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***Requirements of Devout Contemplation: Text and Image for the Poor Clares  
in Trecento Pisa***

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# Requirements of Devout Contemplation: Text and Image for the Poor Clares in Trecento Pisa\*

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## Abstract

*This article analyzes two works of art made for the Poor Clares in Pisa in the third quarter of the fourteenth century. One is a set of frescoes featuring the Life of the Virgin that once decorated the nuns' choir of the convent of Santa Chiara Novella at San Martino, and the other is an illustrated manuscript of the *Meditationes Vitae Christi* possibly also made for the San Martino nuns. Our study of the Life of the Virgin cycle in both works and the interrelationship between text and image reveals an emphasis on the imitatio Mariae designed to instruct the nuns in basic aspects of female Franciscan convent life, including obedience and community, as well as devotion to poverty and to the Eucharist.*

It has long been known that the *Meditationes Vitae Christi*, the famous late medieval devotional text, was originally written by a Franciscan friar for a Franciscan nun or "Poor Clare" in Tuscany.<sup>1</sup> One specific Tuscan locale mentioned in the *Meditationes* is Pisa, and the earliest known illustrated manuscript of the *Meditationes*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS ital. 115, was probably made in Pisa about 1350 for an unknown group of Poor Clares, as a recent study has demonstrated.<sup>2</sup> Despite continued scholarly interest in the *Meditationes*, and interest more generally in art related to the Poor Clares in medieval and Renaissance Italy, the artistic patronage of female Franciscans in Pisa remains virtually unstudied.<sup>3</sup> This neglect is strange given that Pisa was a key center of mendicant spirituality and home to a number of well-known female patrons during the later Middle Ages.<sup>4</sup>

As a starting point for further study of art made for the Poor Clares in medieval Pisa, this article presents new information about the Clarissan convent of San Martino: the wealthiest and most important female Franciscan house in Pisa in the trecento and the probable original context for MS ital. 115.<sup>5</sup> Among the few surviving works of art made for the nuns at San Martino is a cycle of frescoes depicting the Life of the Virgin, originally painted in the nuns' private choir.<sup>6</sup> Dating to the third quarter of the fourteenth century, the frescoes are contemporary with MS ital. 115, which also con-

tains an extensive pictorial cycle illustrating the Life of the Virgin.

Our study seeks to shed light on the devotional interests and religious practices of Clarissan nuns in trecento Pisa through an investigation of the Life of the Virgin fresco cycle at San Martino and that in MS ital. 115. We hope to better understand how texts such as the *Meditationes*, long cited for their impact on devotional art, complemented the viewing of fresco cycles in a female monastic context and, further, how illustrated manuscripts of such texts might have influenced the nuns' readings of monumental images.<sup>7</sup>

*The Meditationes Vitae Christi, MS ital. 115, and the Poor Clares in Pisa*

The *Meditationes Vitae Christi* is renowned for its supposed impact on late medieval and Renaissance iconography.<sup>8</sup> However, recent studies suggest that this text may have been composed later than previously thought and present new theories about its place of origin. Sarah McNamer proposed that the text of the *Meditationes*, long believed to have been known by artists by the early fourteenth century, was instead composed about 1346,<sup>9</sup> and Isa Ragusa suggested that unique passages in the text of MS ital. 115 indicate that it was the very first *Meditationes* manuscript produced.<sup>10</sup> Only further study of other early manuscript copies of the *Meditationes* will confirm both of these hypotheses, but recent work on MS ital. 115 dates the manuscript to about 1350. Thus if McNamer is correct, this version is one of the earliest manuscripts of the *Meditationes*, if not the first.<sup>11</sup> MS ital. 115 has also been specifically located to Pisa based on the Pisan dialect used in the text and stylistic affinities with mid-trecento Pisan painting.<sup>12</sup> The manuscript contains strong textual and pictorial evidence for female Franciscan patronage, including female-gendered commands in the text and an emphasis on women in its program of illustration.<sup>13</sup> If MS ital. 115 is indeed the first copy of the *Meditationes*, then the *Meditationes* text itself must have been composed for the Poor Clares in mid-trecento Pisa—a Tuscan, Clarissan context that matches that of the proposed origin of the *Meditationes* text.

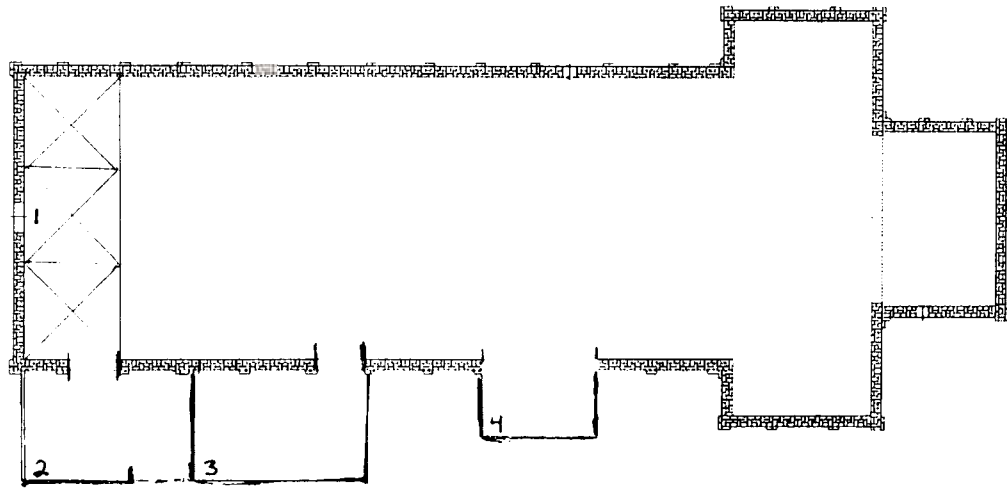


FIGURE 1. *Ground plan of the Church of San Martino (illustration: authors). 1. Elevated nun's choir. 2. Room on second story leading from choir to parish residence. 3. Chapel of the Holy Sacrament. 4. Small chapel opening into nave. Plan not to scale.*



FIGURE 2. *Pisa, San Martino, interior looking east (photo: H. Flora).*



FIGURE 3. *Pisa, San Martino, interior looking west (photo: H. Flora).*

The specific connection of the *Meditationes* to Pisa is also supported by more circumstantial evidence: the attribution of the text to the Franciscan friar John of Caulibus of San Gimignano, an ascription that comes from an account written by Bartholomew of Pisa (ca. 1385).<sup>14</sup> Little is known about John of Caulibus, but it is possible that he traveled to and/or resided in the large and important Franciscan friary in Pisa, where he came into contact with Bartholomew. Whether or not MS ital.

115 proves to be the linchpin that settles the question of the date and location of the *Meditationes*' composition, its evident origin in a Clarissan context in Pisa deserves a closer look.

MS ital. 115 contains no specific indication of the Pisan convent for which it was made, although a prominent image of St. Francis and textual references to Clare of Assisi point generally to a female Franciscan audience. By the mid-trecento, two Clarissan communities existed in Pisa: the first, founded



FIGURE 4. *Sinopie of San Martino choir frescoes (photo: H. Flora).*



FIGURE 5. *Facade of San Martino showing enclosed loggia and second-story room leading from choir to modern parish residence (photo, H. Flora).*

in 1227, was installed at the pre-extant church of Ognissanti; and Santa Chiara Novella, founded in 1331 at the abandoned former Augustinian church of San Martino in the neighborhood of Kinzecca by Count Fazio Novello della Gherardesca da Donoratico (called Fazio), a Pisan nobleman.<sup>15</sup> The first members of the new convent, including the abbess, were transferred from Ognissanti, making Santa Chiara Novella the center of female Franciscan presence in Pisa and the only female Franciscan house within the city walls. Santa Chiara Novella at San Martino quickly eclipsed its mother house in wealth and importance, taking in residents from Pisa's most illustrious families.<sup>16</sup> In summary, because San Martino was the most important female Franciscan house in Pisa in the mid-trecento, it is the most probable original context for MS ital. 115.

The style and date of the frescoes and manuscript offer further support that the manuscript was made for the nuns at San Martino. The few scholars who have studied the Life of the Virgin fresco cycle at San Martino agree on an attribution to Giovanni di Nicola, an enigmatic Pisan painter documented in the 1350s and early 1360s.<sup>17</sup> While the miniatures in MS ital. 115 are the work of several artists and cannot all be attributed to Giovanni, several figures of the Madonna and Child in the manuscript are identical in pose and type to figures in Giovanni's panel paintings, which indicates that common models may have been used.<sup>18</sup> MS ital. 115 dates to about 1350, and while the San Martino frescoes have been dated to as late as the 1370s, on the basis of documentary evidence (to be discussed below), they are closer stylistically to Giovanni's works of the 1350s, and therefore may be closer in date to MS ital. 115.<sup>19</sup> While we cannot prove that these two works were made for the same group of nuns, both the San Martino paintings and MS ital. 115 were made for a Clarissan audience in Pisa in the third quarter of the trecento and together provide evidence for Clarissan spirituality in that context.

