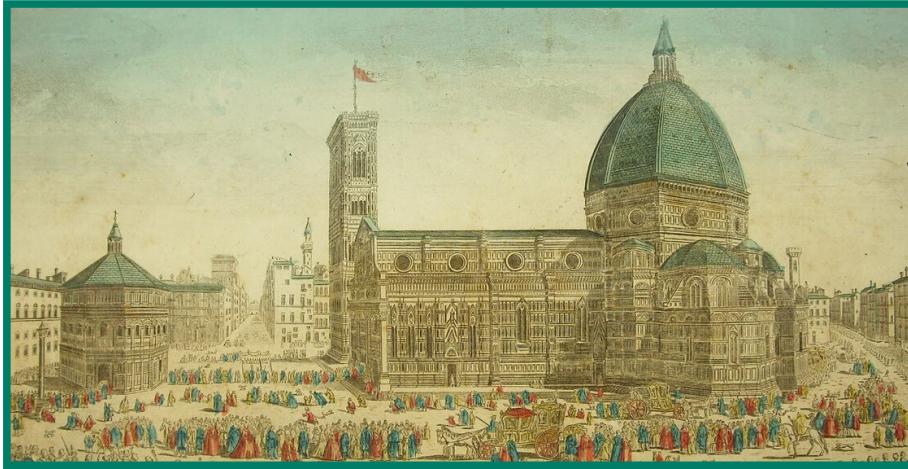


Pasquale Palmieri

# The Land of Devotion



Saints, Politics and Media Culture  
in 18<sup>th</sup>-Century Italy



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ASSOCIAZIONE ITALIANA PER LO STUDIO DELLA SANTITÀ, DEI CULTI E DELL'AGIOGRAFIA

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## Introduction

I have long tried to find a term that would faithfully describe the main protagonists of this study. To call them saints, blessed or venerables would be misleading, since I also encountered many friars, monks, priests, lay sisters and cloistered nuns in the course of my research who were never the beneficiaries of any official recognition from the Catholic Church and who were never raised to the glory of the altars; yet they were charismatic characters who lived in the Italian peninsula during the 18<sup>th</sup> century and revered as champions of the faith, although their fortune was at times short-lived or fluctuating. Some of them were prosecuted for crimes of simulation and condemned to exile or prison; others were quickly forgotten after their death. Only a few achieved canonisation or beatification.<sup>1</sup>

Revisiting their stories and the spread of their worship has allowed me to observe 18<sup>th</sup>-century society from a new perspective, revealing new continuities with the past that were at times just as important as the innovations. The changes that affected Italy (and most of Europe) at the time are for the most part well-known, being related to projects of political and social reform, to the spread of the Enlightenment, clashes between secular and ecclesiastic authorities, and power struggles between dominant factions. Secular governments managed to deprive the clergy of a considerable number of privileges and sought to enforce their newfound control on the religious practices of their subjects. The papacy lost part of its considerable

1. This book constitutes an updated version of crucial chapters excerpted from two of my monographs (P. Palmieri, *I taumaturghi della società. Santi e potere politico nel secolo dei Lumi*, Rome, Viella, 2010; P. Palmieri, *La santa, i miracoli e la Rivoluzione. Una storia di politica e devozione*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2012) and from other essays published from 2006 to 2013.



influence on the chessboard of international politics, with even its defence of orthodox Catholicism coming to a screeching halt, since the courts of the Roman Inquisition had been closed down or neutralised.

Scholars, however, are still less familiar with the ordinary inclinations of a large part of the population focused on defending their basic needs, on simple and consolidated religious practices, on their faith in traditional hierarchies, and on a worldview that encouraged tolerating earthly suffering and seeking happiness only in the afterlife. Their world was diverse and barely touched by secularism. It was a world that is often portrayed only in the background of historiographical reconstructions due to its fleeting nature and the tendency of this social group to leave few written records. The purpose of this book is to arrive at a deeper understanding of that same world through the analysis of devotional religious practices, looking at how religiosity was experienced, used, represented or even refuted at various levels of society, from the aristocracy to the poorest members.

I decided to call “aspiring saints” those individuals whose actions and words while still alive had the clear goal of producing a charismatic effect on devotees in order to be recognised as “saints” inside their communities, as can be seen in Chapter 1, “Living Like a Saint”. I borrowed the term “aspiring saints” from the successful title of Anne Jacobson Schutte’s book on the Republic of Venice, and it has allowed me to situate the experiences of these individuals within the wider scope of relations involving the aristocracy and the powers that be, as well as farmers, laborers, servants, artisans, merchants and beggars.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the Church began to regard these “aspiring saints” as “venerables” only after their death. Nonetheless, in this study I prefer to call them “candidates to sainthood”, as I address in Chapter 2, “Dying Like a Saint”. It is indeed necessary to highlight the practices of the people who created new forms of worship, acting like modern-day “influencers”, drawing attention to the so-called champions of the faith, collecting funds to support the exorbitant expenses of the procedures necessary for these champions to become “eligible” to be beatified and later canonised, a process that I explore in Chapter 3, “Writing About, Painting and Talking About Saints”.

Noting how socio-institutional mechanisms advanced in a dynamic relationship with the evolution of religious language, I have reevaluated

2. A. Jacobson Schutte, *Aspiring Saints: Pretense of Holiness, Inquisition, and Gender in the Republic of Venice, 1618-1750*, Baltimore-London, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001.

some crucial moments in the history of the Italian peninsula during the 18<sup>th</sup> century – dynastic reshufflings, famines, wars, uprisings, revolutions – that have traditionally been interpreted as points of tension between two opposing fronts: one pro-curial and conservative, the other secular and reforming. This bipolar interpretation is based on the contrast that evolved between the culture of the Enlightenment and the more intransigent Catholic culture, but it doesn't provide a comprehensive perspective on the problem at hand. I elected to explore the role of religious institutions within secular states to draw a more holistic picture of seemingly opposing features in a context that is characterised by a permanent juxtaposition of political and ecclesiastical order. In my research, I considered how Italian secular states sought to undermine the authority of the Church, wanting more autonomy in conducting political engagement independently of Rome – something that other sizeable Catholic states in Europe had already achieved – while never questioning the holy roots of monarchical power. The interest monarchs repeatedly manifested toward the supernatural, often branded as “fanatical” or over-the-top devotion, also advanced alongside a complicated process of reinforcement of those institutions that maintained their religious roots.

I would like to specify that the stories of aspiring saints and candidates to sainthood presented in this book have no pretense of being seen as exhaustive. I do not claim to offer a complete picture of the relationship between sainthood, politics and “media culture” in 18<sup>th</sup>-century Italy but to explore separate events in an attempt to provide a means of access to a society caught between the traditions of the past and new pressures for innovation. My decision to focus attention on the two different contexts exemplified by the Kingdom of Naples and the Grand Duchy of Tuscany emerged for very specific reasons. Not only are they among the largest “regional states” of the peninsula outside the Papal States, but the Kingdom of Naples and the Grand Duchy of Tuscany were also under the control of a branch of the House of Bourbon and a branch of the House of Habsburg-Lorraine, respectively. They were therefore part of the network of influence woven by powerful European monarchies, and these states developed two distinct projects of reform, both well-defined and – as we shall see throughout the book – centred on the quest for a new relationship between politics and religion.

More specifically, the cases investigated here show how Italian Catholicism was able to overcome the divisions between regional states

to elaborate an organic political project that would encompass the entire peninsula, based on the alliance between throne and altar, well before the fracture that would be caused by the Revolution. It is for this reason that I decided not to devote each chapter to a single geographical area, but rather to explore different contexts interconnected by a single perspective of analysis. I am aware that the reader might find the continual switching between Naples and Florence disorienting, together with the movement from the countryside of southern Italy to the port cities in the north. Yet it is a risk that I am willing to take, hoping that these different and delocalised contexts might help the reader understand how political and religious history in Italy must be studied holistically, while including regional nuances to arrive at a homogeneous picture. I wish to demonstrate how the new devotions of 18<sup>th</sup>-century Italy were effective in preserving the holy aura that permeated the monarchy and that contributed to strengthening the relationship between subjects and authorities. A sociocultural transformation of the concept of sainthood took place within this context, which was useful not only to react to the new theories introduced by European enlightened and anti-clerical ideologies, but also to defend the foundations of the hierarchical structures of the established world order.

There is one specific aspect that needs to be clarified further. A prevailing view of the age of Enlightenment as a stage for deep cultural, political and institutional transformations has often contributed to disregarding the analysis of a longer period of time, which would highlight what remained from the past. The fact that a great deal of Catholic propaganda, which took many forms, was actually quite successful has not been stressed enough. The stubborn attacks on enlightened reform and the defence of the role of the clergy within the state infiltrated the minds of many devotees and influenced the decisions of secular powers. For this reason, I wanted to include in the title of this book a fundamental concept of the wealth of ideas, symbols and images around which candidates to sainthood were created. The new heroes of faith were truly considered creators and guardians of a “land of devotion”, as well as irreplaceable cornerstones of the monarch’s power to bend subjects to his will. They were believed to possess an extraordinary ability to communicate with the poorest members of society, with people from the city and countryside alike, and most of all to be able to correct deviant behaviors. They conveyed a concept of the State founded on the cooperation between religious and secular authorities, as well as on the necessity of religious values to maintain social stability. They were surrounded by initiatives and

experiences of a conservative universe that deserves more attention on the part of historians because it contributed, in fact, to the persistence and strength of “ordinary” religion during the revolutions that took place at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, allowing for the uncontrolled spread of counterrevolutions (Chapter 4, “Saints of the Counterrevolution”).

### 1. *The role of saints: between institutional control and communicative needs*

In recent decades, the study of sainthood, cults and miracles has undergone significant methodological changes, in part due to the development of new research directions that have sought to shed light on the relationship between the religious sphere and the sociopolitical sphere. Within the historiography, more attention has been paid to the initial stages in the process of creating new objects of worship, and to their cultural value. The role of monarchs, religious authorities and the nobility has also been given added attention, including the effect of new forms of worship on the masses, who had a fragmented relationship with the written text and privileged the use of objects and images. *The Ashgate Research Companion to the Counter-Reformation* is an important collection created to describe the circumstances surrounding the art of studying the Counter-Reformation, focusing attention on domestic and familial devotions and the material side of a transformation that was not only expressed with words but that could be “heard, seen, smelt, touched and – perhaps above all – felt”.<sup>3</sup> Elena Bonora has firmly opposed this approach, emphasising the heuristic risks that can result from perceiving the Counter-Reformation as built almost exclusively from the lowest social circles. She has redirected our attention to the role of authorities who, albeit in a fragmented way, were able to carve their presence into everyday life – especially after the regulations introduced at the Council of Trent.<sup>4</sup>

Critical changes took place between the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, alongside the diffusion of models of

3. A. Bamji, G. H. Janssen, M. Laven, “Introduction”, in *The Ashgate Research to the Counter-Reformation*, ed. by A. Bamji, G. H. Janssen and M. Laven, Farnham-Burlington, Ashgate, 2013, p. 11.

4. E. Bonora, “Il ritorno della controriforma (e la Vergine del Rosario di *Guápulo*)”, *Studi Storici*, 2 (2016), pp. 267-295: 274.

religiosity proposed by Rome that affected the establishment, re-establishment or consolidation of secular powers. The centralisation of institutional authority in the domain of sainthood and the resulting claims of papal privilege in the matter led to a change in the process of canonisation, which started to feature procedures that were increasingly based on legal terms.<sup>5</sup> Historians, however, have pointed out critical issues in the analysis of the sources, emphasising the need to place texts relating to regulation and propaganda (hagiographies, treaties, decrees) side by side with other documents (mainly trial records, administrative papers, private correspondence, and most of all the exchange of news and directives between Roman dicasteries, churches, religious orders and missionaries). These texts can shed some light on disputes occurring within the Church, as well as on the relationship between the Holy See and local contexts, and on the dialectics between local forms of worship and the decisions reinforced by central institutions.<sup>6</sup> In this historical context, dicasteries such as the Sacred Congregation of Rites, the Congregation of the Index and the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars played a critical regulating role, along with the Congregation of the Holy Office and the local courts that were subject to it. The Church used this dense institutional network to establish its juridical authority over the lives of saints, the supernatural phenomena related to them and the spread of their worship.<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, the guidelines on devotion did not always follow the directives of the pope. Oftentimes, they were the product of hard-earned compromise between clergy and devotees, which progressively led to defining new balances.<sup>8</sup>

5. M. Gotor, “La fabbrica dei santi: la riforma urbaniana e il modello tridentino”, in *Storia d’Italia. Annali 16. Roma, la città del papa*, ed. by L. Fiorani and A. Prosperi, Turin, Einaudi, 2000; M. Gotor, “La riforma dei processi di canonizzazione dalle carte del Sant’Uffizio (1588- 1642)”, in *L’Inquisizione e gli storici: un cantiere aperto*, Rome, Accademia dei Lincei, 2000, pp. 279-288.

6. See M. Gotor, *I beati del papa. Santità Inquisizione e obbedienza in età moderna*, Florence, Olschki, 2002; G. Sodano, *Modelli e selezione del santo moderno. Periferia napoletana e centro romano*, Naples, Liguori, 2002; G. Sodano, *Il miracolo nel Mezzogiorno d’Italia nell’età moderna tra Santi, Madonne, guaritrici e medici*, Naples, Guida, 2010.

7. See Palmieri, *I taumaturghi della società*, pp. 12-21; G. Romeo, “La Congregazione dei Vescovi e Regolari e i visitatori apostolici nell’Italia post-tridentina: un primo bilancio”, in *Per il Cinquecento religioso italiano*, ed. by M. Sangalli, Rome, Edizioni dell’Ateneo, 2003, pp. 607-614.

8. Bonora focuses on the enduring importance and complexity of the concept of “negotiation” (see Bonora, “Il ritorno della Controriforma”, pp. 284-289).

In any case, the absolute priority for the Holy See was to prove the truthfulness of religious experiences which were sometimes based on mystical and visionary events that were difficult to decipher, such as types of worship not approved by Rome or built around relics of questionable origin. It is no coincidence that the Inquisition started to deal with the tricky issue of false sanctity – well known to scholars, although it could benefit from some updates.<sup>9</sup> A wide variety of practices were branded as heretical, as they only superficially followed the official doctrine. Judges were not only tasked with recognising true saints from fake ones, but with separating natural from supernatural phenomena, demonic from heavenly inspiration, and lastly, with distinguishing regulated worship – that is to say, recognised by the Church – from superstition. The goal of this repressive effort was to redefine models of Christian virtue and “popular piety” so that a definitive strategy could be employed to address the deep transformations that characterised European and non-European societies between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>10</sup>

At the strictly medical and scientific level, “new methods of approach to miraculous events” emerged.<sup>11</sup> Experts had to work side by side with theologians and *giusperiti* (jurisconsults) in security commissions created after the Council of Trent to investigate cases of alleged recovery or other phenomena that appeared inexplicable. Medical examiners played an increasingly central role in both canonical and secular trials.<sup>12</sup> Depositions

9. See Palmieri, *La santa, i miracoli e la Rivoluzione*, pp. 18-21.

10. See M. Caffiero, “Modelli di disciplinamento e autonomia soggettiva”, in *Modelli di santità e modelli di comportamento. Contrasti, intersezioni, complementarità*, ed. by G. Barone, M. Caffiero and F. Scorza Barcellona, Turin, Rosenberg & Sellier, 1994, pp. 265-279. The bibliography on “popular devotion” is extensive: the recent book by D. Menozzi, focusing on the political use of devotions, is required reading: *Il potere delle devozioni. Pietà popolare e uso politico delle devozioni in età contemporanea*, Rome, Carocci, 2022.

11. P. Cozzo, “Miracoli estremi. Prodigi accrescitivi e ricompositivi nell’Europa di età moderna”, in *Del visibile credere. Pellegrinaggi, santuari, miracoli e reliquie*, ed. by D. Scotto, Florence, Olschki, 2011, pp. 189-214: 203, “nuove modalità di approccio all’evento miracoloso”. In the same volume, see D. Quagliani, “I miracoli tra teologia e diritto”, pp. 177-188.

12. For more bibliographical references, see also A. Pastore, “Medicina, diritto e circolazione delle idee. François-Emmanuel Fodéré (1764-1835) tra Francia e Italia”, *Studi storici*, 4 (2016), pp. 725-752. On the relationship between science and the definition of the supernatural, we have extensive research, from both a historical and anthropological point of view: J. Duffin, *Medical Miracles: Doctors, Saints, and Healing in the Modern World*, Oxford-New York, Oxford University Press, 2009, pp. 101-111; P. Parigi, *The Rationalization*

and reports made by physiologists, surgeons, barber-surgeons, apothecaries and *comari* – professions belonging to a medical sphere “characterized by a diverse and heterogeneous array of tasks and competences” – helped to clarify the “causes, qualities, and gravity of the pathologies that the so-called *miracolato* [a miraculously saved person] had healed from”. They were therefore instrumental in proving the truthfulness or fabrication of the miracle.<sup>13</sup> Claims of supernatural intervention could not be made “in the absence of a previously demonstrated thorough understanding of the natural: only the direct experience of the laws of nature could grant someone insight into how supernatural phenomena might mysteriously defy those laws”.<sup>14</sup>

Nonetheless, consolidating the juridical bodies also led to intensified propaganda. As Miguel Gotor observed, the worship of canonised saints and the promotion of their miracles in the Italian peninsula was aimed at “celebrating papal authority” and at urging devotees to get closer to the

*of Miracles*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012; A. Coudert, *Religion, Magic, and Science in Early Modern Europe and America*, Santa Barbara, Praeger, 2016. On magic, the supernatural and the rationalisation of miracles, see E. Cameron, *Enchanted Europe: Superstition, Reason, and Religion 1250-1750*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010; J. P. Davidson, *Early Modern Supernatural: The Dark Side of European Culture*, Santa Barbara, Praeger, 2012; K. Edwards, *Everyday Magic in Early Modern Europe*, London, Ashgate, 2016; P. Scaramella, *Gli amici dell'aldilà. Saggi di Storia (secc. XV-XIX)*, Rome, Aracne, 2018; A. Laverda, *La nascita del sovranaturale. Storia di una separazione tra Dio e natura*, Milan-Udine, Mimesis, 2021; F. P. De Ceglia, P. Scaramella, “Introduzione”, in *I demoni di Napoli. Naturale, preternaturale, sovranaturale a Napoli e nell'Europa di età moderna*, ed. by F. P. De Ceglia and P. Scaramella, Rome, Edizioni di Storia e letteratura, 2022, pp. IX-XXII.

13. Cozzo, “Miracoli estremi”, p. 204.

14. *Ibid.* See also A. Burkarth, *Les clients des saints. Maladie et quête du miracle à travers les procès de canonisation de la première moitié du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle en France*, Rome, École Française de Rome, 2004; “Guarigioni mirabili. Medicina e teologia tra XIV e XIX secolo”, ed. by G. Fiume, *Quaderni storici*, 1 (2003); M. P. Donato, *Morti improvvise. Medicina e religione nel Settecento*, Rome, Carocci, 2010; M. P. Donato, “Medicina e religione: percorsi di lettura”, in *Médecine et religion. Collaborations, compétitions, conflits (XII<sup>e</sup>-XX<sup>e</sup> siècles)*, ed. by M. P. Donato, L. Berlivet, S. Cabibbo, R. Michetti and M. Nicoud, Rome, École Française de Rome, 2013, pp. 9-33; *Benedict XIV and the Enlightenment: Art, Science, and Spirituality*, ed. by C. M. S. Johns, P. Gavitt and R. Messbarger, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2016 (in particular R. Messbarger, “The Art and Science of Human Anatomy in Benedict’s Vision of the Enlightenment’s Church”, pp. 93-119; G. Pomata, “The Devil’s Advocate Among the Physicians: What Prospero Lambertini Learned from Medical Sources”, pp. 120-150; F. Vidal, “Modernizing the Miraculous Body in Prospero Lambertini’s *De Servorum Dei*”, pp. 151-176).

Church of Rome through lavish ceremonies.<sup>15</sup> Thus, the Church made a significant effort to control mystical and prophetic experiences, the organisation of sacred spaces and tombs, the production of iconographies, the management of rituals and the writing of biographies dedicated to those who exuded the odor of sanctity. At the same time, a pressing need arose to defend the lives of saints – even those who belonged to an earlier tradition of sainthood – from the doubts raised by Protestant and humanist critics. To this end, the inspection of the evidence certifying the alleged miracles became increasingly thorough, as witness reports were at times contaminated by an overactive imagination or ideas inspired by chivalric romance.<sup>16</sup>

This evidence might lead one to surmise that biographies of devout figures written according to the standards imposed by Rome became common, but that was not the case. Elements of “wonder” remained dominant in texts celebrating heroes caught between the sacred and profane. Armed with acute pedagogical minds, the authors of these biographies continued to expound upon episodes from the saints’ lives most likely to strike the reader’s imagination by infusing realistic and exemplary elements with flourishes of marvel and wonder.<sup>17</sup> The intermingling of devotional and literary genres continued unabated, often conditioning book market trends. It was an important and decisive phenomenon, since from the late 16<sup>th</sup> century ecclesiastical censors – along with secular censors in some Italian states – focused their attention on fiction too, as they believed it capable of corrupting the souls of devotees by leading them to confuse the natural with the supernatural. Epic poems of chivalric romance, adventure novels, vernacular translations of the Bible, tales of miracles and natural disaster came under the censors’ scrutiny due to the heavy presence of magical elements with their potential for generating “superstitious” beliefs.<sup>18</sup>

15. Gotor, *I beati del papa*, p. 39.

16. See especially M. Gotor, *Santi stravaganti. Agiografia, ordini religiosi e censura ecclesiastica nella prima età moderna*, Rome, Aracne, 2012; G. Fragnito, “La cultura ecclesiastica romana e la cultura dei semplici”, *Histoire et civilization du livre*, 9 (2014), pp. 85-100; M. Roggero, *Le carte piene di sogni. Testi e lettori in età moderna*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2006.

17. See P. Palmieri, “Educare, evangelizzare, divertire. Agiografia e romanzo”, in *Il libro. Editoria e pratiche di lettura nel Settecento*, ed. by L. Braidà and S. Tatti, Rome, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2016, pp. 263-277.

