

# ■ I Introduction

Therefore [Maria of Venice] worked with all her might for the well-being of her neighbor by doing corporal and spiritual good deeds [...]. She performed all the tasks that she reasonably could: she not only gave alms, but she also personally visited ailing persons and assisted them. She even buried them. She did numerous good deeds, and she would have done even more had I not prohibited her because of her gender, youth, and beauty.

Thomas of Siena, *Leggenda di Maria da Venezia*.<sup>1</sup>

Sometimes a few intriguing sentences in a historical source can puzzle a historian so persistently that in order to unwrap fully their implications she is led to conduct many years of research. One source leads to dozens of others, and a historian learns that her puzzle has more pieces than she originally expected (or perhaps hoped) to find. In the course of a number of years she may find answers to her initial question. Yet, she is also likely to realize that her discoveries created new questions, possibly leaving her even more intrigued than before.

The above-cited quotation from the early fifteenth century *vita* of Maria of Venice, a saintly lay Dominican, is the initial reason why this book, *Worldly Saints*, came into being. While I read Thomas of Siena's text I was left wondering about several expressions and distinctions that, I felt, could not have been accidental. It must have been of importance that Thomas explicitly separated corporal and spiritual acts of charity (*opere de la misericordia corporali o spirituali*) and that he perceived alms (*sovençione*) and personal visits to the indigent (*personale visitaçione*) as two separate categories within charity. These distinctions led me to some of those questions that play a prominent role in my study: What *types* of benevolent deeds did medieval women practice? Were Maria's and other penitent women's acts considerably different from those of, say, nuns and hermits? Could it perhaps be that *personal* participation, rather than mere almsgiving, gave these penitents' good will its own particular flavor?

Having read the paragraph's opening sentences it seemed to me that Thomas was fully supporting Maria's personal deeds of charity. Nonetheless, the subsequent lines made me wonder whether that was the correct interpretation. What exactly did Thomas mean with the statement that Maria "performed all

1 "Unde [Maria of Venice] ad ogni fatica per la salute del prossimo e corporalmente o spiritualmente, col meço dell'opere de la misericordia corporali o spirituali [...] mandando ad esecuzione prontamente tutto quello che buonamente poteva, non solamente per sovençione, ma eçiamdio con personale visitaçione degl'infermi et amministraçione, per fino ala sepoltura, faendo molte cose di pietà: e vie più n'avarebbe facte, se io nolle l'avesse vetate et interdecte, el quale interdire io le faceva avendo respecto non solamente sesso, ma ancora a la sua giovanile etade e corporale speçiositate." Thomas of Siena, *Leggenda di Maria* 1984, 179.

the tasks that she reasonably could”? Was he saying that Maria’s altruism was conditioned by practical reasoning, that she was perhaps not totally negating herself as one might have expected from a saint? Be that as it may, Thomas himself evidently was not unconditionally delighted about Maria’s deeds of service, since he wrote that he had to keep Maria from certain deeds because of her gender, beauty, and youth. Thomas’s reservations lead me to phrase further questions: Was the churchmen’s approval of women’s charity conditional? If so, where were the boundaries of approved action drawn? What kind of criticism could good deeds possibly attract?

I originally intended to limit myself to those lay saints who were venerated by the Dominican hagiographers Raymond of Capua (d. 1399) and Thomas of Siena (d. 1434), namely Giovanna of Orvieto, Margherita of Città di Castello, Catherine of Siena, and Maria of Venice. Yet, I soon realized that this group of saintly women was too limited. Since the medieval Dominican penitents as a collective group had received barely any attention at all, I have found it fruitful, even necessary, to extend my studies to include a list of women who range from Benvenuta Boiani (d. 1292) to Osanna Kotic of Cattaro (d. 1565). This decision to study a wider group of penitent saints has also had its impact on my methodology. My original plan to focus only on a few texts and dissect their narrative strategies with methods borrowed mainly from literary studies was no longer feasible when the number of saints grew from four to more than nineteen, and the *vitae* from the original six to more than thirty. Even my initial research topic – penitent women’s charity – expanded to cover women’s active life altogether. While charity is an important component in the *vita activa* it was by no means the only one, and thus it has to be studied in the context of other forms of active deeds, such as manual labor and teaching. Finally, this active piety is connected to another fundamental issue, namely to the question of women’s presence in the secular world. One cannot possibly discuss the reactions to their active deeds without also studying how their physical presence amidst secular people, men and women alike, was received.