### *The Architecture of San Martino and the Placement of the Nuns' Choir*

The architectural setting of the frescoes of the Virgin is an essential frame for considering the potential impact of MS ital. 115 on the San Martino nuns' viewing of their choir frescoes. The church of San Martino features a Latin-cross plan, with short transepts and a narrow apse (Fig. 1). Originally built for Augustinians, it has an aisleless nave typical of mendicant architecture (Fig. 2). Two small chapels are situated on the south side of the nave outside the cross plan, and an elevated gallery stands at the west end (Fig. 3). Sinopie mark the walls of the southwest corner of the gallery, where the fresco cycle in question was once painted (Fig. 4). In the 1960s the frescoes were removed from their original context and mounted on canvas; today they are displayed on the walls of the nave underneath the balcony (Fig. 3).

A doorway links the west gallery to the adjacent parish residence via a rectangular, hall-like room on the second story, which sits over an enclosed loggia of uncertain date. Both the loggia and the room are also outside the cross plan and are visible just south of the west front of the church (Fig. 5). Although the room is now used for storage, it may once have served as part of a passageway for the nuns to move from their living quarters in the convent to the gallery. Along with these structures, the cloister, cemetery, and other private areas of the convent complex must have been located to the south of the church, because San Martino is flanked by streets on the north and east sides and a piazza to the west, just as it was in the Middle Ages (Fig. 6).

The present-day appearance of San Martino reflects changes over the centuries, but as no architectural study has been done on this church, the dates of the alterations are uncertain. However, several *planned* adaptations of the church,

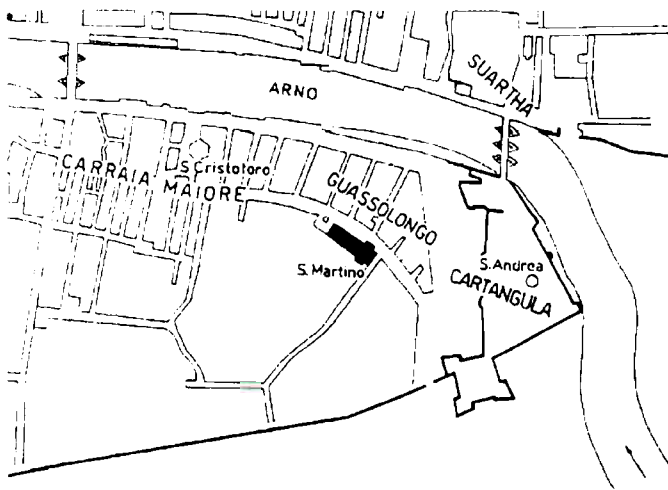


FIGURE 6. *Neighborhood of Kinzecca, Pisa, ca. 1190 (adapted from G. Garzella, Pisa com'era. topografia e insediamento dall'impianto tardoantico alla città murata del secolo XII [Pisa, 1990]).*

designed to better suit the community of nuns who used it during the trecento, are documented. For nuns, such as those at San Martino, who observed rules of strict enclosure, certain spaces were essential so that they could live, communicate, and worship in privacy.<sup>20</sup> Surviving documents from the first decade of Santa Chiara Novella's existence at San Martino mention three architectural additions to the church to accommodate the nuns' enclosed lifestyle: a dormitory (a center for living), a parlatorium (a space where nuns could communicate with the outside world while remaining hidden), and a choir (a space where the nuns could gather to chant the Divine Office and also hear public liturgical celebrations in the convent church without being visible to the lay congregation).<sup>21</sup> The locations of the dormitory and parlatorium at San Martino are not mentioned in the documents, and the extant architecture offers little evidence of where they were.

More information exists regarding the nuns' choir, but its original position is also unknown. As will be discussed below, a nuns' choir in the form of a gallery at the west end of the nave was in place by the 1370s. But because the creation of a choir was specifically stipulated in the foundation documents for the convent, and because being able to hear Mass would have been a priority for the nuns, a provisional choir may have existed earlier. A transverse wall fitted with a grate is mentioned in a 1338 document that described a transaction which took place in the convent's parlatorium.<sup>22</sup> If this wall was built adjacent to or within the nave itself, the parlatorium could also have functioned as a choir. Such a multipurpose space would have allowed the nuns to hear the Mass and perhaps also permitted the consecrated Host to be distributed to them through the grille.

The only surviving structure that could have functioned as a parlatorium-cum-choir is the small chapel flanking the

nave to the southwest.<sup>23</sup> Known as the Chapel of the Holy Sacrament, its name may point to its function as a place for the keeping, adoring, and/or taking of the Eucharist—a use consistent with the Clarissan emphasis on the veneration of the Host.<sup>24</sup> This small chapel could have served for a time as a choir for the nuns, as did a similarly placed Chapel of the Holy Sacrament at Santa Chiara in Assisi.<sup>25</sup>

By the 1370s, however, a choir in the form of an elevated gallery was in place at the western end of the nave. Exactly when construction of the choir began is uncertain, but the patron of the choir was a local nobleman, Piero di ser Simone di Sancasciano. In 1361 ser Simone commissioned an altar at San Martino dedicated to the Annunciate Virgin.<sup>26</sup> His name appears in the documents again in 1372, when he provided money for a friar to celebrate masses continually at the altar. In the same transaction, the nuns asked the clergy of San Martino to see that their choir be finished within one year, to be paid for by ser Simone.<sup>27</sup> Two post-trecento documents, as well as the dating of the fresco cycle that once decorated the walls of the elevated gallery at the west end, support the notion that the choir was built over the west door by the 1370s at the latest. A chronicle of the convent written in 1501 by Agnese di Niccolò dei Torrigiani, then abbess of San Martino, declares that the nuns' choir used at that time had been funded by ser Simone di Sancasciano and constructed within the church "over the main door."<sup>28</sup> Agnese must have been referring to an elevated gallery at the west end of the church, like the one preserved at San Martino today. Further, an early-seventeenth-century document specifies that a new choir was built over the west door to replace the one that "was in a terrible state of preservation after 238 years of use."<sup>29</sup> Because the 1372 document mentions only the completion of the choir, it is possible that its construction began earlier.

The surviving fresco cycle made for the elevated gallery provides further evidence for the date of the balcony's construction. The cycle begins with the Annunciation, a choice that would reflect ser Simone's particular devotion to the Annunciate Virgin.<sup>30</sup> The frescoes are unanimously attributed to Giovanni di Nicola, who is not documented after the early 1360s. They are closer in style to Pisan art of the mid-trecento, so the frescoes could very well have been painted earlier than 1372 to decorate a partially built choir. At any rate, the frescoes date no later than the third quarter of the trecento, so an elevated choir must have been in place by that time. Thus, although the present-day balcony is not original, its placement doubtless echoes that of a structure built in the third quarter of the century.

An elevated gallery like that at San Martino, sometimes called a tribune or a *matronium*, became a common feature in female monastic foundations in Italy and northern Europe by the late thirteenth century.<sup>31</sup> The decision to build such a gallery at San Martino may have come about because the wide, open nave of the church provided the best, and perhaps the only, available space within the church complex for a choir,

given that the church was flanked by streets to the north and east. Because of the topography, it would not have been physically possible to build a retrochoir directly behind the altar, like that at Santa Chiara in Naples. If the Holy Sacrament chapel served as a provisional choir, it was perhaps too small for the growing community.<sup>32</sup> Extant structures from the Augustinian foundation could also have prevented further construction of a choir to the south. The placement of the choir within the church may reflect the late medieval trend away from the “anchoritic” style of building nuns’ choirs in the form of small cells or chapels attached to the nave in favor of elevated galleries that echoed the “women’s galleries” known in Byzantine and Ottonian structures.<sup>33</sup>

It is possible that the nuns had more than one choir, perhaps for use at different times of the day or during certain liturgical celebrations, as had been the case at several nunneries in Germany and Switzerland.<sup>34</sup> The nuns at San Martino may have used the Holy Sacrament chapel for taking the Eucharist and used their gallery for chanting the hours, listening to sermons in the church, and/or praying privately. Agnese’s reference to the balcony as “nostro oratorio e coro privato” establishes multiple uses for the western gallery at San Martino, at least by the early sixteenth century.<sup>35</sup> Noting that the west gallery was a private area for the nuns, Agnese here seemingly uses the words *oratory* and *choir* to indicate the same space above the west door, a phrasing that points to various uses for it. An oratory, by Agnese’s time, was a place where special masses were celebrated, but the term was also used more generally to refer to a locus of prayer, whereas a choir was a space where the nuns would chant the daily office, and it was often identified by the presence of choir stalls, none of which survives at San Martino. Agnese’s terminology may indicate that the gallery was used both for hearing public masses (hence the term *oratory*) and chanting the Divine Office (an activity for the choir). At any rate, it is likely that the western gallery at San Martino served both liturgical and “paraliturgical” purposes, with the nuns using the space both to participate in public liturgical celebrations and for prayer, singing, drama, and other acts of devotion performed by members of the community only.<sup>36</sup> The fresco decoration in the gallery was conducive to these sorts of multiple uses for the space, and manuscripts such as MS ital. 115 may have facilitated such a multitude of devotional activities.

