

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Betwixt and Between: Non-Cloistered Religious Women in Late Medieval Rome

Ashley Tickle Odebiyi

Assistant Professor, Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona, United States of America  
Email: [Ashley.Odebiyi@asu.edu](mailto:Ashley.Odebiyi@asu.edu)

## Abstract

This article examines eleven communities of non-cloistered religious women in fifteenth-century Rome. These women, known as *bizzoche*, created a shared identity through their choice of clothing, which did not conform with their elite status, and their acts of piety, such as Eucharistic adoration and service to the poor. Such practices share similarities with the beguines in northern Europe, *beatas* in Spain and the Americas, and others, pointing to a broader women's religious movement that transcended geographic space. However, scholarship often examines such communities of non-cloistered religious women in isolation, obscuring such connections. This article seeks to illuminate some of these commonalities and argues that late medieval, non-cloistered religious women across Europe used habit and pious practices to form a shared identity and navigate the gender- and class-based restrictions on publicly practicing their religion.

**Keywords:** bizzoche; Rome; piety

## I. Introduction

Francesca Bussa wanted to be a nun. Her parents, like many elite parents, wanted her to marry to cement an economic and political alliance. Francesca obliged her parents and married Lorenzo Ponziani, yet, while married, she lived the life of a *bizzoca* and gathered like women around her. In her *vita*, Father Ippolito sought to capture Francesca's style of dress while she was married to her husband, writing that "although she was the wife of a noble and very rich husband, she clothed herself in coarse and beggarly garments."<sup>1</sup> In choosing to dress simply, even "beggarly," Francesca rejected the sumptuous dress that was the norm for elite Roman women. Eventually, Francesca and her companions would

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<sup>1</sup>Fr. Ippolito, *Pauca Quaedam de Vita et Miraculis Beate Franciscæ de Pontianis* printed in Daniela Mazzuconi, "Pauca quedam de vita et miraculis beate Franciscæ de Pontianis: Tre biografie quattrocentesche di Santa Francesca Romana," in *Una santa tutta Romana: saggi e ricerche nel VI centenario della nascita di Francesca Bussa dei Ponziani (1384–1984)*, ed. Giorgio Picasso (Siena: Oliveto Maggiore, 1984), 95–197, 124, lines 68–69. "Licet uxor esset nobilis ac ditissimi viri, vilibus tamen et panosis vestibus induebatur." Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

become Oblates to the Benedictine Olivetans and live as *bizzoche* and, as such, would wear a particular habit associated with their community.

The *bizzoche* did not take formal religious vows, like nuns, although they could be affiliated with a religious order. Nevertheless, they were more than mere laywomen in that they practiced a particular type of piety that included devotion to the Eucharist, asceticism, and service to the poor. They were, therefore, something in between; they were non-cloistered religious women. Scholarship on such women largely focuses on the beguines in northern Europe.<sup>2</sup> When studies do center Italian *bizzoche*, they are limited to one particular community or a single woman.<sup>3</sup> This article, in contrast, examines eleven communities of Roman *bizzoche* as a whole to reveal how “ordinary” non-cloistered religious women conducted their daily lives. These eleven communities were established between 1282 and 1461 and were affiliated with various religious orders (see Table 1). Most of the communities thrived up until the sixteenth century when they either disappeared from the historical record or transitioned to enclosed communities of formal nuns, largely due to lack of funds, the emphasis on enclosure by the Council of Trent (1545–1563) and Pope Pius V’s bull *Circa pastoralis* (1566), and changing social norms.<sup>4</sup> Because of their various affiliations, fifteenth-century Roman *bizzoche* adhered to different rules and statutes, but all dressed modestly. Shared practices, such as dress, piety, and service to the poor transcended a mere association with a particular religious order and marked *bizzoche* as different from other Roman women, aiding their ability to practice a life of piety despite increasing Church restrictions on non-cloistered women. Like other non-cloistered religious women—such as their counterparts in Tuscany and Venice, the *pinzochere*, and the beguines in Germany—*bizzoche* shared in the practices of simple dress and public piety, indicating a broader European cultural repertoire from which such women drew their models. Investigating such a shared repertoire can provide insight into a universal practice that, at the same time, was dependent on local contexts. Drawing on

<sup>2</sup>Scholarship on beguines is vast. For some examples see Letha Böhringer, Jennifer Kolpacoff Deane, and Hildo van Engen, eds. *Labels and Libels: Naming Beguines in Northern Medieval Europe* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014); Tanya Stabler Miller, *The Beguines of Medieval Paris: Gender, Patronage, and Spiritual Authority* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014); and Walter Simons, *Cities of Ladies: Beguine Communities in the Medieval Low Countries, 1200–1565* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001).

<sup>3</sup>For Rome, the most studied community is that of Tor de’Specchi. See Anna Esposito “Tor de’Specchi e la società romana tra quattro e cinquecento,” in *La Canonizzazione di Santa Francesca Romana santità, cultura e istituzioni a Roma tra medioevo ed età moderna*, eds. Alessandra Bartolomei Romagnoli and Giorgio Picasso (Florence: Edizioni del Galluzzo per la Fondazione Ezio Franceschini, 2013): 303–318; Alessandra Romagnoli Bartolomei, *Francesca Romana: la Santa, il monastero e la città alla fine del medioevo* (Florence: Edizioni del Galluzzo per la Fondazione Ezio Franceschini, 2009); and Suzanne M. Scanlan, *Divine and Demonic Imagery at Tor de’Specchi, 1400–1500: Religious Women and Art in Fifteenth-Century Rome* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018), hereafter, *Divine and Demonic Imagery*.

<sup>4</sup>Both Katherine Gill and Sylvie Duvall argue that the success of *Circa pastoralis* was due to changing social norms without which enclosure of non-cloistered religious women would not have taken place. See Katherine Gill, “Scandala: Controversies Concerning Clausura and Women’s Religious Communities in Late Medieval Italy,” in *Christendom and its Discontents: Exclusion, Persecution, and Rebellion, 1000–1500*, eds. Scott L. Waugh and Peter D. Diehl (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 171–203; and Sylvie Duvall, “Mulieres Religiosae and Sorores Clausae: The Dominican Observant Movement and the Diffusion of Strict Enclosure in Italy from the Thirteenth to the Sixteenth Century,” in *Mulieres Religiosae: Shaping Female Spiritual Authority in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods*, eds. Veerle Fraeters and Imke de Gier (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014): 193–218.

**Table 1.** Communities of Roman *bizzoche* and their affiliation

Community	Date Established	Religious Affiliation	Comments
S. Apollonia	1282	Observant Franciscans	Part of the Congregation of Foligno. United with S. Giacomo delle Muratte in 1668. Became enclosed under Pius V.
S. Elisabetta in Trastevere	1288	Observant Franciscans	Also part of the Congregation of Foligno. Renamed in 1564 S. <i>Maria delle Scala</i> and became Carmelite.
S. Elisabetta in Ponte	Late thirteenth century	Third Order Franciscans	
S. Croce in Monte Citorio	1300	Third Order Franciscans	United with S. Bernardino ai Monti on December 10, 1668. Became enclosed under Pius V.
Monte Citorio/Monte Accettabile/S. <i>Maria delle Concezione</i>	1423, confirmed by Nicholas V in 1451	Third Order Franciscans	Split from S. Croce in Monte Citorio but reunited in the late sixteenth century.
S. Giacomo delle Muratte	1404	Third Order Franciscans	United with Ss. Trinitatis in Eustachio on September 11, 1579 and united with S. Apollonia in 1668.
S. Bernardino ai Monti	Early fifteenth century	Observant Franciscans	United with S. Croce in 1668.
Tor de'Specchi	August 15, 1425	Olivetian Benedictines	Became enclosed in the seventeenth century.
S. Monica de Martellitii	1431	Augustinian	Transferred to S. Lucia in Selci in the sixteenth century.
S. Cecilia in Trastevere	Early to mid-fifteenth century	Dominican	The earliest source I have found is dated May 11, 1448.
Ss. Trinitatis	1461	Third Order Franciscans	Renamed Ss. Cosma and Damiano in 1560 and united with S. Giacomo delle Muratte in 1579.

original archival research regarding eleven communities of Roman *bizzoche*, the *vitae* of late medieval, non-cloistered saints, such as Catherine of Siena, and synthesizing an array of secondary sources, this article argues that late medieval, non-cloistered religious women across Europe formed a shared identity through their choice of dress and their pious practices. Such an identity distinguished them from both laywomen and nuns, placing them in a liminal space and allowing them to thrive at a time of increasing suspicion of non-cloistered religious women.

