastic orders. The eleventh-century zealot Dominicus Loricatus (d. 1060) was yet another possible source of inspiration for the movement, as he allegedly repeated the entire Psalter twenty times in one week, accompanying each psalm with a hundred lash-strokes to his back. The revolutionary element in Fasani's flagellants was that of taking this self-mortification into the cities and other public spaces as a demonstration of piety and communion with Christ. See Largier, *In Praise of the Whip*, 53–96. See also Cecchini, "Raniero Fasani et les flagellants," 341.

these bands of lay and religious men and women began roaming the Italian lands inspired by the anarchy and famine caused by war in northern and central Italy, and perhaps also by the prophecies of Joachim of Fiore (ca. 1135–1202).¹² These flagellants wandered in procession from town to town like pilgrims, performing a penitential rite that involved self-flagellation and ritual bleeding. Notwithstanding the cyclical nature of these autonomous religious demonstrations, historians agree in stating that the flagellant movement reached its peak in the fourteenth century. Following the Black Death of 1348–50, the movement spread to areas outside of Italy as penitential processions, often led by singers, were formed for the confession of sins and acts of flagellation.¹³ Chiefly affecting Germany and the Netherlands, these flagellants often abandoned themselves to mystical blood frenzies and anticlerical or anti-Semitic violence.¹⁴

Perhaps aware of the immediate concerns of the high clergy towards Fasani's movement — concerns that in 1261 led Pope Alexander IV (r. 1254–1261) to forbid any unregulated aggregation and procession of flagellant bands¹⁵ — the tumultuous movements of *disciplinati* in Italian lands quickly transformed into more manageable and acceptable forms of aggregation: religious confraternities.¹⁶ Much of the experimental vitality and drive for spiritual renovation of the 1260 movement was progressively restrained, then finally lost when flagellation was brought indoors and given ritualized form. Confraternities kept the memory of Raniero Fasani and his deeds alive by commissioning copies of a legend recording the miraculous events of 1260. However, they distanced themselves from forms of radical dissent that might be seen to be part of the early flagellant ideals and that characterized some of the transalpine movements in the fourteenth century.¹⁷

¹² Dickson, "Flagellants."

¹³ Largier, *In Praise of the Whip*, 95–96.

¹⁴ See Monter, "Flagellants." For a recent comparison between northern and southern European flagellant movements, see Hammel, "Revolutionary Flagellants?"

¹⁵ The final condemnation of transalpine flagellation was in 1349, when a papal bull outlawed the practice in France. Similarly, groups of flagellants were arrested and sometimes executed by papal inquisitors in many regions of the Holy Roman Empire during the late fourteenth and fifteenth century. See Monter, "Flagellants."

¹⁶ Hammel, "Revolutionary Flagellants?," 306–307. See also Andrew H. Chen, *Flagellant Confraternities and Italian Art*, 23, and Monter, "Flagellants."

¹⁷ Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, 137. Leff, *Heresy in the Later Middle Ages*, 2: 489–490. More recently, Gavin Hammel has argued against a wide gap between northern and southern forms of flagellant aggregations; see Hammel, "Revolutionary Flagellants?," 311–317.

Umbrian Flagellant Confraternities and the “Costellazione Assisiata”

Despite their early absorption into more acceptable political entities within the Italian religious framework, late medieval flagellant confraternities were not devoid of episodes of heterodox ritual and devotional experimentation. Private and public rituals of flagellation, as a matter of fact, combined the act of self-flagellation with other equally theatrical forms of devotion, such as lauda singing.¹⁸ In this sense, flagellant songs are a crucial element for our understanding of the ritual of religious flagellation, its modalities, and the kind of piety it aimed to convey. The *laudari* ‘Fron dini’ and ‘Illuminati’ are perfect specimens for such an analysis. Both texts pertain to a group of four flagellant *laudari* that Franco Mancini called the “Costellazione assisiata,” a cluster of manuscripts that well represent the cultural and devotional analogies between flagellant confraternities in Umbria, with Assisi as its epicentre.¹⁹