#### *The San Martino Frescoes and MS ital. 115 in Convent Life*

This potential architectural and performative context encourages a reading of the San Martino frescoes in light of the text and images in MS ital. 115. As mentioned above, the Life of the Virgin frescoes once decorated the southwest corner of the nuns’ choir, as the surviving sinopie on the walls indicate (Fig. 4). In its original position, the cycle wrapped around the corner and was placed high on the wall. The reason for this

placement is unknown; the original choir balcony might have been higher and/or smaller, the height of choir stalls (now missing) may have dictated this height, or perhaps space was left along the walls for scenes that were planned but never executed. Six scenes from the Life of the Virgin were painted: the Annunciation, Visitation, Birth of the Baptist, Nativity, Adoration of the Magi, and Presentation. At first glance, the iconography seems standard, and Marian imagery would have been appropriate for many reasons, not least of which is that five of the six scenes at San Martino correspond to the hours of the Office of the Virgin.<sup>37</sup> The nuns may indeed have chanted in front of the frescoes.<sup>38</sup>

When looking at the frescoes, however, the nuns at San Martino would also have recalled texts such as the *Meditationes* and perhaps also images like those in MS ital. 115. Their memory of the frescoes, in turn, would have informed their readings of images in other media, also resonating with devotional activities that took place outside the choir. As Lina Bolzoni has argued, devotional imagery in both public and private contexts was designed to relate to sermons, liturgical drama, and other works of art, forming a “web” of contemplative material in the mind of the devout.<sup>39</sup> The use of the mind and the imagination to meditate on sacred stories and events or narrative details *in addition* to the ones that might be in an immediately accessible text or image was therefore a key component of late medieval spirituality for monastic and lay audiences alike. Accordingly, the *Meditationes*’ author remarks in his prologue that the ability to cultivate belief using one’s imagination is a “requirement of devout contemplation.”<sup>40</sup> When considered in light of the *Meditationes* text and the imagery in MS ital. 115, the possible meanings and references in the San Martino frescoes increase, and the spectrum of potential readings of the cycle also broadens.

In contrast to the six frescoes of San Martino, MS ital. 115 is extraordinarily rich in images, with 193 pictures on its surviving 206 folios (it is both unfinished and incomplete, but more than 400 images were originally intended). The images are placed directly in the text with no borders or frames and correspond closely to their related passages of text. The constant interruptions of the text with these images indicate that the “reading” of this book was as much a visual as a verbal experience. The image cycle is cinematic in its presentation of the Life of Christ in great detail, “frame by frame,” making it possible to follow the story without any reference to the text. Narrative descriptions within the images indicating the scene and characters likewise facilitate the visual “reading” of this manuscript. Mary’s life from the Annunciation to the Presentation is summarized in six scenes at San Martino, but is narrated in *thirty-one* images in MS ital. 115.<sup>41</sup> Each representative narrative image in the frescoes could serve as a starting point for contemplating more specific narrative details, such as those presented in MS ital. 115.

Given the large number of images in the manuscript and the numerous references to sermons, visionary texts, drama,

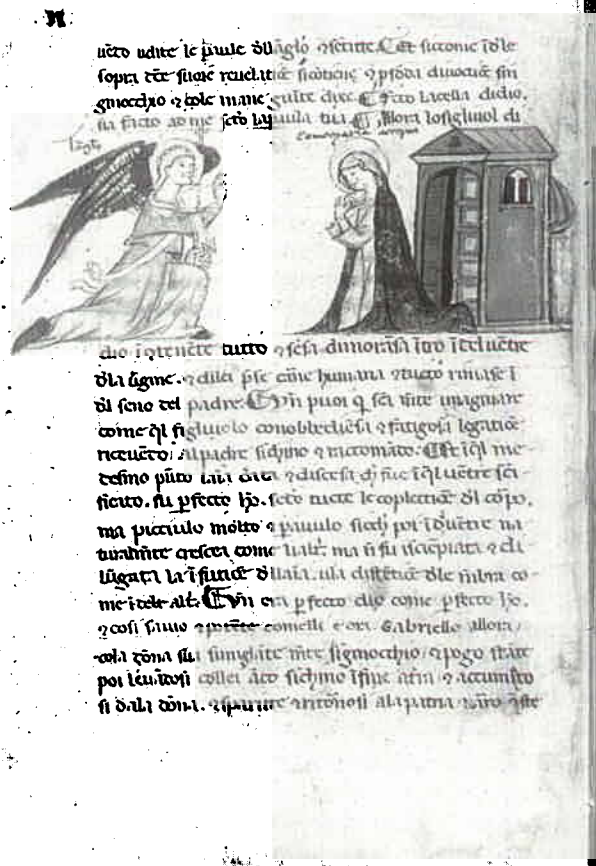


FIGURE 7. Annunciation, ca. 1350, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS ital. 115, fol. 11v (photo: Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris).

and works of art in the *Meditationes*, there are innumerable possible readings of the San Martino cycle. One avenue of exploration, treated here, is to look at the themes that relate to Clarissan spirituality and various aspects of convent life and that appear, interwoven, in both the manuscript and the frescoes. Apart from its liturgical relevance, the Marian imagery in the San Martino frescoes promotes Mary as a devotional model. This *imitatio Mariae* was strongly promoted in Clarissan contexts and is one of the key themes of the *Meditationes* text and in the pictorial program of MS ital. 115. The particular emphasis at San Martino and in MS ital. 115 on the story of Mary's youth suggests that this narrative was used to instruct nuns, and perhaps novices especially, in the basics of Franciscan convent life, including obedience, enclosure, community, devotion to poverty, and devotion to the Christ Child.<sup>42</sup> As the following analysis demonstrates, the two sets of images and the *Meditationes* text refer to both "private" devotional practices, such as individual prayer and meditation, and corporate worship, such as the hearing of Mass. The Virgin's story is equally relevant in the two contexts.

When read together the Annunciation and Visitation narratives at San Martino and in MS ital. 115 offer instruction on basic elements of female monastic life. Woven throughout each narrative in the *Meditationes* are lessons on meditation as well as on behavior. The reader is continually encouraged to "be present" and to imagine witnessing the events in question firsthand.<sup>43</sup> As she is witnessing the events of the Gospels, the reader is implored to follow Mary's example. Because of her holiness and modesty the Virgin did not immediately reply to Gabriel's salutation, as the *Meditationes* tells us, and her hesitant response offers a lesson on monastic silence. "Learn by this example to remain silent . . . for a loquacious virgin is an odious thing," instructs the *Meditationes*.<sup>44</sup>

At San Martino, the Virgin is shown reacting with the gesture of surprise seen in many trecento Annunciation scenes. MS ital. 115 shows her responding in like manner (fol. 10) but then portrays Mary's subsequent response: according to the *Meditationes*, she knelt in front of the angel in a humble gesture of acceptance (Fig. 7). Her act of obedience is emphasized by the caption added to the manuscript image, which reads "come Maria accepta." The nuns' contemplation of the standard monumental image in the San Martino frescoes with this more expansive imagery in mind would prompt thoughts of Mary's example of silence and obedience.

The Annunciation narrative in the *Meditationes* text and the image program of MS ital. 115 also refer to hymns and the Feast of the Annunciation. The vernacular text of the *Meditationes* includes Gabriel's salutation in Latin followed immediately by its Italian translation.<sup>45</sup> Such a structure suggests that the author wishes to teach the reader the meaning of this text, which is part of a standard hymn to Mary that the nuns chanted often. A reference to chanting is embedded in this narrative: the *Meditationes*' author mentions that when Gabriel entered Mary's room, he repeated his salutation multiple times, just as nuns repeated it while performing the Divine Office. The position of the Annunciation scene at San Martino on the south wall of the choir, to the right of the present-day door, hints that the nuns may have greeted the image of Mary similarly when entering their choir. At the end of the description of the Annunciation narrative in the *Meditationes*, the author praises the church feast day commemorating the event, quoting many scriptural references in Latin with their translations.<sup>46</sup>

Another reference to and translation of a commonly recited biblical text is found in the *Meditationes*' description of the Visitation. The dialogue between Mary and Elizabeth, including Mary's "Magnificat," is mentioned, as the *Meditationes*' author describes the joyful meeting and embrace of the two women.<sup>47</sup> At San Martino, this greeting is portrayed in the second fresco in the series (Fig. 8), and a similar image is found in MS ital. 115. In the manuscript, the embrace of Mary and Elizabeth is shown, along with the more unusual depiction

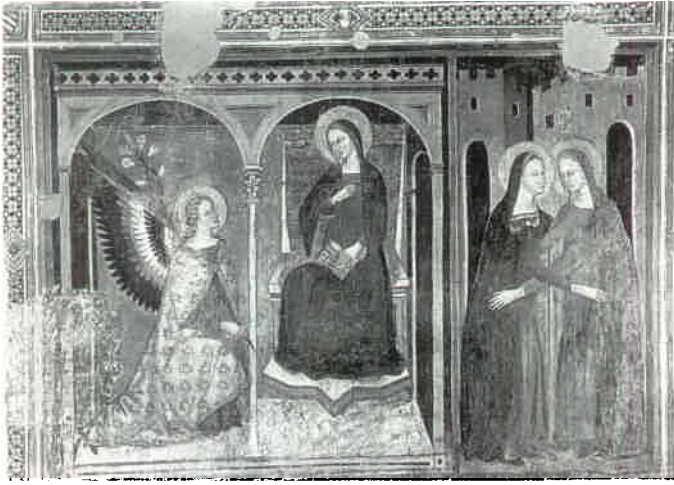


FIGURE 8. Giovanni di Nicola, *Annunciation and Visitation*, ca. 1350–ca. 1375, detached fresco from the nuns' choir at San Martino, Pisa (photo: Soprintendenza di Pisa).