## II. Status and Conformity in the Lives of Non-cloistered Religious Women

In the late Middle Ages, women's options for a pious way of life were many, even as the Church increasingly tried to regulate them. Women, whether nuns or non-cloistered

religious, were flexible in their associations with religious orders for their benefit.<sup>5</sup> Sometimes a woman or group of women would change their religious affiliation to gain more autonomy. At other times, a woman or group of women would choose to affiliate with a particular order only because they wanted to avoid accusations of heresy or immorality. The abundance of religious options along with flexibility in association means that scholars cannot rely on affiliation with a particular order to define a woman's religious sentiments. Rather, scholars should examine the practices that such women used to create a shared identity, such as dress and pious works. This shared identity allowed women in these communities and those who interacted with them to recognize that *bizzoche*, no matter what religious affiliation they had or where they were located, belonged to a broader network of non-cloistered religious women.

Many of the women who joined the eleven communities of *bizzoche* noted in the table above were from elite families. For example, Francesca's father and uncle were conservators (a high office to hold in Renaissance Rome), and her husband's family were *bovattieri* or prosperous cattle ranchers.<sup>6</sup> Other *bizzoche* also came from families tied to these careers. Many of the families of the *bizzoche*, and sometimes the women themselves, were registered in the elite confraternity *Societas Sancti Salvatoris ad Sancta Sanctorum*.<sup>7</sup> The members of this confraternity included cardinals, barons, and the urban elite.<sup>8</sup> The membership of relatives and, at least in one case, of a *bizzoca* herself, indicates that these women belonged to important Renaissance Roman families and thus could have made other choices for their lives rather than becoming a non-cloistered religious woman, and their choice of dress strikingly distinguished them from other elite Roman women.<sup>9</sup>

Elite women wore luxurious clothing to distinguish themselves from other social classes and to bolster the prestige of their families. In fifteenth-century Rome, as in Europe generally, clothing was symbolic, and an ordinary person recognized the status of others (either in person or in images) via their dress.<sup>10</sup> In Rome, as in other affluent cities, elite women wore especially elaborate items such as long cloaks, elaborate veils, perfumed gloves, and corked slippers. In a letter to Cardinal Giulio de' Medici of Florence in 1519, an anonymous writer described women attending a Pentecost Festival in Rome as wearing

<sup>5</sup>Catherine M. Mooney, "Nuns, Tertiaries, and Quasi-Religious: The Religious Identity of Late Medieval Italian Holy Women," *Medieval Feminist Forum* 42 (2006): 68–92. See also Katherine Gill, *Penitents, Pinzochere, and Mantellate: Varieties of Women's Religious Communities in Central Italy, c. 1300–1520* (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, Princeton University, 1994); and Alison More, *Fictive Orders and Feminine Religious Identities, 1200–1600* (Oxford University Press, 2018).

<sup>6</sup>Arnold Esch, "Santa Francesca Romana e la società Romana del suo tempo," in *Francesca Romana: la Santità, il monastero e la città alla fine del medioevo* ed. Alessandra Bartolomei Romagnoli (Florence: Edizioni del Galluzzo per la Fondazione Ezio Franceschini, 2009): 3–21.

<sup>7</sup>Pietro Egidi ed., *Necrologi e libri affini della Provincia romana*, 45 volumes (Rome: Forzani E.C. Tipografi del Senato, 1908), volume I, 331 and 425, and volume II, 483.

<sup>8</sup>Stephen Kolsky, "Culture and Politics in Renaissance Rome: Marco Antonio Altieri's Roman Weddings," *Renaissance Quarterly*, 40, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 49–90.

<sup>9</sup>Caterina de Horto, foundress of Monte Citorio, is listed in the *Societa Salvatoris ad S. Sanctorum*. See Egidi, *Necrologi e libri affini della Provincia romana*. Caterina's name is in volume I, 387 and volume V, 425 where she was listed as giving 50 florins, barley, and onions to the society.

<sup>10</sup>See Catherine Kovesi Killerby, *Sumptuary Laws in Italy 1200–1500*, especially chapters 2 and 6, and Gerhard Jaritz, "Social Groupings and the Languages of Dress in the Late Middle Ages," *The Medieval History Journal* 3, no. 2 (2000): 235–259.

golden dresses made of satin and velvet with pearls, gold, jasper, and carnelian jewelry.<sup>11</sup> By regulating dress, sumptuary laws regulated status by reinforcing social barriers to maintain the social hierarchy.<sup>12</sup> As the Church became increasingly restrictive for women, by the fifteenth century, most sumptuary laws in Italy regarded women's clothing rather than men's clothing or ceremonies and feasts.<sup>13</sup> Often, these laws used moral reasons for such restrictions and emphasized the need for charity rather than opulent dress, but the effect was to strip power.

In contrast, *bizzoche*, many of whom belonged to this elite Roman class insofar as their families were wealthy, opposed the social norms of class and gender by choosing an austere life of lay piety. However, even modest dress and good works posed problems for women in a time when appearing in public was considered disgraceful. For example, prostitutes could not legally wear veils, so women wearing veils technically could be considered respectable. In reality, however, there was no good way to police dress (thus the numerous sumptuary laws) so any woman on a public street was assumed to be dishonest. To mitigate this risk, the *bizzoche* adopted a particular style of dress to mark them as morally upright women. Such dress allowed them the freedom to engage in public charitable work without garnering a bad reputation. There remained, of course, some suspicion and hostility towards *bizzoche* as the adoption of simple habits by elite women could be perceived as performative rather than sincere. Although later than the period covered in this article, the satirical Protestant depiction of Rome in the *Mappe-Monde Nouvelle Papistique* depicts *bizzoche* counterparts in one of the provinces of Rome, the *pinzohcere*, in religious dress but with the faces of wolves, suggesting that *pinzochere/bizzoche* were not holy women but only disguised themselves as such to hide their true nefarious doings.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, as neither prostitutes, professed nuns, nor elite laywomen, the *bizzoche* were, in the words of Victor Turner, "betwixt and between all the recognized fixed points in space-time and structural classification" and therefore better able to navigate gender- and class-based restrictions.<sup>15</sup>

Precisely what style of dress the *bizzoche* wore would have largely depended on their religious affiliation. Of the eleven communities of *bizzoche* examined here, only Tor de' Specchi, affiliated with the Benedictines, left an extant rule detailing their dress and way of life, but we have surviving rules for the Franciscan and Dominican Third Orders as well as the Augustinian Rule. These rules along with notarial records, artwork, and hagiography provide insight into what these other *bizzoche* might have worn and what they might have practiced. One clue lies in the etymological connection of *bizzoche* and Franciscan tertiaries. Roberta A. McKelvie points out that the Italian

<sup>11</sup>The letter is quoted in Anna Esposito, "Donne del Rinascimento: affetti, desideria, aspettative, stili di vita (Roma e Lazio)," in *Donne del Rinascimento a Roma e dintorni*, ed. Anna Esposito (Rome: Fondazione Marco Besso, 2013): 159–182, 181–182.

<sup>12</sup>See Maria Giuseppina Muzzarelli, "Reconciling the Privilege of a Few with the Common Good: Sumptuary Laws in Medieval and Early Modern Europe," *The Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 39, no. 3 (2009): 597–617 and Muzzarelli, "Sumptuary Laws in Italy: Financial Resource and Instrument of Rule," in *The Right to Dress: Sumptuary Laws in a Global Perspective C. 1200–1800*, eds. Giorgio Riello and Ulinka Rublack (Cambridge University Press, 2019): 167–185.