## Focal Questions and the State of Research

*Worldly Saints* focuses on the hagiographic descriptions of the Italian Dominican penitent (lat. *poenitere*, to do penance) women’s active lives and their presence in the world.<sup>2</sup>

The first chapter, “*Attending the Celestial Spouse in Poverty and Humility.*” *The Panorama of Lay Piety*, sets the historical background as well as introduces the Dominican penitent saints and primary sources pertaining to them. Though my study focuses on the Dominican laity, it is vital to see how they were connected with other contemporary lay movements. Some lay people participated in regular religious life by working as lay converts (*conversi / conversae*) in monasteries

. . . . .  
2 On the various appellations for lay-religious, see p. 34.

and other religious institutions. Nevertheless, since the twelfth century it became increasingly common for lay people to take part in religious life without leaving the secular world. Such movements as the Lombardian *Humiliati* and the transalpine Beguines, which combined working life in the world with rigorous asceticism and evangelical poverty, influenced deeply the mendicant penitents' way of life. The Franciscan and the Dominican penitents alike thus had a common background with earlier lay movements. In short, many of those ideals that we encounter in the Dominican penitent piety were visible not only in the Franciscan penitent organizations but also in other lay movements. Of course, each lay association also produced ideals and strategies that were peculiar to it alone. It is the function of this first chapter to map the Dominican penitents' place amidst many contemporary lay movements, as well as to point out those historical developments that shaped the Dominicans' understanding of women's secular piety in particular.

In the chapter's second part I focus on the actual protagonists of my study: the Italian Dominican penitent saints of the Middle Ages. Many of those women who were considered as saintly by their contemporaries must have vanished from the written record or, alternatively, we know them only by names. Thus, I have focused on those nineteen women about whom we have some closer narrative evidence, mainly hagiographies. In chronological order they are Benvenuta Boiani (1255–1292), Giovanna of Orvieto (1264–1306), Jacopina of Pisa (c. 1279–c. 1370), Margherita of Città di Castello (1287–1320), Sybillina Biscossi (1287–1367), Villana Botti (1332–1360), Catherine of Siena (1347–1380), Maria Mancini (1350–c. 1431),<sup>3</sup> Maria of Venice (c. 1379–1399), Margherita of Savoy (1380/1390–1464),<sup>4</sup> Margherita Fontana (1440–1513), Magdalena Panatieri (1443/1453–1503), Osanna of Mantua (1449–1505), Stefana Quinzani (1457–1530), Lucia Bartolini Rucellai (1465–1520), Colomba of Rieti (1467–1501), Lucia Brocadelli (1476–1544), Catherine of Racconigi (1486–1547), and Osanna of Cattaro (1493–1565). I present a brief biography of each of these saints as well as provide a bibliography of primary and secondary sources regarding them. A good number of Dominican penitent saints were unmarried women who came from well-to-do social classes. Nonetheless, the group of saintly penitents comprised also married women and widows, and several offspring of poor families. Therefore, the *vitae* of Dominican penitents testify to the piety of women from all walks of life. I am calling all these nineteen women as saints even if actually only one of them, namely Catherine of Siena, was officially canonized. Thus, the appellation 'saint' is in this study used as an expression that testifies about the existence of a cult among the Dominicans and local people rather than about actual papal canonization. In the Middle Ages many local cults remained without final papal sanction, but it did not hinder people from venerating their local *beati* and *beatae* as if these would have actually been declared saints.<sup>5</sup>

3 Although Maria Mancini died as a nun, she lived for some years as a penitent, see p. 47.

4 Margherita of Savoy died as a nun, but for almost twenty years she lived as a penitent, see p. 47.

5 On the relation between local and papally sanctioned cults, see VAUCHEZ 1981.

In the next chapter entitled "*In Church, at Home, or Wherever She Went.*" *The Secular World as a Forum for Religious Life*, I examine the penitent women's presence in the secular world by asking how these women were situated in this world and how their secular existence was presented as a religiously satisfying way of life. The lay women did not withdraw from the world to a specifically religious space, namely a monastery. Instead they created spiritual fulfillment within their ordinary lives by following religious practices and pious customs. This religious life that was not spatially defined was in fact at the heart of lay piety. I start off by studying the Dominican penitent women's actual housing arrangements in order to understand better their lives' concrete *realities*, which in no small part shaped the *ideals* concerning their daily religious life. The medieval penitent saints lived mainly in private homes. Within this category I have found principally four alternatives: the parental home, a benefactor's house, a marital home, and a widow's own dwelling place. In the late fifteenth century these private housing arrangements were increasingly complemented by another alternative, communal housing with other penitents. To communal housing and these four types of private accommodation can be added a sixth option, which was, however, rarely used by the Dominican penitents: solitary living in an anchorage. Each housing arrangement had its own rewards and challenges, but the basic question in each of them was how penitents were able to remain in the secular world and still achieve religious perfection.

In the second part of this chapter, I discuss the techniques of saintly living in the world. What were the strategies that the penitents' employed in order to transform their secular existence into a religiously satisfying way of life? Did sanctity in the world mean denial of one's secular status or could the world be seen as a particularly rewarding field of activity for a saintly woman? This study shows that penitents employed a myriad of strategies for saintly living in the world: in their external engagements they created a pious state of mind by wearing their religious costume as well as by following devotional practices and secular customs that were adapted to suit their varying daily needs.