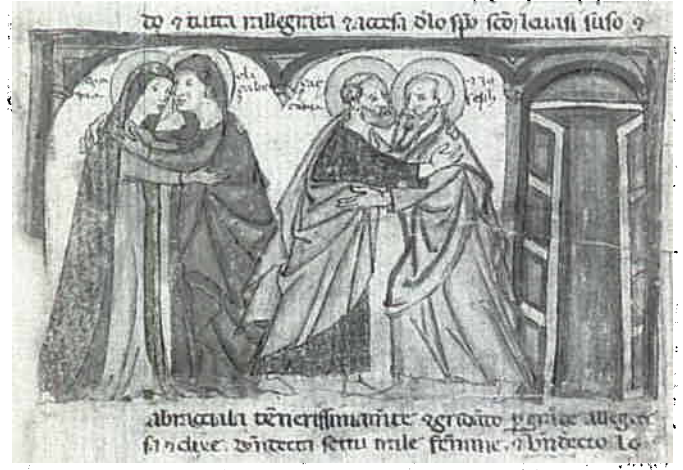


FIGURE 9. *Visitation with Joseph and Zaccharias*, ca. 1350, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS it. 115, fol. 13v (photo: Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris).

of Joseph and Zaccharias similarly embracing (Fig. 9). For a Poor Clare, this portrayal may have called to mind the notion of monastic community, in which holy affection is shared between members of the same sex.

Monastic community and the separation of the sexes in worship are also alluded to in the Birth of John the Baptist at San Martino.<sup>48</sup> Mary and Elizabeth are depicted in the left half of the composition showing the Birth of the Baptist (Fig. 10). A curtain separates them from a crowd of men and women at the right. Although obscured by the remains of a second, painted-over figure that seems too large for the composition, the original seated male figure was the father of the Baptist, Zaccharias.<sup>49</sup> This part of the fresco illustrates an episode from Luke's gospel when, at the naming and circumcision of the Baptist, the mute Zaccharias writes down the child's name, "John," at the urging of neighbors who had come to congratulate the couple. The figures looking on at the right are those witnesses who, according to the biblical text, "Made signs to [John's] father, how he would have him called" (1:61–64).

In MS it. 115, the circumcision of the Baptist, but not his naming, is depicted, in an image on the page facing the birth scene (Figs. 11 and 12). As shown here and described in the text of the *Meditationes*, Mary attends the Baptist's circumcision. Mary, "who was standing behind a curtain that she might be invisible to the men attending the circumcision of John, listened intently to the hymn in which her Son was mentioned."<sup>50</sup> According to the text, Mary hears this liturgical celebration while hidden from the public, providing an example for the Poor Clare reader who participated in public services in a similar way: out of sight of the congregation, separated and hidden from men.

Additional instruction in the history and meaning of liturgy is found in the circumcision of the Baptist narrative in

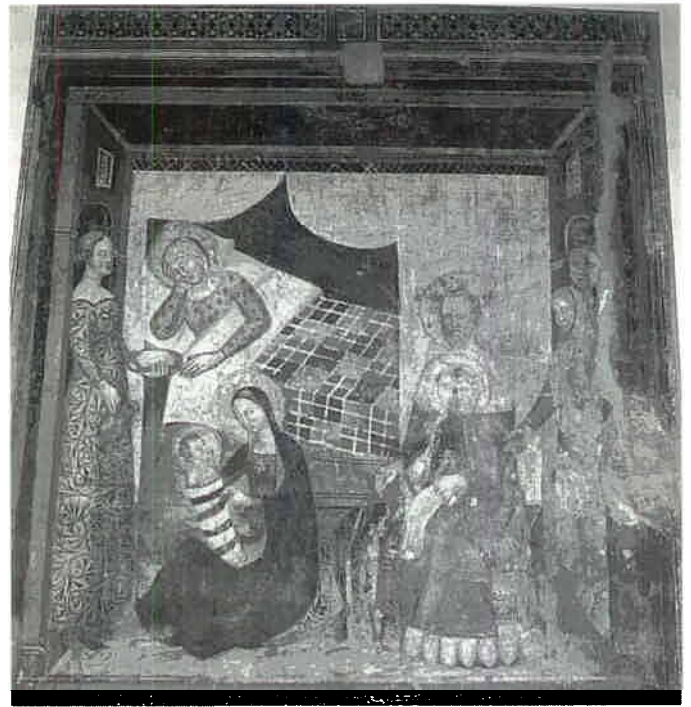


FIGURE 10. Giovanni di Nicola, *Birth of John the Baptist and Naming of John the Baptist*, ca. 1350–ca. 1375, detached fresco from the nuns' choir at San Martino, Pisa (photo: H. Flora, by permission of the Soprintendenza di Pisa).

the *Meditationes* when the author states, "Thus two beautiful canticles were created in [Elizabeth's] house, the *Magnificat* and the *Benedictus*."<sup>51</sup> Although the text states that Mary only heard the hymn and did not see the ceremony, the accompanying image in MS it. 115 depicts Mary also watching the



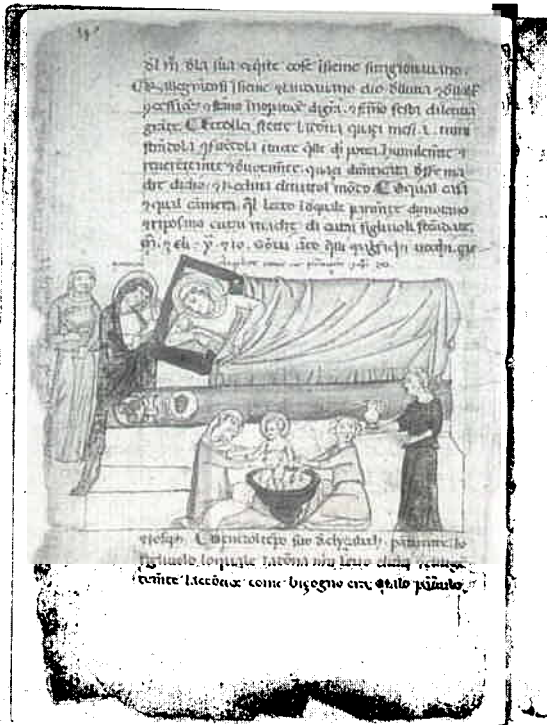


FIGURE 11. Birth of John the Baptist, ca. 1350, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS ital. 115, fol. 14v (photo: Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris).



FIGURE 12. Circumcision of John the Baptist, ca. 1350, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS ital. 115, fol. 15 (photo: Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris).



FIGURE 13. Giovanni di Nicola. Birth of John the Baptist (detail), ca. 1350–ca. 1375, detached fresco from the nuns' choir at San Martino (photo: H. Flora)

circumcision, her eyes seemingly focused on the infant Baptist. Such an image implies a dual-sensory observation of public services for the nuns—that is, they could actually see as well as hear the sacred ceremonies taking place at the high altar. As Caroline Bruzelius has suggested, however, the architectural barriers that kept the nuns hidden from the congregation may also have prevented them from participating visually in public worship.<sup>52</sup> Instead, fresco cycles such as that at San Martino, and perhaps other works of art in the nuns' choir, including illustrated manuscripts, provided the visual accompaniment to the nuns' hearing of public masses.

#### Devotion to the Christ Child and Model Motherhood

Lessons on devotion to the Christ Child and the portrayal of Mary as an ideal mother are also found in both the San Martino frescoes and MS ital. 115. In the Birth of the Baptist image at San Martino (Fig. 13), Mary is shown seated on the floor in front of the reclining Elizabeth, wrapping the infant Baptist in swaddling clothes. Mary and John form their own devotional vignette within the painting, recalling depictions of the Madonna and Child. The infant Baptist wears a necklace of coral, a precious material that often adorns the Christ Child and is traditionally viewed as symbolic of his blood and suffering. Also echoing paintings of the Christ Child, the swaddling clothes here feature a reddish orange stripe, also an allusion to

Christ's blood.<sup>53</sup> Thus Mary's care of John foreshadows her care of and devotion to the Christ Child, highlighting her inherent gifts in caring for a holy infant.

In the Birth of John the Baptist in MS ital. 115 Mary attends Elizabeth, while two female figures below bathe the infant Baptist (Fig. 11). The *Meditationes* text seems more akin to the San Martino version, as it highlights the special relationship of Mary and the infant John; the text tells that from the moment Elizabeth gave birth, the baby favored Mary over his own mother. The author describes how "The child loved her deeply, as though he understood her, and even when [Mary] gave him to his mother he turned his face to the Lady, delighting only in her. She played with him, gaily embracing and kissing him with joy."<sup>54</sup>

In MS ital. 115, however, the most prominent figure attending the Baptist is not the Virgin. Instead, it is a veiled female figure who wears light brown, similar to figures who appear frequently in the manuscript as companions to the Virgin. As has been argued elsewhere, these "other" figures may be intended as visual references to readers of the manuscript, reinforcing lessons on female community.<sup>55</sup> In the fresco, the Poor Clare viewer would see a model of piety and ideal motherhood and, in looking at MS ital. 115, could imagine herself caring for the infant Baptist or the infant Christ in Mary's place.