Both ‘Fron dini’ and ‘Illuminati’ are fourteenth-century collections of flagellant songs belonging to the influential *Fraternita dei disciplinati di Santo Stefano di Assisi*, founded in 1324. The confraternity’s 1327 legal *statuto* became the model for many other flagellant organizations in Umbria and beyond, spreading its influence in ritual practices all over Italian lands.²⁰ The other two *laudari* of the “costellazione assisiata,” ‘Eugubino’ and ‘Oliveriano,’ belong to two confraternities in the neighbouring city of Gubbio. According to the experts in Umbrian flagellant confraternities, such organizations took the *Disciplinati di Santo Stefano* as an example and borrowed many of their *laude* for their public and private celebrations.²¹ All four texts share many compositions, often borrowing from the most ancient text among them, the *Laudario ‘Illuminati’*.²² The text in question has thirteen *laude*, a Latin *sequenza*, and a series of *lezioni* in Latin. The other collection of the *Disciplinati di Santo Stefano*, ‘Fron dini,’ contains sixteen *laude* and a series of *lezioni* and *orazioni* in Latin.²³ Most of the compositions are dedicated to the devotion to Christ’s passion and

¹⁸ Mancini, *Il laudario ‘Fron dini’*, 6–8. See also Milsom, “Lauda Spirituale”; Bellingham, “Flagellant Songs”; and Monter, “Flagellants.”

¹⁹ Mancini, *Il laudario ‘Fron dini’*, 6–11. See also Terruggia, *Il laudario ‘Illuminati’*, 133.

²⁰ Mancini, *Il laudario ‘Fron dini’*, 7, n. 4; Terruggia, *Il laudario ‘Illuminati’*, 133–134. On the dispute over the origins of the *laudario ‘Fron dini’*, see Terruggia, *Il laudario ‘Illuminati’*, 139–140.

²¹ See Terruggia, *Il laudario ‘Illuminati’*, 143–150.

²² Mancini, *Il laudario ‘Fron dini’*, 5–6. More specifically, ‘Fron dini’ shares six *laude* with ‘Illuminati.’ ‘Eugubino’ and ‘Oliveriano’ both share the same four *laude* with ‘Illuminati.’ See Terruggia, *Il laudario ‘Illuminati’*, 156.

²³ *Il laudario ‘Illuminati’*, 136–142.

death (including many spectacular pieces attributable to the tradition of the *lamentatio Mariae*) or the celebration and remembrance of the dead.²⁴ The two collections of laude, therefore, are constructed around what can be considered to be the two most important public events in the calendar of flagellant confraternities: Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. Among these compositions, the laude dedicated to the passion of Christ are the most numerous and relevant for the devotion and shedding of blood.

Blood Feasting and the Eucharist: The Lauda “O glorioso e dengno”

Notwithstanding the fact that the vast majority of songs contained in the laudari were intended for Good Friday celebrations, to correctly understand the approach to blood devotion by the Disciplinati di Santo Stefano it is first necessary to consider a song that does not deal with the passion of Christ, that is, the lauda “O glorioso e dengno” composed for the celebration of Corpus Domini. This lauda, contained in the laudari ‘Illuminati’ and ‘Oliveriano,’ celebrates the Eucharist. While not unlike other medieval texts analysed by Bynum in her research on the devotion to the Blood of Christ,²⁵ the most striking aspect of this composition is — in my view — how the consumption of Christ’s flesh and blood are celebrated. Where in other laude and poetical works dedicated to the Eucharist the consumption of Christ’s body is commemorated in relatively somber tones, in the lauda “O glorioso e dengno” it appears as a joyful consumption of the body and blood of the Saviour, without any major reference to the miracle of transubstantiation.²⁶ The Corpus Domini lauda sung by the flagellants of Santo Stefano does not describe the Eucharist as the consumption of bread and wine turning into Christ’s flesh and blood, but as the act of feasting on Christ’s body. The first four verses of the text, for example, state: “O glorious and most deserving one / as a sign — of the salvation you gave us; / o holy sacrament, / let us gently taste you.”²⁷ In these opening verses, Jesus becomes one with the sacrament of the Eucharist, inviting believers to taste him, and not the consecrated host. This eagerness to feast on the body and blood of Christ is even more evident in the first two stanzas of the lauda:

²⁴ For more information on the medieval genre of *Lamentatio/Planctus Mariae*, see Sticca, *The Planctus Mariae*.

²⁵ See Bynum, “The Blood of Christ in the Later Middle Ages.”

²⁶ ‘Oliveriano’ dedicates a stanza to the event, but the miracle is absent in the older ‘Illuminati’.

²⁷ Terruggia, *Il laudario ‘Illuminati’*, 207, vv. 1–4: “O glorioso e dengno, / en sengno — de salute ad noi lassato; / sacramento biato, / fanne de te gustar suave mente.”