<sup>13</sup>Catherine Kovesi Killerby, *Sumptuary Laws in Italy 1200–1500*, 112–113.

<sup>14</sup>The map is printed in Dror Wahrman, "From Imaginary Drama to Dramatized Imagery: The *Mappe Monde Nouvelle Papistique*, 1566–1567," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 54 (1991): 186–205.

<sup>15</sup>Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), 97.

Dictionary from 1925 has an entry that states “*Pinzochero-a* (It. *Pinzochero*, lengthened form of *Pizzoco*, that is, *Bizzoco*, a corruption of *Bigio*, from the grey dress of the Franciscans); devotee, one who wears a habit of an Order, but has taken no vows.”<sup>16</sup> While some *bizzoche* did not wear the grey habit of the Franciscan Order, it is possible that some of the women of the eight communities associated with the Third Order of St. Francis did so. In particular, the community of S. Giacomo delle Muratte may have worn the gray habits of the Poor Clares. Mariano Armellini, in his comprehensive study of the churches of Rome, stated that the church of S. Giacomo delle Muratte had a monastery of Poor Clares and a hospital of twenty *bizzoche* attached to it.<sup>17</sup> However, since these *bizzoche* were united with Ss. Trinitatis and later with the community of S. Apollonia, both of whom are indicated in several notarial records as Third-Order Franciscans, I have placed the community of S. Giacomo with these other *bizzoche* in regards to habit.

The eight communities affiliated with the Franciscan Order (S. Apollonia, S. Elisabetta, S. Elisabetta in Ponte, S. Croce in Monte Citorio, Monte Citorio, S. Giacomo delle Muratte, S. Bernardino ai Monti, and Ss. Trinitatis) may have followed the rule set forth in *Supra montem* in 1289,<sup>18</sup> which states:

Let the sisters also wear a cloak and tunic made of the same common cloth, or at least with the cloak let them have a black or white skirt or dress or an ample robe of hemp or linen, sewn without any pleats...Let the brothers and sisters, however, not use ribbons or silk cords. Let them have furs only of lambskin, purses of leather and the thongs made without any silk, and none other shall they have. Other ornaments of the world are to be set aside according to the salutary counsel of Saint Peter, prince of the apostles.<sup>19</sup>

The community of S. Elisabetta in Trastevere was dedicated to St. Elizabeth, Queen of Hungary. Since after the death of her husband, she took the habit of the tertiaries of St. Francis, it is most likely that these *bizzoche* did so as well. A seventeenth-century document cited by Armellini stated that the women of S. Croce in Monte Citorio wore the “abito di saia beretina.”<sup>20</sup> The only other reference to such a habit, that I have found, indicates that it was similar to those worn by the confraternity dedicated to the Stigmata of St. Francis.<sup>21</sup> In any case, whether the women of these communities wore a dress in the color of black, white, or the grey of the Poor Clares, the garments would have been plain,

<sup>16</sup>Roberta A. McKelvie, *Retrieving a Living Tradition: Angelina of Montegiove, Franciscan Tertiary, Beguine* (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 1997), 58, see note 10 of her text.

<sup>17</sup>Mariano Armellini, *Le Chiese di Roma dal Secolo IV al XIX* (Rome: Edizioni R.O.R.E. di Nicola Ruffolo, 1942), 351. Hereafter, *Le Chiese di Roma*.

<sup>18</sup>*Supra montem* was instituted by Pope Nicholas IV (r. 1288–1292). It is one of three options that members of the Third Order might have followed. The first option was the *Memoriale Propositi* written by Cardinal Hugolino c. 1221 and the third option was *Inter Cetera* by Pope Leo X (r. 1513–1521). Since the eight communities were founded between 1282 and 1461, it is most likely they followed one of the earlier two *Rules*.

<sup>19</sup>*Supra montem*, printed in *History of the Third Order Regular Rule: A Source Book*, eds. Margaret Carney, Jean François Godet-Calogeras, and Suzanne M. Kush (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 2008), 75.

<sup>20</sup>Armellini, *Le Chiese di Roma*, 379.

<sup>21</sup>Carlo Bartolomeo Piazza, *Eusevologio Romano: Overo delle opere pie di Roma, Accresciuto & ampliato secondo lo stato presente. Con due Trattati delle Accademie, e Librerie Celebri di Roma* (Rome: Per Domenico Antonio Ercole alla strada Parione, 1698). Volume 2, 27. “veste di sacco, e capuccio di saia beretina, simile a quello della confraternità delle Stimate.” I have not been able to determine what this looked like.

without pleats or ribbons or any other ornaments, and the very plainness of their attire served to distinguish them from other laywomen and protect their reputations.

The *bizzoche* of Tor de'Specchi wore the habits of the Oblates of the Benedictine Order: a black dress and white veil. Tor de'Specchi's extant rule is called the *Statutes of Ordinations for the Blessed Francesca*. These seventy-three statutes, according to tradition, were given to Francesca in November 1432 when the Blessed Virgin Mary and Christ told St. Peter to dictate the rules to Francesca.<sup>22</sup> Statute sixty-four concerns dress: "clothing should be worn this way: underneath a white skirt will be worn; on top of that, a black skirt and a belt of black rope; the cloth for coverings will be of linen; that is, bed sheets and edged cloth and other cloth for the head, and the woolen clothes as well as the others should be rough and not ostentatious." Further, statute sixty-six directs: "in folding the skirt, it should not have pleats. Said skirt should not be longer than 18 palmi from the foot, and from the head it should cover part of the neck so that it will be necessary to have a button on one side. The head cloth should not have pleats...there should be nothing on top of the veil...the head should be covered in such a way that nothing is visible beyond the forehead. No one should go out unless she has shoes on."<sup>23</sup> The dress of the Oblates of Tor de'Specchi would have been similar, therefore, to those who followed *Supra montem*: plain, black, and with no pleats.

The *mantellate* of S. Monica de Martellitiis were one of three communities affiliated with the Augustinian church of S. Trifone. They most likely wore the dress of other consoriorities of St. Monica, the mother of St. Augustine. This habit consisted of blue mantles, in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary, veils, and belts.<sup>24</sup> The will of Maria de Cenciis, the foundress of one of the other two communities affiliated with S. Trifone, references the habit of the sisters as a mantle, veil, and leather belt.<sup>25</sup> It is, therefore, likely that the *mantellate* of S. Monica wore the same.

The *bizzoche* of S. Cecilia, associated with the Dominican Third Order, probably wore the dress of a Dominican tertiary. An official Rule for the Third Order of St. Dominic was not approved until 1405. The Dominican Penitent Rule's instructions state that their dress should be made of "white and black cloth...which should be of no value...The mantle should be black...The tunics should be white, and their sleeves should reach the palms of the hands. The sleeves are to be cut narrow. Only leather belts should be worn, and the belts of the sisters should be fastened under their tunics...The veil and wimple of the sisters are to be made of white linen or hemp."<sup>26</sup> Thus, their dress resembled that of the

<sup>22</sup>Paola Vecchi, "La Congregazione delle Oblate di Tor de'Specchi nella sua origine e nella sua storia," in *Una Santa Tutta Romana: saggi e ricerche nel VI centenario della nascita di Francesca Bussa Ponziani (1384–1984)*, ed. Giorgio Picaso (Siena: Oliveto Maggiore, 1984): 457–469, 459. These statutes were revised (to include enclosure) and officially approved by Pope John XXIII on December 21, 1958 (Vecchi, 465).

<sup>23</sup>"Statutes of Ordination for the *Beata Francesca*," printed in Suzanne M. Scanlan, *Divine and Demonic Imagery*, 169.

<sup>24</sup>See Ian Holgate, "The Cult of St. Monica in Quattrocento Italy: Her Place in Augustinian Iconography, Devotion, and Legend," *Papers of the British School at Rome* 17 (2003): 181–206. Also see the bull of Boniface IX, *In Sinu Sedis Apostolicae* printed in *Bullarium Ordinis Eremitarum S. Augustini*, ed. Lorenzo Empoli, (Rome: Ex Typographia Rev. Camerae Apostolicae, 1628), 54. For an artistic depiction of these habits, see the *Saint Monica* altarpiece painted by Francesco Botticini at Santo Spirito in Florence.