The following chapter "*One Should not Abandon Other People.*" *The Virtues of the Active Life* addresses the hagiographic portrayals of penitent women's social deeds. Women's active religious life (*vita activa*) was not a monolithic concept, but instead it was constituted of various actions that were also evaluated differently by the hagiographers. Accordingly, I have analyzed each component of women's active life separately, but I have also tied them together by studying the internal value hierarchy that separated these actions. The Dominican penitent women performed mainly three types of active deeds: manual labor (mainly house chores), charity, and teaching. All of these were seen as spiritually rewarding and socially beneficial, but each of them was evaluated differently by the hagiographers. In the course of this chapter, I shall analyze which deeds constituted manual labor, which charity, and which teaching, and how their respective values were evaluated. To understand the ways in which the hagiographers judged their protagonists' various social deeds I shall also examine penitent piety's relation to earlier religious traditions. How did the lay-religious

borrow from pre-existing tradition, and in which respect did they transform the old teachings? I am also interested in the function of the active life in the hagiographies. Therefore, I ask whether saintly women's active life was regarded as a way to change the world or as means for these women's penitential self-improvement.

Social deeds played an integral part in penitent sanctity. In fact, the Dominican hagiographers underscored, as was seen in Maria of Venice's *vita* that opened the preface, the actual, physical deeds of service, which essentially complemented those forms of neighborly love that did not request personal participation, such as almsgiving and prayer. Nonetheless, the hagiographers were not unconditionally supportive of women's worldly engagements. They emphasized, for example, the spontaneous and uninstitutional nature of their protagonists' good deeds. Yet they favored such social actions that took place in relatively private, often domestic, settings. Therefore, the penitent women should not be seen as antecedents of modern social workers and professional nurses. The Dominican hagiographers took, in some respects, a novel approach to women's *vita activa*, but, nonetheless, they depended on old church traditions and role models that underscored the notion that the active life's fruits were ultimately spiritual rather than social.

While the previous two chapters will have discussed Dominican lay piety from the viewpoint of its defenders, the subsequent chapter, "*Because the Internal and Mental Functions Are the Most Noble. Ambivalence and the Changing Emphasis Concerning Women's Public and Social Piety*," focuses on the criticism that penitent women's religious life in the world attracted. Penitent women's worldly piety was attacked by some of their family members and neighbors, even by some churchmen, for reasons that ranged from mere annoyance over penitents' daily habits to skepticism about the authenticity of their experiences and denial of social piety's value altogether. A study of these negative reactions illuminates inherent paradoxes in lay women's piety. While these women's beneficiary deeds and saintliness in the world earned them support, it was precisely these aspects of publicly manifested piety that attracted the most intense criticism as well. Women's prayerful, inner spirituality was clearly easier to accept than their active and socially displayed piety. This can even be seen, I suggest, in the cults of active saints themselves. When we study, for example, the medieval veneration of Catherine of Siena it is evident that contemplative and mystical aspects of her piety were more readily accepted than her active life. In this chapter I will thus examine the reasons for this controversy over the women's active lives.

The clearest sign of medieval penitent piety's tensions can be seen in the transformation that this movement underwent in the later part of the fifteenth century. While the earlier penitent saints lived in their private homes and found their religious perfection in the world, at the turn of the sixteenth century the saintly penitents withdrew to religious communities in which their contacts with secular people were limited. Even if these later penitents, such as Stefana Quinzani, Colomba of Rieti, and Lucia Brocadelli, still had numerous contacts

with the secular world where they had actually spent a good part of their lives, it was clear that the paradigm of penitent life was changing toward more monastic understanding of the religious life. In fact, by the mid-sixteenth century, under the influence of the Council of Trent (1545–1563), the reorganization of women's religious life meant that even penitent communities were encloistered, just as if their inhabitants would have been nuns. I finish my study by examining the reason for these new developments. In the light of these changes toward more contemplative lay life, we can also better see the characteristics of earlier secular penitent sanctity and appreciate the possibilities that the penitent life had opened to medieval women.

The timeframe of this study ranges between the late thirteenth century and the first decades of the sixteenth century. I begin when the first Italian Dominican penitent saints, Benvenuta Boiani, Giovanna of Orvieto, Jacopina of Pisa, Margherita of Città di Castello, and Sybillina Biscossi lived. It was also at this time, in 1285, that the *Rule* for the Dominican penitent way of life was drafted. The decision to continue my study up to the first decades of the sixteenth century is based on the notion that the medieval forms of pious lay life continued to flourish up to this period. Historians have employed numerous ways of classifying the change from medieval to early modern period. While art historians tend to see that already the fourteenth century Italian Renaissance opened a new era, many historians regard such later events as the fall of Constantinople to the Turks (1453), Gutenberg's printed Bible (1455), the reconquest of Spain from the Moors (1492), or the discovery of America by Columbus (1492) as more telling signs of the new epoch. In the history of the Catholic Church, however, it has been seen by many that only the increasing pressure by the Protestant reformers in the 1520s and 1530s and the subsequent Council of Trent really opened a new period. My study has further encouraged me to consider the first decades of the sixteenth century as still medieval, because until this period many medieval forms of penitent life continued to exist.