You, angelic food, / you feed — the ravenously hungry; / like
a physician / you came to comfort the sinner. / Let us go to
the altar / to receive God in real flesh, / since he deigned to
make / such a gift of his holy body.

O satiating blood, / restorative — from all things lack-
ing, / you can provide food / to the heart, which is ready to
receive. / Woe to those who are not sure / of their purity at
that holy dinner. / They will receive / a soul hurt by sin and
punishment.²⁸

In this section of the text, the flesh and blood of Christ are defined in terms that are both medical and gastronomical. Jesus is portrayed as a physician, providing his body as the ultimate cure, and, at the same time, as a delicious source of food for the hungry. His blood is described as a tasty and curative remedy: restorative, like medicine, but also refreshing and filling. Particularly relevant in this case is the repetition of the verb “aparechiare,” which in this case has the twofold function of providing nourishment and “setting the table” for such nourishment. The description of the sacrament once again mixes medical references with a hint of gastronomy, depicting blood as a source of sustenance for the heart, as well as a bearer of food for a laid table. The culinary setting is once again confirmed by the word “cena” (dinner) two verses below (v. 18), which, while reminiscent of the last supper, in this joyous context sets the scene for a feast, a celebration: “that feast where so much good is created; / that food that fills, / and guides, and rules us all.”²⁹ This theme of the Eucharist as a feast of the body of Christ is further developed in the version of the lauda found in the *Laudario ‘Oliveriano’* where we find: “Oh food of every flavour / which was previously symbolized in the manna, / oh Christ full of sweetness: / you are consecrated on the altar; / you satisfy any palate. / Blessed be the one who approaches you as such: / you reserve great glory for them / in your court and your great dining hall.”³⁰ In the musical celebration of the flagellants,

²⁸ Terruggia, *Il laudario ‘Illuminati’*, 207, vv. 5–20: “Tu che se’ cibo angelico / all’uomo famelico — te dai mangiare; / en figura de medico / allo peccatore venisti ad confortar[e]. / Andiamo all’altare / a dDio [sic] recever en verace carne, / puoi che dengnò de farne / del suo sacro corpo tal presente.” “Sangue satiativo, / restorativo — d’onne mancamento, / aparechie puoi el civo / al cor, ch’è facto l’aparechiamento. / Guai, chi non fosse cento [sic] / de purtade a quilla santa cena / receveriate en pena / et en vitio l’anema dolente.” I took the liberty of modifying “cento” into “certo.”

²⁹ Terruggia, *Il laudario ‘Illuminati’*, 208, vv. 42–44: “tal festa per cui tanto ben te nasce; / quel civo che te pasce / et che governa et regge tucta gente.”

³⁰ Terruggia, *Il laudario ‘Illuminati’*, 208. ‘Oliveriano’, vv. 61–68: “Cibo d’onne sapore / che foste ne la manna figurato, / Cristo pieno de dolçore, / tu se’ en el altare consacrato, / tu satie

Christ thus becomes host, food, and drink to savour abundantly and with great joy.³¹

Drinking Christ's Blood and Medieval Hagiography

Another peculiar element of the lauda “O glorioso e dengno” that unites the devotional trends of blood consumption and blood shedding can be found in ‘Illuminati’, verse 48. Here the singers pray and celebrate the Roman Church, moved to a renewed solemnity through the devotion to the body of Christ, defined as “d’onne bene fontana” (source of all goodness). Despite the obvious necessities dictated by the rhyming scheme, the term “fontana” should not be overlooked. In the laudario ‘Fron dini’, in fact, we find a very similar use of the synonym “fonte” in one of the *lamentatio Mariae* to be sung on Good Friday, the most important public celebration for the Disciplinati di Santo Stefano.³² In this third lauda of the collection, better known as “Or ve piaccia d’asscoltare” (an elaboration of ‘Illuminati’ 14, “O alto padre onnipotente”), Mary Magdalene exclaims: “Alas, oh source of piety, / how much grace you poured in me.” And continues with: “despite my depraved iniquities / you received me at your feet, / which I now see all bloody / pierced through with a big nail.”³³ Mary Magdalene’s harrowing description of the crucified Christ then pans over his entire body, all drenched in gore: “All my heart burns with pain, / for the pain I see you suffer, / as your feet, your hands, your face, and your side; / all your body is covered in blood.”³⁴ This section, which is not present in the ‘Illuminati’ version, plays with the word “fonte” moving from the idea of Christ as a metaphorical source of solace while alive, to his dying body, pierced by many wounds, and gushing blood: the ultimate physical source of piety. The body of Christ thus becomes a spring of liquid salvation, a “fountain” from which Mary Magdalene drinks, kissing his bloody feet: “Poor me, what will I do / now that I lost every solace in

onne palato; / biato l’omo ch’a te sci s’acosta: / gloria tu gl’ài reposta / ne la tua cort’e gran refectione.”