<sup>25</sup>Archive General of the Augustinian Order (AGA), Fondo S. Agostino, C 10, f. 87v (Rome). "habitum dictarum sororum vel salcam cum supragetto in caput et corrigia pellectia cincta."

<sup>26</sup>*Dominican Penitent Rule*, in *Dominican Penitent Women*, eds. Jaiju Lehmijoki-Gardner, Daniel Bornstein, E. Ann Matter, and Gabriella Zarri (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2005), 48.

Oblates of Tor de' Specchi and those women associated with the Franciscan Third Order who followed *Supra montem*.

The habits chosen by *bizzoche* set them apart from other laywomen and created a shared affinity with other non-cloistered religious women. Current scholarship has unfortunately occluded our vision of this larger pattern insofar as it typically focuses on one or two communities rather than picturing the broader landscape of Roman *bizzoche* or even the broader phenomenon of European non-cloistered religious women. It is true that the eleven communities studied here could be distinguished by the habits associated with their affiliated religious orders, but while their clothing would have had subtle distinctions based on religious affiliation, to the common person, these distinctions would not have been clear. Rather, the similarities of the habits would have marked them as non-cloistered religious women, distinguishing them from other laywomen and providing them with respectability.<sup>27</sup>

Similarly, communities of beguines in Germany also developed a shared identity based on dress, particularly clothing color. Jennifer Deane explains, "In the north, for example, lay religious women were often known as 'blue sisters'... Elsewhere, the women were known variously as grey sisters, brown sisters, white sisters, and even black sisters."<sup>28</sup> As with Roman *bizzoche*, the habits of the beguines established an identity that separated them from other laywomen and also served as a legitimizing force for their public pious expressions.<sup>29</sup> Similar to beguines in northern Europe and *bizzoche* in Italy, Spanish non-cloistered religious women, such as *beatas* and *seroras*, also wore distinguishing habits. The Basque *seroras* were independent of the Third Orders, yet some chose to adopt Franciscan or Dominican habits to distinguish them as devout women who played central roles in caring for local religious sites and objects.<sup>30</sup> The Castillian and New World *beatas* also donned specific habits, which marked these women as different and were more important than any kind of vows, which they may or may not have taken. These examples show that the use of special habits to distinguish non-cloistered religious women and create a shared identity was not a phenomenon exclusive to Roman *bizzoche* and points to a broader European women's religious movement.

### III. Practicing Piety as *Bizzoche*

The clothing that *bizzoche* chose to wear marked them as different and created a shared identity as non-cloistered religious women, but they also shared a pattern of life that revolved around a particular expression of piety that was marked by Eucharistic devotion,

<sup>27</sup>The habit signifying community and respectability can also be seen in the Venetian context with *pinzochere*. See Jennifer McFarland, "Ties that Unbind: Proximities, Pizzochere, and Women's Social Options in Early Modern Venice," in *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance* 24, no. 2 (2021): 241–267, 253.

<sup>28</sup>Jennifer Kolpacoff Deane, "From Case Studies to Comparative Models: Würzburg Beguines and the Vienne Decrees," in *Labels and Libels*: 53–82, 72–73.

<sup>29</sup>See Alejandra Concha Sahli, "The Meaning of the Habit: Religious Orders, Dress and Identity, 1215–1650," (PhD Dissertation, University College London, 2017), specifically Chapter 3: Habit Envy: Extra-Religious Groups, Attire, and the Search for Legitimation Outside the Institutionalised Orders. See also, Susan E. Dinan, "Female Religious Communities Beyond the Convent," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, eds. Jane Couchman and Allyson M. Poska (Routledge, 2013): 133–146.

<sup>30</sup>Amanda L. Scott, *The Basque Seroras: Local Religion, Gender, and Power in Northern Iberia, 1550–1800* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020): 6.



ascetic practices such as fasting and flagellation, acts of service, and charity. Many of the *vitae* from women in the thirteenth to sixteenth century were marked by such practices. We know that women, both religious and lay, read and shared devotional literature, including *vitae* of saints. In this way, they drew on a shared repertoire from which they shaped their pious practices.<sup>31</sup>

For many holy women, Eucharistic devotion meant frequently partaking in the sacrament, sometimes living only on the Eucharist without other food. The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 required all Christians to take communion once per year at Easter. Pious women, both nuns and laywomen, desired to take frequent communion, and it is likely that Roman *bizzoche* also sought to do so. Francesca, for example, took frequent communion and often fell into ecstasy when visiting various churches in the city.<sup>32</sup> She was even able to tell when a priest gave her and her sister-in-law, Vannoza, unconsecrated hosts.<sup>33</sup> The priest did so because he did not agree with the frequent communion that the women sought. This denial of communion to women was a common theme in many women's *vitae*.<sup>34</sup> There were various reasons for the refusals, ranging from a fear that frequency would lessen the feeling of awe at the miracle of the Eucharist to the belief that, because holy women often went into ecstasy during communion, its denial would prevent such spectacles and preserve male authority.<sup>35</sup> In the case of Francesca, many of her ecstatic visions happened in churches, especially in the presence of the Eucharist. Her access to the divine through these visions gave her the ability to see the priest's intentions or even the priest's sins.<sup>36</sup> Women's access to the divine, through such mystical visions, was one way in which holy women could contest or even bypass priestly authority.<sup>37</sup> Like her dress, Francesca's visions, accessed through ingesting the Eucharist,

<sup>31</sup>See June L. Mecham, "Cooperative Piety among Monastic and Secular Women in Late Medieval Germany," *Church History and Religious Culture* 88, no. 4 (2008): 581–611. In fact, Mecham argues that "patterns of book ownership, book donation, and even reading habits thus indicate that by the later Middle Ages similar devotional texts and spiritual concerns shaped the piety of both monastic and laywomen" (609). We also know that women's pious practices were different than men's pious practices. See Katherine L. French, *The Good Women of the Parish: Gender and Religion After the Black Death* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 1.

<sup>32</sup>Placido Tommaso Lugano, *I processi inediti per Francesca Bussa dei Ponziani, 1440–1453* (Vatican City: Edizione Anastatica, 2010), *processo* of 1440, Art. VI, 18–21; Art. XXII, 49–50; Art. XXVIII, 60–64; Art. XXX, 64–66; Art. XXXI, 66–70; Art. XXXII, 70–72; Art. XXXIII, 73–74 and *processo* of 1451, Art. XVI, 233–234. Hereafter, *I processi*.

<sup>33</sup>Lugano, *I processi*, *processo* of 1440, Art. XLI, 83. "quondam presbiter ipsius ecclesie egre ferens et iudico temerario effectus, quod iste domine habentes maritos et divites, dicebat infrase admiratus quod iste tam frequenter veniebant ad communionem: 'quid est hoc quod divitiis affluentes mulieres totiens communicentur' et excogitavit nefandissimum nefas et cum more solito ipse domine venirent ad communionem ad eum, iste porrexit eis hostias non consecratas."

<sup>34</sup>See examples from the *vitae* of Lidwina of Scheideam, Margaret of Cortona, Ida of Lèau, and many more discussed in Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 228–231.

<sup>35</sup>Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 58, 230, and 238.

<sup>36</sup>In one instance, related in the canonization *processo* of 1440, Francesca saw a priest's sins (he had a concubine) manifested as a form of leprosy. Lugano, *I processi*, *processo* of 1440, Art. XLII, 84.

<sup>37</sup>For a discussion of how mystical visions aided in bypassing clerical authority see Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast* especially 227–251. Other scholars have emphasized that mystical visions, even when those visions criticize priests and the Church, served to reinforce ideas about women's weakness. For this kind of discussion see Diane Watt, *Secretaries of God: Women Prophets in Late Medieval and Early Modern England* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1997); Veerle Fraeters, "Gender and Genre: The Design of Hadewijch's Book of

distinguished her from other laywomen. They marked her as a holy woman who could participate in public charitable acts and inspire others to do the same.