The text of the *Meditationes* reinforces this *imitatio Marie* in instructions to the reader that accompany the Nativity narrative:

Kiss the beautiful little feet of the infant Jesus who lies in the manger and beg his mother to offer to let you hold him a while. Pick him up and hold him in your arms. Gaze on his face with devotion and reverently kiss him and delight in him. . . . Then return him to the mother and watch her attentively as she cares for him assiduously and wisely, nursing him and rendering all services, and remain to help her if you can.<sup>56</sup>

Such specific instructions may indicate that the Poor Clare reader contemplated the Nativity while using a doll of the Christ Child as a meditational aid. Dolls of the Christ Child were given as gifts to novices when they entered convents, where they were used in prayerful "play."<sup>57</sup> Not only manuscripts such as MS ital. 115 but also devotional objects like these dolls may have been used at times in the choir, appropriate to the frescoes' emphasis on the infants Baptist and Christ.

#### *Devotion to Poverty and to the Eucharist*

Devotion to poverty was of course a key element of Franciscan spirituality, and St. Francis' famous celebration of the Nativity at Greccio also made the Nativity an important theme.<sup>58</sup> The *Meditationes* connects the virtue of poverty



FIGURE 14. *Giovanni di Nicola, Nativity, ca. 1350–ca. 1375, detached fresco from the nuns' choir at San Martino, Pisa (photo: Soprintendenza di Pisa).*



FIGURE 15. *Nativity, ca. 1350, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS ital. 115, fol. 20 (photo: Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris).*



FIGURE 16. Adoration of the Shepherds, ca. 1350, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS ital. 115, fol. 23 (photo: Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris).

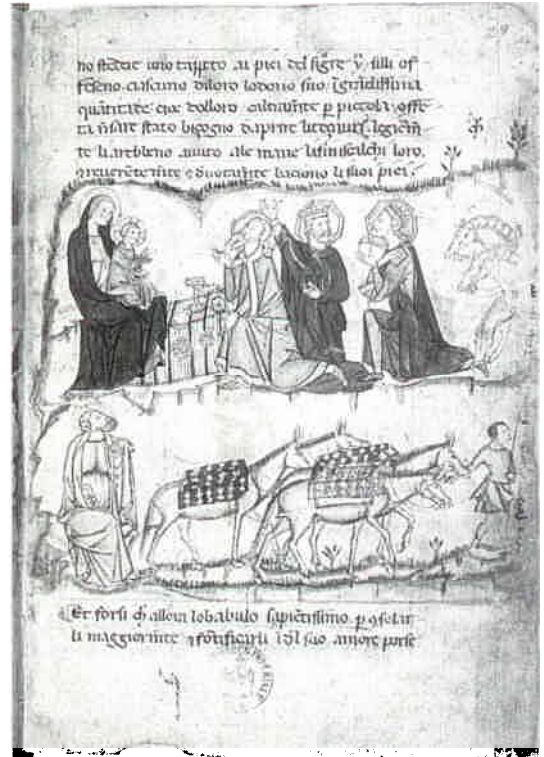


FIGURE 18. Adoration of the Magi, ca. 1350, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS ital. 115, fol. 29 (photo: Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris).



FIGURE 17. Giovanni di Nicola, Adoration of the Magi, ca. 1350–ca. 1375, detached fresco from the nuns' choir at San Martino, Pisa (photo: Soprintendenza di Pisa).



FIGURE 19. The Virgin Gives away the Gifts of the Magi to the Poor, ca. 1350, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS ital. 115, fol. 30v (photo: Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris).

very specifically to the Christ Child, and indeed the first long sermon on poverty in the text accompanies the Nativity narrative.<sup>59</sup> At San Martino, the juxtaposition of the scenes of the Birth of the Baptist and the Nativity emphasizes Mary's poverty. The luxury surrounding the Birth of the Baptist, indicated in the representation of colorful textiles, attendants, and food, contrasts markedly with the humble birth of Christ, shown in a stable. The sumptuous fabrics and comfortable bed shown in the depictions of John's birth in both fresco and manuscript (Figs. 10 and 11) heighten the sense of destitution portrayed by the rustic bed and stone manger at the Nativity of Christ (Figs. 14 and 15). The text of the *Meditationes* likewise emphasizes Mary's poverty as opposed to Elizabeth's wealth: the author writes, "Consider [Mary's] poverty. She returned to a house in which she would find neither bread nor wine nor other necessities, and she had neither possessions nor money. . . . Feel compassion for her and kindle your love of poverty."<sup>60</sup> Because most of the nuns at San Martino came from wealthy Pisan families, the life they had known at home, and indeed even in their convent, probably resembled Elizabeth's more than Mary's, but Mary in her poverty is held up as the supreme role model.<sup>61</sup>

Another economic contrast is created in the two scenes depicting the Nativity (which includes the Adoration of the Shepherds) and the Adoration of the Magi, as poor and wealthy alike are portrayed in devotion to the Christ Child (Figs. 14–16, 17 and 18). Even in their wealth, the Magi become models of Franciscan piety. In both manuscript and fresco, the Magi are portrayed with octagonal halos, a configuration often used to indicate beatification or virtue, but not one indicative of sainthood.<sup>62</sup> Here the halos seem to indicate that the Magi receive a blessing, conferred on them by the Christ Child's gesture, as soon as they offer their gifts. The underlying message for the Poor Clare reader is that generosity, in the form of charitable gift giving, will be rewarded with Christ's favor. Once again the Virgin is presented as a role model. While in the image at San Martino she graciously accepts the gifts, the accompanying text of the *Meditationes* states that the Virgin, "desiring poverty, charitably gave it all to the poor."<sup>63</sup> as shown in the following folio of ital. 115 (Fig. 19). To further underscore the lesson on charity, the *Meditationes* author asks his reader bluntly, "What would you have done with the gold, which was of great value?"<sup>64</sup>

In addition to being associated with the ideal of poverty, the devotion to the Christ Child was connected to veneration of the Eucharist. Adoring the Christ Child as the Magi and shepherds did was linked in late medieval traditions to beholding the consecrated Host. The motif of the ox and ass feeding in the same manger where the Christ Child slept similarly allies the idea of the altar with the manger.<sup>65</sup> The Christ Child as Eucharist was a recurrent theme in female spirituality; Angela of Foligno, a Franciscan tertiary who lived in the thirteenth century, was just one of many female mystics who reported seeing the Christ Child in the Host. Significantly, Angela

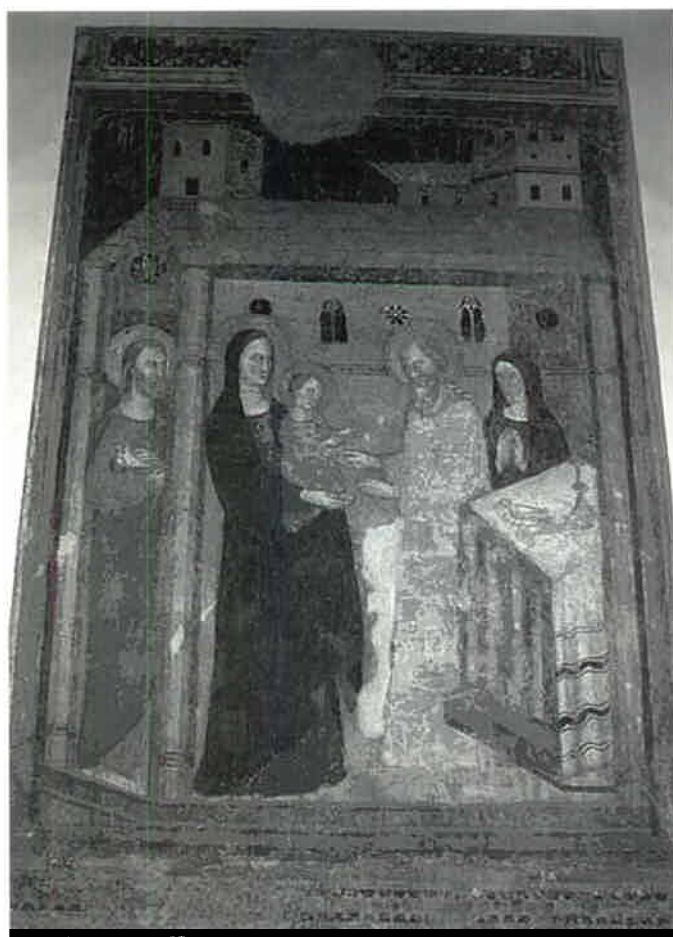


FIGURE 20. Giovanni di Nicola, Presentation, ca. 1350–ca. 1375, detached fresco from the nuns' choir at San Martino, Pisa (photo: H. Flora, by permission of the Soprintendenza di Pisa).

recalled seeing the Christ Child and receiving instruction from the Virgin on the meaning of the Eucharist in a vision that coincided with the priests' elevation of the Host during Mass.<sup>66</sup>