³¹ Terruggia, *Il laudario ‘Illuminati’*, 209, vv. 103–105: “quando te manducamo / tu ci ariempie la mente d’alegrecca / e scacce onne brutecca,” [when we savour you / you fill our mind with happiness / and chase away any ugliness].

³² Lunghi, *La Passione degli Umbri*, 115.

³³ Mancini, *Il laudario ‘Fron dini’*, 139, vv. 97–102: “Oi me, fonte de pietade / quanta gratia in me spargiste! / le mie prave enequitade / ai tuoi piè me riceviste: / ed or gle veggo ensanguenate / d’un grosso chiovo oltrapassate.”

³⁴ Mancini, *Il laudario ‘Fron dini’*, 139–140, vv. 105–108: “Tucto el core de dolore m’arde, / tanta t’ho veduta pena: / ché i piè e le mano e ‘l volto e ‘l lato, / tucto el corpo è ‘nsanguenato.”

life? / I will not depart from you / if I do not have you, dead or alive. / Let me satiate myself / kissing your holy feet.”³⁵

The idea of believers “satiating themselves” with the bleeding body of Christ found in “Or ve piaccia d’asscoltare” does not pertain only to the tradition of the laudari. Together with the sections analysed in “O glorioso e dengno,” it depicts a form of ritual consumption of the blood of Christ that goes beyond transubstantiation and is compatible with Angela of Foligno’s vision of the Christian flock partaking of Christ’s wound. The similitudes between the bleeding Christ described in the laude and Angela’s hagiography do not end there. Quite remarkably, in her *Memorial* Angela is described drinking blood from the side wound of a bleeding crucifix, just like in the laude Mary Magdalene (or the Virgin Mary according to the different versions) found solace in the bleeding feet of the crucified Christ.³⁶ Similarly, the legend of the Dominican Giacomo Bianconi of Bevagna (1220–1301) tells of a miracle in which the blessed friar tasted the blood of Christ from a bleeding crucifix. The heavenly taste of such blood persuaded him to dedicate his entire life to spiritual contemplation.³⁷

Blood shedding and blood consumption connected with divine messages and exceptional examples of piety, therefore, were not rare in the late Middle Ages, especially on the Italian peninsula. On the contrary, they were mainstream narratives that illustrated religious exemplarity and purity. Let us consider, for example, another key figure in mendicant hagiography: Catherine of Siena (1347–1380). Like other female mystics of the time, Catherine sought to follow and share Christ’s suffering through mystical consumption and the shedding of blood.³⁸ Catherine is well known for having found blood in her mouth or for bleeding from the mouth on several occasions when she received the host, thus strengthening the idea that, when partaking communion, she was ingesting the actual flesh and blood of Christ.³⁹ To return Christ’s favours towards her, Catherine

³⁵ Mancini, *Il laudario ‘Fron dini’*, 141, vv. 121–126: “Et io Trista, co’ faraggio / c’ho perduto onne conforto? / Da te non me parteraggio / s’io non t’aggio o vivo o morto: / ch’io me pocca satiare / dei tuoi santi piè basiare.” The same section is present in ‘Illuminati,’ but it is the Virgin Mary speaking.

³⁶ Lunghi, *La Passione degli Umbri*, 27–28.

³⁷ Lunghi, *La Passione degli Umbri*, 41–42.

³⁸ As Bynum mentioned, mystics (especially women mystics) often “participated” in the Crucifixion through a vision, often involving the shedding of, or consuming of the blood of the crucified Christ; Bynum, “The Blood of Christ in the Later Middle Ages,” 689: “Mystics (especially women mystics) who were denied access to the cup at mass repeatedly experienced both the flooding of ecstasy through their limbs and the taste of the wafer in their mouths as blood.”