Other Roman *bizzoche* did not leave records of mystical visions as did Francesca. Nevertheless, drawing on other types of sources, scholars can reconstruct how they might have interacted with the Eucharist. In the 1451 canonization process (*processo*) for Santa Francesca Romana, Margherita Martelluci, the foundress of *S. Monica*, testified that she saw Francesca receive communion from the prior of *S. Clemente* in the church of *S. Angeli* and the priest Giovanni at the church of *S. Maria* in Trastevere.<sup>38</sup> While this testimony does not indicate that Margherita also received communion on these occasions, probably she did so. If that is the case, then it could be that Roman *bizzoche* received communion at various churches throughout the city, no matter what religious affiliation it was under, reinforcing the argument that shared practices rather than religious affiliation connected these women. The eleven communities of *bizzoche* discussed here were spread throughout Rome in the neighborhoods (*rione*) of Monti, Trevi, Campo Marzio, Ponte, S. Eustachio, Campitelli, and Trastevere. Santa Francesca Romana lived in her husband's house in Trastevere until joining her community (Tor de'Specchi) located in Campitelli while Margherita's community of *S. Monica* was located in Campo Marzio. Examining this one case of Santa Francesca and Margherita at *S. Maria* in Trastevere provides insight into the geographic span and movement of these women within Rome and how location was not a barrier to the creation of a shared identity. The figure below demonstrates the geographic spread of these eleven communities.

The Franciscan and Dominican Third Order Rules detail interaction with the Eucharist for tertiary communities. *Supra montem* requires members of the Third Order of St. Francis to confess at least three times a year and receive the Eucharist.<sup>39</sup> While the Dominican Penitent Rule requires communion only four times a year, it states that "someone who devoutly desires to receive communion more often in the course of the year has God's blessing to do so after he has petitioned for and received permission from a prelate."<sup>40</sup> The *bizzoche* affiliated with the Franciscan and Dominican Third Orders also had models for taking frequent communion in figures similar to Angela of Foligno (1248–1309) and Catherine of Siena (1347–1380), who also often had ecstatic visions in the presence of the Eucharist. Such models mean that it is possible *bizzoche* affiliated with these orders also sought to deepen their connection to the Divine through regular communion.

Frequent communion and fasting usually went hand in hand because fasting was often seen as a way to purify the body and become worthy of receiving the Eucharist. Such practices can be seen in *vitae* from across Europe and across all forms of religious association.<sup>41</sup> Francesca was remembered for her fasting and bodily asceticism. From a

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Visions," in *Visions of Silence: Women's Literacy in a Men's Church*, eds. Thérèse de Hemptinne and María Eugenia Góngora (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004): 57–81; and Sara S. Poor, *Mechthild of Magdeburg and Her Book: Gender and the Making of Textual Authority* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

<sup>38</sup>Lugano, *I processi, processo* of 1451, Art. XVI, 234.

<sup>39</sup>*Supra montem*, 65.

<sup>40</sup>*The Dominican Penitent Rule*, 51.

<sup>41</sup>For example, fasting and bodily asceticism can be seen in *vitae* as varied as Marie d'Oignies (1177–1213), Catherine of Siena, Lukardis of Oberweimar (d. 1309), and Elizabeth of Hungary (1207–1231); See Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 200. Other scholarship on fasting and Eucharistic devotion includes Anne Jacobson Schutte, "Per Speculum in Enigmat: Failed Saints, Artists, and Self-Construction of the Female Body in Early

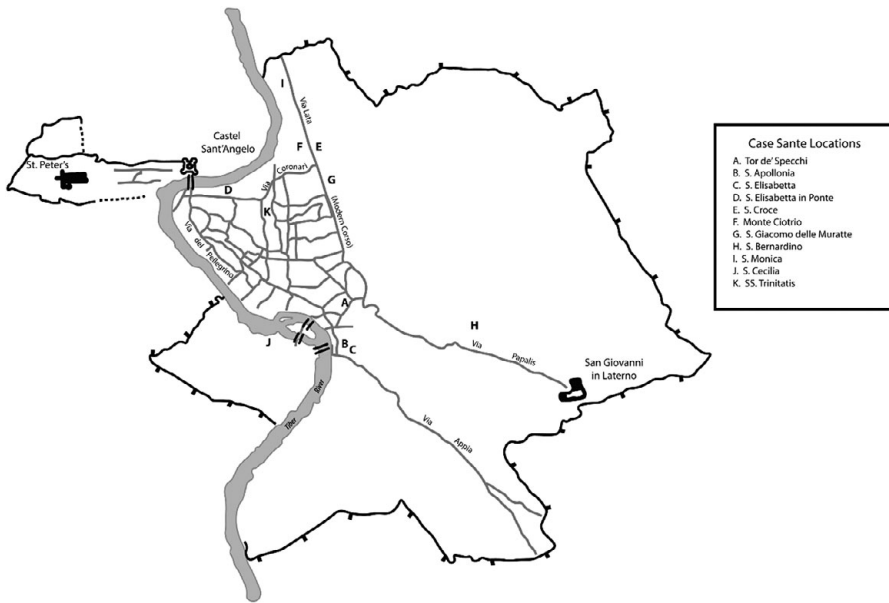


Figure 1. Approximate Locations of the Case Sante.

young age, and even while married, she was described as sleeping on the floor for no more than two hours a night. She mortified her body. She had strict dietary restrictions, only eating once a day and only fruit, herbs, and legumes without oil or salt, and she wore a sackcloth and an iron collar until her confessor ordered her not to do so.<sup>42</sup> Such practices align with the depictions of many other holy women in the late Middle Ages, including Catherine of Siena and Margaret of Cortona (1247–1297), lending credence to the idea that non-cloistered religious women everywhere imitated the models found in hagiography.

The Rule of St. Augustine, *Supra Montem*, and the Dominican Penitent Rule proscribe fasting for the sisters.<sup>43</sup> *Bizzoche* associated with the Third Order Franciscans and the Dominican Order of Penitents might also have followed the examples of popular holy

Modern Italy,” in *Creative Women in Medieval and Early Modern Italy: A Religious and Artistic Renaissance*, eds. Ann E. Mater and John Coakley (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994): 185–200; and Rebecca J. Lester, “Embodied Voices: Women’s Food Asceticism and the Negotiation of Identity,” *Ethos* 23, no. 2 (1995): 187–222.

<sup>42</sup>Lugano, *I processi, processo* of 1440, Article IV, 14–15 and Article V, 16–17.

<sup>43</sup>The Rule of St. Augustine states that one should “subdue the flesh...by fasting and abstinence from food and drink” (Ch. III, 1). *The Rule of St. Augustine*, trans. Robert Russell 1976. Accessed 8/25/2021, <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/ruleaug.asp>. *Supra Montem* states that “no less shall they observe the other fasts prescribed by the Church or imposed by the Ordinaries for common cause” in addition to fasting on Fridays all year long, and Wednesdays from All Saints to Easter, and every day “from the feast of blessed Martin until Christmas and from Quinquagesima Sunday until Easter, except Sundays.” (77). The *Ordinationes* states that “From Advent to the Nativity of the Lord, the sisters fast daily, and the same is done from the Quinquagesima to Easter Sunday. They always fast on Fridays. They observe all the solemn fast days that have been instituted by the church. If they wish to fast more, they may do so with a license from their confessor.” (44). The Dominican Penitent Rule states the same in similar language. (51–52).