18. See G. Fragnito, *Proibito capire. La Chiesa e il volgare nella prima età moderna*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2005, pp. 133-259; G. Caravale, *L’orazione proibita. Censura ecclesiastica e letteratura devozionale nella prima età moderna*, Florence, Olschki, 2003,



How the transmission of the lives of saints, stories of miracles and relics took place is a topic that requires further research. This theme is particularly significant in the context of Italy, which differs from the rest of Europe. Italian textual culture was stuck for a long time between the oral and written tradition, characterised as it was by common practices such as reading out loud, preaching, recitations, the historical relationship of exchange between poetry and prose, the performative acts of actors and singers, and the evolution of sacred opera and drama. Through a hybrid orality, Italian textual culture was able to overcome the obstacles of illiteracy, poverty and the limited inclination to use books.<sup>19</sup> As Roger Chartier has ascertained multiple times, miracles – as well as other sensationalistic events – are often conveyed in low-priced and sporadic texts and ephemera that draw “their strength from situating topics and themes of universal interest in circumscribed and localised stories that are either transmitted before or contemporaneously with other more traditional oral and written genres”. These topics can stimulate “beliefs, obsessions, fears, and steadfast certainties”,<sup>20</sup> which is why we must understand their “functions, reasons and uses”.<sup>21</sup>

The worship of saints as a practice is related to the balance that characterised the relationship between the powers that be, cultural enterprises and the public in the *ancien régime*. Individuals and groups did not passively take in news; instead, they actively produced polyphonic stories with multiple authors, which today we would call participatory and “transmedial” productions. They added new narrative segments to the

pp. 63-69; Roggero, *Le carte piene di sogni*. On censorship and literature, see A. Prosperi, “Censurare le favole. Il protoromanzo e l’Europa cattolica”, in *Il romanzo*, vol. I, *La cultura del romanzo*, ed. by F. Moretti, Turin, Einaudi, 2001, pp. 71-106; G. Fragnito, *Rinascimento perduto. La letteratura italiana sotto gli occhi dei censori (secoli XV-XVII)*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2019.

19. The bibliography on this topic is extensive. Required texts for understanding this topic are: M. Rospocher, “L’invezione delle notizie? Informazione e comunicazione nell’Europa moderna”, *Storica*, 64 (2016), pp. 95-115; *Interactions Between Orality and Writing in Early Modern Italian Culture*, ed. by L. Degl’Innocenti, B. Richardson and C. Sbordoni, London, Routledge, 2016. See also *Libri per tutti. Generi editoriali di larga circolazione tra antico regime ed età contemporanea*, ed. by L. Braidà and M. Infelise, Turin, Utet, 2010.

20. R. Chartier, “Gli usi dei miracoli”, in R. Chartier, *La rappresentazione del sociale. Saggi di storia culturale*, Turin, Bollati Boringhieri, 1989, pp. 126-167: 160.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 127.

main plots, expanding the mythical universes that surrounded their heroes of faith or the supernatural phenomena they engendered.<sup>22</sup> What mattered most was the participation of devotees, which was capable of influencing the decisions and inclinations of the powers that be. Consequently, we should seek to understand not only how people read or listened to hagiographies, homilies and devotional texts, but also how they spoke about saints, how they addressed them in worship and even how they insulted them when they vented emotions, expectations and fears. Achieving this goal is far from easy, since oral discourse does not leave behind tangible evidence that historians can analyse. For this reason, we must try to “listen to the dead with [our] eyes” and understand how texts, images and objects interacted with gestures, voices and mere thoughts.<sup>23</sup>

## 2. *Devotional practices and local/national identities*

The dialectics of universalism and particularism consistently present in devotional literature in both the early and late modern periods is another topic worthy of attention. Despite the efforts of the Church of Rome to overcome particularism when it came to cultural and national identity, localised social structures and Catholic institutions still influenced the production of hagiographical collections and miracle narratives.<sup>24</sup> It is no coincidence that many hagiographies featured introductory accounts of the history of one specific region, “consecrated by the passage of saints or the presence of their bodies”, albeit lacking established legal traditions or social institutions.<sup>25</sup> The authors of these collections were often providing

22. See H. Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, New York, New York University Press, 2006; *The Routledge Companion to Transmedia Studies*, ed. by M. Freeman and R. Rampazzo Gambarato, New York-London, Routledge, 2019; P. Bertetti, *Che cos'è la transmedialità*, Rome, Carocci, 2021.

23. See R. Chartier, *The Author's Hand and the Printer's Mind*, New York, John Wiley & Sons, 2013.

24. See Palmieri, *I taumaturghi della società*, pp. 21-28.

25. R. Michetti, “Introduzione”, in *Europa sacra. Raccolte agiografiche e identità politiche in Europa fra Medioevo ed età Moderna*, ed. by S. Boesch Gajano and R. Michetti, Rome, Viella, 2002, p. 21. On hagiographical collections, see *Raccolte di vite di santi dal XIII al XVIII secolo. Strutture, messaggi, fruizioni*, ed. by S. Boesch Gajano, Fasano di Brindisi, Schena, 1990; *Erudizione e devozione. Le raccolte di vite di santi in età moderna e contemporanea*, ed. by G. Luongo, Rome, Viella, 2000.

their services to princes, noble families or secular authorities; in their attempts to juggle competing demands for power legitimation, many of which came directly from the centralising ambitions of the Holy See, they showed a strong affiliation with the local clergy, especially religious orders.<sup>26</sup> While the production of hagiographies was undeniably influenced by the persistent strategy of control employed by papal congregations that supported the plan to create more uniform models, it is also true that local realities were able to resist this approach, especially in contexts where the various familial dynasties were actively trying to “confer a holier quality on the new organisation of the state”.<sup>27</sup>

Hagiographical developments helped define the identity of a territory, overcoming the obstacles represented by family feuds and conflicts within communities and dominant groups, mending the tears of factual history in a unifying picture that was consistent with the providential theme of *historia salutis*.<sup>28</sup> The well-known case of the Holy Shroud is useful for understanding this thematic twist as a disputed relic that is still put on display for devotees to venerate, despite being proven a fake.<sup>29</sup> The Dukes of Savoy thus transformed the Holy Shroud into a defining element of their holy lineage. Between the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the marketing of a specific “devotional language” related to the shroud that extolled the virtues of their dynastic tradition in tandem with the assimilation of the local impulses found within their territories became a distinctive element in the consolidation of their role in European geopolitics.<sup>30</sup>

Faced with these issues, researchers have had to reenact the patterns of religious tradition together with the fundamental mechanisms of

26. See R. Rusconi, “Scrittura agiografica e stati nazionali”, in *Europa sacra*, pp. 393-395.

27. Michetti, “Introduzione”, p. 22.

28. S. Cabibbo, “Locale, nazionale, sovranazionale. Qualche riflessione sulle raccolte agiografiche di età moderna”, in *Europa sacra*, pp. 397-402.

29. See A. Nicolotti, *I Templari e la Sindone. Storia di un falso*, Rome, Salerno, 2011; *Sindone. Storia e leggende di una reliquia controversa*, Turin, Einaudi, 2015; *Il processo negato. Un inedito parere della Santa Sede sull'autenticità della Sindone*, Rome, Viella, 2015.

30. See P. Cozzo, *La geografia celeste dei duchi di Savoia: religione, devozioni e sacralità in uno stato di età moderna (secoli XVI-XVII)*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2006, p. 18. See also P. Cozzo, “Santi, principi e guerrieri. Modelli agiografici e strategie politiche nel ducato sabauda di prima età moderna”, in *Monasticum regnum. Religione e politica nelle pratiche di governo tra medioevo ed età moderna*, ed. by G. Andenna, L. Gaffuri and E. Filippini, Münster, Lit Verlag, 2015, pp. 85-96.

political life, such as the relationship between monarchs and ministries, interconnections based on protection and solidarity, and the more general process of sanctifying political power. While secular power continued to play an important role in canonisation, the pontifical mission of selecting and directing the worship of saints was another area of conflict and tension between the Church and other states in the early modern period.<sup>31</sup> However, during the papacy of Urban VIII (1623-1644), it was feared that the element of sanctity would be used by secular powers as a political tool to curb papal control over what was considered sacred. This led to a reduction in the number of requests advanced by monarchs to initiate new processes of canonisation.<sup>32</sup>

Along the axis of the relationship between religion, politics and society the possibility of developing historiographical itineraries focused on sanctity and the many answers it may still yield endures. Despite the attempts of the Church of Rome to centralise the sacred, saints still manifested qualities that were tied to their place of origin. They functioned within a localised network of earthly protections, which could be acquired in the “same way one obtains financial resources” or through a “system of gifts that triggered a requisite for reciprocity” and that also regulated “relations and careers at court”.<sup>33</sup> Promoting the worship of a saint involved legitimising, supporting and strengthening specific individuals or social groups that were sometimes easily identifiable. It also required endorsing an institution and manipulating large segments of society through the spread of messages that could affect both individual behavior and the dynamics of collective governing. The figure of the saint represented at once change and preservation; saints became catalysts for hope, embodying a type of charisma that devotees ascribed to them. Devotees themselves had faith in their miraculous capabilities, their supernatural qualities or simply the comforting power of their preaching.

31. See M. Caffiero, “Santità, politica, sistemi di potere”, in *Santità, culti, agiografia. Temi e prospettive. Atti del I convegno dell'Associazione italiana per lo studio della santità, dei culti, dell'agiografia*, ed. by S. Boesch Gajano, Rome, Viella, 1997, pp. 364-372.

32. For an overview, see M. Gotor, *Chiesa e santità nell'Italia moderna*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 2004.

33. Caffiero, “Santità, politica, sistemi di potere”, p. 369.

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## Abbreviations

ASA	Archivio di Stato di Arezzo
ACDF	Archivio della Congregazione per la Dottrina della Fede
ASAF	Archivio Storico Arcidiocesano di Firenze
ASDA	Archivio Storico Diocesano di Arezzo
ASDC	Archivio Storico Diocesano di Capua
ASDN	Archivio Storico Diocesano di Napoli
ASF	Archivio di Stato di Firenze
ASN	Archivio di Stato di Napoli
ASN, MAEc	Archivio di Stato di Napoli, Ministero degli Affari Ecclesiastici
ASV	Archivio Segreto Vaticano
BMCC	Biblioteca del Museo Campano di Capua
BSNSP	Biblioteca della Società Napoletana di Storia Patria
DBI	<i>Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani</i>



# 1. Living Like a Saint

## 1. *Displays of devotion in the court of Charles of Bourbon and Maria Amalia of Saxony*

In recent decades, the historiography of the Mezzogiorno in the early modern period has dedicated considerable attention to the interpenetration of religious and political spheres, looking not only at the relationship between secular and ecclesiastical authorities but also at pronounced tensions between families, social classes, guilds, communities and local and centralised powers. Disputes between these diverse social groups were centred on the control of religious institutions, rituals, worship, holidays, anniversaries and, not least of all, mechanisms for the promotion and recognition of old and new saints. This therefore concerns a matter that cannot simply be explained by the debate between continuity and change, secularisation and confessionalisation, centralisation and particularisation, or between what is “cultured” and what is “popular”. Without a doubt, some lines of evolution must be read within the wider context of the redefinition of a political identity that, despite having developed in preceding centuries, experienced a crucial evolutionary phase in the 1700s. While Enlightenment thought and projects of reform expanded to draw new spaces of autonomy for the State, Catholic monarchies were very cautious in managing their relations with the Roman Church, continuing to put pressure on the faith to maintain a preeminent role on the cultural horizon of their subjects.<sup>1</sup>

1. See P. Palmieri, *La terra dell'obbedienza. Aspiranti santi e potere politico nel Regno di Napoli (secoli XVIII-XIX)*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Università degli Studi di Napoli “Federico II”, 2007, pp. 19-102.



For quite some time the Mezzogiorno had filled the role of “a political and religious outpost” of the European continent at the heart of the Mediterranean, maintaining a strategic position within the equilibrium of a vast area from Spain to Anatolia, passing through northern Africa.<sup>2</sup> It had long remained under the control of the Spanish crown and, after a brief period of Austrian domination, it earned its dynastic autonomy in 1734 under Charles of Bourbon. Thus, Naples no longer had a viceroy, but its own king and ruling family. The inhabitants of the capital city tallied more than 300,000, and it was a gathering point for merchants, diplomats, consuls, spies, slaves and preachers. Hidden throughout were also shrewd liars who would acquire the identities of others in their hunt for riches or notoriety. All of these figures contributed to the uncontrolled diffusion of false information and legends, in some cases shaped by established powers, but also frequently manipulated by agents who remained in the shadows, taking advantage of communications to defend private interests, commissioned on behalf of influential individuals or factions. Between the governing handshakes of established powers and the participatory needs of the population, increasingly lively debates regarding crime, invasions, scandals, discoveries, miracles and natural catastrophes were taking shape. Within this communicative ecosystem – spread via speech, writing and the visual and performing arts – various aspiring saints were also mobilised, concretely influencing judicial practices, reinforcing or weakening dominant stereotypes and building consensus for the actualisation of economic, political and religious strategies.

From the moment he arrived, Charles of Bourbon made a new push to reinforce monarchical power by seeking to reshape ecclesiastical and aristocratic privileges. Through various provisions, he demonstrated his desire to limit ecclesiastical control over fairs and markets, land ownership, agricultural activities and girls’ schools. In 1741 he stipulated an agreement with the Holy See to regulate controversial matters related to heresy, blasphemy, polygamy, the validity of marriage, adultery, concubinage, beneficiary issues and public scandals. Five years later, in 1746, he prohibited judicial cases conducted by the Holy Office, rendering them effectively impossible to carry out within the entire kingdom.<sup>3</sup>

2. A. M. Rao, “Conclusion: Why Naples’s History Matters”, in *A Companion to Early Modern Naples*, ed. by T. Astarita, Boston-Leiden, Brill, 2013, p. 477.

3. See P. Palmieri, “Il lento tramonto del Sant’Uffizio. La giustizia ecclesiastica nel Regno di Napoli durante il secolo XVIII”, *Rivista storica italiana*, 123 (2011), pp. 26-60.

Nonetheless, the efforts of the sovereign did not produce the hoped-for results as it came against resistance from dominant social groups: papal influence remained strong in the Mezzogiorno, much like the power of the entire ecclesiastical body.

Jurisdictional politics aside, “widespread manifestations of devotional sensitivity” on the part of rulers were not excluded from possibility.<sup>4</sup> This was in fact exemplified by the queen, Maria Amalia of Saxony, herself. On 4 July 1738, Charles of Bourbon, accompanied by his wife, entered the capital and received tributes from the aristocracy, civil and military authorities, and the people. The affable character of the young queen conquered even the poor, who – according to influential Tuscan minister Bernardo Tanucci, operating in his capacity as minister of justice and of the state – loved her “tenderly”. However, the parlors of the aristocrats were animated by entirely different discussions. Tanucci himself confirmed it on 22 April 1738: “Nothing else is spoken of now but the changes that will take place in the court following the arrival of the Queen; they’re already calculating which ministers and courtiers will have to fall as a result of the Reform”.<sup>5</sup>

Tensions owing to the persistent presence of Austrian and Spanish factions were accompanied by the need to reorganise the ranks of the privileged bodies and reinforce loyalty to the crown. One important testing ground was the composition of the queen’s new entourage, instilled with a standard of equilibrium, though the presence of diverging interests inflamed a bitter competition to capture the heart of Maria Amalia.<sup>6</sup> From

4. A. M. Rao, “Corte e paese: il Regno di Napoli dal 1734 al 1806”, in *All’ombra della corte. Donne e potere nella Napoli borbonica*, ed. by M. Mafrici, Naples, Fridericiana Editrice Universitaria, 2010, pp. 11-30: 18. The bibliography on queens and queenship in the early modern period is vast. See at least, also for further bibliographical information: *Queenship in the Mediterranean*, ed. by E. Woodacre, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013; *Queens Matter in Early Modern Studies*, ed. by A. Riehl Bertolet, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2017; C. Beem, *Queenship in Early Modern Europe*, London, Bloomsbury, 2019.

5. B. Tanucci, *Epistolario. Vol. I (1723-1746)*, ed. by R. P. Coppini, L. Del Bianco and R. Nieri, Rome, Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1980, to Father Ascanio, member of the clergy and diplomatic representative of the Spanish court in Florence, 22 April 1738, pp. 270-271: “Ormai non si parla d’altro che delle mutazioni che seguiranno nella corte la venuta della Regina, già si contano i ministri e i cortigiani che dovranno cadere nella Riforma”.

6. See R. Ajello, “La vita politica napoletana sotto Carlo di Borbone. ‘La fondazione ed il tempo eroico della dinastia’”, in *Storia di Napoli*, vol. VII, Naples, Soc. Editrice

the start, she revealed herself to be sensitive to those who demonstrated their religiosity in public, displaying at times a high degree of performative devotion, without fear of incurring accusations of hypocrisy.

As to the rest, Maria Amalia was inclined towards particularly explicit external demonstrations herself, bordering at times on genuine religious enthusiasm. With “exemplary piety” she participated in sacred “rituals” during holy days and festivals, showing off her devotion to the Infant Jesus and the saints. The pre-Christmas period was of utmost importance to her, and she personally dedicated herself to the preparation of the nativity scene with maniacal commitment. Additionally, she offered great esteem to those most cunning in the court, who generously lent themselves to revealing obscure prophecies or showing off miraculous transformations.<sup>7</sup> An eloquent example is that of Niccolò Mira, president of the Sicilian consistory, who usually took communion “publicly”, showing himself “in ecstasy and transported into the bosom of divinity”. Mariano Naselli, a prince of Aragon (and brother to royal majordomo Baldassarre), had a similar propensity, making “profane use of religion without taking care to hide it”, as Tanucci would write in September of 1746.<sup>8</sup>

In the preceding years, the duke of Losada, Giuseppe Miranda, had grown his power by taking preliminary steps to establish an alliance with Francesco d’Eboli, the duke of Castropignano, who did not lack for an ambiguous disposition. Strong in his role as an army commander, Castropignano had earned positions in the aristocratic hierarchy and hoped to replace Bartolomeo Corsini in his role as viceroy of Sicily. To achieve this, he could count on plots outlined by his wife, Zenobia Revertera, a lady capable of trampling under foot all her rivals at court to rise to the top of Queen Maria Amalia’s list of preferred ladies in waiting.<sup>9</sup>

Storia di Napoli, 1972, pp. 678-680; *Carlo di Borbone. Lettere ai sovrani di Spagna. vol. II (1735-1739)*, ed. by I. Ascione, Rome, Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali, Direzione generale degli Archivi, 2002, p. 278.

7. B. Tanucci, *Epistolario. Vol. IV (1756-1757)*, ed. by L. Del Bianco, Rome, Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1984, to the Duke of S. Elisabetta, 5 April 1757, p. 484: “esemplare pietà”, “funzioni”.

8. B. Tanucci, *Epistolario. Vol. II (1746-1752)*, ed. by R. P. Coppini and R. Nieri, Rome, Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1980, to Bartolomeo Corsini, 10 September 1746, pp. 118-119: “pubblicamente”, “rapito e trasportato nel seno della divinità”, “uso profano della religione senza alcuna cura di nascondarlo”.

9. Tanucci, *Epistolario. Vol. I*, to Corsini, 11 May 1743, p. 693.

Despite his bias, Bernardo Tanucci's perspective remains fundamental to our ability to understand not only the intricate ties that animated the Bourbon court, but also the atmosphere that prevailed in an environment characterised by the unrestrained exercise of artful deceit.<sup>10</sup> In his letters, the minister would describe the Castropignanos as a corrupt house, drowning in debt and suspected of ties with foreign spies. Nonetheless, the power of Duke Francesco d'Eboli was built on solid foundations.<sup>11</sup> During the brief Austrian viceroyalty (1707-1734), the nobleman had moved to Spain and, by virtue of his belonging to a house with ancient roots, had earned the trust of Charles of Bourbon. After a year of carrying out the role of Neapolitan ambassador in Paris, he made his return to the kingdom, conquering a command post in the Bourbon military and entering into a role at the Council of State.

The fact that Duchess Zenobia Revertera "demanded the moon and more for her husband" is therefore unsurprising. Still, Charles decided not to accede to these requests, probably for reasons of prudence, or perhaps because his collaborators dissuaded him from turning Sicily over to the Castropignanos. This decision provoked "unthinkable melancholy" in the queen, who, after having brought a masculine heir into the world (Philip, born in June 1747), had greatly grown her power by becoming an active part of the government, intervening in all the most important decisions and "energetically inserting herself into discussions on all matters".<sup>12</sup> From her corner, Zenobia did not become discouraged. Ostentatious devotional behavior took on a central role in her strategies. She stubbornly continued to parade a "charged, physical religion", a strategy typical of those "without merit" who wished to stand out. She spoke to the queen of "miracles and celestial life". She convinced her to accept as confessor the Jesuit father Saverio Savastano, "her creation and ally". She went so far as to lead her to "holy" women who claimed to be armed with supernatural gifts.<sup>13</sup>

10. Tanucci, *Epistolario. Vol. II*, to Corsini, 10 September 1746, pp. 118-119.

11. E. Chiosi, "Il Regno dal 1734 al 1799", in *Storia del Mezzogiorno*, vol. IV, *Il Regno dagli Angioini ai Borboni*, Naples, ESI, 1981, p. 412.

12. Tanucci, *Epistolario. Vol. II*, to Marquis Mauro, 2 July 1747, and to Count Finocchietti, 26 September 1747: "mari e monti per il suo marito", "malinconie impensate", "interloquendo su tutte le materie vivacemente".

13. B. Tanucci, *Epistolario. Vol. IX*, ed. by M. G. Maiorini, Rome, Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1985, to Iaci, 11 November 1760, p. 103: "religione materiale, caricata", "senza merito", "di miracoli e vita celestiale", "sua creatura ed alleato". On 13 September 1760, the

## 2. *The queen's vision (Kingdom of Naples, 1734-1752)*

The Carmelite friar Salvatore Pagnani played an important role in these events. In those years, he received a great deal of flak for his efforts to carry out the difficult endeavour of transforming a “ritiro” (an unofficial gathering of religious women) into a cloistered monastery in the city of Capua, an important archepiscopal headquarters to the north of Naples. The “ritiro” dated from the early 1730s and had been dedicated to Archangel Gabriel.<sup>14</sup> In particular, the nobles in the area looked with hostility at what was happening; they considered religious institutions to be the direct emanation of their power over society and sought to conserve their control over those already present in towns and villages in order to maintain their dominance over local political life. Instead, the influence of families rooted in rural areas who were traditionally excluded from running city affairs went in the opposite direction; they intended to seize the opportunity provided by the newly-conceived “ritiro” to expand their spheres of influence into urban zones.<sup>15</sup>

Pagnani knew that the main way to conclude the matter was to put the new “ritiro” under the direct protection of the king. To achieve this goal, he had an important card to play: among the women placed under his spiritual direction was Angela Marrapese, who had demonstrated notable charisma in revealing visions and prophecies to the public. He thus decided to take advantage of the intercession of his penitent, Gabriella Remon, wife of the commander Emanuele Cavezon, with the declared goal of obtaining an audience with the eminent Zenobia Revertera, duchess of Castropignano, who by then was at the height of her power.<sup>16</sup>

apostolic nuncio Locatelli announced that “the Jesuit father Savastano” was going to Spain “on an Iberian ship”. When he learned about the death of the queen, he came back, and he was followed by the duchess of Castropignano, by order of King Charles of Bourbon (ASV, *Segreteria di Stato*, Naples, Cifre del nunzio Giuseppe Locatelli, 13 and 20 September, 7 and 28 October, b. 255, ff. 237, 248r, 279-r, 203r-204). See E. Novi Chavarría, *Il confessore alla corte di Carlo*, in *Corte e cerimoniale di Carlo di Borbone*, ed. by A. M. Rao, Naples, FedOA Press, pp. 111-124.