While it is important to notice that the piety of such later penitents as Colomba of Rieti, Stefana Quinzani, and Lucia Brocadelli, each of who found semi-monastic communities, differed considerably from such earlier home-dwelling penitents as Giovanna of Orvieto, Margherita of Città di Castello, and Maria of Venice, all the penitents I shall discuss still lived in a world where religious women's public participation was tolerated, even encouraged. Female saints, like the Dominican nun Catherine de' Ricci (1522–1590), who were born in the sixteenth century, grew up instead in a society where women's public presence was condemned, their open monasteries were encloistered, and their religious participation was limited mainly to prayer and other forms of inner spiritual life.

It has not been my intention to study all issues related to Dominican penitent piety during the medieval period. I have instead limited myself to the two previously discussed, interrelated themes, namely these women's secular presence and their active deeds. These themes play an important role in our understanding of penitent ways of life at large, yet they were by no means the only components in these women's religious lives. In penitent women's lives

asceticism, visions, and other mystical experiences, as well as prayer and contemplation, were fundamentally important as well. In fact, these phenomena were often the ultimate reasons why penitent women were seen as saintly. Therefore, my focus on the representations of social piety is not intended as a statement that other factors in penitent women's lives would have been irrelevant. On the contrary, I am aware of the importance of these phenomena and direct the readers' attention to the publications by, for example, Caroline Bynum, Peter Dronke, Bernard McGinn, Barbara Newman, Elizabeth Petroff, and Massimo Petrocchi whose works on medieval spirituality contain valuable insights to the inner lives of not only nuns, but penitent women as well.<sup>6</sup> My own training in history and philosophy has directed my interest toward religious experience's social and theoretical aspects, whereas I have felt less equipped to analyze expressions of women's spirituality, such as their mystical language and their visionary messages. Moreover, I believe that medieval religious women's active lives deserve to be studied more than is presently done. I acknowledge my debt to several fine publications on women's active piety, for example such anthologies as *Medieval Religious Women*, *Women & Power in the Middle Ages*, and *Women Preachers and Prophets* have shaped my approach to active women's lives.<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, many questions concerning women's active religious lives have still remained undiscussed, or at least understudied. For example, there are still only a few attempts to systematize women's various active deeds, and, to analyze philosophical and theological foundations of women's active life.<sup>8</sup> I hope that my study may contribute to the analytical classification of women's *vita activa* in general and to that of Dominican penitent women in particular. Finally, I have focused on questions of women's public presence and social deeds because I believe that they are particularly important for our understanding of penitent women's piety since it was precisely this direct participation in the secular world that set these lay women apart from nuns and other religious women who withdrew from the world.

6 Caroline Bynum has written on the bodily aspects of women's mysticism, particularly on their food asceticism, see BYNUM 1988 and 1990. Peter Dronke has studied the writings of medieval female mystics, see DRONKE 1984. Female mystics play an important role in Bernard McGinn's multi-volume series on Christian mysticism as well, see MCGINN 1991 and 1994. Similarly Massimo Petrocchi has several entries on female spirituality in his three-volume history of Italian spirituality, see PETROCCHI 1978. Barbara Newman has written on literary topoi in the texts by and about medieval women, see NEWMAN 1995. Elizabeth Petroff has written on women's visionary literature, often from the viewpoint of Italian religious women, see PETROFF 1979 and 1994. She has also edited an anthology, *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature* 1986. Frances Beer has studied women's mystical experience, see BEER 1992. For other important article collections on medieval women's mysticism, see *Religiöse Frauenbewegung und mystische Frömmigkeit im Mittelalter* 1988 and *Scrittrici mistiche italiane* 1988.

7 There are several articles on medieval religious women's active roles in *Medieval Religious Women* (Vol. 1 *Distant Echoes*; Vol. 2 *Peace Weavers*) 1984, 1987. On women's social and political influence, see *Women and Power in the Middle Ages* 1988. On women as teachers and preachers, see *Women Preachers and Prophets through Two Millennia of Christianity* 1998.

8 Janet Tibbets Schultenburg has thematized early medieval women's public and private roles, see SCHULENBURG 1988. Peter Dinzelsbacher has analyzed various components in Hildegard of Bingen's, Birgitta of Sweden's, and Catherine of Siena's political influences, see DINZELBACHER 1988. Gabriella Zarri has studied late medieval penitent women's various types of social and spiritual roles, see ZARRI 1990. Richard Kieckhefer has outlined the relation between contemplative, ascetic, and active sanctity, see KIECKHEFER 1990, 12–23.

The history of the Dominican penitent order has attracted surprisingly little attention. In fact, a comprehensive history of this movement is yet to be written. We have a few books that lead us to this medieval penitent order, but even all of them combined do not provide a satisfying overview to Dominican penitents in the Middle Ages.