women of those orders, such as Margaret of Cortona, Angela of Foligno, and Catherine of Siena. Margaret and Angela were loosely associated with the Third Order of the Franciscans.<sup>44</sup> Angela, in her *Memorial* written down by a Brother A., stated that, even while married, she “began to reject fine foods, fancy clothing, and headdresses.”<sup>45</sup> Brother A. recalled that Angela performed “harsh penances” for her sins although he did not detail what these penances involved.<sup>46</sup> Perhaps, like other late medieval holy women, she wore hair shirts or deprived herself of sleep. Margaret of Cortona is remembered as practicing “extended fasts.” Her *vita* states that, “she refused to keep for herself more than crumbs from her begging, giving the whole loaves to the poor.”<sup>47</sup> Catherine of Siena, as a young girl, did not eat meat nor drink wine. Her confessor and biographer, Raymond of Capua, recalled that “during all the time it was my privilege to witness her way of life, she took no nourishing food, either solid or liquid.”<sup>48</sup> While this statement is an exaggeration, it does convey that Catherine practiced extreme fasting. According to Raymond, Catherine also slept on planks without bedding, wore a hair shirt, and then switched the hair shirt for an iron chain. Similar to Francesca’s confessor, Raymond had Catherine stop wearing the iron chain as it “occasioned her great pain.”<sup>49</sup> Finally, as with Francesca, Catherine is described as depriving herself of sleep. Raymond stated that she slept only half an hour every other day.<sup>50</sup> Such ascetic practices served to connect the woman to the suffering of Christ, both mentally and physically and were believed to allow women, like Christ, to aid in the redemption of others.<sup>51</sup>

Hagiographical works, such as the *vitae* of Santa Francesca Romana and Catherine of Siena and even the *Memorial* of Angela of Foligno, were created to demonstrate the holiness of these women and aid in their canonization. Holy women served as models and examples for both religious and laywomen, even if they were not expected to go to the same extremes in their quest for holiness. We can assume, therefore, that while the *bizzoche* did not all practice extreme forms of asceticism, they probably fasted more often than a regular layperson. Fasting was one way in which women could partake in the suffering of Christ, which could aid them in becoming one with the divine. This oneness with God was a frequent theme in the writings of beguine mystics, such as Hadewijch of Brabant (1200–1260) and Marguerite Porete (1250–1310), demonstrating one probable connection between *bizzoche* and beguines.<sup>52</sup> Finally, asceticism was a marker of holiness for late medieval and early modern persons, and as women seeking to live a holy life,

<sup>44</sup>I say loosely associated with the Third Orders because, as Mary Harvey Doyno has shown, the Franciscans adopted Margaret of Cortona after her death as one of their ‘lay saints’ for their own purposes. Margaret did, however, seek advice from Franciscan friars and I thus include her as one of the models of a Franciscan holy woman. See Mary Harvey Doyno, “The Creation of a Franciscan Lay Saint: Margaret of Cortona and Her *Legenda*,” *Past and Present*, no. 228 (August 2015): 57–91.

<sup>45</sup>*Angela of Foligno’s Memorial*, ed. Cristina Mazzoni and trans. John Cirignano (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1999), 26.

<sup>46</sup>*Angela of Foligno’s Memorial*, 27–28.

<sup>47</sup>Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 142.

<sup>48</sup>*Life of Saint Catherine of Siena by Raymond of Capua*, ed. and trans. Conleth Kearns, O.P. (Wilmington DE, Michael Glazier Inc., 1980), 56.

<sup>49</sup>*Life of Saint Catherine of Siena*, 57.

<sup>50</sup>*Life of Saint Catherine of Siena*, 57.

<sup>51</sup>Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 207–215, 304.

<sup>52</sup>See Ashley Tickle Odebiyi, “Mechthild of Magdeburg, Hadewijch of Brabant, and Marguerite of Porete: The Annihilation of the Soul and the Challenge to Church Authority,” *Medieval Feminist Forum* 55, no. 2 (2020): 146–169. Specifically see pages 163–166.

*bizzoche* may have followed the models of these women and Francesca Romana and participated in such practices.<sup>53</sup>

A final characteristic that Roman *bizzoche* exhibited that demonstrates their piety was an adherence to poverty and service to the poor. Herbert Grundmann noted that it “was not lack of wealth but rather the flight from riches which precipitated [women’s] desire for voluntary poverty.”<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, Luigi Pellegrini argues that “radical poverty is the most striking characteristic of the female religious groups in central-northern Italy toward the end of the second decade of the thirteenth century.”<sup>55</sup> Although the *bizzoche* of Tor de’Specchi were born elites, on July 4, 1433, Pope Eugene IV (r. 1431–1447) granted them permission “to imitate the apostolic life” of poverty.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, we know that at least the members of Tor de’Specchi sought to live out this ideal of voluntary poverty. The canonization *processi* and *vita* of Santa Francesca Romana recalled that during a time of famine, Francesca opened the palazzo to the poor and gave out the food and all the wine that her father-in-law had been saving for the family’s use. He became very angry at her but, miraculously, Francesca caused the empty wine casks to be filled with even better wine.<sup>57</sup> Her selfless act was memorialized in one of the frescoes inside Tor de’Specchi. As an elite wife, Francesca was in charge of the running of the household. She was expected to ensure the provision of her household first before providing for those in need. Yet, as a *bizzoca*, Francesca’s duty was to serve God through serving the poor. The tension between these two duties caused some trouble within her household, but it is in these tensions that Francesca was able to demonstrate her power as an elite woman able to give the household’s wine to the poor and as a holy woman able to miraculously refill the casks. We do not know if other *bizzoche* from Tor de’Specchi also disposed of family property, but by choosing to live in a community focused on a pious way of life, they did renounce the extravagancies of their upper-class families. The *Statutes of Ordination for the Beata Francesca* advised that no member may keep items without permission from the president “otherwise she must give up that which she has and will fast on bread and water for one day, on the floor, having tied that which she has around her neck.”<sup>58</sup> The statutes, therefore, promoted restraint when it comes to personal property and encouraged the Oblates to shun excesses.

The other communities of *bizzoche* may have also adhered to voluntary poverty. If they wanted to do so, they had plenty of models, such as Margaret of Cortona, Catherine of Sienna, and Angela of Foligno. It is more likely, however, that they maintained their property and sought to live simply rather than in a state of radical poverty. Neither *Supra*

<sup>53</sup>The association between holiness and asceticism, especially for women, is well studied. For a nice overview of the association see Gillian T. W. Ahlgren, “Negotiating Sanctity: Holy Women in Sixteenth-Century Spain” *Church History* 64, no. 3, 1995:373–388, particularly page 378.

<sup>54</sup>Herbert Grundmann, *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages: The Historical Links between Heresy, the Mendicant Orders, and the Women’s Religious Movement in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Century, with the Historical Foundations of German Mysticism*, trans. Steven Rowan (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995): 83.

<sup>55</sup>Luigi Pellegrini, “Female Religious Experience and Society in Thirteenth-Century Italy,” in *Monks & Nuns, Saints & Outcasts, Religion in Medieval Society: Essays in Honor of Lester K. Little*, eds. Sharon Farmer and Barbara H. Rosenwein (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000): 97–122, 101.

<sup>56</sup>Placido Tommaso Lugano, “L’istituzione delle oblate di Tor de’Specchi secondo i documenti,” *Revista Storica Benedettina* 14 (1923): 272–308, Document II, 279–281. Hereafter, “L’istituzione.”

<sup>57</sup>Lugano, *I processi, processo* of 1440, Art. XII, 33 and Fr. Ippolito, *Pauca quedam de vita et miraculis beate Francise de Pontianis*, Vita II, lines 129–140.

<sup>58</sup>*Statutes of Ordination for the Beata Francesca*, number 4.

*montem* nor the Dominican Penitent Rule have any prohibition against owning personal property. *Pinzochere* in Venice associated with the Franciscan and Dominican orders did not adhere to radical poverty, and their belongings remained their own when they joined the community.<sup>59</sup> Although the Rule of St. Augustine states that members should “call nothing your own, but let everything be yours in common,”<sup>60</sup> this statute does not seem to have been taken literally by the *mantellate* of S. *Monica* as we know from testament documents that at least two members, Rita and Jacobella, disposed of their personal property to others, including other *mantellate*.<sup>61</sup> Some of the items in Jacobella’s testament included a house that was part of her dowry, a ring, a mantle, a dress, and a copy of the divine office. Many of the communities of *bizzoche* in Rome owned houses or land, either bought by the community or given to them by others in testament documents.<sup>62</sup> It could be that members, such as Jacobella, used rents from personal property to support themselves and the rest of the community during their lifetimes and thus felt that the command to hold all things in common was met.