14. See Palmieri, *I taumaturghi della società*, pp. 33-95.

15. See M. Campanelli, *Monasteri di provincia (Capua, secoli XVI-XIX)*, Milan, FrancoAngeli, 2012.

16. See BMCC, *Fondo manoscritti, Lettere del padre Salvatore Pagnani a Gabriella Remon y Cavezon*, b. 29, f. 1; ASDC, *Processus originalis super fama sanctitatis vitae, virtutum, et miraculorum Servi Dei Salvatoris Pagnani, Deposizione di Gabriella Remon y*

In the disjointed panorama of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the governance of feminine religious experiences was at the centre of bitter conflicts between factions busily contending among themselves for positions of prestige and control over the economic resources that orbited around various institutions. A harsh debate involving numerous thinkers and government officials was also unfolding over themes of broad interest. Figures active in the middle decades of the century within the Kingdom of Naples alone included Bernardo Tanucci, Antonio Genovesi and Giovanni Andrea Serrao, who concerned themselves with the management of monastic endowments and the redefinition of regulations for religious institutions, whether from the past or of more recent vintage.<sup>17</sup>

One of the thorniest problems was that of the very governance of women whose humble origins and lack of economic means prevented them from being accepted into the cloistered monastery. These women found shelter in “ritiri” and girls’ schools, or the third order (“lay sisters”, “tertiary sisters”).<sup>18</sup> The latter, known also as “bizzoche”, “monache di casa”, or house nuns, would declare their simple vows by promising obedience to certain religious orders, but often ended up at the centre of controversial incidents. They dressed and behaved like cloistered nuns, in order to be socially recognised as such. They were accused of fraud, of practicing magic, sexual trafficking, the recitation of unauthorised prayers, claiming to experience prophecies and visions, and were even suspected of heresy, thus damaging the clergy’s image of integrity. Ecclesiastical authorities strove throughout the entire early modern period to preserve existing hierarchies and to impede these women from entering the most prestigious circle of cloistered monasteries. They therefore sought control over their clothing, their daily customs, their

*Cavezon*, vol. III. On 11 August 1749, Pagnani wrote to Gabriella and told of his meeting with Zenobia Revertera: “mi portai dalla duchessa Castropignani quale con tutta bontà mi trattò e si degnò offrirmi come ha infatti operato ed opera efficacemente”.

17. See E. Chiosi, *Andrea Serrao. Apologia e crisi del regalismo nel Settecento napoletano*, Naples, Jovene, 1981, pp. 104-114.

18. See M. Caffiero, “Dall’esplosione mistica tardo-barocca all’apostolato sociale (1650-1850)”, in *Donne e fede. Santità e vita religiosa in Italia*, ed. by L. Scaraffia and G. Zari, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 2004, pp. 327-373. On Naples, see E. Novi Chavarria, *Monache e gentildonne: un labile confine. Poteri politici e identità religiose nei monasteri napoletani (secolo XVI-XVII)*, Milan, FrancoAngeli, 2001; G. Boccadamo, “Le bizzoche a Napoli tra Seicento e Settecento”, *Campania sacra*, 22 (1991), pp. 351-394; G. Boccadamo, “Monache di casa e monache di conservatorio”, in *Donne e religione a Napoli (secoli XVI-XVIII)*, ed. by G. Galasso and A. Valerio, Milan, FrancoAngeli, 2001, pp. 159-191.

attachments, their means of self-representation, and at times even their alleged states of ecstasy, which could give rise to prophetic revelations that were destabilising for the established order. It is necessary to consider, beyond this, that the cohabitation of tertiary sisters or the growth of some girls' schools could give birth to new monasteries that were likely to become the object of contention between dominant hierarchies, precisely due to their genesis from initiatives undertaken by an individual charismatic or small consortial groups seeking to grow their own prestige.<sup>19</sup>

Pagnani's strategy is therefore quite understandable: the Carmelite friar had a prestigious objective to reach, but the political atmosphere around the birth of new female convents was not favourable. He thus took advantage of an impenetrable network of relations woven into the royal family's entourage.<sup>20</sup> It did not take long for the right occasion to arrive for Gabriella Remon Cavezon to be able to inform the Duchess of Castropignano of the case of the religious women in Capua. She described them as victims of unjust "persecutions", but also as virtuous and saintly. She concentrated above all on Angela Marrapese, a key figure to the entire affair, considered a living saint, destined for divine revelations that could affect the life of the kingdom and the entire Catholic world. She emphasised that the woman had already been examined by four "theologians" (among them Domenico Fiorillo, who was of great note in the ecclesiastical milieu of the capital), who had confirmed the genuine character of her religiosity.<sup>21</sup> Thanks to this stubborn work of persuasion, Salvatore Pagnani was able to meet Zenobia Revertera in person, currying her favour by regaling her with the miracles happening in Capua.<sup>22</sup>

On 9 February 1752, the nuns from the "ritiro" of San Gabriele received a visit from Maria Amalia's favorite lady, who was accompanied by her husband Francesco d'Eboli. The chronicle of the event was reported in a desk diary; though written in an uncertain hand, it spared no detail. The "lady Duchess of Castropignano" – we read in these pages – was welcomed with all honours and, in seeing the Mother Superior, there

19. See P. Palmieri, "Le verità di Isabella. I falsi santi, fra giustizia, propaganda e invenzioni letterarie (Napoli, 1755-1782)", *Atti dell'Accademia Roveretana degli Agiati*, 265 (2015), pp. 103-130.

20. See *Carlo di Borbone*, p. 278.

21. ASDC, *Processus originalis, Deposizione di Gariella Remon y Cavezon*, vol. III: "persecuzioni", teologi".

22. *Ibid.*

was “such a deep feeling of consolation and devotion that her tenderness caused goosebumps”. Feeling herself overcome by the “true spirit of God”, she wanted to kiss the hand of the nun, “giving her many caresses”. She wished to personally ascertain the conditions of the “ritiro”, and promised that she would intercede with the royal Bourbon family.<sup>23</sup>

On 14 February, a royal dispatch reached Capua that placed the institute under the protection of the sovereign, and a few days later the authorities had to prepare themselves for the visit of Charles of Bourbon’s consort.<sup>24</sup> The memoirs from the “ritiro” described in detail the ceremony organised to welcome the queen and her entourage.<sup>25</sup> The undiscussed protagonists of the tale were the duchess of Castropignano, Maria Amalia of Saxony, and Angela Marrapese. Their gestures were full of symbolic value.<sup>26</sup> The religious Capuan woman ably won over the sovereign from the very first moment with her affable ways and persuasive words, showcasing her supernatural gifts. Zenobia Revertera, fully aware of her role as architect of the encounter, did not hide her satisfaction. The tie between the three women became indissoluble and was read in the hagiographic account developed over the following decades as a sign of divine providence that provoked “disgust among those opposed” and the highest “fulfilment” to “all those who are good, and not merely sated by giving a thousand blessings to the Lord to put in that extraordinary manner an end to their own fears of possibly ruining” the new women’s convent of San Gabriele.<sup>27</sup>

23. BMCC, *Fondo manoscritti, Memoriali delle visite della regina Maria Amalia di Sassonia al Ritiro di San Gabriele*, b. 408, f. 1. The text has been published by R. Chillemi, “Una visita della regina al Ritiro di Capua”, *Capys*, 20 (1987), pp. 15-32: “signora Duchessa di Castropignano”, “vedere la madre Priora fu tale la comunione [commozione] interna, consolazione e devozione che per la tenerezza si sentiva ingracciare la carne [venir la pelle d’oca]”, “vero spirito di Dio”, “facendole molte carezze”.

24. A copy of the document is in ASDC, *Fondo monastero di san Gabriele*, b. I, f. 1. 43; ASDC, *Processus originalis, Articoli* upd. in 1778, vol. I.

25. B. Tanucci, *Epistolario. Vol. V (1757-1758)*, ed. by G. De Lucia, Rome, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1985, p. 174. On the strategies of Eleonora Borghese and Michele Imperiali in the Neapolitan court, see D. Balestra, *Gli Imperiali di Francavilla. Ascesa di una famiglia genovese in età moderna*, Bari, Edipuglia, 2017, pp. 147-173.

26. Chillemi, “Una visita della regina”, p. 26.

27. ASDC, *Processus originalis, Deposizione di Gabriella Remon y Cavezon*, vol. III: “disgusto a li contrari”, “godimento... [a] tutti li buoni, i quali non si saziavano di dare mille benedizioni al Signore per vedere in tal portentosa maniera finiti li timori di potersi distruggere”.



The apostolic nuncio Ludovico Gualtieri, diplomatic representative of the pope in the Kingdom of Naples, looked on with apprehension at what was happening in Capua. In the reports sent to the Holy See, he underlined the fact that the ecclesiastical authorities had few possibilities to intervene and denounced the primacy of the Neapolitan court, which could assert itself not only as a place symbolising power, but also as a centre of governance for religious life in the kingdom. He also revealed the growing personal sway of Maria Amalia of Saxony, who was capable of influencing all the king's decisions and of planting within him a strong "conception of faith" for the "bizzoca" of San Gabriele.<sup>28</sup> A few months later, the queen gave birth to her fourth male child and even decided to name him Gabriel, "in imitation" of the will of Angela Marrapese – now an "esteemed saint", without hesitation – and in honour of the Archangel Gabriel for whom the "ritiro" had been consecrated.<sup>29</sup> Bernardo Tanucci received the news with astonishment and, showing himself sceptical toward the fervid devotion of Charles' consort and her emotional choices, foresaw a future full of challenges for the new religious establishment, feeling that it was at risk of becoming an object of violent contention between Church and State.<sup>30</sup>

Closely echoing the opinion of the Tuscan minister in a report dated 20 May 1752, the apostolic nuncio would admit that Zenobia Revetera had shown her boundless power in the management of the affair. According to him, a "strong plot" lurked behind every development. It had been put into action by the Castropignano family to make Francesco d'Eboli become "viceroy in Sicily and to procure through him the means to pay their debts".<sup>31</sup> In other words, religious devotion had become an instrument to sustain the political ambitions of a noble house. Many representatives of the kingdom's elite commented on what had occurred in a critical manner, spreading slander about the moral character of those involved, judged in the same manner as vulgar frauds. However, this defamatory campaign did not produce the desired outcomes. The strategies of Salvatore Pagnani were demonstrated

28. ASV, *Segreteria di Stato*, Naples, Accounts of the nuncio Ludovico Gualtieri, 21 March 1752, b. 236, f. 19: "concetto di fede".

29. *Ibid.*, accounts of the nuncio Ludovico Gualtieri, 16 May 1752, b. 236, f. 307: "a imitazione", "stimata santa".

30. Tanucci, *Epistolario. Vol. II*, to Tommaso Chacon Navarez, 13 May 1752, p. 764.

31. ASV, *Segreteria di stato*, Naples, accounts of the nuncio Ludovico Gualtieri, 16 May 1752, b. 236, f. 313: "maneggio forte", "viceré in Sicilia e procurargli con ciò il modo di pagare i suoi debiti".

victorious: the charisma of his spiritual daughter Angela Marrapese had managed to hit the mark, capturing the attention of influential people within the court and gaining the approval of the royal family.

Marrapese's religious visions, punctually reported in voluminous notebooks, abounded in apocalyptic scenes animated by monstrous figures, based at times on biblical episodes or hagiographical legends. These writings also involved characters that had lent their protection to the "ritiro" of San Gabriele and whom, for their action that was "immensely pleasing" to God, were described as targets of the "devil[']s" ire.<sup>32</sup> Each of them acquired a role in the redeeming project of Providence: Zenobia Revertera was identified as a guardian angel, ready to lend aid to those living through difficult moments, while the Virgin Mary's virtues were attributed to Maria Amalia of Saxony. More generally, the entire Bourbon court was represented as an earthly mirror of the celestial order, the propulsive centre of a monarchical power called to carry out God's plans for his people.

### 3. Royalty, fear and devotion

Similar dynamics can be observed in the case of another aspiring saint living in those same years: Maria Maddalena Sterlicco.<sup>33</sup> An important turning point for this woman, born in 1688 to a noble family from Bitonto, was a meeting with the theologian Giulio Niccolò Torno, a strenuous defender of Catholic orthodoxy during the period of Austrian control over Naples. In addition to organising a substantial group of confessors and preachers tasked with promoting official devotions and defending moral conventions, Torno had violently attacked the noted philosopher and jurist Pietro Giannone, who in his *Istoria civile del Regno di Napoli* (1723) had stated the necessity of separating secular and ecclesiastical powers.<sup>34</sup> It was the very same Torno who in 1726 promoted the celebration in Naples of an important diocesan

32. BMCC, *Fondo manoscritti, Quaderni della Priora Suor Maria Angiola del Divino Amore*, b. 165: "sommamente gradita", "Demonio".

33. G. Radente, *Vita della serva di Dio suor Maria Maddalena Sterlicco religiosa del monistero di Santa Maria dello Splendore*, Naples, V. Orsino, 1779.

34. *Ibid.*, pp. 39, 47. On Torno and the Synod of 1726, see R. De Maio, *Religiosità a Napoli (1656-1799)*, Naples, ESI, 1997, pp. 202-207. On his speeches and writings against Giannone, see E. Chiosi, *Lo spirito del secolo. Politica e religione a Napoli nell'età dell'Illuminismo*, Naples, Giannini, 1992, pp. 19-23, 149-151.

synod that was capable of worsening jurisdictional disputes. The effect of this initiative was the formation of two dominant factions: the magistratures and supporters of the royals on the one side, with the archbishop Francesco Pignatelli and the canonical traditionalists on the other.

Driven by such an influential and doctrinally well-equipped protector, Maria Maddalena Sterlicco saw her fame grow in the Bourbon period. She became a point of reference in the Conservatorio dello Splendore in Naples and managed to establish contacts among the most important aristocratic houses; she entered the Bourbon court through the intercession of Zenobia Revertera. Thanks to the initiatives of this lady of the court, the nun had the honour of receiving visits from Maria Amalia of Saxony beginning in 1747. The posthumous hagiography – published by the priest Gennaro Radente in 1779 – stressed the symbolic value of these events: the queen had refused to let the nun kiss her feet and had preferred to embrace her, recognising her as a model of Christian virtue.<sup>35</sup> Like Angela Marrapese, Maria Maddalena Sterlicco achieved a level of notable prestige. The two women remained at the centre of a strain of openly curial politics that gathered consensus from the ecclesiastic and aristocratic elites of the kingdom.<sup>36</sup> The strategic objective was to restart the alliance between throne and altar in order to guarantee the preservation of the existing social order.

These positionings were crucial for the political battles that would occur in the middle decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, marked as they were by important transitions for the city of Naples as well as the entire kingdom. The Bourbon government worked on a series of reforms to protect the prestige of the ruling dynasty on the international stage. Education constituted one of the most crucial sectors in this renewal. In 1753, a university post for technology and economics was financed to accommodate the teaching of Antonio Genovesi. In his 1753 *Discorso sopra il vero fine delle lettere e delle scienze* (*Discourse on the True Aim of Letters and Science*), the famous Enlightenment thinker emphasised the connection between philosophy and the concrete world of things, explaining how the spread of practical knowledge was crucial to changing the economy and society.<sup>37</sup> Moreover,

35. Radente, *Vita della serva di Dio*, p. 49.

36. For more bibliographical references, see P. Palmieri, “I pericoli e le risorse del mare. Il Mediterraneo nelle missioni gesuitiche (Napoli, secoli XVII-XVIII)”, *Rivista di storia e letteratura religiosa*, 53/2 (2017), pp. 295-324.

37. A. M. Rao, “Enlightenment and Reform”, in *Early Modern Italy*, ed. by J. A. Marino, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 229-252.

Genovesi tried to undermine the influence of the clergy by denouncing ecclesiastical privileges and the Church's flourishing wealth, and how both weighed heavily on the State. For instance, since many clerics were satisfied with the small incomes they received from the land, there was no ecclesiastical incentive to increase agricultural productivity by investing in technology and rationalising human labour.

To improve productivity, Genovesi and his followers sought to involve a wider community in debates about economic reforms and, in so doing, to create a more informed and engaged public. On the upside, these reformers achieved their goals in the surrounding areas of the capital, in the southern part of the province named Terra di Lavoro, for instance, where the new Royal Palace of Caserta was being built. On the downside, they finally had to recognise and accept that they would not be able to change things for the better in the outskirts of the kingdom, in such places as present-day Abruzzo, Puglia, Basilicata and Calabria. As for the rest, it was difficult to chip away at the strong legacies of the past. The new Bourbon state had not managed to liberate itself from the Church of Rome, which was inclined to maintain its pre-eminence over secular power. Beyond undermining the international credibility of the kingdom, dependence on the papacy generated fiscal burdens and territorial imbalances, leaving little room for free economic initiative.<sup>38</sup>

In 1759, King Charles of Bourbon left the capital to assume the crown of Spain, leaving the Neapolitan throne to his eight-year-old son Ferdinand IV (1751-1825). A Council of Regency was placed in charge of guiding him and taking care of matters until he reached the age of majority, which took place in 1767. From the fall of 1763 until the summer of 1764, a great famine and subsequent epidemic struck the population. The whole city, weakened by hunger, began to share stories inspired by the effects of disease and lack of food. It was a crucial moment for the relationship between the monarchy and enlightened writers in the kingdom. According to such influential thinkers as Genovesi, feudal and ecclesiastical monopolies, rights, tariffs and tax exemptions made it impossible to plan an effective response to the emergency. It is therefore no wonder that all these conditions strengthened the resolve of the lay reformist movement. Significantly, similar traumatic events, such as the Lisbon earthquake of 1755, had stimulated public debate all over Europe

38. Rao, "Conclusion", p. 481.

and were widely discussed among elites in coffee houses and at informal gatherings.

Starting in early 1764, massive crowds of miserable, unemployed and hungry people sought refuge in the capital, hoping to find assistance. In response, the government not only strengthened welfare and charitable institutions but also implemented repressive measures against vagrancy and begging. These political decisions led to the creation of “a veritable system of police whose various functions had previously been confusedly divided between military and judicial bodies”.<sup>39</sup> Given the increase in poverty, the rising prices of material goods and the growing demand for food from abroad, a range of social groups – from nobles to the underprivileged – developed a new interest in the distribution of land and in the organisation of agricultural labour. Foreign observers detected a wide gap between rich and poor in Naples, a city with high unemployment and widespread criminality, but they also recognised the presence of a lively public space, where many forms of legal and illegal interaction took place.

These deep political and social divisions were accompanied by a flourishing print market in the middle decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>40</sup> About fifty printers were active in Naples alone. A substantial part of their business was tied to university texts, if not directly to ecclesiastical and state clientele. In clear continuity with the past, some genres in broad circulation, such as novels, biographies of illustrious persons, almanacs, calendars, breviaries, handbooks, devotional books and the lives of saints, continued to drum up approval. Additionally, the fortunes of periodicals, gazettes and diaries were growing, coexisting alongside short stories in the macabre, adventure or horror vein, which were often based on purported heroes of the faith. Bookshops also functioned as centres of sociability for enlightened *litterati*. Moreover, the city boasted other social spaces, such as coffee houses, ice cream shops, pleasure gardens and assembly halls, where locals and foreigners could gather, enjoy conversation, read newspapers and listen to concerts. As Melissa Calaresu has observed of this period, “the commercialization of cultural life, away from the social restrictions of

39. *Ibid.*, pp. 485-486.

40. R. Pasta, “Mediazioni e trasformazioni: operatori del libro in Italia nel Settecento”, *Archivio storico italiano*, 172 (2014), pp. 311-354; A. M. Rao, “Introduzione, mercato e privilegi”, in *Editoria e cultura a Napoli nel XVIII secolo*, ed. by A. M. Rao, Naples, Liguori, 1998, pp. 3-33, 173-199.

the court and aristocratic salons, allowed an ever-wider group of people to participate in enlightened culture”.<sup>41</sup>

The flourishing print industry of the 1750s and 1760s supported not only the writings of Genovesi, as we have seen, but also the revival of the reformist ideas of Pietro Giannone, who had enjoyed success earlier with his widely read *Istoria civile*. Other reformist ideas acquired greater visibility in public debate, including advocacy for religious tolerance and freedom, for the independent value of the sciences and for a virtuous education of princes. These stirrings of reform owed much to the lessons of François Fénelon, the French archbishop who authored the didactic novel *The Adventures of Telemachus* (1699), and Andrew Michael Ramsay, who enjoyed great fame thanks to the novel *The Travels of Cyrus* (1727), inspired by Fénelon’s earlier writings. The voices of dissent against the Catholic Church also found support in the famous work of the German theologian Johann Nikolaus von Hontheim (also known as Giustino Febronio), whose *De Statu Ecclesiae* (*On the State of the Church*, 1763) questioned the primacy of the papacy and highlighted the persistent corruption of the clergy.

Several reformists found a common fight against one religious order in particular: the Society of Jesus. Thinkers from different cultural backgrounds blamed the troubles of the Bourbon kingdom on the Jesuits, thus agreeing with other European reformers of the time. Tanucci took the opportunity to organise a widespread press campaign, “so that the people would learn about the wickedness, thievery, pride, envy, and rebellious spirit” of the order founded by Ignatius of Loyola.<sup>42</sup> In 1761, the minister banned the pamphlet *La Verità difesa* (*Defence of the Truth*), written by the Jesuit Gennaro

41. M. Calaresu, “The Enlightenment in Naples”, in *A Companion to Early Modern Naples*, p. 422; M. Calaresu, “Coffee, Culture and Consumption: Reconstructing the Public Sphere in Late 18<sup>th</sup>-Century Naples”, in *Filosofia, scienza, storia*, ed. by A. Gatti and P. Zanardi, Padua, Il Poligrafo, 2005, pp. 135-173; M. Calaresu, “Making and Eating Ice Cream in Naples: Rethinking Consumption and Sociability in the Eighteenth Century”, *Past and Present*, 220/2 (2013), pp. 35-78.

42. Chiosi, “Il Regno dal 1734 al 1799”, p. 431, Tanucci to Losada, 1 December 1767: “affinché il popolo imparasse a conoscere le cattiverie, le ruberie, l’orgoglio, l’invidia, lo spirito di ribellione”. On the media campaign against the Jesuits, see D. K. Van Kley, “Plots and Rumors of Plots: The Role of Conspiracy in the International Campaign Against the Society of Jesus”, in *The Jesuit Suppression in Global Context*, ed. by J. D. Burson and J. Wright, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 13-39; M. T. Guerrini, “Gesuiti espulsi, gesuiti soppressi: una difficile integrazione”, *Società e Storia*, 154 (2016), pp. 737-765.