Surprisingly enough the most industrious historian of the Dominican penitent order lived already at the turn of the fifteenth century. He was Thomas of Siena, the above-mentioned author of Maria of Venice's *vita*. Between 1402 and 1407 Thomas wrote a history of the Dominican penitent order, the so-called *Tractatus*.<sup>9</sup> Though this book in some aspects distorted the Order's history, for example by presenting the later medieval penitents as direct offspring from the antihetical lay associations that had been formed by Dominic himself, it still remains a valuable exposition.<sup>10</sup> Thomas's account, which was actually inspired by Raymond of Capua's short treatise on penitent history in the *Legenda maior* of Catherine of Siena, has indeed influenced many later accounts.<sup>11</sup>

By far the best modern exposition of Dominican penitents is that by Gilles Gerard Meersseman who has studied the history of the Franciscan and the Dominican penitents in his *Dossier de l'ordre de la pénitence*.<sup>12</sup> Though this laudable book and its edited sources function as an indispensable guide to penitent history, it has little to say about the entire Middle Ages simply because the study is limited to the thirteenth century. Meersseman did return to the later history of Dominican laity in his study of medieval confraternities, *Ordo fraternitatis*, but at that point he was interested in the Dominican confraternities rather than the actual Third Order.<sup>13</sup> One looks in vain to find an equivalent of Meersseman's *Dossier* to the history of Dominican penitents in the later Middle Ages. In the writing concerning the Dominican Order's general history, the lay members have received scant attention. In William Hinnebusch's two-volume *History of the Dominican Order*, for example, the history of the penitent order number less than ten pages.<sup>14</sup> Fortunately there are a few articles that fill in some gaps. Fernanda Sorelli's studies on Venetian penitent order, particularly her introduction to *La santità imitabile*<sup>15</sup> and her *Per la storia religiosa di Venezia*,<sup>16</sup> and Gabriella Zarri's writings on late medieval saints, especially her *Le sante vive*,<sup>17</sup> shed light on the Italian Dominican penitent order more generally as well.<sup>18</sup>

. . . . .

9 See Thomas of Siena, *Tractatus* 1938.

10 On the historical value of Thomas of Siena's claim that the Dominican Penitent Order would have stemmed from antihetical lay fraternities of St. Dominic's time, see p. 35 and note 40.

11 For Raymond's short history of the Dominican penitent order, see Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 880–881. Pius-Thomas Masetti's concise nineteenth century historical commentary on the Dominican nuns and penitents, for example, was inspired by Raymond's and Thomas's versions, see MASETTI 1864. See also FANFANI 1924, 217–228.

12 MEERSSEMAN 1982.

13 *Idem*. 1977.

14 HINNEBUSCH 1965, 400–404.

15 SORELLI 1984a.

16 SORELLI 1984b.

17 ZARRI 1990.

18 The lack of studies on the Dominican penitent order is further underscored by the fact that

Only quite recently, scholars seem to have noticed the void in research concerning the Dominican penitents.<sup>19</sup> Though this realization has not yet produced studies and anthologies of the movement as a whole, there have appeared several valuable publications on individual penitent saints as well as re-editions of their *vitae*. Andrea Tilatti has researched Benvenuta Boiani.<sup>20</sup> Maria Lungarotti has produced critical study on both of Margherita of Città di Castello's legends.<sup>21</sup> Fernanda Sorelli has studied Maria of Venice whose Italian legend she has also edited.<sup>22</sup> Emore Paoli and Luigi Ricci have done a critical edition of Giovanna of Orvieto's *vita*<sup>23</sup> and Adriana Valerio has published on the semi-official Dominican penitent, Domenica of Paradiso.<sup>24</sup> There has also been a conference on Colomba of Rieti, which has produced a collection of articles: *Una santa, una città*.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, E. Ann Matter, Armando Maggi, and I are presently editing the *Visions* of Lucia Brocadelli of Narni. All these recent publications, as well as some further articles on individual penitents, have contributed greatly to our understanding of Dominican penitents, which previously was dominated by one single figure, namely Catherine of Siena.<sup>26</sup>

Given the recent contributions to the study of Dominican penitents, one may still wonder why this order's numerous penitent saints as a *communio sanctorum* have not attracted more attention. While I remain without an ultimate answer, I would like to suggest a few possible reasons. One reason may be found from the general character of the Order of Preachers. This order is emphatically clerical and thus also the historians have prioritized the experiences of the friars over those of the nuns and lay members.<sup>27</sup> On the contrary, the Franciscan order, for example, has historically been less priestly and thus the lay order has perhaps

the Franciscan penitents have recently enjoyed considerable popularity. The Historical Institute of the Capuchins (*Istituto Storico dei Cappuccini*) has published numerous volumes on historical questions concerning the Franciscan penitents, see, for example, *Il Movimento Francescano della Penitenza nella società medioevale*, edited by Mariano d'Alatri. Istituto Storico dei Cappuccini, Roma 1980) and *I frati penitenti di San Francesco nella Società del due e trecento*, edited by Mariano d'Alatri. Istituto Storico dei Cappuccini, Roma 1977. Similarly, the Historical Commission of the Regular tertiaries (*Commissione Storica Internazionale T.O.R.*) has also published several studies on the lay Franciscans, the most notable perhaps being *Prime manifestazioni di vita comunitaria maschile e femminile nel movimento francescano della penitenza (1215–1447)*, edited by R. Pazzelli and L. Temperini. Commissione Storica Internazionale T.O.R. Roma 1982. Moreover, the studies of Anna Benvenuti Papi, such as her "*In castro poenitentiae*" and Mario Sensi, such as his *Storie di bizzocche*, have focused principally, though not exclusively, on the Franciscan penitents, see PAPI 1990 and SENSI 1995. Finally, Giovanna Casagrande's surveys of the medieval penitents, for example the articles she has published in the journal *Benedictina*, have chiefly illuminated the Franciscan foundations, see CASAGRANDE 1980 and 1983.