Read in the context of the imagery in MS ital. 115, the Presentation scene that concludes the fresco cycle at San Martino (Fig. 20) likewise relates the Christ Child to the Host. The *Meditationes* offers a lengthy description of Mary and Joseph's participation in their son's dedication, and in MS ital. 115 the text is supplemented with an extended image cycle. The first feast of the Presentation is vividly described, with Simeon and Joseph leading the procession, singing, followed by the prophetess Anna and the Virgin, who carries the Christ Child, lifts him up, and places him on the altar (Figs. 21–23). The Virgin's lifting up of the Christ Child mimics the act of a priest who would, at the appropriate dramatic moment, present the Eucharist, to be gazed on by the congregation.<sup>67</sup>

As a prophetess, Anna's presence at the Presentation affirms the divinity of the Christ Child and, by implication,

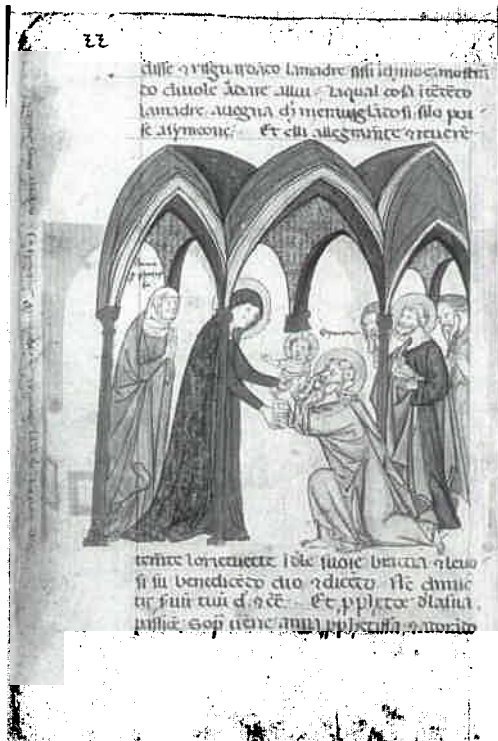


FIGURE 21. Presentation in the Temple, ca. 1350, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS ital. 115, fol. 33v (photo: Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris).

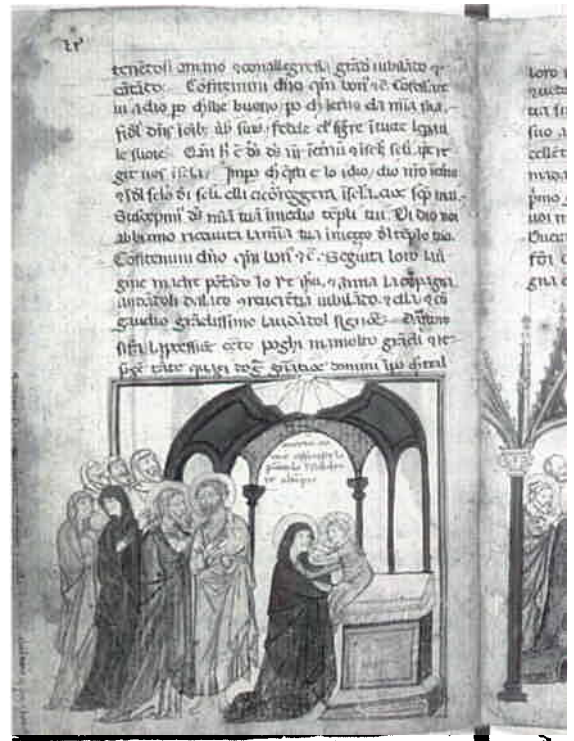


FIGURE 23. Presentation in the Temple, ca. 1350, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS ital. 115, fol. 34v (photo: Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris).



FIGURE 22. Presentation in the Temple, ca. 1350, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS ital. 115, fol. 34 (photo: Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris).

the verity of the Host as well. In both MS ital. 115 and the San Martino fresco, Anna seems to wear the dress of a Poor Clare nun. The Anna figure in the manuscript wears the same pale brown costume as the many “other” female figures in the manuscript, while the figure in the fresco dons the brown habit and black veil more typically seen in images of St. Clare of Assisi.<sup>68</sup> As Anna may be intended here to represent the Poor Clare viewer, such an image would have urged the San Martino nuns toward the same mystical “seeing” that the prophetess Anna experienced in the presence of the infant Christ.

The idea of the Christ Child as Eucharist in MS ital. 115 and the San Martino frescoes linked the nuns’ “private” devotional experiences of individual prayer to the public celebration of Mass performed at the altar below them, even though they would probably have been unable to see the performance of Mass in the convent church from their choir’s elevated position at the west end of the nave. Nonetheless, Clarissan nuns were devoted to the body of Christ and the consecrated Host; indeed, one of the standard emblems of St. Clare of Assisi is a monstrance. The importance of “seeing” the Host in late medieval devotion has been pointed out by several scholars, as have the difficulties inherent in that type of experience for enclosed women.<sup>69</sup> The frescoes, with their emphasis on the Christ Child, may have been intended as a substitute visual experience, offering, instead of the Host, “food” for contemplation.

This study of the potential intersection of text and image, of monumental and miniature, at San Martino has given only a small glimpse into the complex history and visual culture of the Poor Clares in trecento Pisa. What is clear is that images in different media worked together to produce a variety of religious meanings; the Life of the Virgin cycle in MS ital. 115 and the frescoes at San Martino were appropriate both for

individual prayer and meditation and relevant to the nuns' participation in corporate worship. Texts such as the *Meditationes*, considered "spiritual food" for the Christian reader, worked in tandem with images such as the frescoes at San Martino and the illustrations in MS ital. 115 in convents, providing nuns with a cornucopia of spiritual nourishment.

#### NOTES

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1. On the original Clarissan audience of the *Meditationes*, see Pseudo-Bonaventure, *Meditations on the Life of Christ: An Illustrated Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century*, trans. I. Ragusa and R. Green (Princeton, 1961), xxvii; and, more recently, John of Caulibus, *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, trans. F. Taney, A. Miller, and C. M. Stallings-Taney (Asheville, NC, 2000), xvi. All quotations from the *Meditationes* in this article are taken from Ragusa and Green's translation, since it is a direct translation of the Italian text of MS ital. 115.
  2. Pisa is mentioned in a passage describing the Holy Family's journey to Jerusalem and the discovery of the Christ Child among the doctors. The road between Jerusalem and Nazareth is compared with that between Siena and Pisa, "for one could return by several roads; as he who returns from Siena to Pisa might travel by way of Poggibonsi or Colle or other places." See Pseudo-Bonaventure, *Meditations*, 89. On the mid-trecento dating and Pisan provenance of MS ital. 115, see H. Flora, "The Paris *Meditations on the Life of Christ: A Pisan Fourteenth-Century Manuscript*," *Bollettino storico pisano*, LXXIII (2003), 353–359.
  3. Recent studies of art and female spirituality in Italy include J. Wood, *Women, Art, and Spirituality: The Poor Clares of Early Modern Italy* (New York, 1996); and A. Thomas, *Art and Piety in the Female Religious Communities of Renaissance Italy: Iconography, Space, and the Religious Woman's Perspective* (Cambridge, 2003). The only two studies we are aware of that treat art made for the Poor Clares in medieval Pisa are K. Houston, "Painted Images and the Clarisse, 1212–1320: Aspects of Production and Reception, and the Idea of a Nunnery Art" (Dissertation, Yale University, New Haven, 2001); and M. A. Filipiak, "The Plans of the Poor Clares' Convents in Central Italy from the Thirteenth through the Fifteenth Century" (Dissertation, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1966), 135–143. Houston analyzes painted panels traced to the Pisan convent of San Martino in the modern era (although many of these were made in the thirteenth century, before the foundation of San Martino in 1331), and Filipiak discusses the architecture of Santa Chiara in San Miriato, about ten miles outside Pisa, but does not treat Clarissan convents within Pisa itself.
  4. An excellent summary of the history of the Franciscans in Pisa is found in M. Ronzani, "Il francescanesimo a Pisa fino alla metà del Trecento," *Bollettino storico pisano*, LV (1985), 1–57. Two studies of female patronage (not including the Poor Clares) in late medieval Pisa are A. Roberts, "Chiara Gambacorta of Pisa as Patroness of the Arts," in *Creative Women in Medieval and Early Modern Italy*, ed. E. A. Matter and J. Coakley (Philadelphia, 1994), 120–154; and eadem, "North Meets South in the Convent: The Altarpiece of Saint Catherine of Alexandria in Pisa," *ZfKg*, L/2 (1987), 187–206.
  5. The convent founded at the pre-extant church of San Martino (formerly home to Augustinian canons) was called Santa Chiara Novella, but the church and convent continued to be referred to as San Martino. On the history of Santa Chiara Novella at San Martino, see A. Pecorini Cignoni, "Francescanesimo femminile a Pisa: il monastero di Santa Chiara Novella in San Martino in Kinzica," *Bollettino storico pisano*, LXXIV (2005), 371–395.
  6. As will be discussed below, these frescoes have been removed from their original context and mounted on canvas, but they are today displayed in the San Martino nave. On the restoration of the frescoes, which took place in the early 1960s, see C. L. Bertolini, *Mostra del restauro* (Pisa, 1967), 18–24. Surviving sinopie and tempera stains indicate the frescoes' original placement in the southwest corner of the nave high on the walls, to decorate an elevated choir at the west end.
  7. While this study was in preparation, two essays comparing the *Meditationes* to frescoes in the nuns' choir at the Clarissan convent of Santa Maria Donnaregina in Naples were published: C. A. Fleck, "'To exercise yourself in these things by continued contemplation': Visual and Textual Literacy in the Frescoes at Santa Maria Donna Regina," in *The Church of Santa Maria Donna Regina: Art, Iconography, and Patronage in Fourteenth-Century Naples*, ed. J. Elliot and C. Warr (Aldershot, 2004), 109–128; and, in the same volume, A. S. Hoch, "The 'Passion' Cycle: Images to Contemplate and Imitate amid Clarissan *Clausura*," 129–154. Although our approach is in some ways similar to that in both of these studies, we do not assume an artistic relationship between the *Meditationes* and the frescoes at San Martino (that is, that the artists based their images on the *Meditationes* text, which is a problematic argument given the disputed dating of the *Meditationes*), and we also consider the impact of illustrated manuscripts of the *Meditationes* in our discussion.
  8. The scholarly comparisons made between the *Meditationes* and art are far too numerous to cite here, but a specific study on the topic is E. Varanelli, "Le *Meditationes Vitae Nostri Domini Jesu Christi nell'arte del duecento italiano*," *AM*, VI (1992), 137–114.
  9. S. McNamer, "Further Evidence for the Date of the Pseudo-Bonaventuran *Meditationes Vitae Christi*," *Franciscan Studies*, L (1990), 247–248.