Sanchez de Luna to plead the cause of his own Society. Perceiving the threat of this writing, Tanucci forbade publishers to reprint it “in any language, or under any title”, declaring it illegal “to read it, keep it, sell it, or in any way to lend/donate it, under penalty of exile for a year, or a hundred ducats”.<sup>43</sup> Three years later, in 1764, while accounts of the famine were flooding the public sphere, the minister promoted the publication of the first two volumes of a work titled *Inquietudini de’ gesuiti* (*Concerns About the Jesuits*), with the aim of informing his readers that the government opposed the multiplication “of colleges, monasteries and convents of the regular orders”, to put (better late than never) an end to the depreciation of assets, “which resulted in secular mendicancy, a royal treasury stripped of resources, and the desolation of cities within the Kingdom”.<sup>44</sup>

Tanucci’s *Inquietudini de’ gesuiti*, consisting of four tomes, collected and reworked a large quantity of writing that had already enjoyed enormous success in the Italian and European book markets since the 1750s. These texts had circulated anonymously and in translation, sometimes strategically hiding the identities of the authors and printers. They thereby made the original sources unidentifiable and, of course, rendered the publishers untraceable. These same writings, a veritable flood of prose, show us how mid-18<sup>th</sup>-century news traversed the public sphere and acquired new meaning in its constant interaction between the handwritten and printed word, image and performance, sermon and gossip. Tanucci had decided to put them together and republish them as a single corpus, almost as if they were episodes of a single great narrative, because he had realised that they had considerable communicative potential and could trigger Naples’ collective political participation. The minister was carefully observing the changes taking place. The press was only one link in a complex chain that involved different media addressing diverse stakeholders invested in dialectical socio-cultural and economic issues. Some groups were simply

43. M. Sabato, *Disciplina e circolazione libraria nel Regno di Napoli fra ’700 e ’800*, Lecce, Congedo, 2007, p. 174. The source is *De libris auctoritate regia proscriptis*, vol. CXL, pram. VI, 3 August 1761: “in qualunque lingua, o sotto qualsivoglia titolo”, “leggerlo, tenerlo, [...] venderlo, o in qualunque modo alienarlo, sotto pena di esilio per un anno, o di ducati cento”.

44. Also quoted in Venturi, *Settecento riformatore*, vol. II, *La Chiesa e la repubblica dentro i loro limiti*, Turin, Einaudi, 1976, p. 168. The source is *Inquietudini de’ gesuiti*, 4 vols, Naples, 1764-1769: “dei collegi, monasteri e conventi de’ regolari”, “cagionavano mendicizia a’ secolari, mancanza di sussidio al regio erario e desolazione alle città del Regno”.

looking in a self-serving manner for attention; some hoped to construct a political platform from which to make various demands for social change; and some sought to defend their own private interests.

This sort of soft power strategy effectively shaped public communication and facilitated the expulsion of the Jesuits from the kingdom in 1767. The members of the Society of Jesus went into exile or had to leave the order. Many houses of the order were transformed into catechism and grammar schools or were used as rehabilitation centres for vagabonds. This period of transformation marked a process in the centralisation of monarchical power in Naples. It affected several aspects of social life. In particular, between 1750 and 1769, the government tried to mitigate poverty, wandering, begging, gambling, prostitution and even blasphemy and heresy, which used to be explicitly reserved for the domain of religious courts.<sup>45</sup>

On its end, the Church of Rome found itself faced with a number of unresolved problems. Various episcopates suffered from an invasion of secular powers and hoped for decisive papal support. Pope Clement XIII showed himself to be sensitive to this request for help: he turned against the moderate current and privileged the traditionalist line. He called for regular parishes to make a strenuous defence of doctrinal orthodoxy, and opposed with force instances of contemporary cultural innovation, encouraging evangelising missions on the part of the regular orders, among whom the Passionists, the Lazarists and the Redemptorists stood out. He reiterated the need to maintain a connection between spiritual and earthly affairs. With the encyclical *Christianae Rei Publicae salus* (*On the Preservation of the Christian Republic*), published in 1766, he condemned Enlightenment culture and launched a clear appeal to the Catholic princes, inviting them to unsheathe their swords and defend the authority of the priesthood.<sup>46</sup>

These forces nonetheless failed to slow reformist projects in progress in the Italian peninsula and in Europe, which were also assisted by books that collected growing approval. For instance, the jurist Camillo Manetti

45. M. Bellabarba, *La giustizia nell'Italia moderna*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 2011, pp. 184-185, 190-191.

46. D. Menozzi, "Tra riforma e restaurazione. Dalla crisi della società cristiana al mito della cristianità medievale (1758-1848)", in *Storia d'Italia. Annali IX. La Chiesa e il potere politico*, ed. by G. Chittolini and G. Miccoli, Turin, Einaudi, 1986, pp. 771-772.



published the *Avvertimenti politici, storici, canonico-legali ai principi cristiani intorno all'uso della loro podestà sulle cose ecclesiastiche e sacre* (*Political, Historical and Canonical-Legal Warnings to Christian Princes Regarding the Use of Their Power Over Ecclesiastical and Sacred Things*, 1767), which warned rulers to reject any imposition of the Holy See and to take control of the censorship system. Likewise, the writer Carlantonio Pilati – who studied in both Leipzig and Gottingen, and who was in close contact with the Protestant world – argued in his *Di una riforma d'Italia ossia dei mezzi di riformare i più cattivi costumi e le più perniciose leggi d'Italia* (*Of a Reform of Italy, or of the Means to Reform the Bad Customs and the Most Pernicious Laws of Italy*, 1767) that the monarchies should exterminate friars, priests and inquisitors, all of whom were the “sources of the ailments of Italy” because they intended to fill “the houses of the faithful with lives of saints and ascetic books”. “There should be no more Inquisition”, he wrote, “and the name of the Inquisitor alone should cause perpetual abhorrence in Italian souls”. At the same time, Cosimo Amidei’s *La Chiesa e la Repubblica dentro i loro limiti* (*The Church and the Republic Within Their Limits*, 1768), which theorised about a more general separation between the two powers of Church and State, enjoyed great circulation. The ecclesiastical authorities tried to ban all these writings, but, predictably, their efforts ended up having the opposite effect. Censorship turned into a powerful advertisement and aroused curiosity among readers.<sup>47</sup>

The success of these books was undoubtedly important, and it shows how Italian Enlightenment writers confronted jurisdictional issues. Nevertheless, we would be wrong in thinking that these texts created a mainstream news flow, capable of prevailing over other currents of the media environment. There was a strong backlash against reformist ideas. Conservative thought found fertile ground for development and circulated throughout the courts and institutions, reaching a large audience. For its part, the Neapolitan government, while showing a willingness to manage public opinion, failed to bring about a structural change in society, a

47. P. Delpiano, *Liberi di scrivere. La battaglia per la stampa nell'età dei Lumi*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 2015, pp. 119-122: “sorgenti dei malanni”, “le case dei fedeli di vite di santi e libri ascetici”, “Non ci sia più Inquisizione, ed il nome solo di inquisitore sia di perpetuo abborrimento negli animi italiani”. A critical edition of Pilati’s work was recently published by S. Luzzi (Rome, Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2018).

change that might prove useful for overcoming the conflicting interests of the capital and the provinces and elites and popular masses. In fact, a substantial portion of the aristocracy remained hostile toward the ideas of radical thinkers, who remained ever more isolated. The lands expropriated from the Jesuits and regular religious orders were not redistributed to farmers who could improve systems of production, but instead ended up in the hands of local potentates.<sup>48</sup>

In addition, two further sensational events worked as turning points in 1767, at the same time as the expulsion of the Jesuits: the tragic consequences of the eruption of Vesuvius (which had already begun at the end of 1766) and the untimely death of the archduchess of Austria, Maria Josepha, who was betrothed to the heir to the throne, Ferdinand IV of Bourbon. The conservative and pro-Jesuit front described these two tragedies as fatal signs. Numerous preachers convinced the Neapolitans that God was punishing their disobedience, while at the same time protecting the religious order founded by Ignatius of Loyola. These rumours reached the ears of the young son of King Charles, who was deeply shaken in his convictions. In such a critical moment, a key role was played by two of the famous and highly respected nuns we previously encountered: Angela Marrapese from the cloister of San Gabriele in Capua, and Maria Maddalena Sterlicco from the Conservatorio dello Splendore in Naples. They wrote letters to the monarch, recommending that he stop the repressive measures taken against the Jesuits in order to avoid the impending apocalypse. Understandably, Tanucci had to make enormous efforts to curb Ferdinand's panic and to be sure that the government would stay firm in its decision.<sup>49</sup>

The affair is significant for many reasons. Despite the diffusion of Enlightenment ideas and reform projects, religious and secular powers remained profoundly interlinked, finding important points of reference in holiness and devotion. Exponents of Catholicism who stood out for their traditional orientation continued to subordinate the safeguarding of the state's adherence to a uniformity of religious behaviours and devotional practices among its subjects in hagiographical, political and theological-

48. A. M. Rao, "Il riformismo borbonico a Napoli", in *Storia della società italiana*, vol. XII, *Il secolo dei lumi e delle riforme*, Milan, Teti, 1989, pp. 263-265.

49. *Lettere di Bernardo Tanucci a Carlo III di Borbone (1759-1776)*, ed. by R. Minuzzi, Rome, Istituto per la storia del Risorgimento italiano, 1969, pp. 412-413, 420.

doctrinal writing and in sermons. At the heart of these processes the importance of the court was confirmed, not only as a space for the control and exaltation of aristocratic influence, a “place of exercise and symbolic representation of regality, and of the ties between sovereign and subjects”, but also as a true instrument of government in religious life, carried out through its dense network of charitable institutions, patronage and allegiances.<sup>50</sup> As to the rest, the presuppositions upon which the royalty had constructed its own identity across the centuries remained intact. Even within its attempts to evolve under the light of great changes within European thought, the Bourbon monarchy in Naples continued to defend its sacred roots and spoke to its subjects using the language of worship.

#### *4. The fabrication of saintliness in the context of Church and State*

More generally, the enlightened and reformist promotion of a new society founded upon secular values and emancipation from “deceptive” apologetics did not evolve in tandem with the creation of a judiciary system capable of clearly separating the individual and public spheres, the court of conscience from that of the outside world, or the concept of sin from that of guilt. These issues are particularly visible in the phenomenon of the fabrication of saintliness; after its marked presence during the Counter-Reformation induced religious tribunals to draw specific repressive strategies, it continued to create apprehension among powers established throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Numerous devotees, in cities and rural areas in equal measure, observed the outward manifestations of personalities who claimed to be the custodians of celestial revelations, prophesying imminent catastrophes, practicing exorcisms and incantations, and arrogantly claiming the merits of incredible acts of healing. Alongside these personalities, cunning pied pipers appeared who would profit from recent mechanical innovations to manoeuvre puppets to surprising effect, inducing the public to believe that what they were seeing was the result of supernatural intervention.

For decades the crime of “contrived holiness” had been the subject of important transformations, on the judiciary as well as on the more

50. Rao, “Corte e paese”, p. 11: “luogo di esercizio e di rappresentazione simbolica della regalità, e del legame tra sovrano e sudditi”.

strictly political-cultural plane. One such change was the publication of the treatise *De Servorum Dei beatificatione et beatorum canonizatione* (*On the Beatification and Canonisation of the Servants of God*, 1734-1738) by Prospero Lambertini, archbishop of Bologna who had become pope in 1740 under the name Benedict XIV. The work retraced centuries of normative practices with regard to saintliness but also considered some developments within the 18<sup>th</sup> century, seeking exhaustive and applicable answers for ecclesiastical trials whose purpose it was to recognise new saints.<sup>51</sup> In fact, the corrosive criticism of rationalist thinkers, along with new medical explanations for phenomena such as ecstasy and possession – traditionally entrusted to spiritual advisors and exorcists – had encouraged important reconsiderations within the codification of the procedures involved. But it was above all secular powers that played a decisive role as they began to occupy themselves more consistently with questions that, up until a few years prior, had lay exclusively within the jurisdiction of clerical authorities: the so-called “materie di fede”, or matters of faith.<sup>52</sup> The near-immediate consequence of this evolution was the growing duty of secular states in the Italian peninsula to distinguish not only between malefactors and honest people, but also between “true” and “false” saints.

The promotion of a “regulated” religion, however, had to confront the sensitive and mellifluous discourse proposed by preachers or deal with a persistent appeal to the spectacle of “baroque” piety – promoted by religious orders like the Jesuits and centred on the exaltation of aspects exterior to devotion, which intended to strike the vision, hearing and even sense of smell of the faithful – which reached its height in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. At the centre of attention was the performance of charismatic characters who pretended to act in accordance with divine inspiration, but who also gave birth to a strong suspicion of possible fraud and trickery. These topics, especially in light of their late-17<sup>th</sup>-century successes, remain in part unexplored in the historiography. We have research on a few judiciary proceedings. Among the most relevant are those against Lucia Roveri della Mirandola, the so-called “prophetess of Valentano”, or that of Giovanna Marella da Ceccano. The facts at our disposal nonetheless

51. Gotor, *Chiesa e santità*, pp. 121-127.

52. For a more detailed reconstruction and additional bibliographical references, see Palmieri, *La santa, i miracoli e la Rivoluzione*.

lead us to believe that the phenomenon can only be completely resolved when considered within the broader context of the relationship between Church and State.<sup>53</sup> Research carried out up to the present has in fact been conducted on ecclesiastical sources, stemming mainly from Roman Inquisition trials. Consequently, all questions regarding the development of repressive measures against pretended saintliness remain substantially unresolved for territories where tribunals that depended on the pontifical congregation of the Holy Office were dismantled or scaled back. Was it decriminalised? Was it considered a question of conscience, no longer punishable as a criminal act? Were bishops then tasked with these cases, in place of inquisitors? What role did secular magistrates play in punishing false saints?

The case of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, where the Habsburg-Lorraine dynasty replaced the Medici family in 1737, took power, and immediately began to implement important reform initiatives in the religious sphere, is significant. In those years, the activity of the Holy See's tribunals continued, though less forcefully than in the past, with increasingly limited margins of action. In fact, the new government began to debate the need to reorganise the judicial academies, causing discontent among the representatives of the Holy See, who sought to react and impose their reasoning. According to them, removing power from the Inquisition would have created enormous problems in a state where "strong Spirits" were "in fashion" and where "freedom of thought" triumphed and "the

53. On the case of Lucia Roveri della Mirandola, see G. Biondi, "Lucia Roveri della Mirandola (1780-1783). Da affettata santità a falsa divinità", in *Finzione e santità tra medioevo ed età moderna*, ed. by G. Zari, Turin, Rosenberg & Sellier, 1991, pp. 464-492, and, in the same volume, M. Caffiero, "Le profetesse di Valentano", pp. 493-519. The case of Valentano was recently readdressed by M. Caffiero, *Profetesse a giudizio. Donne, religione e potere in età moderna*, Brescia, Morcelliana, 2020. On Maria Antonia Colle, see E. Bottoni, "Un'aspirante santa nella Toscana del Settecento: Maria Antonia Colle (1723-1772)", *Archivio Italiano per la Storia della Pietà*, 15 (2002), pp. 13-80; E. Bottoni, "Mistiche e profetesse nella Toscana del Settecento", *Archivio Italiano per la Storia della Pietà*, 17 (2005), pp. 307-339. On Giovanna Marella, see M. Cattaneo, "Il processo a Giovanna Marella: un caso di affettata santità tra Repubblica romana e Restaurazione", *Rivista di storia del cristianesimo*, 2 (2004), pp. 283-301. An interesting case of fake sanctity (Angela Francesca Zapata) is mentioned in M. T. Silvestrini, *La politica della religione. Il governo ecclesiastico nello stato sabauda del XVIII secolo*, Florence, Olschki, 1997, p. 284. For the "notificazioni di affettata santità" (notifications of fake sanctity) produced by the Congregation of the Holy Office from 23 June 1745 to 14 February 1816, see ACDF, *Stanza Storica*, B7-pp.

temperament of the occupants” was marked by disobedience. In other words, the Grand Duchy risked becoming a land of “impiety”.<sup>54</sup>

All of these issues came home to roost in 1740 when a case was officiated against Maria Serafina Vincenti, a religious woman from the Conservatorio di San Bonifazio in Florence, who showed markings on her hands passing through “from above and below, just like stigmata”. Her fame had spread rapidly, and it was her own sisters who denounced her, perhaps fearful of her exuberant behaviour, or merely envious. The case attracted the attention of the local inquisitor and secular powers, fearful that the woman could send her devotees subversive messages and encourage them toward deviant behaviour. In an increasingly uncertain climate, the secular and ecclesiastical authorities came to an agreement and decided to entrust the investigation to the archbishop of Florence, Giuseppe Maria Martelli. He began to “inform himself about the character of this nun, her way of life, not only in the past but also in the present, her religiosity, her exercise of the virtues, observance of rules, penitence, prayer, frequency of sacraments”. In the end, the woman – it is difficult to say whether she acted spontaneously or not – decided to admit her guilt. She confessed to having procured the wounds with a pair of scissors and to having infected them using various artificial substances. The wounds on her hands were caused by the cut of a key, a lit piece of charcoal and the application of a leech. Those on her feet were the result of a trickle of boiling wax.<sup>55</sup>

The case of Maria Antonia Colle, who occupied authorities about a decade later, was more complicated. The engrossing climb to notoriety of the lay sister from Lucca began on Holy Thursday in 1750, when the Capuchins at the girls’ school in Pontremoli – on the border between the

54. ASF, Reggenza, f. 340, n. 6, pp. 296, 318-320: “Spiriti forti”, “alla moda”, “la libertà del pensare”, “l’indole degli abitatori”, “empietà”. On the fall of the Inquisition in Tuscany, see G. Romeo, *L’Inquisizione nell’Italia moderna*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 2002, pp. 110-113; A. Del Col, *L’Inquisizione in Italia dal XII al XVII secolo*, Milan, Mondadori, 2006, pp. 731-734. On the crisis of the Holy Office in other European areas, see V. Sciuti Russi, *Inquisizione spagnola e riformismo borbonico fra Sette e Ottocento: il dibattito europeo sulla soppressione del “terribile monstre”*, Florence, Olschki, 2009; Palmieri, “Il lento tramonto del Sant’Uffizio”.

55. ACDF, *Stanza storica*, 34 P, ff. 907-930: “di sotto e di sopra, appunto come le stimmate”, “informarsi sulla qualità di tal monaca, quanto sul suo modo di vivere, non solo per il passato, ma ancora per il presente, sì intorno la sua religiosità, come intorno all’esercizio delle virtù, l’osservanza della regola, penitenza, orazione, frequenza de’ sacramenti”.

Republic of Genoa and the Grand Duchy of Tuscany – began to claim having seen stigmata on her hands. Facing the hostility of Marquis Bourbon Del Monte, who was head of the small town, the aspiring saint did not lose faith and put herself in search of new supporters, managing to find hospitality even in lands possessed by Duchess Dianira Malaspina in Mulazzo, a small centre in Lunigiana (in the same geographical area).<sup>56</sup> Among her spiritual advisors was the Carmelite Giovanni Colombino, who kept correspondence with her from July of 1754 until February of 1756 and who encouraged her to compile an autobiography. Their intention was to found a cloistered monastery in Mulazzo and to shape the order according to the contents of Maria Antonia's celestial visions. In June of 1756, Colombino was summoned by the Inquisition to give information about his female charge, but he chose to remain silent. He refused to express his opinion, abandoning her to her own destiny.<sup>57</sup>

The Holy Office entrusted the archbishop of Lucca with the unpleasant duty of surveilling the woman, but the results were disastrous. Sensing that she was in danger of being arrested, Maria Antonia managed to flee along with her followers. In 1757, the ecclesiastical authorities circulated a *Notificazione di affettata santità* (a public accusation of false saintliness) to the press, obliging the faithful to denounce the woman and assist authorities in her capture. Even these efforts revealed themselves to be in vain. The aspiring saint's untouchability ended up at the centre of sensational tales characterised by nearly mythical embellishments. According to some stories circulating uncontrollably, it was God who wished her to be free to preach and proselytise. The news also reached cardinals close to the pope, who demonstrated even greater concern: those guilty of false saintliness were escaping the control of ecclesiastical judges and attempts at fabrication now appeared almost daily. The display of devotee behaviour risked transforming itself into a profitable "vocation". The words of an anonymous writer apprising the apostolic nuncio of Florence of the situation were emblematic of this: "these false devotees do not wish to work and are maintained by false devotees who are wealthy".<sup>58</sup>

56. See E. Bottoni, *Scritture dell'anima. Esperienze religiose femminili nella Toscana del Settecento*, Rome, Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2009, pp. 133-136.

57. *Ibid.*, pp. 140-150.

58. *Ibid.*, pp. 160-162. The source is in ACDF, St. St. C2d, fasc. II, c.n.n: "queste false devote non hanno voglia di lavorare, e sono mantenute dalle false devote ricche".

A particular aspect of the matter is worth emphasising for the purposes of this research: the incessant roaming of Maria Antonia and her proselytes was not random but followed a plan put into place with skill and awareness. The fugitives moved within an inextricable tangle of ecclesiastical and secular jurisdictions that were all in conflict with each other, and each time they found protection among prominent locals. In fact, they succeeded at rendering impossible the intervention of armed bailiffs or police forces. In the meantime, the woman revealed prophecies to her followers that seemed increasingly full of subversive content, expressing dread of a new apocalypse, screaming about a necessary regeneration of the Church and of the entire social body. Many of her denigrators described Maria Antonia as “the little Pope of Mulazzo”, but she far surpassed their mockery, arriving even to the point of calling herself the “Pope of Angels”, champion of the palingenesis of a corrupt world, destined to convert and baptise “the Gran Turco” and to impose renewal upon the entire Catholic universe.<sup>59</sup>

Faced with a clear assault on orthodoxy, the upper ecclesiastical hierarchy refused to slacken its grip. On 29 March 1761, the bishop of Brugnato-Pontremoli (Domenico Tatis) wrote to the bishop of Sarzana (Giulio Cesare Lomellini), explaining that he did not have a single “arm of justice” that could be applied to the capture of her cabal. Two years later, the Florentine apostolic nuncio and the Tuscan government sought to achieve her capture, but without success. In fact, it would be necessary to wait until the end of the decade to hear about Maria Antonia again, still in Mulazzo and living underground. She had “imposed a guarded silence on her sister companions” who remained faithful and who had forbidden access to anyone they did not trust, hiding any means of identifying where she dwelled. She practiced severe penitential rites spiced up with daring sexual practices that often involved her spiritual advisors. Even Dianira Malaspina, who up until then had been a tenacious devotee, became suspicious of those same extreme behaviours.<sup>60</sup> Only once the noblewoman’s support disappeared were the authorities finally able to arrest the aspiring saint and dissolve the coterie born around her. Maria Antonia Colle died in prison on 24 January 1772.<sup>61</sup>

59. *Ibid.*, pp. 163-172: “il papino di Mulazzo”, “papa angelico”, “Gran Turco”.

60. ACDF, St. St. C2-d: “imposto un silenzio custodito alle compagne”.

61. See Bottoni, *Scritture dell’anima*, pp. 176-179.



### 5. Processions that “please God”

Even though the Holy Office had already shown that it was struggling to assert its presence in Italian territory, its control over the devotional events surrounding the realm of sainthood was alive and well. In fact, the events involving aspiring Church heroes and heroines represented a delicate proving ground in which collaboration between ecclesiastical and state authorities had become increasingly difficult. It is enough to consider that secular powers were making important efforts to assert new means of control over devotional celebrations and public prayer.