19 See, for example, CASAGRANDE 1991, 109–110.

20 TILATTI 1994.

21 LUNGAROTTI 1994.

22 SORELLI 1984a.

23 PAOLI – RICCI 1996.

24 VALERIO 1991, 1992, 1994.

25 *Una santa, una città* 1991.

26 On the bibliography concerning Catherine of Siena, see p. 46 note 84.

27 Indeed, not only have the Dominican laity not attracted historians' attention, but also the Dominican nuns have been given only a marginal position in the Order's histories. Hinnebusch's two-volume *History of Dominican Order*, for example, devotes barely twenty pages to the history of nuns, see HINNEBUSCH 1965, 377–400. On his treatment of penitent order, see p. 18 and note 14.

been regarded as a more integrated part of Franciscan piety than has been case with the Dominicans.<sup>28</sup> As shall be studied in Chapter Two, the Franciscan Order of Penance was given papal approval more than a hundred years before that of the Dominicans (1285 and 1405 respectively), which is reflected on the available documentation: the medieval Franciscan penitents were more self-conscious to save historical documentation concerning their foundations, deeds, and papal privileges, whereas Thomas of Siena was really the first Dominican to collect the Dominican penitent hagiographies, privileges, and historical information.<sup>29</sup> Surely the focus on Catherine of Siena has also played its role. As a patron of the Third Order and as its only canonized medieval member, Catherine has been taken as representative of the entire penitent experience and thus scholars have felt less need to study "minor" saints like Sybillina Biscossi, Margherita Fontana, and Magdalena Panatieri. Catherine of Siena indubitably stands forth as the most prominent saintly figure in my study as well, but it is one of my goals to answer whether or not her experience may be taken as representative. Can we indeed take Catherine as the standard of female medieval penitent life? To what degree would such decision be warranted?

The evident need for a general study about Dominican penitents in the Middle Ages shaped my goals for the *Worldly Saints*. While I focus on the thematic questions of women's public presence and *vita activa*, I hope that my study sheds light on the Dominican penitent order's institutional developments and on its less known saintly offspring as well.

## Ways of Approaching the *vitae*

*Worldly Saints* operates on two levels. Firstly, this book aims to map the Dominican penitent saints' factual living conditions, ways of life, and actions. The hagiographies commonly relate such details as a protagonist's housing and family situation, her background, and daily routines, which help us to perceive the *de facto* situation of a given penitent woman and her companions. Secondly, and more importantly, I study the "world of ideas" that shaped the perception of these women's presence and actions in the world. Hagiographies reveal numerous ways of justifying and idealizing women's worldly participation. Already the hagiographers' selection of his material tells of certain values. This focus on two interrelated, but distinct, levels is related to general methodological issues concerning the hagiographies.

Presently medievalists frequently use saints' *vitae*, miracle collections, and canonization processes as source material for the history of the Middle Ages.<sup>30</sup>

28 Moorman, for example, treats in his general history of the Franciscan order, the institutional developments of the second and third orders more extensively than Hinnebusch did, see MOORMAN 1988, 32-45, 205-225, 406-428, 548-568.

29 On papal approval of the Franciscan and the Dominican penitent orders' *Rules*, see p. 36-38. On Thomas and his work among the Dominican penitents, see p. 54-55.

30 Though presently outdated, the extensive annotated bibliography in *Saints and Their Cults: Studies in Religious Sociology, Folklore, and History* (Ed. Stephen Wilson, Cambridge

In fact, one could even speak of a "boom" in hagiographic studies in general. This can be seen in numerous publications, periodicals, conferences, associations, and even internet discussion groups that are dedicated to the study of saints' cults.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, it is of interest to note that particularly historians and literary scholars, rather than theologians, have been active in using the hagiographies in their studies and in promoting new methodologies. The hagiographies have indeed been used in many ways in order to shed light on medieval thinking, even from surprising angles.<sup>32</sup>

Quantitative studies have illuminated saints' social and occupational backgrounds as well as shown the contours of their piety.

symbolism in saints' own writings and in their *vitae*, others have been interested in psychological aspects of sainthood,<sup>37</sup> and others yet have analyzed the hagiographers' role in the creation of new saints.<sup>38</sup> Sainly women have recently attracted proportionally more attention than male saints have. Sainly women's lives were carefully recorded, whereas ordinary women's experiences were under-represented in all historical documentation. Thus, the hagiographies have played a critical role not only in our understanding of saintly women's history but also that of women in general.<sup>39</sup>