10. I. Ragusa, "La particolarità del testo delle *Meditationes Vitae Christi*," *AM*, 2003, 71–82.
11. On the dating of MS ital. 115, see H. Flora, "A Book for Poverty's Daughters: Gender and Devotion in Paris Bibliothèque Nationale ital. 115," in *Varieties of Devotion in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. S. Karant-Nunn (Turnhout, 2003), 65.
12. Flora, "The Paris *Meditations*," 353–359.
13. See Flora, "A Book for Poverty's Daughters," 61–85.
14. The attribution to Caulibus was first made in the eighteenth century and has been accepted by the authors of the latest critical edition of the text. See B. Bonelli, *Prodromus ad opera omnia S. Bonaventurae* (Bassano, 1767), 657; and John of Caulibus, *Meditations*, xiv.
15. It should be noted that the group of nuns first documented in 1227 as inspired by the Damianite Order of St. Clare were only officially linked to that order in 1235, and they became part of the Order of St. Clare in 1265. See Ronzani, "Il francescanesimo," 52; and A. Pecorini Cignoni, "Gregorio IX e il francescanesimo femminile: il monastero di Ognissanti in Pisa," *Studi francescani*, XCV (1998), 383–406. On Clarissan convents in the Pisa-Lucca area, see L. Borelli and A. Pecorini Cignoni, "Gregorio IX e il francescanesimo femminile nel territorio Pisano-Lucchese," *Bollettino storico pisano*, LXXIII (2003), 169–182. Only an arch and part of a medieval wall remain of Ognissanti, which can be seen at 63/65 Via Vecchia Livornese, La Vettola, just outside Pisa. It should be noted that the hospital in Pisa, which is dedicated to St. Clare of Assisi, housed an Augustinian community in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, with only a small chapel dedicated to St. Clare of Assisi. On the hospital, see E. Rothrauff, "Charity in a Medieval Community: Politics, Piety, and Poor Relief in Pisa, 1257–1312" (Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1994), 64–65; and M. Ronzani, "Nascita e affermazione di un grande 'Hospitale' cittadino: lo Spedale Nuovo di Pisa dal 1257 alla metà del Trecento," in *Centro italiano di studi di storia e d'arte, Pistoia, Dodicesimo convegno di studi: Città e servizi sociali nell'Italia dei secoli XII–XV, Pistoia, 9–12 ottobre 1987* (Pistoia, 1990), 201–235.
16. See Pecorini Cignoni, "Francescanesimo femminile a Pisa," 391–395.
17. The frescoes are treated briefly in terms of style and attribution in M. Burrelli and A. Caleca, *Affreschi medievali a Pisa* (Pisa, 2003), 99; E. Carli, *La pittura pisana del trecento* (Pisa, 1961); idem, *La pittura a Pisa dalle origini alla bella maniera* (Pisa, 1994), 93–95; A. Caleca, "Pittura del duecento e del trecento a Pisa e Lucca," in *La pittura in Italia: il duecento e il trecento*, ed. E. Castelnuovo (Milan, 1986), 248; and A. Taruferi, "Pisa, Sardegna," in *Pittura murale in Italia del tardo duecento ai primi del quattrocento*, ed. M. Gregori (Turin, 1995), 76.
18. For example, the pose of the Christ Child on fol. 25 of MS ital. 115 is identical to that in a panel depicting the Virgin and Child with SS. Francis and Clare in the Museo Nazionale di San Matteo in Pisa, attributed to Giovanni di Nicola or to the so-called Maestro della Carità. See Carli, *La pittura a Pisa*, 94, 144, Fig. 151.
19. Carli, *La pittura a Pisa*, 94–95, briefly discusses the lack of documentary evidence for Giovanni di Nicola past the 1360s, as well as the problem of dating the San Martino frescoes.
20. Nuns living under "strict enclosure" were not allowed to leave their convent, and male clerics, usually Franciscan friars in the case of the Poor Clares, were assigned to female religious houses to administer the sacraments to the nuns and to take care of their business matters. Four friars were assigned to San Martino to perform these duties. See Archivio Storico Pisano, Diplomatico San Martino, 22 February 1331, "quatuor presbiteri . . . qui in eadem ecclesia parrochianis ipsius missas et alia divina officia celebrent et ministrent ecclesiastica sacramenta." Nuns were kept sequestered from the general public, and their communication with their male caretakers and other outsiders was carefully controlled and often conducted via walls perforated with small windows covered with grates and/or curtains. The church attempted to enforce enclosure with greater care after the papal decretal *Periculoso* was issued in 1298. See J. A. Brundage and E. Makowski, "Enclosure of Nuns: The Decretal *Periculoso* and Its Commentators," *Journal of Medieval History*, XX (1994), 143–155. Because many Clarissan churches were used for public liturgical celebrations and were open to the laity, keeping the nuns separate was of particular concern. On the rules of enclosure and how they affected architecture for the Poor Clares, see C. Bruzelius, "Hearing Is Believing: Clarissan Architecture, ca. 1213–1340," *Gesta*, XXXI/2 (1992), 83–91.
21. Count Fazio's early donations for the convent included funds allotted for the building of a choir and dormitory; see Archivio Storico Pisano, Diplomatico San Martino, 22 February 1331 and 19 July 1337. The parlatorium is mentioned as the location of a meeting that took place in 1338; see Archivio Storico Pisano, Diplomatico San Martino, 14 November 1338. For a more detailed documentary study of San Martino, see Pecorini Cignoni, "Francescanesimo femminile a Pisa." Documents from San Martino, now dispersed among several archives, were exhibited in part in 1996. The brochure catalogue from this exhibition, which features a very short summary of the history of the church, is Pisa, Scuola Sant'Anna, *Ricordo e memoria del monastero di San Martino di Pisa dalle carte dell'Archivio Storico* (Pisa, 1996).
22. Archivio Storico Pisano, Diplomatico San Martino, 14 November 1338. The grate is described as part of a transverse wall: "iusta retia ferrea que sunt infixa in muro que est per transversum in dicta ecclesia."
23. The other small chapel on the south side of the nave (no. 4 on the plan, Fig. 1) opens directly into the nave (that is, it is not closed off by a wall and would therefore be unsuitable for enclosed nuns in its present form) and appears to be of modern manufacture.
24. On the Poor Clares' devotion to the consecrated Host, see Wood, *Women, Art, and Spirituality*, 152–153.
25. See Bruzelius, "Hearing Is Believing," 85. This chapel also contains frescoes dating to the late trecento by Cecco di Pietro and Antonio Veneziano, but they have not been treated in this study because it is unclear whether the nuns could see them. See Carli, *La pittura a Pisa*, 99.
26. Archivio Storico Pisano, Diplomatico San Martino, 5 September 1361. See Pecorini Cignoni, "Francescanesimo femminile a Pisa," 384–385.
27. Archivio Storico Pisano, Diplomatico San Martino, 15 November 1372.
28. Archivio Storico Pisano, Codex Agnesinus, 51v–52. Agnese states that Mass was celebrated elsewhere in the convent, "prima che per quelli di San Casciano fusse posto il nostro oratorio di San Martino sopra la porta grande."
29. Memoirs written by the nuns dated 10 June 1609 attest to their intention to destroy and rebuild the choir to replace the one that "usato già 238 anni presenta un cattivo stato di conservazione." Archivio Scuola Sant'Anna, Monastero San Martino, no. 10, 26r–v.
30. Other possible motives for the selection of the Annunciation and Youth of the Virgin will be discussed below, but it is worth mentioning that Annunciation scenes are often found in the choirs of female religious houses in Renaissance Italy. See Thomas, *Art and Piety*, 120.
31. Bruzelius, "Hearing Is Believing," 86.
32. On the retrochoir at Santa Chiara in Naples, see *ibid.*, 87–88. On the growth of the community of nuns at San Martino by the mid-trecento, see Pecorini Cignoni, "Francescanesimo femminile a Pisa," 394–395.
33. Bruzelius, "Hearing Is Believing," 87. On the placement of choirs in Clarissan churches in Italy, see Filipiak, "The Plans of the Poor Clares' Convents," 256–258; and on that in female monastic foundations in