An eloquent example can be found in the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, where tensions had reached a high point. In March of 1750, the government intervened to impose new rules on Holy Week celebrations in Castiglion Fiorentino. The members of four confraternities were organising a lavish nocturnal procession featuring groups of flagellants, tasked with inflicting upon themselves deep wounds, imprinting on their own bodies the same sufferings as Christ, and at the same time following the examples of exalted candidates for sainthood in hagiographical works and in trials for beatification. Numerous faithful would arrive, even from surrounding inhabited centres, often creating issues for public order. One could expect “robberies, filth and infinite abominable indecencies”, without even considering that the torches used for illumination produced smoke and ash, soiling public streets. Secular authorities thus decided to make a body of armed men available to the bishop, in order to guarantee sober and restrained ceremonies. The motivation was as simple as it was clear: one could not obtain any “spiritual benefit” from “nocturnal processions”.<sup>62</sup>

In February of 1766, some inhabitants of Colle (now Colle Val d’Elsa) denounced the perpetuation of “abuses rooted elsewhere” during Holy Week celebrations: “On Holy Wednesday, Thursday and Friday some Hoods at the Head of the lay companies carry a Cross and shuffle day and night, in the streets and in the Churches, long chains of them, combining that great dragging noise from the Sacred Functions, and some other Hoods even discipline themselves until they bleed showing their nude shoulders”. Overseeing the operation was the newly established Secretariat

62. ASF, *Auditore dei Benefici Ecclesiastici*, then *Segreteria del Regio Diritto*, f. 338, pp. 73-77, 682-683: “rubbamenti, immondezze, ed infinite abominevoli indecenze”, “processioni di notte”, “vantaggio spirituale”.

of Royal Law, which was created by the Habsburg-Lorraines to handle the relationship between Church and State. It wasn't the first time that similar episodes had taken place in the Grand Duchy, for already in preceding years (1735 in Pisa, 1759 in Pietrasanta) the bishops had published pastoral letters to teach the public the "true spirit of penitence desired by the Church in order to make the mortification of the Body religious, pious, and acceptable to God". Even in this case, then, a warning was published to reiterate the "vanity of cowls and whips", and the noncompliant were threatened with arrest "via public interdiction".<sup>63</sup>

Just five years later the problem resurfaced in the rural centres of Arezzo. The Council of State tasked itself with stopping the "flagellant" processions that transformed sacred rites into a form of profane "spectacle". To achieve this goal, local leaders invited Bishop Jacopo Gaetano Inghirami to "publish a prohibition", but he did not wish to obey and recommended a prudent attitude instead: there was, in fact, the concrete danger of provoking public tumult, given that the faithful so greatly loved that celebration and were disinclined to give it up. The representatives of secular power did not allow themselves to be intimidated by this eventuality and decided to insist. According to them, "the penitential processions" needed to respect "the spirit of true religion".<sup>64</sup>

The disputes were renewed in 1773 when new condemnations reached Florence of "monstrous processions" taking place in Castelfranco di Sotto, Santa Maria a Monte, Figline, Anghiari, Asciano, Badia al Pino, Castiglione in Val di Chiana, Castelnuovo, Castiglion Fibocchi, Cicogna; in various locations in the Val di Chiana, among which were Foiano and Monte San Savino, and in Rassina, Vitiano, Bibbiena, Poppi, Chiusi, Montalcino, Volterra, Cortona and Massa. By then the problem required a radical solution. The government therefore decided to send a circular to all the Tuscan bishops with clear directions in order to make a decisive blow

63. ASF, *Segreteria del Regio Diritto*, f. 402, pp. 152-156: "abusi altrove sradicati", "Nei giorni di mercoledì, giovedì e venerdì santo alcuni Incappucciati alla Testa delle compagnie laicali portano una Croce e strascichino di giorno, e di notte, per le strade e per le Chiese, lunghe catene, confondendo con tale rumoroso strascico le Sacre Funzioni, e che alcuni altri pure Incappucciati si disciplinano a sangue mostrando le spalle nude", "il vero spirito di penitenza voluto dalla Chiesa per rendere religiose, pie, ed accette a Dio le mortificazioni del Corpo", "vanità delle cappe e flagelli", "con pubblico bando".

64. *Ibid.*, f. 428, pp. 360-365: "flagellanti", "spettacolo", "pubblicare una proibizione", "le processioni di penitenza", "lo spirito della vera religione".

against customs that were very dear to the populace. These provisions were sought by Grand Duke Peter Leopold (1747-1792), who had a clear predilection toward more moderate forms of religiosity and rejected in a radical manner the connection between faith and spectacle. He had received a religious education characterised by a rigorous morality that was not lacking for Jansenist influences; he was convinced that one of the prerequisites for the correct functioning of the state was a well-regulated ecclesiastical life, centred on the actions of scrupulous priests and free from material interests.

Especially in intransigent Catholic environments, “Jansenism” as a concept became useful in those years for cataloguing a broad range of beliefs and behaviours. The immediate connection was to followers of the doctrine of Cornelius Otto Jansen (1585-1638) whose teachings centred on the corrupt nature of human beings and their natural propension towards evil and which were condemned many times by the Catholic Church. But more generally, the term “Jansenist” began to be used to identify people who emphasised the necessity of a radical renewal of religious life. It was therefore used to take aim at moral strictures disconnected from the discipline imposed by the Holy See, and above all at ideas that could be ascribed to Episcopalism, to objections against papal primacy and to diffidence toward absolute monarchy.

The response of the dioceses to Peter Leopold’s orders was conditioned by the hostility of the Church towards Jansenism: unable to explicitly disobey the grand duke, the bishops preferred to show themselves as hesitant, and in some cases used wording that was deliberately vague. Many tended toward understating the problem of spectacles at the processions or claimed that they were marginal. The case of the bishop of Pescia is significant: in a letter dated 9 February 1774, he defended the tri-annual Holy Thursday procession in honour of the Most Holy Crucifix taking place in his city. Numerous foreigners were attracted to the city by the “splendid and widespread illumination” at night, with its undeniable advantage for commercial activity. A day-time procession would not have produced the same profits.<sup>65</sup>

Similar resistance came from bishops who ran dioceses in border territories located between the Grand Duchy of Tuscany and

65. *Ibid.*, f. 440, pp. 262, 273-276, 310, 318, 331-333, 363-365, 413-414: “sfarzosa e generale illuminazione”.

neighbouring states (Sarzana, Brugnate, Mola, Faenza, Forlì, Bertinoro, Montefeltro, Città di Castello, Città della Pieve, Acquapendente). Peter Leopold commanded all of them to prohibit nocturnal processions and flagellant spectacles in order to safeguard the “spiritual and earthly profit of the people” still accustomed to residual “ignorance and superstition”. But even in these cases the responses were cold. The prelates were called upon, in essence, to publish pastoral letters with precise norms directed toward the populace. But many refused to do so, for a variety of reasons. The bishop of Faenza, for example, specified that texts of that nature were reserved only for “universal instruction and matters of great importance”. His colleague from Città di Castello replied to the government with polemical tones emphasising that in his district there was not “even a shadow” of abuse during devotional ceremonies. The bishop of Brugnate managed to stall for a few months, while the bishop of Città della Pieve used a unique tactic: he emphasised that, in fact, rituals of corporal penitence were dangerous and that they even recalled the Witches’ Sabbath, but he then limited himself to only prohibiting them for the faithful of his diocese who lived within the borders of Tuscany, leaving all the others (that is, those who were not formally subjects of the grand duke) free to act as they pleased.<sup>66</sup>

In the end, the government’s stance seemed to have won out, but only through enormous effort.<sup>67</sup> An organic political project dedicated to asserting the authority of secular power was still missing from matters of faith. A change occurred only at the end of the 1770s, when the action of Grand Duke Peter Leopold became more decisive, putting into play new initiatives against the economic privileges of the clergy, particularly those of members of the regular orders not directly tasked with the care of souls. Between 1776 and 1777, the Habsburg-Lorraine government unleashed a tough battle against hermit and mendicant friars accused of stealing enormous sums from a credulous populace in rural communities via bizarre and unscrupulous behaviours. Repressive measures against confraternities and monasteries became ever more numerous. It was

66. *Ibid.*, f. 440, pp. 262, 273-276, 310, 318, 331-333, 363-365, 413-414: “profitto spirituale e temporale de’ popoli”, “dell’ignoranza e della superstizione”, “universale istruzione, e per cosa d’assai riguardo”, “neppur l’ombra”.

67. *Ibid.*, f. 451. On the diabolical sabbath, see C. Ginzburg, *Storia notturna. Una decifrazione del sabba*, Turin, Einaudi, 1989; G. Romeo, *Inquisitori, esorcisti e streghe nell’Italia della Controriforma*, Florence, Sansoni, 1990.

women's convents that paid the greatest price; they were transformed into institutions for the education of young girls. The overall number of religious women who took their sacred vows was practically halved within a few years.

The reformist action was later reinforced in 1780 by the nomination of Scipione de' Ricci (1741-1810) as bishop of Pistoia and Prato. Scipione had conducted advanced studies in theology and canonical law, cultivating explicit Jansenist sympathies, and he supported much-needed, radical ecclesiastical reforms. His collaboration with Peter Leopold gained approval in certain sectors of the Tuscan clergy, above all among those attracted by the idea of bringing Christian religion back to the purity of its origins. A new season of religion and politics thus began, marked by even greater progress in the rights of the sovereign to govern religious life. The dense correspondence between the renowned bishop and the grand duke provides an important source for understanding the atmosphere that prevailed. In their letters, Scipione and Peter Leopold confronted in detail and with urgency all issues yet to be resolved: the privileges of the clerical state, religious associations, ecclesiastical property, the exploitation of revenues, the role of the regular orders, as well as the devotional sphere and the pleasures of sacred office.<sup>68</sup>

68. See M. Rosa, *La contrastata ragione. Riforme e religione nell'Italia del Settecento*, Rome, Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2009, pp. 132-143; M. Rosa, *Riformatori e ribelli nel Settecento religioso italiano*, Bari, Dedalo, 1969, pp. 165-213. We have an extensive bibliography on the relationship between Ricci and Peter Leopold. See at least M. Verga, "Il vescovo e il principe. Introduzione alle lettere di Scipione de' Ricci a Pietro Leopoldo (1780-1791)", in *Lettere di Scipione de' Ricci a Pietro Leopoldo (1780-1791)*, ed. by B. Bocchini Camaiani and M. Verga, Florence, Olschki, 1990, vol. I, pp. 3-47; P. Stella, *Il giansenismo in Italia*, vol. II, *Il movimento giansenista e la produzione libraria*, Rome, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2006, pp. 325-326; P. Leopold, *Relazioni sul governo della Toscana*, ed. by A. Silvestrini, vol. I, Florence, Olschki, 1969, pp. 163-187. Moreover, see D. Toccafondi, "La soppressione leopoldina delle confraternite tra riformismo ecclesiastico e politica sociale", *Archivio storico pratese*, 61 (1985), pp. 143-172; C. Fantappiè, *Il monachesimo moderno tra ragion di Chiesa e ragion di Stato. Il caso toscano (XVI-XIX sec.)*, Florence, Olschki, 1993, pp. 201-302. For additional bibliographical references, see G. Greco, "La storiografia sulla Chiesa toscana in età moderna", in *La Toscana in età moderna (secoli XVI-XVIII). Politica, istituzioni, società: studi recenti e prospettive di ricerca*, ed. by M. Ascheri and A. Contini, Florence, Olschki, 2005, pp. 177-200; B. Bocchini Camaiani, "Chiesa e vita religiosa", in *La Toscana dei Lorena al fascismo. Mezzo secolo di storiografia nella cinquantenario della "Rassegna storica toscana"*, ed. by F. Conti and R. P. Coppini, Florence, Polistampa, 2009, pp. 217-242.

## 6. *Heretics, healers and false saints under the gaze of the grand duke*

The consequences of these transformations were soon rendered visible also in the oversight of living saints, or those behaviours that the Inquisition had long defined as a “fabrication of saintliness”. In March of 1774, Mattia Cancelli was imprisoned, guilty of having claimed “with serious deception” to belong to the “family that housed within it the Most Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, and which possessed the privilege conceded by them of healing the illness known by the name of sciatica”. Interrogated by the Minister of Royal Law (and no longer by judges from the Holy Office, as had occurred in previous periods), the presumed thaumaturge responded with incredible declarations: several bishops had signed attestations for him to give credence to his claims. They had thus ended up in the eye of the storm for having dared “to authorise similar falsehoods” that only served to “foment superstition among the people” and compromise the purity of the faith.

Martino Bianchi, bishop of Lucca, justified himself by stating that he had merely supported an inveterate and widespread belief held “by the entire Ecclesiastical State”. His colleague from San Sepolcro, Niccolò Marcacci, responded with irritation. He claimed to have merely completed his duty after having examined “various diplomas” granted by the diocese of Foligno, where the accused was from, which demonstrated an incontrovertible truth: the Cancelli family was directly descended from the apostles Peter and Paul and was recognised as heir to the power to use their hands to assist those afflicted by sciatica. Many of the faithful saw their ailments disappear, which would give reason for their nearly unshakeable convictions. The bishop of Sarzana admitted to having signed the document, being aware of “an ancient and long-standing tradition” that ascribed supernatural powers to the descendants of the house. The bishop of San Miniato, Domenico Poltri, responded on 17 May, his words steeped with evident embarrassment. He confessed to having granted the certification after seeing the signatures of his esteemed colleagues. The legend had been thus reinforced, and any repressive measure existing to prevent it would have been ineffective.<sup>69</sup>

69. ASF, *Segreteria del Regio Diritto*, f. 466, pp. 290-296. On the healing powers of the Cancelli family, see M. Sensi, *Vita di pietà e vita civile di un altopiano tra Umbria e Marche (secc. XI-XVI)*, Rome, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1984; P. Giovetti, *I guaritori*

At the beginning of the following decade, the most relevant cases of false sainthood and suspected heresy took place in the diocese of Pistoia. Decisions taken by Scipione de' Ricci actually brought these cases to the attention of secular authorities: on 7 May 1781, the famous reform bishop wrote to the grand-ducal vicar Filippo Cercignani denouncing a “false Christian” (his name is not mentioned in the documents) who claimed to have been converted “to the true Church from Judaism”. The man had distributed “bulletins” and prescribed “prayer formulas with various superstitious actions” that could break a curse. He had proselytised and could count on a large crowd of devotees. The intervention on the part of secular authorities was therefore necessary to prevent similar individuals from continuing to disseminate false beliefs procuring “spiritual and earthly superstition” among the people.<sup>70</sup>

The thorniest case with the greatest resonance, however, dealt with the religious women of the Dominican convent of Santa Caterina di Prato: Irene Buonamici and Clodesinde Spighi. In the summer of 1781, the women were accused of having faked devout behaviour in order to be taken for saints, and of having made gravely heretical claims, putting into doubt doctrines concerning the Holy Spirit, the Incarnation of the Word, Mary's virginity, the immortality of the soul, the importance of baptism and other sacraments, and the existence of Hell and Purgatory. Irene had broken her vow to the cloister by meeting with her brother Giovan Battista many times, while Clodesinde was suspected of carrying on relations with Portuguese ex-Jesuit Giovanni Bottello and other men. The women had been called before the Holy Office many times, but their penitence was revealed to be unconvincing.

Their situation worsened even more after the depositions given by their sisters to the parish authorities. One of them, Orsola Pasi, claimed to have been instigated to join in “union with God” through “indecent acts”, while the pair of accused nuns frequently slept in the same bed, committing under “her eyes every licentiousness”. Anna Diomira Baroni

*di campagna. Tra magia e medicina*, Rome, Edizioni Mediterranee, pp. 17-24. “con solenne impostura”, “che aveva alloggiati i SS. Apostoli Pietro e Paolo, e che possedeva il privilegio da essi concesso di sanare il male conosciuto sotto il nome di sciatica”, “autorizzare simili falsità”, “fomentar nel popolo la superstizione”, “in tutto lo Stato Ecclesiastico”, “diversi diplomi”, “un'antica e costante tradizione”.

<sup>70</sup> ASF, *Carte Ricci*, Trascrizione dei copialettere N/441, f. II, Reg. 45, p. 98, orig. p. 68, Prato, 7 May 1781: “un falso cristiano”, “alla vera Chiesa dal giudaismo”, “bulletini”, “formole di preghiere e con varj atti superstiziosi”, “pregiudizio spirituale e temporale”.

recounted seeing them take the holy wafer and putting it “in their vagina”. Antonia Salvi claimed that she had heard them utter blasphemies while they held up their robes in clearly obscene acts.<sup>71</sup>

In front of the judges, Irene was rather talkative. She explained that she had been arrested “for being a Christian and confessing Christian truths”. According to her, the prince of everything was God, while Christ was a simple man, no different from all the others, victim of the wickedness of his counterparts, “born of Virgin Mary to Saint Joseph”. She confessed to having put the holy wafer in her vagina, believing Christ to penetrate her in this way and thus wishing to make an act of love toward him. She admitted to having claimed that baptism was only necessary to be recognised as Catholics, but that it was not required to obtain eternal salvation. The key to eternal salvation was – in the words of the Dominican – “in the union between man and woman”. She then touched her intimate parts in front of the judges, claiming that she was “obligated to do it to fulfil her vow of chastity”.

Clodesinde’s interrogation added little to Irene’s. In the presence of the ecclesiastical authorities, the woman abandoned herself to making unmistakable gestures demonstrating the dynamics of the sacrilegious acts she had carried out. She got up from her chair and suddenly raised her robes, provoking bewilderment from those present. She claimed to have learned everything from the “book of truth” that was the voice of God himself. She sustained that Christ had certainly not come to earth to save humanity, but simply “to establish the Law”. She confessed to having had “mutual touching” and “shameful embraces” with some of her sisters and various friars, who had encouraged her to undress under the threat of denying her the sacraments.<sup>72</sup>

71. ASF, *Carte Ricci*, f. 29, *Affari di Prato*, fil. 1, pp. 273-275: “l’unione con Dio”, “atti [...] indecenti”, “di lei ochj ogni licenza”, “alle parti pudende”. On the relationship between sexual misbehaviour and female religiosity, and for further bibliographical information, see C. Monson, *Nuns Behaving Badly: Tales of Music, Magic, Art, and Arson in the Convents of Italy*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2010; *Tribadi, sodomiti, invertite e invertiti, pederasti, femminelle, ermafroditi... per una storia dell’omosessualità, della bisessualità e delle trasgressioni di genere in Italia*, ed. by U. Grassi, V. Lagioia and G. P. Romagnani, Pisa, ETS, 2017; *La fama delle donne. Pratiche femminili e società tra Medioevo ed età moderna*, ed. by V. Lagioia, M. P. Paoli and R. Rinaldi, Rome, Viella, 2020.

72. ASF, *Carte Ricci*, f. 29, *Affari di Prato*, fil. 1, pp. 277-283: “per esser cristiana e confessare le verità cristiane”, “nato da Maria Vergine per commercio di San Giuseppe”, “erroneamente che vi fusse [dentro] Gesù Cristo”, “nell’unirsi fra uomo e donna”,



This thorny affair drew the attention of the Holy See, which quickly showed that they were inclined to contest the case against the two women. Scipione de' Ricci was accused of showing “barely measured fervour”: in requesting the grand duke of Tuscany’s intervention, he had made a public scandal out of that which should have remained secret. In fact, not one judicial document had been sent to Rome, and Tuscan secular authorities even kept the Florentine tribunal of the Holy Office out of the matter. The wager to be won was quite high, considering that the government was also seeking to assert its jurisdictional prerogatives in the feminine and masculine branches of the regular orders. A clear indication of success emerged from the affair: no pontifical protests followed, and Peter Leopold guaranteed his full support to the prelate of Pistoia. In the *Memoria* of his decisions, Scipione de' Ricci did not mince words about “turbulent” people who did not take to heart the “holy Doctrine”. He also claimed his right to decide on the case and on other matters of the same nature, without interference from Rome. The word of bishops was inspired “solely by God” and could not be “opposed or contradicted, nor in the smallest part diminished”.<sup>73</sup>

A few months later, on 5 July 1782, an edict was published that abolished the inquisitorial tribunals, but the transfer of authority on matters of faith to secular judges had already been realised. It is enough to consider that on 18 April the Pontifical Secretary of State, Vincenzo Degli Alberti, had written to the Secretariat of Royal Law asking for information about a Carmelite friar whose last name is all we know: Della Terza. The man enjoyed a well-established level of saintly fame thanks to his presumed gifts of healing, but he was known to frequently cause problems with public order. The investigations set off from the convent of San Paolino di Firenze. The most pressing questions were directed to the prior, who was unafraid and hard-nosed in his response: according to him, the incriminated was “a saint”, and nothing could be said as long as he continued to “make miracles”. Faced with this situation, members of the

“obbligata a farlo per adempiere al voto di castità”, “libro della verità”, “per fondare la Legge”, “toccamenti vicendevoli”, “abbracciamenti vergognosi”.

73. *Ibid.*, pp. 317-322. On the nuns of Prato, see A. Zobi, *Storia civile della Toscana dal 1737 al 1848*, vol. II, Florence, Molini, 1850, pp. 290-298, and the appendix of the same volume, pp. 115-127 (for the abolition of the Holy Office, see pp. 124-127); L. J. A. De Potter, *Vie et Mémoires de Scipion De Ricci*, Paris, Tastu, 1829, pp. 73-81: “poco misurato fervore”, “turbolente”, “sana Dottrina”, “unicamente da Dio”, “contrastata e contraddetta, o nella minima parte diminuita”.

Lorrainian government reacted with similar vehemence. They published an ordinance, clarifying that “true saints” had always lived “secluded in their cells” and that ostentation was “incompatible with saintliness”.<sup>74</sup>

### 7. *The false saint and obedience to the king*

Similar transformations were observed in the Kingdom of Naples. Certainly, the trigger was the case of the lay sister Isabella Milone, who was tried by ecclesiastical and secular tribunals in the 1760s and 1770s for having inspired the birth of a sect and for throwing Naples into disarray by disseminating messages smelling of heresy. Concurrently, her troubling affairs stimulated the production of handwritten and printed records, which reached a consistent number of consumers, interweaving channels of written and oral communication. The competition between friends and enemies of the aspiring saint became a question of public relevance that went beyond the borders of the Bourbon kingdom, setting off an immediate flow of news that was difficult to control, as it was capable of crossing social groups of diverse rank and function, accompanied time and again by maxims, anecdotes, fantastical reenactments and rumours.

The woman, born in Perdifumo near Salerno in 1724, had been entrusted to the spiritual direction of the Teresian friar Apollinare di San Tommaso.<sup>75</sup> Arriving in the capital of the kingdom, she established herself in an apartment near Pontenuovo in Foria, which quickly became a meeting place for the faithful wishing to hear her revelations and receive her love potions, miraculous powders and healing waters.<sup>76</sup> In 1767 (the same year as the expulsion of the Jesuits), the cardinal archbishop Antonino Sersale collected complaints from some Church officials concerned by the superstitious practices of Isabella’s followers, defined “Sabelliani” because they integrated beliefs from the homonymous heretical sect that existed during the first centuries of Christianity. Among them could be found not

74. ASF, *Segreteria del Regio Diritto*, f. 521, pp. 292-294: “un santo”, “a far miracoli”, “i santi veri”, “ritirati nelle loro celle”, “inconciliabile con la santità”.

75. *La verità sfolgorante a fronte dell'impostura*, Naples, Paci, 1782, p. 2. The text is mostly based on the manuscript XXII.C.21, 31 July 1774, titled *Argomento per il Pubblico Disinganno Della spacciata Santità di Isabella Mellone*, in BSNP.

76. *La verità sfolgorante*, pp. 24-25.

only humble commoners but also lawyers, notaries, scribes and influential members of the clergy.