The spectrum of scholars' interests has been wide, and practical research techniques have varied greatly. Still, most of these scholars have shared a few basic methodological presumptions. All of them agree that hagiographies provide us with valuable information about the past. Therefore, the legacy of nineteenth century historicism's that hagiographies were mere signs of churchmen's propaganda and medieval believers' credulity, and therefore useless as historical evidence, is no longer alive.<sup>40</sup>

Modern historians do not, needless to say, advocate that hagiographic narratives should be simply taken as objective evidence of what actually happened. Firstly, it is held that hagiographies convey a reality that was shaped not only by their authors' motivations but also by intertextual hagiographic conventions. Secondly, it is generally acknowledged that not only in hagiographies, but also in all narrative historical writing -may it be, for example, chronicles, letters, *belles-lettres*, or diaries- the form shaped the content.<sup>41</sup> Accordingly, the historian who uses any narrative sources is obliged to pay attention not only at *what* his sources convey, but also *how* the material is presented. Thirdly, the historians of today do not necessarily share the methodological presuppositions of the illustrious Jesuit scholars, the Bollandists, whose editorial projects have shaped the hagiographic scholarship in this field since the seventeenth century.<sup>42</sup> While the Bollandists held that meticulous

. . . . .

for the so-called sociology of sainthood, see DELOOZ 1962. On the "making of saints" see also KLEINBERG 1989 and 1992. Peter Brown has studied the social function of saints; for example see BROWN 1981.

37 Sainly women's food asceticism, for example, has been a topic that has attracted scholars from various disciplines. Some have seen these women's fasting as neurosis (BELL 1985), whereas others have been interested in this phenomena's religious symbolism ( BYNUM 1988).

38 For the hagiographers' task, hagiographic conventions, and different hagiographic techniques, see DELEHAY 1910, AIGRAIN 1953, GRÉGOIRE 1987, and HEFFERNAN 1988. On the hagiographers' cooperation with saintly penitent women, see COAKLEY 1991a, 1991b, and 1994.

39 For state of research on medieval women, see Elisabeth van HOUTS, "Women in medieval history and literature." *Journal of Medieval History* 20 (1994), 277-292. For some recent publications on female saints, see p. 16-17, notes 6-8. Remember also *Donne e fede* 1994, and *Images of Sainthood in Medieval Europe* 1991 and *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages* 1992. While gender studies about female saints have been popular, a similar problematizing of male sainthood remains undone. For a rare attempt to discuss and employ the methods of gender studies for the interpretation of male sanctity, see COAKLEY 1994.

40 For the history of attitudes about the use of hagiographies as a historical source, see AIGRAIN 1953.

41 On hagiographies as a part of medieval historiography, see LIFSHITZ 1994.

42 The Bollandists have, for example, edited *Acta Sanctorum* (67 vols., 1643-), a collection of

unearthing of historically accurate hagiographies would provide readers with an objective account of saints' deeds and miracles, the historians are presently less interested in pinning down whether certain miracles, visions, or other saintly phenomena actually took place.<sup>43</sup> In fact, it is characteristic of contemporary scholarship to see hagiographies as sources to past people's religious beliefs, mentalities, and social strategies rather than as texts that prove God's presence in the world.

In other words, historians are presently focused in how medieval people *perceived* the saints and how these perceptions exemplify a medieval worldview and strategies of living. Yet, the hagiographies are also read as sources that reveal, often unintentionally, details of medieval life. Though the hagiographer focused his energy on those events that prove the saintliness of his protagonist, the text may produce valuable side-information to medieval people's living conditions as well. Thus, hagiographies, miracle collections, and canonization records have been used as sources to medieval family relations, housing arrangements, illnesses, and social concerns, just to mention a few. It is in the framework of these above-discussed methodological presuppositions that I operate in this study. I use hagiographies in part as a window to penitent women's *daily lives*, but mainly I study through them the *ideas* that shaped women's experiences about religious life in the world. These ideas lead us to the understanding of the religious framework within which the penitent women operated. Yet, alas, it is not easy to interpret who ultimately was behind these ideals: Women themselves or the men who wrote about them?

Yet, it is of vital importance to ask whose version of reality do the hagiographies relate to us? That of their authors or that of saintly women themselves, or perhaps even that of penitent women in more general? I answer: all of the above, and even more. The hagiographies also tell us about intertextual hagiographic conventions and ideals of saintly behavior that shaped the work of an individual hagiographer and influenced the behavior of saintly and ordinary penitents alike. Needless to say, these interlinked layers of meaning make hagiographies challenging, if not difficult, to interpret.

A hagiographic text was a product of an individual author whose selection of material, style, and motives left their personal mark.<sup>44</sup> Still, the author was not merely using his own imagination. He penned the story of a saintly penitent who had actually lived and with whom he had often had close personal ties. The saintly women were not docile individuals but strong personalities who impressed their hagiographers. Thus, it is reasonable to presume that the saint who we

...  
saints' *vitae* in Latin, and they publish *Analecta Bollandiana* (1882-), a journal about hagiographic scholarship. On the work of these Bollandists, see AIGRAIN 1953, 329-350 and DELEHAYE 1959.