- northern Europe, see C. Jäggi, "Eastern Choir or Western Gallery? The Problem of the Place of the Nuns' Choir in Königsfelden and Other Early Mendicant Nunneries," *Gesta*, XL/1 (2001), 79–93.
34. Jäggi. "Eastern Choir or Western Gallery?" 87.
  35. Archivio Storico Pisano, Codex Agnesinus, 6v: "il nostro oratorio e choro per uso di noi monache." The Latin term used for *choir* in the foundation documents is *corus*.
  36. Jäggi. "Eastern Choir or Western Gallery?" 87.
  37. On the Hours of the Virgin in books of hours, rare in trecento Italy, see R. Wieck, *Painted Prayers: The Book of Hours in Medieval and Renaissance Art* (New York, 1997).
  38. On the Clares and the Divine Office, see M. Nativig, "Rich Clares, Poor Clares: Celebrating the Divine Office," *Women and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture*, IV (2000), 59–70, esp. 59, where she notes importantly that women as well as men chanted the Divine Office: "Scholars . . . have put to rest the old misconception that the liturgy was 'performed' exclusively by men."
  39. L. Bolzoni, *The Web of Images: Vernacular Preaching from Its Origins to Bernardino da Siena* (Aldershot, 2004).
  40. Pseudo-Bonaventure, *Meditations*, 5.
  41. This narrative is found in MS ital. 115 on fols. 9v–36v. The Annunciation is represented in three images, the Visitation in three, the Birth of John the Baptist in three, four scenes narrate Joseph's questioning his marriage to the Virgin, nine images narrate the Nativity and Annunciation to the shepherds, six scenes show the Adoration of the Magi, three show the Holy Family at the manger, and eleven illustrate the Presentation of Christ/Purification of the Virgin.
  42. Though for Italy there is little information about educational practices in trecento convents, it has been suggested that different image programs were created for novices in northern Europe. See J. F. Hamburger, "The Use of Images in the Pastoral Care of Nuns: The Case of Heinrich Suso and the Dominicans," *AB*, LXXI (1989), 36. An unpublished, short study of MS ital. 115 likewise suggests that it was made for young nuns. See S. Wagner, "Embracing Convent Life through Illustrations of the Holy Family in a Fourteenth-Century Italian Translation of the *Meditations On the Life of Christ*: Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms. Ital. 115" (M.A. Thesis, Florida State University, Tallahassee, 1995).
  43. There are repeated instances of this in the *Meditationes*, particularly in the sections on the Youth of the Virgin. In his description of the Annunciation, for example, Pseudo-Bonaventure, *Meditationes*, 15, states, "you must learn all the things said and done as though you were present."
  44. *Ibid.*, 17–18.
  45. Pseudo-Bonaventure, *Meditations*, 16–17: "When the faithful emissary Gabriel entered, he said to the Virgin, 'Ave gratia plena: dominus tecum, benedicta tu in mulieribus.' 'Hail, you who are full of grace; the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women.'" It should be noted here that not all manuscripts of the *Meditationes* contain these translations, but all references in this article are specific to the text of MS ital. 115. Several different versions of the *Meditationes* were circulating by the mid-fourteenth century, and MS ital. 115 is a vernacular version of the "grosse" text, or the long version, of the *Meditationes*. On the various versions, see P. Columban Fischer, "Die 'Meditationes Vitae Christi': Ihre Handschriftliche Überlieferung und die Verfasserfrage," *Archivum franciscanum historicum*, XXV (1932), 175–209, 305–348, 449–483.
  46. Pseudo-Bonaventure, *Meditations*, 20–21.
  47. *Ibid.*, 23.
  48. The San Martino cycle thus departs from the typical iconography associated with the Youth of the Virgin, such as that in the canonical Hours of the Virgin.
  49. Although there is no obvious motive behind it, a particular devotion to John the Baptist and/or Zaccharias was practiced at San Martino. Another fresco, part of a fragmentary cycle in a small side chapel in the church dated to the 1380s, features an image of Zaccharias in the temple and an accompanying Visitation scene. This may be the result of a later patron's interest, and indeed, such a patron was perhaps responsible for the repainting of the choir fresco with the large figure of Zaccharias at the same time, the 1380s, the chapel frescoes were executed. Very little has been written about these frescoes; see Carli, *La pittura pisana del Trecento*, 99.
  50. Pseudo-Bonaventure, *Meditations*, 25.
  51. *Ibid.*
  52. Bruzelius, "Hearing Is Believing," 87, goes on to hint that an understanding of convent practices can be gleaned from such fresco cycles: "In this context, as no doubt in many other convents, wall painting takes on a special significance, and should be considered as providing a visual pattern for prayer and meditation that may have taken place as an accompaniment to hearing the service."
  53. The Christ Child wears coral and striped swaddling clothes in *The Virgin and Child with Saints Francis and Clare*, attributed to a follower of Giovanni di Nicola, Museo Nazionale di San Matteo, Pisa. See E. Carli, *Il museo di Pisa* (Pisa, 1974), Fig. 96.
  54. Pseudo-Bonaventure, *Meditations*, 25.
  55. See Flora, "A Book for Poverty's Daughters," 69.
  56. Pseudo-Bonaventure, *Meditations*, 38.
  57. See C. Klapisch-Zuber, "Holy Dolls: Play and Piety in Florence in the Quattrocento," in Klapisch-Zuber, *Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy* (Chicago, 1985), 310–329, who argues that devotional dolls were almost always associated with women, often given on betrothal or entry into a convent. It is generally assumed that these dolls were used in "private" devotion in the nuns' cells, though hard evidence is lacking. But because activities traditionally considered part of "private" devotion may at times have also taken place elsewhere in convents, it is possible that dolls were used in other places within the private areas of the convent (the nuns were not in "public" spaces at all).
  58. For a discussion of the Franciscan *presepe* in relation to women, see A. Randolph, "Regarding Women in Sacred Space," in *Picturing Women in Renaissance and Baroque Italy*, ed. G. Johnson et al. (Cambridge, 1997), 17–41.
  59. Pseudo-Bonaventure, *Meditations*, 36–38.
  60. *Ibid.*, 26.
  61. On the wealth of the "Poor" Clares at San Martino, see Pecorini-Cignoni, "Francescanesimo femminile a Pisa," 394–395.
  62. Octagonal halos are frequently found in depictions of the Virtues, for example. For an example of this motif in a Pisan manuscript of the trecento, see New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, *Painting and Illumination in Early Renaissance Florence, 1300–1450* (New York, 1994), by L. B. Kanter et al., 3.
  63. Pseudo-Bonaventure, *Meditations*, 52.
  64. *Ibid.*, 51.
  65. On the Christ Child as the Eucharist, see L. Sinanoglou, "The Christ Child as Sacrifice: A Medieval Tradition and the Corpus Christi Plays," *Speculum*, XLVIII/3 (1973), 491–509; as well as U. Nilgen, "The Epiphany and the Eucharist: On the Interpretation of Eucharistic Motifs in Medieval Epiphany Scenes," *AB*, XLIX/4 (1967), 311–316. On devotion to the Eucharist in general, see M. Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge, 1991).



66. Angela of Foligno, "The Book of the Blessed Angela of Foligno," chap. 4, in Angela of Foligno, *Complete Works*, trans. P. Lachance (New York, 1993), 157.
67. Several women mystics, including Hildegard of Bingen, wrote about Mary as priest. See A. Clark, "The Priesthood of the Virgin Mary: Gender Trouble in the Twelfth Century," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, CXVIII/1 (Spring 2002), 5–24.
68. Members of the Poor Clare order in Italy wore both white and black head-dresses with brown habits, so even though their dress is not identical, the figures in fresco and manuscript could refer to Franciscan nuns. The standard Poor Clare dress included a dark neutral-colored or brown habit, knotted rope belt, black veil, and sandals. See D. Koslin, "The Dress of Monastic and Religious Women as Seen in Art from the Early Middle Ages to the Reformation" (Dissertation, New York University, 1999), 132. Koslin, 267, also remarks that female novices of various orders sometimes wore white veils during their first, trial, year of monastic life. See also J. Brink, "Cardinal Napoleon Orsini and Chiara della Croce: A Note on the Monache in Simone Martini's Passion Altarpiece," *ZfKg*, XLVI (1983), 419–424. He mentions "bende" (bindings) and "soggoli" (wimples) worn by several nuns depicted, 419, and the "rudem de Gattinello," a mantle that fastens in the front, 423. See also C. Warr, "Religious Dress in Italy in the Late Middle Ages," in *Defining Dress: Dress as Object, Meaning and Identity*, ed. A. de la Haye and E. Wilson (Manchester, 1999), 79–92. Some variation on this dress existed; striped mantles were worn by Poor Clares in northern Italy, for example. See C. Warr, "The Striped Mantle of the Poor Clares: Image and Text in Italy in the Later Middle Ages," *Arte cristiana*, LXXXVI (1998), 415–430.
69. See, for example, C. W. Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley, 1987), 53–69.