The Regency Council intervened in the matter, guided by Bernardo Tanucci. Ending up in the government's crosshairs were members of the clergy who stubbornly kept in Naples the "bizzoca" who "passed herself off as a saint, miracle worker, a living being who does not eat, a prophetess, a dreaming damsel and of a piety quite different from the true and grounded Christian one".<sup>77</sup> The case brought to mind an old precedent that remained alive in the memory of the Neapolitans: in the first two decades of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Giulia di Marco da Supino had claimed to have supernatural powers, creating a large group of devotees, which came to involve members of the Spanish nobility and the viceroy family itself.<sup>78</sup>

Isabella's scandal also attracted public interest in other Italian states. In early 1769, the Florentine journal *Notizie dal mondo* (*News from the World*) focused on the arrest of two "maliarde" (prostitutes) in the "street called Vico Longo" who were intent on "exercising their magical charms before the door of a miserable girl" and who had fallen into the trap of "their bad arts". When interrogated, the defendants had tried to put the responsibility on "a certain Isabella Milone", a "secular *bizoca*", who enjoyed the reputation of a saint.<sup>79</sup>

In March of the same year, Isabella's enemies filed new complaints with the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs. Isabella was locked up in the prisons of the Vicaria, where she remained for three years on charges of "being a witch, a prostitute and a sorceress".<sup>80</sup> However, evidence of her crimes did not come out. During her imprisonment, she maintained correspondence with her supporters, mainly with the confessor Apollinare di San Tommaso, who continued to promote the prophecies and miracles of his spiritual daughter among the populace and privileged groups,

77. *Lettere di Bernardo Tanucci a Carlo III di Borbone*, 25 August 1767, p. 402: "passar per santa, operatrice di miracoli, vivente senza mangiare, profetessa, una donzella illusa e d'una pietà molto diversa dalla vera e solida cristiana".

78. On Giulia Di Marco, see P. Zito, *Giulia e l'inquisitore*, Naples, Arte Tipografica, 2000. For more bibliographical references, see Palmieri, *I taumaturghi*, pp. 17-18, 29-32.

79. "Notizie da Mondo per l'anno MDCCLXIX", 10 January, p. 46: "due maliarde", "strada detta Vico Longo", "esercitare i loro magici incanti avanti la porta d'una misera ragazza, che sacrificar voleano alle loro pessime arti", "pubbliche carceri", "una certa Isabella Milone", "Bizoca secolare", "per donna di santa vita".

80. ASN, *MAEc*, b. 987, f. 1: "col pretesto di esser strega, maliarda e fattucchiera".

claiming that the Archangel Michael had inspired her. In the meantime, the Sabellians began to slander the archbishop of Naples, and did not spare him from taunts. During the *novena*, a Catholic devotion consisting of nine days of prayer in preparation for the feast of Saint Januarius, they posted a sign on the gates of the Chapel of the Treasure on which they wrote: “Antonino [Sersale, the archbishop], I, Januarius command that you stop persecuting my sister Isabella, if you do not wish to experience the punishments of God”.<sup>81</sup>

The propaganda organised by members of her sect played a fundamental role in the evolution of an affair that took on a sensational profile, occupying public space and imposing itself on the attention of established powers. The *bizzoca*'s story, beyond raising religious questions of primary importance, became the heart of information exchanged between diverse social groups of varied rank and function, founded upon messages, codes and symbols that acquired specific meanings in the 1760s, 1770s and 1780s. Above all, the Neapolitan monarchy was put to a harsh test, tasked with reshaping the role of the clergy in the social order and with honing the instruments of consensus-building by more tightly controlling the circulation of ideas. In the preceding era, the case of Isabella would have been entirely in the hands of ecclesiastical power, but times had already changed. In 1746, Charles of Bourbon had in fact banned the Inquisition from the kingdom, prohibiting bishops and superiors from religious orders from taking orders from Rome in their oversight of trials relating to matters of the faith.<sup>82</sup>

An important resolution arrived on 30 May 1772 when Ferdinand IV ordered the capture of the *bizzoca* of Perdifumo and her imprisonment in the Conservatorio di Rocca dell'Aspide near Salerno. The Sabellians thus

81. *La verità sfolgorante*, pp. 32-33: “Antonino [Sersale], io Gennaro ti comando che lasci di perseguire Isabella mia sorella, se non vuoi provare i castighi di Dio”.

82. Palmieri, “Il lento tramonto del Sant’Uffizio”. On the Holy Office in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, see at least G. Romeo, *L’Inquisizione nell’Italia moderna*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 2002, pp. 110-113; A. Del Col, *L’Inquisizione in Italia dal XII al XVII secolo*, Milan, Mondadori, 2006, pp. 731-734. On the crimes of the clergy, see G. Romeo, M. Mancino, *Clero criminale [...] nell’Italia della Controriforma*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 2013; R. Bizzocchi, “Mormorazione e scandalo. Un caso toscano di ‘economia morale’, 1769”, *Quaderni storici*, 140 (2012), pp. 469-494. On methodological issues, see at least V. Lavenia, “The Holy Office in the Marche of Ancona: Institution and Crimes”, in *The Roman Inquisition: Center Versus Peripheries*, ed. by C. Black and K. Aron-Beller, Boston-Leiden, Brill, pp. 161-192.

suffered a severe blow; many of them were exiled or removed from the capital.<sup>83</sup> The followers of the aspiring saint did not give up and presented pleas to the king in favour of their heroine. A lawyer named Giovan Battista Monsolino took control of the case in 1773. He wrote a detailed report to the government, denouncing “the blasphemies, the insults, the unjust and wicked inventions”, which were made “in all conversations and courtyards, in cafés and even in public streets, at the expense and discredit of a creature” who had been “baptised and redeemed with the precious blood of Jesus Christ”. This “surprising news” raised great “noise” and divided the entire Neapolitan population “into two factions”, and at the same time it spread consternation among Isabella’s friends, “respectable prelates, secular and regular priests, knights, officers, lawyers, and many other very honest [...] faithful vassals” of the king. This description is far from impartial, but the case was still highly relevant to the public. The trial intensified social communication concerning politics and culture.

Nonetheless, Monsolino’s efforts counted little. While maintaining a formal collaboration with the diocesan tribunal of Naples, the secular authority firmly took into its hands the destiny of the case and condemned Isabella to remain in a cell for the rest of her days, isolated from those who knew her, without the right to receive religious solace. Government resolutions did not lessen public interest in the religious laywoman. The battle between supporters and critics continued in reports, testimonials, invectives and jokes that circulated in handwritten form to escape the watchful eye of censors. Apollinare di San Tommaso, Isabella’s spiritual advisor, took over leadership of the movement in favour of Isabella and produced many writings to promote the fame of his heroine, first of which was a long biography titled *Relazione Istorica (Historical Account)*.<sup>84</sup> Among the enemies of the tertiary sister, conversely, was an anonymous abbot who distinguished himself for his determination. He used the pseudonym Basilio Finoro and put at least

83. Tanucci, *Lettere*, 3 August 1773, p. 826.

84. We have two handwritten versions of this text: *Breve e Succinta Relazione della Prodigiosa vita della Gran Serva di Dio Isabella Milone* (BSNSP, MS XXIV.D.13); *Breve Relazione Istorica della Prodigiosa Vita della Gran Serva di Dio Isabella Milone* (BSNSP, MS XXIV.D.17): “le bestemmie, le detrazioni, le ingiurie, le inique e scellerate invenzioni che senza scrupolo”, “in tutte le conversazioni e ridotti, ne’ caffè e sino nella pubblica strada, in discapito e discredito di una creatura battezzata e redenta col sangue prezioso di Gesù Cristo”, “rumore”, “sorprendenti novità”, “due fazioni”, “rispettabilissimi prelati, sacerdoti, secolari e regolari, Cavalieri, ufficiali, avvocati, e molti altri [...] fedeli vassalli”.

five defamatory manuscripts into circulation within a few months. The first was titled *Professione di fede* (*Profession of Faith*) and was dedicated to the refutation of “Eight Articles of the *Sabellian Faith*”.<sup>85</sup> Beyond the apparent theological intent, the writing was, by Finoro’s own admission, a *frascheria*, or satirical pamphlet, aimed at giving the audience not only “pleasant entertainment” but also a useful source of information and admonition “not to fall into the trap” of the prophetic.

Despite great adversity, the fame of Isabella spread to other states of the Italian peninsula, reaching cities like Benevento, Rome and Florence. Several followers kept her “vivid and ruddy blood” in ampoules, in order to reify their devotion. According to Finoro’s denunciation, the heretical implications of the lay sister’s ideas were clear: Isabella embodied a model of active religiosity, subverting the traditional subordination that regulated the relationship between penitent and confessor. Indeed, she refused priestly mediation, engaging in biblical exegesis independently, in line with other reformers. The Sabellians wanted their heroine canonised without the approval of the Church of Rome, relying only on the “consensus of the people”.<sup>86</sup>

The denigratory campaign continued on 16 March 1773, when the same Finoro put into circulation an *Apologia*, again in handwritten form, that proposed to demolish “with force [...] the Fanaticism” generated by Isabella.<sup>87</sup> On 31 May it was the turn of a *Lettera* addressed to the most obstinate of the *bizzoca*’s followers.<sup>88</sup> On 18 March 1775, he published the *Osservazioni* on the “Romanzo della *Storica Relazione* dello illuso Direttore” (“Novel on the *Historical Account* of the Enchanted Director”).<sup>89</sup> As often happened in those years, even in this scandal the word “novel” was used to identify a lie, deception and, more generally, all crimes based on dissimulation.<sup>90</sup> This largely anonymous production showed, in both form

85. *La verità sfolgorante*, p. 20; BSNP, *Professione di Fede Del Sacerdote Secolare Basilio*, 18 July 1782: “Contraddittori”, “sotto il nome di Basilio Finoro”, “8 Articoli della Fede Sabelliana”.

86. *Professione di Fede*, pp. 1, 6, 12, 16-18, 23: “frascheria”, “un piacevole passatempo”, “precauzione a non cader nella Trappola”, “sangue vivido e rubicondo”, “dal solo consenso de’ Popoli”.

87. *La verità sfolgorante*, p. 45. No handwritten version of the text is in BSNP.

88. The letter has been published in its entirety in *La verità sfolgorante*, pp. 80-116.

89. This text is in *La verità sfolgorante* and is titled *Osservazione su la disdetta*, pp. 6-8.

90. See P. Palmieri, *L’eroe criminale. Giustizia, politica e comunicazione nel XVIII secolo*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2022.

and content, a remarkable adaptability. Far from acquiring the aspect of a formal accusation in legal terms, this corpus of texts made use of teasing tones, turning Isabella and her fans into *commedia dell'arte* or *opera buffa* characters, in order to entertain readers and inform them. Isabella's story was unstable and polymorphous, suspended between claims of truth and flights of fancy founded on stereotypes of the hagiographical tradition, but also on suggestions from novels, romances, poetry and theatre. When all was said and done, this same story became a popular tale that lent itself to multiple reuses and that gave life to a long battle between those who found her innocent or guilty.

In 1778, many of the writings on the case were collected in one volume, which was never printed but nevertheless circulated in handwritten form under the title *Il fanatismo de' Sabelliani (The Fanatism of the Sabellians)*.<sup>91</sup> In 1780, the friar Apollinare di San Tommaso fell seriously ill, and although his spiritual daughter had predicted a speedy recovery, he died. The deceitful prophecy left room for satire to spread throughout the streets of Naples. Among the most widely circulated texts, there was a blank-verse poem titled *Le sette corde de lo calascione scassato* ("The Seven Strings of the Broken Calascione"). It referred to a very popular instrument, similar to a mandolin, that was capable of producing only out-of-tune notes. Worthy of attention is also the "schiribizzo" (poetic joke) titled *Lo trase e jesse de li verme* ("The Entry and Exit of Worms"), which made fun of those who believed in the incorruptibility of the aspiring saint's body. On 22 November 1782, Isabella signed an abjuration in the Hospital of the Incurables, and she died a few weeks later, after ten years, five months and twenty-one days of detention.<sup>92</sup>

This ending does not diminish the fluid and chameleon-like nature of the plot. The different segments of the story raised the curiosity of a heterogeneous audience, which included individuals of different classes, economic conditions and educational levels. In an attempt to defend a credible thesis, the members of the two factions did not disdain the use of a large repertoire of persuasive techniques, from time-to-time adding small pieces to a collective storytelling, and thus actively participating in the expansion of a narrative universe.<sup>93</sup>

91. *La verità sfolgorante*, p. 45.

92. *Ibid.*, pp. 55-56, and appendix, p. 4.

93. See Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*.

In the same year, 1782, a solitary and anonymous text dedicated to the affair was published: *La verità sfolgorante a fronte dell'impostura* (*The Blazing Truth in the Face of Dishonesty*). The writing collected the most notable anecdotes about the event, constructing a narrative that also had a satirical tone: Isabella, Apollinare and the Sabellians appeared as bumbling and unhinged protagonists of a little mock-heroic poem, destined to end in dishonour. The didactic message of the work was enclosed in their inglorious defeat and oriented toward a celebration of monarchical power.<sup>94</sup> The author asserted in a clear manner that the destiny of Isabella Milone was decided in the courtrooms of royal tribunals, and that the ecclesiastical judges had simply performed a supplemental job, always deferring their decisions to the authority of Ferdinand IV. The pamphlet in question, *La verità sfolgorante*, made the public aware of Church-State affairs at the broadest level. In the end, the pamphlet can be seen as a defensive move by the Bourbon monarchy, which was capable of asserting its primacy even over trials of faith, succeeding at promoting the profile of a new and edifying brand of saintliness and punishing deception and imitation.

94. *La verità sfolgorante*, p. 65.





## 2. Dying Like a Saint

### 1. *The body of miracles*

In Chapter 1, we explored the stories of individuals who in life were worshipped as saints. These were people revered by kings and queens and capable of eliciting feelings of devotion among different social groups or, conversely, of being condemned for masquerading as saints. It is time to examine the charismatic figures who died “in the odor of sanctity”, that is to say, in the transitional phase that allowed some aspiring saints to be transformed into “candidate saints” and begin their climb towards canonisation. This was a turning point in the creation and consolidation of a cult, both for the faithful and for the ecclesiastical and secular authorities.

To understand the methodological questions connected with our investigation into these themes, let us consider a paradigmatic case study that is helpful in revealing – for this is what I intend to show – how the sociopolitical, religious, economic, cultural and media transformations of the Italian 18<sup>th</sup> century played a part in redesigning the physiognomy of the cult of saints. The case study is that of Teresa Margherita Redi (1747-1770), a young Tuscan noblewoman from the city of Arezzo who ended up at the centre of various conflicts and debates that lasted until the Napoleonic Age and the Restoration. In 1765, at around eighteen years of age, this young woman (who was born Anna Maria) became a Carmelite nun in the convent of Santa Teresa di Firenze. In early March 1770, she became gravely ill and died just a few days later, on 7 March, at age 23. Her body – according to an anonymous hagiography published at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century – became rigid almost immediately, and “a dull, livid colour” appeared on

her face and neck. Her belly swelled out of all proportion showing the evil consequences of “intestinal gangrene”.<sup>1</sup>

However, just before her burial, something unexpected happened. The “livid-purple” of her face, hands and feet began to take on a “softer pallor”, just as her face took on a rosier complexion. Teresa Margherita’s sisters ordered that the burial be stopped and chose to wait a few more hours. In the end, it was a worthwhile decision, for the gruesome body’s metamorphosis continued, in ways that seemed miraculous to those present. Her arms and cheeks turned a “vivid crimson”, and Teresa appeared “more beautiful and rosier than when she was alive”.<sup>2</sup> The first medical examination took place on 9 March, two days after her death, by the surgeon Antonio Romiti, who was left speechless “in observing [...] the beauty” of the girl, who seemed to be “sweetly sleeping”. For years, Romiti had been charged with taking care of the Carmelites, and he declared that he was even more amazed that he did not smell the typical stench of a body in decay. On the contrary, the room was filled with a “sweet smell” unequalled in nature.

Upon hearing Romiti’s clear assessment of the situation, the nuns of the Florentine convent became overjoyed and cried out that they had witnessed a miracle. Quickly informed of the facts, the archbishop of Florence, Gaetano Incontri (1704-1781), tried to take control of the situation and ordered other examinations of the body to be made.<sup>3</sup> The events took a decisive turn on 22 March when the prelate himself arrived on the scene, accompanied by other experts that he had personally called to weigh in on the delicate case. A few noteworthy details were unsettling to those present: the eyes were slightly sunken, the nostrils were discoloured by a thin layer of mold, and the lips seemed parched.<sup>4</sup> All things considered, however, the body appeared perfectly intact to their eyes. The face showed no signs of

1. *Breve compendio della vita della Serva di Dio suor Teresa Margarita Redi del Cuor di Gesù, monaca teresiana, dedicata alla Sagra Real Maestà di Carlo Ludovico Infante di Spagna Re di Etruria*, Rome, Antonio Fulgoni, 1806: “un color pallido e livido”, “cancrena intestinale”.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 154-155: “porpora viva”, “più bella e più vermiglia di quando era viva”.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 155-156. See also the records of the Florentine process of beatification: ASAF, *Processus beatificationis Ven. Servae Dei Sororis Theresiae Margharitae Redi*, vol. I: “una gran fragranza”.

4. ASA, Archivio domestico Albergotti, 22, B XXXI, *Vita della serva di Dio suor Teresa Margherita Redi del S. Cuor di Gesù, monaca professa dell’Ordine delle Carmelitane Scalze del Monastero di Santa Teresa di Firenze, estratta fedelmente dai processi ordinari compilati per la causa della Sua Beatificazione e Canonizzazione*, c. XIII.

decomposition, and the body did not emit any unpleasant odors.<sup>5</sup> Influential scholars, after putting their expert gazes to the test, declared that this was an instance of “marvellous and prodigious incorruptibility”.<sup>6</sup>

There still remained some doubt about where the body had been kept: a cellar exposed to humidity and bad weather.<sup>7</sup> The room in which Teresa’s body was held – wrote the experts – only had two small openings that let in sunlight, but there was not enough light “to clearly distinguish objects”, even at midday. These clues suggested that the autopsies had been carried out under artificial light, with the use of candles and lamps. Nonetheless, it was undeniable that the hands and feet of the deceased were “white and sufficiently pliable”, while the arms had not become rigid and maintained their flexibility. They even observed some evidence of bloodletting on the body, marks that were surrounded by small circles “of a beautiful light pink colour”.<sup>8</sup>

Over the course of fifteen days when the body remained on display, various clergymen, nobles and people of humble birth asked for and obtained permission to enter the rooms of the Carmelite convent, seizing small relics that were said to possess miraculous powers. In some cases, it was the nuns themselves who made them using the clothing of the deceased. Even after the funeral, Teresa Margherita Redi’s fame continued to grow exponentially.<sup>9</sup> The devout began to worship her as a saint, but the Church remained cautious and continued to commission scientific inquiries into the body of the young girl from Arezzo. Indeed, there were still important questions that needed to be answered.

The archbishop Gaetano Incontri needed assurances before endorsing a candidate saint who could excite easy passions, but who also risked being but a passing craze that would come to nothing. His position was very delicate, and he was certainly familiar with the preconditions for being raised to the glory of the altars. He had already presided over the Florentine commission for the beatification of Giuseppe Calasanzio (1557-1648, who

5. *Breve compendio*, p. 157; ASA, Archivio domestico Albergotti, 22, B XXXI, *Vita della serva di Dio*, c. XIII.

6. ASAF, *Processus beatificationis*, vol. I. See also ASA, Archivio domestico Albergotti, 22, B XXXI, *Vita della serva di Dio*, c. XIII; ASDA, *Memorie sacre*, vol. II; *Breve compendio*, pp. 158-159: “incorruzione portentosa e prodigiosa”.

7. ASA, Archivio domestico Albergotti, 22, B XXXI, *Vita della serva di Dio*, c. XIII.

8. ASAF, *Processus beatificationis*, vol. I: “per distinguere chiaramente gli oggetti”, “bianchi e sufficientemente trattabili”, “d’un bel colore carnicino chiaro”.

9. ASV, Congregazione dei Riti, 822, *Teresa Margherita Redi*, ff. 89r-90.

became a blessed in 1748 and a saint in 1767), and he had made a name for himself in reformist circles because of his anti-Jesuit positions. At the same time, however, the bishop vigilantly tracked the behaviours and attitudes of Grand Duke Peter Leopold, and he followed his early initiatives to modernise the organisation of the state of Tuscany with suspicion. Thus, he could not afford any missteps and was mindful of the scepticism that an alleged incorrupt body could evoke in the world of medical science and among ecclesiastical authorities.<sup>10</sup>

The preceding decades saw fierce debates on the subject, punctuated at times by critical voices. Though not the sole deciding factor, the presence of a sweet smelling and uncorrupted body was a decisive impetus in the opening of a case for beatification and for its future success. However, throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Enlightenment culture, founded on reason and scientific knowledge, began to cast doubt on principles that in previous centuries had been accepted without question. The debates over cults, the credibility of miracles, the possibility of the supernatural exerting influence over life on this earth, superstitions, witchcraft, magic, vampirism, the authenticity of relics and the veneration of sacred images grew more and more heated.<sup>11</sup>

In 1739, Giuseppe Davanzati, a prelate from Apulia, circulated the first handwritten edition of his *Dissertazione sopra i vampiri* (*Dissertation on Vampires*). The idea to write on such a peculiar subject came to him

10. See B. C. Tesi, "Incontri, Francesco Gaetano", in DBI, 62 (2004). See also B. A. Bouley, *Pious Postmortems: Anatomy, Sanctity, and the Catholic Church in Early Modern Europe*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017; *Public Uses of Human Remains and Relics in History*, ed. by S. Cavicchioli and L. Provero, New York-London, Routledge, 2020. For more general information, see *The Body of Evidence: Corpses and Proofs in Early Modern European Medicine*, ed. by F. P. De Ceglia, Boston-Leiden, Brill, 2020.

11. See F. Venturi, *Settecento riformatore*, vol. I, *Da Muratori a Beccaria*, Turin, Einaudi, 1969, pp. 355-385; L. Parinetto, *Magia e ragione. Una polemica sulle streghe in Italia intorno al 1750*, Florence, La Nuova Italia, 1974; E. Brambilla, *Corpi invasi e viaggi dell'anima. Santità, possessione, esorcismo dalla teologia barocca alla medicina illuminista*, Rome, Viella, 2010; F. P. De Ceglia, "La scienza dei vampiri: Giuseppe Davanzati e i confini tra vita e morte nell'Italia del Settecento", *Atti Acc. Rov. Agiati*, 5 (2015), pp. 79-101 and F. P. De Ceglia, "I vampiri di Partenope. Riflessioni sui limiti della natura, tra Napoli e l'Europa", in *I demoni di Napoli*, pp. 275-296; *Gli illuministi e i demoni. Il dibattito su magia e stregoneria dal Trentino all'Europa*, ed. by R. Suitner, Rome, Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2019. Within a few years – in the specific context of the Italian publishing market – Girolamo Tartarotti (1749), Scipione Maffei (1749), Clemente Baroni di Cavalcabò (1753) and Augustin Calmet (1756) published important works on these themes.

during his extensive travels throughout Europe, where he heard many unsettling stories. In the villages of Silesia, for example, the peasants were terrorised by the idea that some of the dead could come back to life to carry out nocturnal raids, torment the living, drink their blood and injure livestock by biting them and committing other violent acts. The bodies of the presumed vampires were exhumed and, like the bodies of saints, showed no signs of decay. The bishops and imperial judges were racked with doubt: the “servants of God” and the “creatures of Satan” exhibited the same supernatural traits. Every possible action one could take seemed ill-advised when facing the fury of a populace that was dominated by superstition and that performed gruesome rites of purification, impaling and beheading of the corpses of the unfortunate persons afflicted with the shame of suspicion.