³⁹ Bynum, “The Blood of Christ in the Later Middle Ages,” 689.

flagellated herself abundantly. According to Catherine's biographer, the Dominican friar Raymond of Capua (d. 1399):

[she took] the discipline three times daily with an iron chain [...] [S]he took the discipline on each occasion for about an hour and a half, and [...] it seldom or never happened that her blood did not flow on these occasions, running down from her shoulders to her feet. Weigh well, Reader, the perfection of a soul who could scourge herself to blood three times a day that she might render to her Savior blood for blood.⁴⁰

Catherine's devotion to the shedding and drinking of blood did not stop at the practical level, but it appears to be also deeply embedded in her theology. In one of her letters, for example, she states: "I want us to wake up from the slumber of negligence and live our life in the light of virtue, so that we could live this life as terrestrial angels, drowning in the blood of the crucified Christ, and hiding in his sweet wounds."⁴¹ Despite their metaphorical and exemplary meaning, both Catherine and Angela's spiritual narratives were deeply anchored on the idea of the partaking of Christ's blood and providing their own blood in exchange, thus rendering "blood for blood" as a symbol of purity and spiritual superiority, an idea that had considerable success in the broad context of medieval Franciscan and Dominican piety.⁴² It thus becomes clear how, in the act of consuming the blood of Christ, the songs collected by the *Disciplinati di Santo Stefano* mirrored the contemporary hagiographical narratives of miraculous blood to be found in the Dominican and Franciscan milieu.

Ritual Bloodshed and Bleeding Crucifixes in the Good Friday Songs of the Flagellants

When comparing the songs of the *Disciplinati di Santo Stefano* with contemporary trends in blood devotion, it is even more important to stress the relationship between the flagellant lauda and the visual representation of Christ that was often connected with such hagiographical narratives, namely the iconographical tradition of the *crocifissi dolorosi*.⁴³ Experts in the field of art in medieval confraternities have already stressed the

⁴⁰ Raymond of Capua, *The Life of Catherine of Siena*, 58 (1.6.63).

⁴¹ Santa Caterina Da Siena, *Le Lettere*, 6: "voglio che ci destiamo dal sonno della negligenza, esercitando la vita nostra in virtù del lume; acciocché in questa vita viviamo come angeli terrestri, annegandoci nel sangue di Cristo crocifisso, nascondendoci nelle piaghe dolcissime sue."

⁴² On this subject, see Lunghi, *La Passione degli Umbri*, chapters 1–4.

⁴³ A solid introduction to the topic can be found in Lunghi, *La Passione degli Umbri*.

close relationship between the sodalities' devotional artworks, public celebrations, and confraternal lauda singing.⁴⁴ Members of the Disciplinati di Santo Stefano were encouraged to meditate on Christ's bleeding body while practicing their public and private rituals.⁴⁵ One hymn in the confraternity's laudari in particular, the lauda "Levate gl'ochie e resguardate," begins by directing worshippers to lift their eyes and witness the wounds in Christ's hands, feet, and side: "Lift up your eyes and look, / Christ has died today for us." Sing the sisters of Mary. "His hands and feet are nailed to the cross, / open is his side; oh, sad are we!"⁴⁶ These words were sung during the celebrations of Good Friday, the most important public ceremony for the Disciplinati di Santo Stefano, in a way that suggests the presence of a bleeding crucifix in the economy of the sacred play.⁴⁷

The lauda "Levate gl'ochie e resguardate," present in all four collections of the "Costellazione assisiata," corroborates the idea of a relation between song, ritual bloodshed, and bleeding crucifixes in the celebration of Christ's blood. This lauda also belongs to the genre of the *lamentatio Mariae*, where the Holy Virgin and her retinue narrate the passion of Christ in excruciating detail. Deeply connected with the ritual act of self-flagellation performed by the confraternity during the singing of such a lauda, the text provides us with a very exhaustive narration of Christ's suffering in the last hours of his life, a narrative that coincides with the progressive transformation of Christ from a bleeding man into a bleeding crucifix, much like the one accompanying the procession. The harrowing of Christ begins with the spitting and injuries of the crowd as he is brought in front of Pontius Pilate:

[Virgin Mary] After binding him, / they started to torment
Christ: / they spit in his face / and no-one was not allowed to
clean / that precious flesh / from the filthy spit.

While they were pushing him on the streets / they did not stop
tormenting him / until he was all bloody: / this was their en-
joyment. / And so, they brought him to Pilate / all covered in
blood.