Roman *bizzoche* also had a local model, Margherita of Colonna (1255–1280), who they could follow if they did not want to adhere to radical poverty. Bianca Lopez has argued that, among Roman elites, pious practices were associated with “almsgiving and endow [ing] churches” rather than the radical poverty associated with the Franciscans.<sup>63</sup> In Margherita’s *vita*, it was her virtues of “humility, nobility, and almsgiving, which carried specific connotations related to class, gender, and piety in the thirteenth century” that were emphasized.<sup>64</sup> Margherita used her dowry to provide for those in need and “even made loans (without expecting repayment) or provided anonymous funding for those who had fallen on hard times.”<sup>65</sup> So, rather than eschewing all possessions, some *bizzoche* may have chosen to follow a more moderate path, using their wealth and possessions in service to their communities. Such a path was in line with many beguines who integrated themselves economically into their local societies.

The *bizzoche* of fifteenth-century Rome also served the poor. In fact, Daniel Le Blévec has demonstrated that “feminine holiness and charity are linked.”<sup>66</sup> The canonization *processi* of Santa Francesca Romana depicted her and her sister-in-law, Vannoza, as frequently begging for alms and bread for the poor.<sup>67</sup> Additionally, Francesca and

<sup>59</sup>See Jennifer McFarland, “Ties that Unbind,” 250.

<sup>60</sup>*The Rule of St. Augustine*, Ch. I, statute 3.

<sup>61</sup>See the Testament of Jacobella at the Archive General of the Augustinians in Rome (AGA), S. Agostino, C. 3, pergamene 9 and the Testament of Rita AGA, Fondo S. Agostino, C.3, pergamene 40.

<sup>62</sup>There are several of these notarial documents contained in the Vatican Apostolic Library (BAV) VAT LAT 7953 volumes 1–3. For example, Ss. Trinitatis bought a house on June 12, 1497 in S. Angeli near the Jewish ghetto (BAV: VAT LAT 7953, volume 2, 114r). Another example occurred when S. Giacomo bought a house on June 7, 1514 (BAV: VAT LAT 79533, v. 2, 119r).

<sup>63</sup>Bianca Lopez, “Between Court and Cloister: The Life and Lives of Margherita Colonna,” *Church History* **82**, no. 3 (2013): 554–575, 557.

<sup>64</sup>Lopez, “Between Court and Cloister,” 558.

<sup>65</sup>Lezlie Knox, “Navigating Saintly Circles: Margherita Colonna and the Women’s Religious Movement in Rome,” in *Between Orders and Heresy: Rethinking Medieval Religious Movements* eds. Ann E. Lester and Jennifer Kolpacoff Deane (University of Toronto Press, 2022): 288–306, 298.

<sup>66</sup>Daniel Le Blévec, “Le rôle des femmes dans l’assistance et la charité,” *Cahiers de Fanjeaux* **23** (1988): 171–190, 176. “Il est frappant de constater combien sainteté féminine et charité sont liées.”

<sup>67</sup>Lugano, *I processi, processo* of 1440, Art.VIII, 23. “Et sepius propter sui infinitam humilitatem accedebat per Urbem ad domos alienas et elemosinas petebat, quoniam dictus frater Ypolitus deposuit quod pluries ad dictum monasterium accessit petendo elemosinam panis et habuit; similiter dicti domnus Franciscus, domna

Vannoza were remembered as serving the needy in the Hospital of Santa Maria in Capella.<sup>68</sup>

Other communities of *bizzoche*, such as S. Croce and Ss. Trinitatis, served the poor through educating young girls.<sup>69</sup> Educating young women was a common practice of female monasteries, as well as pious communities of beguines, the Modern Devout, and Spanish *beatas*.<sup>70</sup> This type of education could “include...instruction in foreign language...music, Latin, and, at least in some cases, Bible study, contemporary spirituality, and possibly even theology.”<sup>71</sup> The education could also include instruction in “the fundamentals of reading and writing.”<sup>72</sup> The young girls educated by the *bizzoche* were most likely from the upper and upper-middle classes. For example, one of the girls educated at S. Croce was Beatrice Cenci, a notorious noblewoman.<sup>73</sup> A testament concerning S. Giacomo delle Muratte indicates that at least some of the members of this community were also in charge of educating Roman youth.<sup>74</sup> In this document, the grandmother of Lavinia, Stratonica, and Calfurnie de Attavantibus paid the *ministra* with food to educate her grandchildren. Although outside of our time, an apostolic visitation to S. Apollonia in 1683 reiterated that the young girls the sisters were educating should “pay the monthly fee in advance and that those who defaulted had to pay or be sent home.”<sup>75</sup> It could be that S. Apollonia had educated young girls before the seventeenth century or it could be that since S. Giacomo delle Muratte was united with them in 1668 (see Table 1 above) that these *bizzoche* brought their practice of education with them to their new community.

Other *bizzoche* served their communities through caring for the poor. The *bizzoche* of S. Bernardino ai Monti took in poor and destitute spinsters and orphans.<sup>76</sup> Likewise, a testament involving S. Elisabetta indicates that they also worked with orphans.<sup>77</sup> Finally,

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Andreotia et domna Palotia deposuerunt quod pluries ad ipsarum domum accessit ad petendum elimosinam panis et habuit.” See also Art. VII, 22.

<sup>68</sup>This hospital was purchased by Francesca’s father-in-law in 1423. See Lugano, *I processi*, XXXV.

<sup>69</sup>Lino Temperini, “Fenomeni di vita comunitaria tra i penitenti Francescani in Roma e dintorni,” in *Prime manifestazioni di vita comunitaria maschile e femminile nel movimento Francescano della Penitenza (1215–1447)*, eds. Raffaele Pazzelli and Lino Temperini (Rome: Commissione Storica Internazionale (T.O.R.), 1982): 603–653, 625 and 636. Hereafter, “Fenomeni di vita comunitaria.”

<sup>70</sup>On beguines and education see Simons, *Cities of Ladies* and Miller, *The Beguines of Medieval Paris*. On *beatas* and education see Mary Elizabeth Perry, *Gender and Disorder in Early Modern Seville* (Princeton University Press, 1990), 100; and Jacqueline Holler, *Escogidas Plantas: Nuns and Beatas in Mexico City, 1531–1601* (Columbia University Press, 2001). Founded by Gerard Groote in the fourteenth century, the Modern Devout was a religious movement focusing on re-conversion through spiritual exercises, such as meditation on religious texts and focused prayer. For more on the Modern Devout see John van Engen, *Sisters and Brethren of the Common Life: the Devotio Moderna and the World of the Later Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

<sup>71</sup>Simons, *Cities of Ladies*, 82.

<sup>72</sup>Miller, *The Beguines of Medieval Paris*, 37.

<sup>73</sup>Beatrice was accused of murdering her father, Count Francesco and was executed by Pope Clement VIII in 1599. See Montenovesi Ottorino, *Beatrice Cenci davanti alla giustizia dei suoi tempi e della storia* (Rome: Optima, 1928).

<sup>74</sup>Vatican Apostolic Library (BAV), VAT LAT 7953, Part III, f. 166r. November 8, 1588. “Lavinia, Stratonica, et Calfurnie de Attavantibus eius nepotum dixit se solucis se alimenta pro toto tempore...causa educationis in monastero S. Jacobi...cum erat ministra sor. Virginia de Bonsignoribus.”

<sup>75</sup>Vatican Secret Archive (ASV), Congr. Visita Ap. 3, f. 298v cited in Alessia Lirosi, *I monasteri femminili a Roma tra XVI e XVII secolo* (Rome: Viella, 2012): 99.

<sup>76</sup>Temperini, “Fenomeni di vita comunitaria,” 642.