Given the delicacy of the matter, pope Benedict XIV (1740-1758) felt compelled to provide some clarity. In his famous treatise titled *De Servorum Dei Beatificatione et Beatorum Canonizatione*, he wrote that some bodies remain incorrupt by natural means while others are artificially embalmed.<sup>12</sup> It was no accident that during the same period, the case of Caterina de’ Vigri (1413-1463), a Clarisse from Bologna canonised in 1712, returned to the fore. According to biographers of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, the woman’s mortal remains had done astounding things in the presence of the faithful, moving on their own, kneeling in front of the altar and letting out alarming sounds.<sup>13</sup> Modern critics were more inclined to think that such stories were the products of fantasy or religious zeal. Caterina, in their opinion, had been mummified by skilled specialists, in order to impress the most credulous and gullible believers.

These same doubts weighed heavily on Teresa Margherita Redi’s beatification process. In March 1770, in the Carmelite convent of Florence, an important debate began that centred around the very body of the young girl from Arezzo. The official recognition that her body had been miraculously preserved and had undergone an even more prodigious transformation could determine whether the beatification process would begin. Archbishop Gaetano Incontri understood this but preferred to

12. De Ceglia, “La scienza dei vampiri”: “servi di Dio”, “creature di Satana”.

13. See C. Dogheria, *Le avventure del cadavere*, Catania, Stampa alternativa, 2006, pp. 203-204. The source is P. Lambertini, *De Servorum Dei Beatificatione et Beatorum Canonizatione Libri IV*, Padua, Giovanni Manfrè, 1743, vol. IV, par. I, ch. 30, pp. 281-283.

proceed with caution. He wanted to hold all the cards and not risk compromising his reputation. It was during these critical months that he promoted the Carmelite friar Idelfonso di San Luigi (1724-1792), spiritual director of the candidate saint, to the position of synodal examiner (a member of the diocese who assisted with administrative proceedings regarding the clergy).<sup>14</sup> We can assume that he wanted Idelfonso by his side to help him manage what appeared to be a very challenging situation.

Nevertheless, during this phase of the cult's formation, there was another protagonist capable of outmanoeuvring everyone else thanks to his determination and drive: Ignazio Redi, Teresa's father. When he learned about the presumed miracle, the nobleman from Arezzo put all his energy into stoking people's devotion to Teresa. We cannot exclude the possibility that he was motivated by faith and paternal affection, but we have good reason to believe that his actions were driven by other hidden motives. Let us try to see what those motives were.

## 2. *The father of the candidate saint*

The lineage of the Redi family is uncertain, but the papers kept in their private archive speak of Spanish ancestors who arrived in Tuscany in the first few years of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Yet, it was the celebrated physician and naturalist Francesco Redi (1626-1697) who brought fame to the family. After having made a name for himself as a poet, he won a place of privilege in the court of the Medici, who bestowed on him the position of *bali* (knight commander) of the Order of Saint Stephen. This important appointment, which was viewed as a major recognition for the nobles of the Tuscan state, was passed down through inheritance to his nephew Gregorio, who fathered seven sons.

One of his sons was Ignazio, who was born on 30 August 1717. While Ignazio's brothers were groomed for religious careers in the Benedictine order, the Jesuit order and the secular clergy, ever since he was a young boy his distinct role within the family was clear: to safeguard the family estate and produce heirs. He later married Camilla Ballati (a noblewoman from Siena) and had four children, one of which was Teresa. Despite his many

14. G. G. Fagioli Vercellone, "Ildefonso di S. Luigi Gonzaga (al secolo Benedetto Liborio Maria Frediani)", in DBI, 62 (2004).

family obligations, Ignazio also devoted himself to humanistic studies, delving into the classics of antiquity and joining the Accademia dei Forzati under the pseudonym Alceste.<sup>15</sup> His numerous writings help us understand his cultural, political and religious positions: his affected style, marked by Arcadian and Mannerist influences, revealed a profoundly conservative spirit that was unwilling to accept the propositions of Enlightenment thought. His stilted poetry and his bombastic and verbose letters suggest a fragile character grappling with a difficult situation.

In fact, young Teresa's death (1770) came at the height of a dark period for the Redi family, which had been dispossessed of important estates in the wake of reformist policies spearheaded by the Lorraine government. Even holding public offices and high ecclesiastical positions had become increasingly difficult. Ignazio's brother, Giovan Battista, was forced to give up the canonicate of the cathedral to help his nephew Diego Giuseppe Maria (Teresa's brother). The family, however, had been reluctant to approve this plan, thus revealing painful internal divisions. Belonging to the Order of Saint Stephen – an important topic that we will return to in the next chapter – no longer afforded them the advantages of the past and, consequently, Ignazio found himself having to face a rather complex economic situation. A few years later, in a testimony given for the beatification of his daughter, he even admitted to having been forced to “sell the carriage [symbol of their aristocratic privilege]” to ensure that his children had an education, without fear of damaging his image.<sup>16</sup>

Teresa Margherita's father, however, adopted a careful strategy: he left his sons at the Jesuit college of Cicognini of Prato, while he sent his daughter to the boarding school of the Benedictines of S. Apollonia of Florence. Gregorio Maria, the first-born son, was the only one who did not take up a career in the Church. Francesco Saverio, on the other hand, set himself apart by showing initiative: at first, he joined the Society of Jesus and, after the suppression of the order, assumed the role of secular priest. Their mother Camilla Ballati – according to testimonies given in subsequent trials to raise Teresa to the altars – shattered, if only in part,

15. Fr. Ferdinando di Santa Maria, “Il padre santo di una santa: il cavaliere Ignazio M. Redi”, *Ephemerides carmeliticae*, 10 (1959), pp. 8-12; G. Redi, *Opere divise in quattro tomi e consacrate al merito di Mons. Enriquez*, 3 vols, Venice, Romiti, 1751-1758.

16. Fr. Ferdinando di Santa Maria, “Il padre santo di una santa”, pp. 12-16: “dismettere carrozza”.



this uniform description of loving and steadfast piety. In fact, she was described as a lover of parties, dances, high society, honours bestowed upon the nobility and carnival festivities. Her behaviour, in some cases, proved rather embarrassing for her family, especially when compared with that of Ignazio who, in the minutes of the trial proceedings, always appeared to be an example of virtue, an irreproachable model of pious life.<sup>17</sup>

The sources that shed light on the relationship between the nobleman from Arezzo and the daughter who was a candidate for the glory of the altars all have the distinctive qualities of hagiographic texts. The many letters exchanged between the two therefore do not help us much, for they are often filled with innumerable annotations regarding religious doctrine and prayer exercises. The head of the Redi family, facing the complex task of needing to describe himself, assumed the role of both father and spiritual director. He painted himself as a weary knight racked with sorrow and bent on resisting the temptations of a treacherous and cruel world, and as one who could only be delivered through the help of his daughter and her faith.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, Ignazio's letters repeatedly revolved around the Jesuit order's devotion to the Sacred Heart, which was inspired by the visions of the French Visitandine Marguerite-Marie Alacoque (1647-1690) and was marked by impulses to legitimise and strengthen monarchical powers, preserve social hierarchies and respect the established order.<sup>19</sup> Once a Carmelite, the girl took the name Teresa Margherita del Cuore di Gesù (of the Sacred Heart of Jesus). Her life in the convent, from her daily devotional exercises to the celebrations of canonical feasts, was profoundly influenced by this decision.

As we have already learned, Teresa died on Wednesday, 7 March 1770, but it took three days before the news of her death reached her parents. In his first few letters to the Carmelite nuns who had been looking after the young woman, the nobleman from Arezzo expressed nothing but gratitude towards them and lamented the fact that human weakness caused him to feel pain over the loss of his daughter: we can deduce that he was not yet aware of what was happening to his daughter's body. In a letter dated 22 March to the nun Anna Maria Piccolomini, we see the beginnings of

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 17-23.

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 25-28, 34.

19. On the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, see D. Menozzi, *Sacro Cuore: un culto tra devozione interiore e restaurazione cristiana della società*, Rome, Viella, 2001.

what can be interpreted as a swift change in his behaviour: “the great, admirable, and most loving God is to be eternally praised for having given me such a Daughter, [...] and for having placed her in your garden of virtue where [...] she became a Saint, and has likewise desired to make it self-evident before the eyes of the world”. From that moment on, Ignazio’s actions showed his growing resolve. He began collecting written testimonies that would be useful for the opening of the beatification process and requested detailed reports of all that occurred in the Carmelite convent in Florence. He asked that the objects used by Teresa be sent to him: locks of her hair, pieces of her habit, etc. He began to distribute all of these objects among individuals who were both devout and hungry for relics. To the painter Anna Piattoli he entrusted the task of painting a portrait of the deceased, which he hoped would facilitate the diffusion of a new cult.<sup>20</sup>

The communications between Ignazio Redi and the spiritual director Idelfonso di San Luigi rapidly intensified. Their primary objective was to produce a well-documented and credible biography of the candidate saint. There was no lack of support from individuals in high places. The archbishop of Florence Gaetano Incontri, though he remained cautious, appeared sympathetic, and his colleague Francesco Maria Ginori (diocesan ordinary from Fiesole) appeared equally supportive, enthusiastically accepting pieces of young Teresa’s habit. Ignazio encouraged the nuns of the Carmelite convent of Santa Teresa to make use of all the objects that had belonged to his daughter: her pillowcases were cut into a hundred small pieces, and each of them was sealed in a small envelope authenticated by the Mother Superior. Moreover, he ordered 500 copies of devotional holy pictures and put them in copper frames. The costs he incurred were considerable, but his economic difficulties were overshadowed by his growing belief that his investment would eventually turn a profit. The nobleman was not to be disappointed, for news of alleged miraculous events soon surfaced. After enduring a case of “tuberculous dactylitis in one arm” and gout, a farm worker regained his health after holding in his hands a relic that came from the Florentine convent.<sup>21</sup>

20. Fr. Ferdinando di Santa Maria, “Il padre santo di una santa”, pp. 38-39: “Il grande, l’ammirabile ed amorosissimo Iddio sia in eterno lodato per avermi dato una tal Figlia, [...] e per averla posta in cotesto giardino di virtù dove [...] si è fatta Santa, ed ha voluto altresì farlo palpabilmente conoscere agli occhi del mondo”.

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 164-165: “spina ventosa in un braccio”.

However, there was no lack of obstacles either. The nuns of the boarding school of S. Apollonia, where Teresa had spent her first years away from home before becoming a Carmelite, refused to supply the testimonies requested for the writing of the biography of the candidate saint. What motivated their obstructionism is difficult to determine, but we can imagine that the young woman's decision to abandon the Benedictine order had not been taken very well by the sisters. Ignazio, in any case, discovered a suitable solution by leveraging what he had learned from hagiographic texts. In fact, on 7 June 1770, he wrote: "I read in the biography of a great servant of God, written by the renowned Father Scaramelli of the Society of Jesus, that said Servant of God had to endure a great deal of aversion from her fellow sisters".<sup>22</sup> With this annotation, he was referencing the biography of the Franciscan Maria Crocifissa Satellico, published in Venice in 1750 and reprinted in 1752 and 1761.<sup>23</sup> Being a careful reader of devotional texts, Ignazio was therefore able to find useful tips for the construction of his daughter's hagiographic profile. With the complete backing of the confessor Idelfonso, he intended to incorporate all the seemingly dissonant and contradictory aspects of the events surrounding Teresa in a closely knit story in which every detail needed to be traced back to the workings of divine providence.

Thus, the collection of objects was as meticulous as the choice of doctrinal positions was calibrated. Nevertheless, the nobleman from Arezzo focused the majority of his attention on his daughter's incorruptible body, for he understood that the new cult's fate rested on it. In a note dated 3 August 1770 and placed in the Florentine diocesan trial records, we read: "I am most certain that the burial room does not smell like mold, as one would expect, but of cypress, and besides that, I would be surprised if the smell didn't become even more pleasant and less human".<sup>24</sup> Almost echoing his words, Idelfonso praised the miracle of the dead body that had regained "all at once

22. *Ibid.*, 7 June 1770, pp. 166-167: "Ho letto in una vita di una gran serva di Dio scritta dal celebre Padre Scaramelli della Compagnia di Gesù, che detta Serva di Dio, riceveva dalle sue sorelle religiose grandi contrarietà".

23. G. B. Scaramelli, *Vita di suor Maria Crocifissa Satellico monaca francescana nel monastero di Monte Novo scritta dal padre Gio. Battista Scaramelli della Compagnia di Gesù*, Venice, Giuseppe Rosa, 1750.

24. ASAF, *Processus beatificationis*, vol. III: "Sono persuasissimo che la stanza di sepoltura non renda il sito di muffa, che dovrebbe, ma l'odore di cipresso, e oltre di ciò punto mi meraviglierei, se rendesse ancora grata, e non umana fragranza".

the colour white and then vermillion”, had appeared “pliable, flexible”, and had been left exposed “in the humid and stuffy burial room of the Nuns, emitting a sweet smell”, in the first important biography of Teresa completed in the spring of 1773. The event was met with the “excitement of all the people of Florence, Tuscany, and of every social condition”.<sup>25</sup>

### 3. *Miracles, authority and faith*

The miracle of the incorruptible body soon became an effective impetus for other reputed supernatural events. To start with, the people who frequented the convent – workers, purveyors of basic goods – were the ones who stole flower petals that had come into contact with the body and gave them to family members. According to accounts by the worshippers, all the objects that belonged to Teresa gave off a sweet smell.<sup>26</sup> In the first few months after Teresa’s death, Idelfonso counted over 60 declarations of graces received, but in his biography, he made explicit reference to only 38 of these, which mainly benefited believers in the areas around Florence and Arezzo.<sup>27</sup>

The relics circulated by Ignazio and the other supporters of the new cult had their desired effect, which was reported like clockwork by different believers to the diocesan authorities of Florence. For instance, on 12 June 1770, Giuseppe Brizzi, a Celestine monk from Milan, reported that he had sustained a wound to the head after a terrible fall. He had lost a considerable amount of blood and, finding himself in a desperate situation, placed all his faith in a tiny piece of Teresa Redi’s scapular, given to him by his brothers. Additionally, he refused the help of the doctors, who planned “to make an incision on his head” to prevent the formation of an infected blood clot. Giuseppe’s stubbornness was rewarded: the wound closed on its own, even though he was unable to give the ecclesiastical judges any scientific explanation for his recovery.<sup>28</sup>

25. “La Biografia di S. Teresa Margherita Redi scritta per il papa Clemente XIV”, ed. by Fr. Gabriele di S. Maria, *Ephemerides carmeliticae*, 1/4 (1950), p. 561: “a un tratto il color bianco e poi vermiglio”, “pieghevole, flessibile”, “nell’umida, e uggjata stanza sepolcrale delle Religiose, tramandante soave odore”, “commozione di tutto il popolo Fiorentino, e Toscano, e di ogni ceto di persone”.

26. *Breve compendio*, pp. 160-161.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 63; “La Biografia di S. Teresa Margherita Redi”, pp. 562-568.

28. ASAF, *Processus beatificationis*, vol. I, ff. 30-31: “fargli un taglio nella fronte”.

That same summer, Anna Becherini Piattoli, the painter who was working on the portrait of the candidate saint, saw a long-term illness of hers begin to worsen. An infection caused by “two scrofulous excrescences on the head” risked becoming gangrenous and began to discharge “putrid substances”. Giuseppe Teodoro Paillot, “one of the chief surgeons” of the military hospital of Florence, said he planned on performing surgery, but the woman seemed to have other ideas. She preferred placing her trust in “divine intervention, [which was] a better doctor and a safer bet”. Thus, she decided to retrieve a lock of Teresa Redi’s hair that had been given to her by *bali* Ignazio Redi and place it on the wound which, in very little time, drained completely. Paillot could not give a rational explanation for what had occurred and said that he was “ready to provide a written statement describing the supernatural recovery”. He signed a sworn deposition on 14 December 1770, which was attached to the proceedings of the beatification trial.<sup>29</sup>

By contrast, there were heated arguments concerning the recovery of Beatrice Kajer, who was a teacher at the conservatory of the Bianchette. For six years, she had suffered from “many complicated illnesses considered incurable by professors”. She had “unrelenting pain in her head, lower abdomen and kidneys, accompanied by shortness of breath, convulsions and almost total paralysis”. In early 1773, her health deteriorated even further with “scirrhus tumours, bouts of vertigo, and lastly, fevers”, until the doctors decided to give up and turn her over “to the care of the priests”. At that point, the confessor entered and gave the woman a picture of Teresa Margherita – it is not difficult to imagine that it was a copy of the painting done by Anna Piattoli – and that succeeded where science had failed. The sick woman felt “a sudden and remarkable feeling in her legs” and rose to her feet, to the rejoicing of the sisters.<sup>30</sup> Beatrice’s story was also recounted in a printed pamphlet meant to encourage devotion. This text also attacked the scepticism of the educated who venerated

29. *Ibid.*, ff. 40-42: “due scrofe sopra la testa”, “materie putrefatte”, “uno dei cerusici maggiori”, “all’aiuto divino, miglior medico e più sicuro”, “pronto a fame un attestato dimostrativo di una guarigione soprannaturale”.

30. *Breve compendio*, pp. 168-169: “molti e complicati malori, dichiarati incurabili dai Professori”, “pertinaci dolori nel capo, nel basso ventre, e nei reni, accompagnati da affanno, e convulsioni, e quasi perfetta paralisia”, “tumori scirrosi, vertigini, e finalmente la febre”, “all’assistenza dei Sacerdoti”, “all’improvviso un moto straordinario nelle gambe”.

Enlightenment culture and who were eager to voice their “opposition” at the mere mentioning of miracles.<sup>31</sup>

However, the most important event in this first phase of the cult’s promotion was without a doubt the healing of Anna Fedele Bartolommei. Through the mediations of Idelfonso and the upper ranks of the Carmelite order, word of the incident reached the ears of Pope Clement XIV (1769-1774), who ordered the apostolic nuncio in Florence to keep a close eye on what was happening. The information collected by the ecclesiastical authorities reveal controversial points of view produced by people’s belief in the miracle. These views oscillated between unbridled enthusiasm and the wariest scepticism.<sup>32</sup>

Anna was born on 4 November 1750 “to healthy parents”, even if her father, the marchese Mattias Bartolommei, had often suffered from “frequent headaches” in his youth. The girl was “endowed with a good bodily constitution and was of suitable stature”. She enjoyed perfect health, except for “some very minor illnesses not attributable to the madness of love”. She joined the Franciscan order on 17 May 1768, and made it her solemn profession a little more than a year later. Her health problems began on 15 October 1770, when she started to complain of “headaches, minor cases of vertigo, and a pain in her throat thought to have been caused by a simple fluxion”. On 4 November she was struck with a high fever. The doctor performed “some moderate bloodletting on her” and prescribed “a moderate diet” that got her back on her feet in about 15 days. However, her health problems persisted and were endured in silence by the young woman until 25 April 1771, when she was again overwhelmed by “intense bouts of vertigo accompanied by vomiting and fevers”.

Thus, the course of treatment she had undergone was not as effective as they had hoped. “Unbroken striations of the muscles of the neck” – wrote the doctors in their reports – made any kind of movement impossible, and the woman’s head exhibited an alarming degree of swelling on the right side. Warm baths and the opening of “artificial wounds” to encourage the discharge of infected fluids proved ineffective.<sup>33</sup> On 12 January 1772,

31. ASAF, *Processus beatificationis*, vol. I. On the case of Beatrice Kajer, see also ASV, *Segreteria di stato*, Florence, 161, f. 179: “contrarietà”.

32. “La Biografia di S. Teresa Margherita Redi”, p. 521.

33. ASV, *Segreteria di stato*, Florence, 161, ff. 129-131: “da genitori sani”, “frequenti dolori di capo”, “dotata di buono abito di corpo, e di giusta statura”, “qualche leggerissima malattia non riducibile ad affezione isterica”, “dolore al capo, leggieri vertigini, e dolore

Anna was afflicted by intense pains in her chest and head, “convulsive coughing” that prevented her from drinking, and by a numbing of the right side of her body. On 19 June of the same year, she was struck by convulsions that rendered her completely paralysed, unconscious and unable to move or eat. By then, the situation seemed beyond hope, and the spiritual directors of the convent decided it was time to give her the sacrament of Extreme Unction.<sup>34</sup>

Instead, on the morning of 3 January 1773, the unexpected happened. Anna Fedele Bartolommei, who moments before was completely paralysed, woke up in her bed happy and “free of all those maladies that normally afflicted her”. The doctors asked for an explanation of some kind and, astounded, listened to the young woman speak. She told them that in a dream she saw two nuns wearing Carmelite habits: one was Teresa Margherita Redi, and the other was the famous Spanish mystic Teresa d’Avila (1515-1582). Thanks to this dream encounter, Anna was able to reopen her eyes, begin to speak, move and even eat.

The doctor in charge, Michele Angiolo Targioni, visited the patient that same morning and drafted a written report. In his opinion, the recovery he observed was “perfect”, and one could not attribute what had happened “to the weak forces of Imagination” or other natural causes. In the end, this case possessed all the preconditions for “having to say that God had rejoiced in healing this wise nun by means of a miracle”. At the bottom of the report, the distinguished signature of Jacopo Collini was added alongside Targioni’s. Collini enjoyed considerable fame for curing rare forms of paralysis. The purpose of these documents was clear: to obtain formal recognition that a miracle had occurred in accordance with the dictates of *De Servorum Dei beatificatione* by Pope Benedict XIV.<sup>35</sup>

alla gola creduto derivante da semplice flussione”, “una discreta cavata di sangue”, “una moderata dieta”, “da fierissime vertigini con vomito, e febbre”, “costante striatura dei muscoli del collo”, “artificiali piaghe”.

34. *Ibid.*, ff. 131-133: “tosse convulsiva”.

35. *Ibid.*, ff. 133-137. A printed version of Targioni’s account is in ASAF, *Processus beatificationis*, vol. I. See also *Lettera del Sig. dottore Luigi Fiorilli al Signor Lorenzo Nannoni medico fiorentino, chirurgo della Real Corte di Toscana ec. Sopra gli stravaganti sintomi di una rara Paralysis, in Opuscoli scelti sulle Scienze e sulle Arti*, vol. III, Milan, Marelli, 1780, p. 324. Moreover, see Collini’s obituary, in *Gazzetta toscana*, n. 26, 1777, p. 103: “libera da tutti quelli incomodi che Essa era solita soffrire”, “perfetta”, “alle deboli forze della Immaginazione”, “doversi affermare essersi Iddio compiaciuto di usare una prodigiosa maniera per risanare questa savia religiosa”.