⁴⁴ Lunghi, *La Passione degli Umbri*, 115. See also Chen, *Flagellant Confraternities*, 47–57.

⁴⁵ Chen, *Flagellant Confraternities*, 48.

⁴⁶ Terruggia, *Il laudario 'Illuminati'*, 216: vv. 1–4: "Levate gl'ochie e resguardate, / morto è Cristo ogi per nui. / Le mano e i piè en croce à chivate, / aperto è 'l lato; o triste nui!"

⁴⁷ The confraternity is known to have had in their possession a wooden *crocifisso doloroso*, executed by a certain Pietruccio di Picziche, since 1338. A 1363 inventory of the confraternity reveals the possession of two wooden crucifixes. See Chen, *Flagellant Confraternities*, 48. See also Lunghi, *La Passione degli Umbri*, 124–125.

Pilate immediately ordered / that he be bound to a column: / there was copious blood on the floor at the end / for the whip lashes that / the cruelest among his servants / inflicted on his order.⁴⁸

The attention paid by the lauda to the act of flagellation and to Christ dripping blood, spit, and — in other sections — tears further binds the ritual with the contemporary tradition of the *crocifissi dolorosi* connected to many cases of miraculous blood shedding and blood consumption.⁴⁹ At the end of the trial Jesus Christ is depicted as completely covered in spit and blood: a ritual shedding that almost certainly coincided with the flagellants self-flaying collectively.

As in the other cases of metaphorical blood consumption seen above, when Mary Magdalene tells the crowd that Christ has been nailed to the cross, the words she uses recall once again the act of feeding: “My master was looking at me / and he said: ‘daughter of mine, there is nothing you can do / let these evil people be; / let them satiate themselves with me.’”⁵⁰ Just like in “Or ve piaccia d’asscoltare,” “Levate gl’ochie e resguardate” draws a clear connection between the bleeding of Christ and the act of being “satiated.” Whether we are dealing with a thirst for vengeance or love and devotion, Christ’s blood in the laude of the *Disciplinati di Santo Stefano* acts as a catalyst for quenching both holy and unholy desires. Right after this moment of lyricism, the Virgin Mary describes the flowing of Jesus’ blood onto the ground,⁵¹ witnessing the transformation of Christ into the devotional image of a bleeding crucifix.

In this narrative *tour de force* the ritual bloodshed of the flagellants merges with the visual reminder of Christ’s death on the cross represented by one or more bleeding crucifixes.⁵² The ritual shedding of human blood

⁴⁸ Terruggia, *Il laudario ‘Illuminati’*, 218, vv. 55–72: “Puoi che Cristo àver legato / començaro a tormentare: / ello voluto gle fo sputato, / né non se podea nectare / quelle carne pretiose / delli sputi obrobriose. // Mentre per la via el menaro / non finar dalgle tormento / tucto sì lo sanguenaro: questo era loro piacimento. / Così tucto ensanguenato / menarlo nance ad Pilato. // Et Pilato a una colonna / mantenen[te] el fè legare: / infine a terra el sangue abunda / delle frustate che i fè dare / ai più crudel servente / che fossero fra tucta lor gente.”

⁴⁹ Lunghi, *La Passione Degli Umbri*, chapters 1 and 3.

⁵⁰ Terruggia et al., *Il laudario ‘Illuminati’*, 222, vv. 151–154: “El mio maestro me sguardava / dicendo: ‘Filglà, que puoi fare, / lassa fare la gente prava; / lassaigle de me satiare.”

⁵¹ Terruggia et al., *Il laudario ‘Illuminati’*, 222, vv. 157–162: “Puoi che l’ave ben chiaavato, / la croce en piè sì fier riçare, / et sta tucto efinestrato / e ’l sangue fine a terra andare, / che uscia de quel corpo diviso, / da capo a piène tucto era alliso.” [After they nailed him firmly, / they erected the cross. / He is completely on display. / His blood was dripping on the ground / spurting from his severed body. / He was bruised from head to toe.]