<sup>77</sup>BAV, VAT LAT 7953, Part III, f. 206r.

many *bizzoche* cared for the sick. Some of the duties of the consoriority of S. *Monica*, of which the *mantellate* of S. *Monica* de Martellitii were a part, “included visiting sick members, offering prayers for the souls of the dead, providing dowries for young women, and alms to the poor of the district.”<sup>78</sup> Since the *bizzoche* of S. Elisabetta in Trastevere followed the example of St. Elizabeth of Hungary, they might have undertaken the care of the sick as she did. Finally, Francesca Romana was remembered as healing the sick in many of the testimonies contained in the *processi* and her and Vanozza are remembered as serving the sick and poor in the Hospital of Santa Maria in Capella.<sup>79</sup> These examples suggest some of the ways that Roman *bizzoche* sought to serve their communities, and they demonstrate that these activities were broadly consistent with the practices of other groups of non-cloistered religious women elsewhere in Europe.<sup>80</sup> The *bizzoche* of Rome, like the beguines, embraced charitable activities as part of their pious practices.

#### IV. *Bizzoche* and Beguines: A Broader Lay Religious Movement?

The practices of Roman *bizzoche*—simple dress, Eucharistic devotion, fasting and bodily asceticism, and poverty and service to the poor—were also the characteristic of other non-cloistered religious women throughout Europe. Both beguines and *bizzoche* shared these core pious practices although the extent of such practices sometimes differed. The papal bull *Cum de quibusdam*, issued at the Council of Vienne and published in 1317, stated that the beguines wore special dress.<sup>81</sup> These habits, similar to those worn by the *bizzoche* in Rome, served to distinguish beguines from other laywomen and marked them as belonging to a community of non-cloistered religious women.

Pious practices also marked beguines as different. The famous beguine mystics Hadewijch of Brabant (1200–1260) and Mechthild of Magdeburg (1207–1282) wrote about their devotion to the Eucharist.<sup>82</sup> Jacques de Vitry (1180–1240) wrote in his *vita* of Marie d’Oignies (1177–1213) that he saw many holy women who, when they “received [the Eucharist] they took it not only as a refreshment in the heart but also received it in their mouth as a perceptible consolation, ‘sweeter than honey and the honeycomb.’”<sup>83</sup> Marie, often considered the first beguine, had a special devotion to the Eucharist. Jacques de Vitry recalled several instances of visions and ecstasies experienced by Marie during the elevation of the Eucharist.<sup>84</sup> Similar to Santa Francesca and other non-cloistered religious women, such as Catherine of Siena, Marie also practiced bodily asceticism. Jacques de Vitry related that she would “sleep on planks” and that “she took up the cross by chastising her body through abstinence and imitated Christ by casting herself down

<sup>78</sup>Ian Holgate, “The Cult of Saint Monica,” 194.

<sup>79</sup>See Lugano, *I processi*, XXXV.

<sup>80</sup>See for example Jennifer McFarland on Venetian *pinzochere* in “Ties that Unbind,” 246.

<sup>81</sup>*Cum de quibusdam* printed in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils: From Nicea I to Vatican II*, 2 volumes, ed. Norman P. Tanner (London: Sheed and Ward, 1990), vol I, 374.

<sup>82</sup>See Mechthild of Magdeburg, *Selections: The Flowing Light of the Godhead*, trans. Elizabeth A. Anderson (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2003). Book 5.23, 93–96 and Book 8.21, 127–128. See also Hadewijch of Brabant, *The Complete Works*, trans. Mother Columba Hart, O.S.B. (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1980), specifically Letter 22, 143–159 and Poem 16, 353.

<sup>83</sup>Jacques de Vitry, *Two Lives of Marie D’Oignies*, trans. Margot H. King (Toronto: Peregrina Publishing Co., 1998): 44.

<sup>84</sup>For one example see Jacques de Vitry, *Two Lives of Marie D’Oignies*, 103.



through humility.”<sup>85</sup> She also participated in extreme fasting, only eating once a day.<sup>86</sup> Finally, many communities of beguines in the Low Countries and in Paris practiced charity, taught children, and engaged in manual labor.<sup>87</sup> Using the example of Marie d’Oignies, Jacques de Vitry stated that she “busied herself as far as she was able in the external works of mercy. But in these works of mercy, she occupied herself above all in assisting the sick and being present at death beds for contrition or at burials.”<sup>88</sup>

While Marie d’Oignies and some beguines wanted to practice voluntary poverty, other communities of beguines in the Low Countries, similar to the *mantellate* of *S. Monica*, “did not condemn property per se, only its misuses and excess.”<sup>89</sup> In fact, social and class restrictions could prevent elite non-cloistered religious women from practicing the radical poverty of saints, such as Angela of Foligno and Catherine of Siena. Instead, the focus was on a humility that was enacted through giving alms and providing services to the poor, which “indicated a perpetual state of spiritual poverty rather than actual voluntary impoverishment.”<sup>90</sup> Thus, while pious practices—such as Eucharistic devotion, bodily asceticism, voluntary poverty, and service to the poor—connected these eleven communities of *bizzoche* and other non-cloistered religious women throughout Europe, the extent of such devotion and practice in reality could and did differ based on location, religious affiliation, and class restrictions.

Nonetheless, the commonalities in pious practices among non-cloistered religious women in Europe, both beguines to the north and *bizzoche* and *beatas* to the south, as well as the similarities across religious affiliation, indicate that the women’s religious movement was a broad one and should be examined across geographic space.<sup>91</sup> Yet, scholarship still tends to isolate the beguines from other non-cloistered religious women and vice versa. Doing so obscures larger issues, such as the collaborative relationships between pious women and male clerics and how pious women creatively negotiated a space to practice their way of life under increasing institutional restrictions.

This article, in examining eleven communities of *bizzoche* together and making comparisons with other non-cloistered religious women, not only reinforces the fact that common practices of dress, piety, and service connected pious laywomen across Europe but also demonstrates that broad issues of gender and class influenced the ways that non-cloistered religious women chose to enact their way of life. While the beguines of northern Europe and the Spanish *beatas* differed in some aspects from the *bizzoche* in late-medieval Italy, they also continued to share some characteristic practices—devotion to the Eucharist, asceticism, and service to the poor—that connected them to a larger women’s religious movement that cut across locale, region, and religious affiliation. Without an examination across these boundaries, one can miss the larger social and cultural patterns that existed in regard to women’s piety and practices. The beguines, similar to the *bizzoche*, were from elite families (at least at first). In choosing to dress simply or in a particular habit, *bizzoche* and beguines marked themselves as distinct from other elite women. In doing so, they were able

<sup>85</sup>Jacques de Vitry, *Two Lives of Marie D’Oignies*, 51, 58.

<sup>86</sup>Jacques de Vitry, *Two Lives of Marie D’Oignies*, 59–60.

<sup>87</sup>For the Low Countries see Simons, *Cities of Ladies*, 61. For more on the role of teaching see pages 80–82. For Paris see Tanya Stabler Miller, “What’s in a name? Clerical representations of Parisian beguines (1200–1328),” *Journal of Medieval History* 33, no. 1 (2007): 60–86.

<sup>88</sup>Jacques de Vitry, *Two Lives of Marie D’Oignies*, 86.

<sup>89</sup>Simons, *Cities of Ladies*, 66.

<sup>90</sup>Bianca Lopez, “Between Court and Cloister,” 559.

<sup>91</sup>Hebert Grundmann, *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages*, 82.

to transcend the boundaries of their gender and class that would have restricted their public presence, thus allowing them to practice visible acts such as begging alms and serving the poor. Further, while *bizzoche* and other non-cloistered religious women had access to examples of saintly women, such as Catherine of Siena, they did not necessarily practice the extreme asceticism and poverty associated with such women. Through comparison, it seems that the lived experience, especially with respect to poverty and private property ownership, was similar across geographic context—extreme poverty was not the norm but rather the focus was on avoiding excess and serving the true poor.

When taken together, these similarities, transcending geographic borders, are indicative of a broader social influence on non-cloistered religious women's lived practices. Their gender and class restricted the *bizzoche*'s ability to publicly practice their way of life since walking the street carried a risk to their reputations. However, with a shared repertoire of saintly examples and devotional literature and similar experiences as elite women, these non-cloistered religious women were able to use shared practices of habit and piety to craft a shared identity as in-between persons to mitigate these restrictions and expand their choices.