43 The scholars working in the Bollandist tradition focused on the *historical value* of hagiographies in order to use them as *historical documents* to a saint's deeds. This can be seen, for example, in the approach and language of the early twentieth century Bollandist, Hippolyte Delehaye, see DELEHAYE 1910, 90-121, 154-166, and *passim*.

44 On the hagiographer's role in the creation of the text, see p. 22, note 38. See also DELEHAYE 1910, 90-99.

encounter in the hagiography resembles that woman who once lived.<sup>45</sup> Yet, it would be naïve to believe that the depicted saint would be identical with the person who once lived. The reality that the hagiographies convey is that of the *ideals* concerning women's spiritual perfection rather than the whole state of their own religious lives, which surely had human failings as well. The hagiographers idealized and manipulated the evidence so that the depiction of penitent women's lives suited the hierarchical church's goals.

Moreover, a hagiographer's and his protagonist's actions were conditioned by previous *vitae*. A hagiographer wanted to present the new saint in the likeness of her predecessors in order to show that she was not merely displaying her own heroism but also that she belonged to the collective family of saints (*communio sanctorum*). Finally, the saintly aspirant herself took models from earlier saints about whom she had learned in sermons, legends, and other church teachings. Therefore, specific *vitae* have to be read in the light of a collective hagiographic tradition as well.<sup>46</sup>

In many respects, for example in their visions, miracles, and extraordinary penance, the saintly individuals were simply exceptional. Even their morality was seen as an extraordinarily demanding form of altruism whose rigor was hardly attainable by ordinary human beings.<sup>47</sup> Thus, these deeds cannot be taken as portrayals of actions that could have been performed by any penitent woman. Yet, some of the religious ideals of the saintly penitents' were shared with ordinary penitents. For example, certain religious practices and daily customs were intended to be embraced by all penitents, saintly and less extraordinary alike.<sup>48</sup> Since my study focuses on non-miraculous manifestations of piety, such as moral deeds, religious practices, and daily behavior, it is particularly justified to expect that similar events, even if less rigorously practiced, could have taken place in the lives of ordinary penitents as well. In short, I have taken hagiographies as sources that represent multi-layered reality and lead us to experiences of hagiographers, saints, and ordinary believers, all of whom were nurtured by pre-existing religious traditions.

My study is thematic rather than chronological, which means that I am not moving from one saintly individual to another in their respective order. This thematic approach enables us to perceive the thought systems and daily necessities that shaped the experiences of all penitent women. My approach is principally

45 Caroline Walker Bynum, for example, has repeatedly emphasized that mystical women were not mere victims of medieval misogyny but instead powerful leaders and spiritual reformers, see BYNUM 1988, 6, 14, 208–218.

46 On the importance of the *communio sanctorum*, see HEFFERNAN 1988, 114–119.

47 Saintly moral deeds were seen as heroically virtuous, or, in other words, supererogatory. In these heroic moral acts the moral agent suppressed all her self-interest, and for that matter self-protection, to the point that she was even willing to give her own life for the good of another human being. On the concept of heroic virtue, see HOFFMANN 1933. The 'heroic virtue' became an official criterion for sanctity only in the seventeenth century, but this Aristotelian notion influenced already the medieval understanding of saintly morality. On 'heroic virtue' and medieval sanctity, see DELOOZ 1962, 32–36.

48 Some saints' deeds, such as their miracles, were seen as such that an ordinary believer should only admire them (*ad admiranda*), whereas other acts, like moral behavior, was taken as imitable (*ad imitanda*), see KIECKHEFER 1984, 248.

qualitative, but I do produce a few quantitative analyses about Dominican saints' backgrounds and marital status, which help us, I believe, to understand these women's social situation. I base my study primarily on the hagiographies that are introduced in the following chapter. Nonetheless, I have perused other types of sources as well, such as chronicles, letters, and medieval fiction, which provide insights to penitent saints' place in secular society. Particularly important non-hagiographic sources to me have been the penitent rules which in many respects intimately complemented the hagiographies: for example, many of those religious practices that we encounter in the *vitae* were originally prescribed as ideals in the Penitent *Rule*. *Worldly Saints* bases its research on printed primary sources. 9.03her oe perusd thesf sources assysteimanically aspossible, I have resntlyls

therusd of mauescriptss, respeically such non-

hagiographic sources asterstemenus, ould greatlye erhichsouw understanwingofe thoseconcretse rualihies tha schaddr Dominican penitents'ltivsn. n frace, hies us thelinsdofstudytha inendofolloinfutureFfoexample, suchquerstioes as

thelemrg end of Dominican peniten (women's comuana hiouningsimplys)Tji^T\*1^0.001 Tcr^01 areruse. All2 placentemes follorsimplys te Englisheconivnstioe. Ffoe