⁵² This theory is shared by Lunghi in his *La Passione degli Umbri*, 121.

is mirrored by the iconographical reminder of Christ's bleeding in an exchange that binds devotional blood loss with the visual consumption of the blood of Christ, "satiating" his original tormentors as well as his later followers. As the character of the Homo Devotus (Devout Man) in the 'Frondini' version of "Levate gl'ochie e resguardate" says: "We must always cry and suffer / for Christ the saviour, / and may our suffering never end / until we feel him in our heart / so battered and bloody, / he who was flagellated for us!"¹ The sudden appearance of the Homo Devotus and the following stanza in the 'Frondini' laudario meant to be recited by a group of persons might well hint at the addition of a chorus of flagellants in the traditional scheme of the lauda, making this section even more relevant for the understanding of the public ritual surrounding the singing of such hymn, and its purpose. The Devout Man and the stanza that follows reflect in more than one way the desire of the participants to emulate the passion of Christ through ritual flagellation and bloodshed. Their approach to the concept of *imitatio Christi* is quite literal: humanity must grieve until its suffering matches that of Christ. For the Devout Man, the hearts of the believers must be bleeding like the flagellated Christ. If we consider the ritual during which this hymn was sung, we can see a sort of unison between the words of the Devout Man and the ritual blood shedding of flagellation. After the Devout Man's brief monologue, the chorus focuses once again on Christ's blood, dripping from his suffering body: "What heart did not cry / while watching Christ begging, / his blood falling / in thick drops all the way to the ground?"² In the 'Frondini' version of "Levate gl'ochie e resguardate" we thus find a perfect continuum between flagellation and contemplation, with a strong connection between the visual presence of a bleeding Christ and the bleeding of the members of the confraternity.

Conclusion

In late medieval Italy, after the success of Raniero Fasani's flagellant movement of 1260, the *disciplinati* were rapidly tamed by the ecclesiastical hierarchy and swiftly institutionalized into confraternities. These brotherhoods of *disciplinati* or *battuti* survived and became a part of Italian civic life for many centuries, marking the imagination with elaborate and engaging ritual processions celebrating Christ's passion. Such celebrations, although restrained in comparison of the episodes of mass participation

¹ Terruggia et al., *Il laudario 'Illuminati'*, 218. Mancini, *Il laudario 'Frondini'*, 163. vv. 37–42: "Sempre piangere e dolere / deven Cristo Salvatore, / e maie posa no n'avere / defin che l'sentemo e-nel core / così alliso e 'nsanguenato, / che per noie fo fragellato!"

² Terruggia et al., *Il laudario 'Illuminati'*, 218. Mancini, *Il laudario 'Frondini'*, 164. vv. 43–46: "Qual è el cor che non piangesse / de veder pur Cristo orare, / del sangue le ghiocce spesse / en-fine a terra andare [...]?"

in 1260 and then again in 1348, preserved some of the innovations introduced by the original movement and evolved a series of devotional experiments in dialogue with similar late-medieval trends.

The devotion to holy blood is most certainly one of the primary elements of this new form of public piety. Compatible as it was with the ritual of self-flagellation typical of confraternities of *disciplinati*, the devotion to Christ's blood in these brotherhoods evolved beyond the usual Eucharistic boundaries. The 'Illuminati' and 'Fron dini' laudari help us understand how confraternities related themselves to holy blood, in Assisi as well as elsewhere in central Italy. The songs of the Disciplinati di Santo Stefano, in this sense, provide us with narratives of bloodshed and blood consumption that are very close with contemporary forms of art (the *crocifissi dolorosi*) and hagiographical narratives (the miracles of Angela of Foligno, Giacomo of Bevagna, and Catherine of Siena to name a few).

In the collective as well as in the private spectacle of flagellant devotion, blood is adored, desired, ingested, witnessed, shed in its purest form. Blood was painted on and carved into the crucifixes that paraded in public flagellant processions: crucifixes that were used as props for the spectacle of lauda singing and the ritual of self-flagellation. Blood was one of the main elements of Christ's passion in the flagellant laude, where the Messiah is described in great detail as battered, whipped, and nailed to the cross. The blood spurting from Christ's dying body is adored as the ultimate source of salvation. It is kissed and ingested by his first followers as it is desired by his medieval followers, who celebrated it in the ritual of Corpus Domini. In the consecration of his sacrifice, Christ's blood is portrayed as capable of satiating the body and soul of his most devoted — and ravenous — followers. The figure of the dying Christ, bleeding profusely in the oral chanting of the laude as well as in the iconography accompanying the public and private ritual of the flagellants thus becomes the protagonist of a narrative of discipline and desire that sees the flagellants feed on Christ's suffering and, in return, suffer themselves. Blood for blood.

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