However, not all their plans went as expected. The apostolic nuncio Ottavio Manciforte carefully analysed the case of Anna Bartolommei and expressed various doubts. In his opinion, these were the hard facts that one should consider when assessing the case: “the long duration of the illness, the complication of the ailments, the frequency of the pernicious symptoms, the ineffectiveness of the remedies, the persistent debilitating effects on her strength and the miraculous nature of her return to health”. Nevertheless, evidence pointing to a miracle was not enough to erase the suspicion that, in reality, the patient had suffered from hysteria and that all of her symptoms could be traced back to a neurological imbalance, that is to say, “true hysteria”. The illness had actually begun “with headaches, pain in the throat, and mild cases of vertigo, which surely suggest some kind of hysteria”, especially for women around twenty years of age, “more than similar ailments to which they are susceptible”. Moreover, the nuncio’s focus was on the incessant headache, the increase in symptoms as her period approached, the chest pains, the “convulsions, [...] the inability to swallow, the loss of sensory faculties, epileptic movements, [and] foaming at the mouth”. Even stranger was the fact that Anna dozed off “between six and seven times a day”. Furthermore, the momentary blindness – from Manciforte’s point of view – did not support the theory that a miracle had occurred. She regained her sight in very little time, which made one think that her loss of vision had been caused by “some violent and persistent convulsion”. This too, however, could be attributable to a “hysterical disease”. The nuncio’s conclusion was final: for them to open the beatification process, more concrete evidence was needed, as well as a careful re-examination of all the testimonies and reports. Only by ruling out hysteria could the miracle be accepted as proof by the Sacred Congregation of Rites.<sup>36</sup>

36. *Ibid.*, ff. 113-114. The Congregation of the Rites also collected news published in periodicals which focused on the case of Anna Bartolommei: ASV, *Congregazione dei Riti*, 822, *Tomo settimo delle Gazzette Toscane uscite settimana per settimana nell'anno 1773*, n. 8, 1773, p. 29: “la lunga durata del male, la complicazione de’ morbi, la frequenza de’ perniciosi sintomi, l’inutilità de’ rimedj, le forze della natura già da gran tempo debilitata, ed il mirabil modo della sanazione accaduta”, “vero isterismo”, “con dolori di capo, e gola, e leggiere vertigini, li quali effetti sicur si prestano a qualche causa da isterismo”, “maggiormente a simili incomodi soggette”, “convulsioni, [...] impedimento nell’inghiottire, alienamento da’ sensi, moti epilettici, spuma alla bocca”, “fino a sei, e sette volte al giorno”, “qualche violenta e pertinace convulsione”, “isterico morbo”. See at least Brambilla, *Corpi invasi e viaggi dell’anima*; M. Zangari, *Santità femminile e disturbi mentali fra Medioevo ed età moderna*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 2022.



The scepticism of an authority figure as important as the apostolic nuncio Manciforte was, however, only a momentary snag for the patrons of the new cult of Teresa Redi, all of whom showed great determination in the pursuit of their goals. Ignazio Redi and Idelfonso di San Luigi understood that they were moving in quicksand, but they also knew that they could leverage the solid scholarship that existed on the subject of sainthood, relics and prayers. The disputes of doctors and ecclesiastics over the body of the Carmelite candidate saint and the presumed miracles reflected the tensions that had enveloped the entire Catholic world during the Counter-Reformation. Nevertheless, the debate became exceedingly heated in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, with the explosion of publications that subjected traditional beliefs to the scrutiny of human reason.

Thus, it would be worthwhile to take a small step back to understand precisely how the Church of Rome was making these appeals. During his papacy (1740-1758), Benedict XIV gave consideration to the teachings of writers like the scholar from Modena, Ludovico Antonio Muratori (1672-1750), who invited all Catholics to cultivate a faith that was more contemplative and less spectacular, viewing with suspicion the beliefs that captivated the illiterate. He tried to slow the diffusion of fanciful re-enactments of presumed miracles, the immoderate practice of exorcisms and spells, and the sale of sacred objects. Nevertheless, the pronouncements of popes were far from unequivocal, and the sentences passed in reaction to individual transgressions often did not translate to the adoption of a wider strategy, with a clear political and cultural stance. Ultimately, the Holy See took care to maintain wide margins of discretion in the handling of individual judicial cases concerning alleged supernatural phenomena, rather than to provide the ecclesiastical courts with clear rules. The medical profession still appeared to bow to theology. The criteria for distinguishing between healing miracles and natural therapeutic processes could still be traced back to Paolo Zacchia's *Quaestiones medico-legales*, published in nine volumes between 1621 and 1651.<sup>37</sup>

In 1774, Eusebio Amort, a Lateran canon regular from the abbey of Polling, published his *De revelationibus, visionibus et apparitionibus privatis regulae tutae [...]*, a treatise that would garner a great deal of

37. See Brambilla, *Corpi invasi e viaggi dell'anima*, pp. 178, 185-186, 236. For additional bibliographical information, see P. Palmieri, "I miracoli fra scienza e storia. Il sangue di San Gennaro, la Sindone e altre reliquie", *Storica*, 67-68 (2017), pp. 193-219.

attention in the following years. The treatise developed a critique of female visionary mysticism, foretelling the final decline of a form of religiousness based on revelations and prophecies. Amort steadfastly denied the sainthood of the Spanish Franciscan Maria de Àgreda (1602-1665) and that of the French Visitandine Marguerite-Marie Alacoque (1647-1690), on whose visions the Jesuits had based the “modern” devotion of the Sacred Heart (that same devotion to which Teresa Redi had dedicated her religious life). Having engaged in the matter himself, the author also took steps to moderate the fame of the Franciscan nun Crescenzia di Kaufbeuren (1682-1744), known for having inspired, with her states of ecstasy, a particular devotion to the Holy Spirit in the form of a boy surrounded by tongues of fire. This position was also taken by Benedict XIV, who in October 1745 published the apostolic letter *Sollicitudini Nostrae*, establishing that the Holy Spirit could not be depicted in human form.<sup>38</sup>

However, the doctrinal debates and disputes about these topics left their mark and paved the way for a new way of understanding devotion, inspired by restraint and reflection rather than outward and spectacular manifestations designed to strike an emotional chord with the faithful. The moderate positions of Benedict XIV and Ludovico Antonio Muratori gave currency to these ways of thinking during the middle decades of the century, but they did not fully take root among the hierarchy of the Church of Rome, who gradually abandoned the cautious path of moderation to openly encourage opposition to a modernity embodied by Enlightenment ideas and requests for social change. The more conservative factions were then able to reopen Crescenzia di Kaufbeuren’s beatification process, imbuing it with anti-revolutionary political meaning. More generally, the Roman hierarchy’s need to preserve its primacy over the world of the supernatural went hand-in-hand with the will to defend the role of the ecclesiastical body in public life against absolutist policies that tended to carve out new spaces of autonomy for secular powers.

It is worth pausing to reflect precisely on this point. The promoters of the cult of Teresa Margherita Redi did not expend most of their energy trying

38. M. Rosa, *Settecento religioso. Politica della Ragione e religione del cuore*, Venice, Marsilio, 1999, pp. 58-62. F. Boespflug, *Dieu dans l’art. “Sollicitudini Nostrae” de Benoit XIV (1745) et l’affaire Crescence de Kaufbeuren*, Paris, Cerf, 1984; M. Cattaneo, *Convertire e disciplinare. Chiesa romana e religiosità popolare in età moderna*, Naples, Fedoa Press, 2022, pp. 18-19, 149-154.

to resolve the medical-theological issues that emerged during the initial phase of her beatification case, probably because they knew that they could not find all the necessary answers. Besides, the biographical information about Teresa was inadequate and vague. They therefore decided to focus their energy on highlighting the political significance of the new cult. During the years that saw the rise of Lorraine absolutism, they transformed the Carmelite candidate saint into a symbol of resistance against attempts mounted by the grand duke to transform society. Let us see how.

#### *4. Ties, kinship and loyalty to the Medicean dynasty*

In April 1773, the apostolic nuncio Giovanni Ottavio Manciforte delivered to Pope Clement XIV detailed reports on the healings of Anna Bartolommei and Beatrice Kajer and, most importantly, Teresa Redi's biography written by Idelfonso di San Luigi.<sup>39</sup> In this text, we read that the candidate saint had a peaceful childhood. She had a "a gentle but spirited temperament" that was complemented by "the nobility of her soul, her sharpness of wit, the sweetness of her manners and her innocent behaviour". She was not interested in games that normally attracted children and instead dedicated her time to "decorating little altars and obtaining devotional images". The information about her time at the boarding school of Sant'Apollonia was reported succinctly and is at times full of lacunae. Instead, the writer's attention lingered on the return of the young woman to her paternal home. Ignazio welcomed his daughter with open arms and, sensing her doubts and uncertainties, decided to take her on a pilgrimage to Mount Alvernia, where St Francis of Assisi had received the stigmata. In this place, imbued with an air of sacredness that was beyond compare, the young woman resolved to become a Carmelite nun at the Florentine convent of Santa Teresa.

Her respect for the order compelled the young woman to adopt a strict lifestyle inspired by that of Teresa d'Avila and Agnese di Gesù, the founder of Carmelo di Firenze. She became accustomed to sleeping in uncomfortable beds without mattresses and subjected herself to long fasts, performed acts of penance and did hard manual labour. She quietly endured the serious ailments that beset her, first among them a "very large

39. "La Biografia di S. Teresa Margherita Redi".

and painful tumour in one knee". The devotional exercises assigned to Teresa Redi by her spiritual directors led her on long spiritual journeys that occurred "almost outside her body and the use of her senses". These she experienced in silence and without giving any "outward signs" of something happening. Reverence for sacred objects was at the heart of a physical and visceral form of devotion that seems to have been openly against the models of moderation and restraint taught by many of the thinkers of those years. Devotions were often directed towards the good of the community: the young Carmelite would pray so that the "righteous" would find the strength to carry on their mission of evangelisation and would ask God to bring about the conversion of "sinners" and "infidels". She also performed self-flagellation for "many hours using a cilice and iron chain, a cross interwoven with thorns, knotted ropes that hit sharply against her sides and arms, prostrating herself on the ground for long periods of time". During the summer, she wore heavy clothing, while during the winter she let "both her hands freeze" by plunging them in ice-cold water.

Idelfonso di San Luigi dedicated various pages to the flights of the soul of the candidate saint. The expressions he used seem prudent, sometimes vague, and deliberately elude precise definition. Thus, we read that Teresa would succeed in "dying without herself knowing it, and without taking any pleasure in this mystical and spiritual death, burying her every thought in Christ". The biography's author accomplished quite a difficult feat. News about the life of the late young Carmelite was often ambiguous and easily manipulable, for Idelfonso needed to consider the papal guidelines on the beatification process which, as we have already seen, were becoming increasingly complex and convoluted.

The role played by Ignazio Redi in the retrieval, selection and organisation of sources was decisive. What he established with Idelfonso was no simple collaborative relationship, but a true sharing of strategies. Just think of the fact that one of Teresa's closest confidants was her uncle Diego Redi, of the Society of Jesus. During the preliminary phase of the diocesan trial, the father and spiritual director of the candidate saint succeeded in concealing this particular detail. We can very well understand the reasoning behind this decision. These were difficult years for the religious order founded by Ignatius of Loyola, as it was being attacked on multiple fronts and had been expelled from various European states and suppressed by the Holy See. Even Teresa's brother, Francesco Saverio, was initially sidelined because of his Jesuit militancy. That, however, did not

make his role any less crucial. Both Diego and Francesco Saverio had in fact wielded a great deal of influence on the young woman and had given her advice about which path to take. Several years later, in the years of the Restoration when the political situation for the members of the Society of Jesus was more favourable, relevant details would come to the fore. Before the papal authorities, Francesco Saverio testified that his sister's choice to join the Carmelite order had been inspired by Cecilia Albergotti, "daughter of cavalier Giovanni Albergotti", a prominent member of the nobility of Arezzo.<sup>40</sup>

However, we are not fully convinced that the friendship between these two girls was what inspired the very choice that changed the candidate saint's destiny. We can imagine – in spite of the absence of sources – that Ignazio hoped to benefit greatly from having a daughter in the Carmelite convent in Florence and that the relationship between the Redi and Albergotti families was, in this sense, crucial. Sure enough, in the 1760s the two families from Arezzo renewed an alliance that had already proven fruitful in the past, finding new incentives to work together in the face of grand-ducal policies enacted by the house of Habsburg-Lorraine, which tended to place significant curbs on noble privileges. The members of the regular and secular ecclesiastical ranks of the Redi and Albergotti families formed a small but effective lobbying group, dedicated to preserving the existing social order and capable of seeing that religion and devotion could serve as a powerful loudspeaker to amplify their own requests. In the following decades, this same group would gradually bolster its ranks and increase its political clout. However, in what was still the preliminary phase of Teresa Margherita del Cuore di Gesù's ascent to the altars, the protagonists of this story already had clear and sound ideological assumptions. Let us try to identify them.

Idelfonso di San Luigi dedicated a substantial part of his scholarly work to the history of the convent of Santa Teresa of Florence. Not by chance, among his most important and discussed works we find the biography

40. *Ibid.*, p. 598: "temperamento soavemente sanguigno", "la nobiltà dell'animo, la perspicacia dell'ingegno, la dolcezza delle maniere, e l'innocenza de i costumi", "ornando Altarini, e procacciandosi divote Immagini", "tumore assai grande, e penoso in un ginocchio", "quasi fuori di sé, e dell'uso de' sensi", "esteriori dimostrazioni", "giusti", "peccatori", "Infedeli", "molte ore di cilizio e di catena di ferro, di Croce tessuta di punte, di corde nodose strette a' fianchi, ed alle braccia, di lunghe prostrazioni per terra", "scoppiare tutte le mani", "morire a sé senza saperlo, e senza gustare alcun piacere di questa morte mistica, e spirituale, seppellendo in Cristo ogni pensiero", "figlia del cavaliere Giovanni Albergotti".

of the convent's founder Maria Agnese di Gesù, published in 1762.<sup>41</sup> An important part of the work was dedicated specifically to miracles of bodily preservation (total or partial). Sister Maria Agnese died on 25 March 1648, at the age of 53: “[She] suddenly became more and more beautiful, and with her face lit up, she tightly clasped her crucifix”. Her face had remained, “even after death, utterly beautiful and full of joy, precisely as one who peacefully sleeps”. Her body and her clothes had begun to give off a “remarkably sweet odour”, and the members of the Medici court did all they could to pay homage to her.<sup>42</sup> Between 1711 and 1716, as many as four nuns had died in the odour of sanctity, and their bodies – according to the testimonies of devout followers – had remained incorruptible.<sup>43</sup> The Carmelite convent of Florence could also count on an enviable supply of sacred objects, to which a miraculous power was attributed: a “nearly intact temple with its flesh attached”, a cloth dipped in the blood of Teresa d’Avila, various pieces of the body of St John of the Cross (1542-1591, co-founder of the Order of Discalced Carmelites), and the bodies of various martyr saints donated by influential noble families.<sup>44</sup>

What mattered most, however, was the network of political protection built around that women’s institution, which had seen the power of the Medici play a leading role since its beginnings. Maria Maddalena d’Austria (1587-1631) and Vittoria della Rovere (1622-1694), wives of grand dukes Cosimo II (1590-1621) and Ferdinando II (1610-1670), had made substantial donations to the foundress and even advocated for opening the beatification process after her death. Several ladies of the court, after becoming widows, joined the community, conferring a great deal of prestige on the institution.<sup>45</sup> Among the most prestigious guests of

41. Ildefonso di san Luigi, *Vita della ven. serva di Dio suor Maria Agnese di Gesu carmelitana scalza fondatrice del monastero di s. Teresa di Firenze al secolo donna Luisa Mellini genovese. Scritta da fr. Ildefonso di S. Luigi*, Florence, Viviani, 1762.

42. Ildefonso di san Luigi, *Vita della ven. serva di Dio suor Maria Agnese*, pp. 207-208; “Novelle letterarie”, XXXIII, 1762, pp. 417-418. See also Carmelitane scalze del monastero di S. Teresa, “Il Carmelo di Firenze: storia e spirito”, *Ephemerides carmeliticae*, 10 (1959), pp. 64, 75, 83-84: “fatta in un tratto vieppiù bella, ed accesa nel sembiante, strettamente abbracciata al suo Crocifisso”, “anco dopo morte, tutto bello, e giulivo, come appunto di chi placidamente si dorme”, “soavissimo odore”.

43. Ildefonso di san Luigi, *Vita della ven. serva di Dio suor Maria Agnese*, p. 129.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 126: “tempia pressoché intera con sua carne sopra”.

45. Carmelitane scalze del monastero di S. Teresa, “Il Carmelo di Firenze: storia e spirito”, pp. 64, 75, 83-84.

the Carmelite convent of Florence was Sister Teresa Beatrice del Cuore di Gesù (1705-1769) of the Medici family. Formerly, she had been the lady-in-waiting of the archduchess Violante Beatrice (1673-1731). Alongside her there had lived various young girls belonging to the Piccolomini, Malaspina, Verrazzano and Ricasoli families, who owed much of their wealth to Cosimo III (1642-1723), a grand duke who strongly supported the preservation of religious traditions.<sup>46</sup>

The situation changed in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century after the rise to power of the house of Habsburg-Lorraine. The families of the nuns at the Carmelite convent greeted with hostility the reformist initiatives of the new ruling dynasty, feeling that their interests and privileges were being undermined. The changing political and religious equilibrium also affected the development of internal relationships at the convent in Florence. The social standing of Cecilia Albergotti, who could boast a special relationship with the candidate saint Teresa Margherita Redi, was certainly crucial. The testimonies given during the beatification process paint a dubious portrait of Cecilia, at times marked by character excesses and emotional instability. She saw Teresa Redi as a point of reference, having established a special spiritual bond with her that stemmed from their mutual adoration of the Sacred Heart, blindly based on information contained in the biography of Margherita Maria Alacoque.<sup>47</sup> It is worth highlighting just how much young Cecilia testified throughout the apostolic process: “When [Teresa] died, I thought it was the tremendous pain [I felt] that affixed itself to my brain in such a way that each day, for almost eight days, if not more, at the very same hour in which she had died, I was racked with convulsions”.<sup>48</sup> This was a controversial and imprudent remark, for it was well known that the emotional disturbances of women had generated a great deal of suspicion among the ecclesiastical authorities.

Nevertheless, the doctrinal foundation on which the promotion of the new cult was based was very solid, thanks to the prowess of Idelfonso who

46. See Carmelitane scalze di Santa Teresa, “La comunità di S. Teresa Margherita”, *Ephemerides carmeliticae*, 10 (1959), pp. 123-137.

47. Carmelitane scalze di Santa Teresa, “S. Teresa Margherita fra le consorelle”, *Ephemerides carmeliticae*, 10 (1959), p. 152.

48. Carmelitane scalze di Santa Teresa, “La comunità di S. Teresa Margherita”, p. 132: “Quando [Teresa] morì, credetti dal gran dolore di dar volta al cervello in modo tale che in ciascuno giorno, quasi per otto giorni, se non fu più, all’ora medesima in cui era morta mi venivano le convulsioni”.

likened the image of Teresa Redi to that of Teresa d'Avila, thereby situating her in a strong tradition of Church heroines who had been ordained in the Carmelite order. In the specific context of Tuscany, the hagiographer took steps to insert the young girl from Arezzo in a religious tradition that had firmly established itself under the auspices of the Medici dynasty and that, in the days of the house of Habsburg-Lorraine, had begun to feel the effects of change. The construction of the image of the candidate saint was therefore connected to a kind of traditional spirituality – with roots in the Counter-Reformation – that was completely removed from Enlightenment culture, regulated devotion and the political-religious reformism of the house of Habsburg-Lorraine.

In the end, the promoters of the new cult were working on sound footing and had a clear political direction. Throughout the 1770s, the lawyer Vincenzo Maria Bergamelli of the Sacred Congregation of Rites – the papal office charged with the management of the cult of saints in the Catholic world – stayed in close contact with those who were preparing the diocesan process of beatification in Florence. His instructions were very detailed: witnesses were to be called in to give long depositions, and the preachers were to have many relics to distribute among the faithful, especially among the sick who were in want of thaumaturgic miracles.<sup>49</sup>

The network of alliances was very unified. A group of ecclesiastics and nobles united by a common need to defend specific political and economic interests had converged around the Redi family and the Carmelite nuns. They worked to achieve their objectives through various means: they opened legal proceedings in the civil courts, they tried to keep an open dialogue with grand-ducal power, and they launched a massive media campaign. A considerable amount of printed material began to circulate, competing with Enlightenment and reformist writing, defending traditional religion, and expressing (more or less surreptitiously) pro-Medici sentiments. A diverse constellation of influence groups – inspired by Ignazio Redi, Idelfonso di San Luigi and their allies – found common ground in their protest against the political changes that were then under way and began to create a united front engaged in a momentous battle. This conservative universe soon found its symbolic points of reference in a mythical, idealised and golden past that prominently featured a fictitious

49. ASAF, *Processus beatificationis*, vol. I, 2 August 1777, 8 May 1779, 16 November 1779.



model of a perfect society founded on the cohesion between the throne and altar. That same past featured images of Cosimo III de' Medici, who stood as a champion of the Christian faith. It also called attention to the exploits of the knights of the Order of Saint Stephen against the infidel "Turks", and to numerous holy days observed in honour of prophetesses and visionaries who were worshipped by the people and the grand duke as living saints (as we shall also see in the next chapter).

### *5. Defying the marks of time, once again*

The year 1783 was an important turning point in the promotion of the cult of Teresa Margherita Redi. More than 13 years had passed since the young Carmelite's death. Cavalier Ignazio and father Idelfonso di San Luigi had worked hard on the official opening of the beatification process, and attaining that goal now seemed close at hand. There was, however, one last important obstacle to overcome. It was necessary to re-examine the body for visible signs of corruption, and the date of exhumation was set for 16 June. The sisters of the candidate saint were excited, but they were also afraid that this re-examination of the body would bring Teresa back into the sphere of ordinary mortals. Besides, their institution was going through a difficult period: the jurisdictional claims of the Lorraine government were strong and aimed to reduce the Carmelite order's spaces of autonomy.<sup>50</sup> Thus, tensions were amplified, and the stakes were increasingly high.

The person in charge of these proceedings was the archbishop of Florence, Antonio Martini (1721-1809), who had taken up the mantle of Gaetano Incontri. The grand duke Peter Leopold had recommended him to lead the Florentine diocese, believing that in doing so he would secure a faithful ally for the realisation of his reformist policies. His hopes, however, soon proved illusory. Despite having the reputation of someone who favoured reform, the new diocesan ordinary chose to proceed with caution. However, in his introduction to the vulgarisation of the *New Testament* (1769) he did not neglect to make his position clear: "It is not unknown to anyone how our century is rife with certain spirits who, if they

50. Fr. Melchior a S. Maria O.C.D., "Quattro direttori spirituali di S. Teresa Margherita del Cuor di Gesù", *Ephemerides carmeliticae*, 10 (1959), p. 234: "Turchi".

do not dare us to go so far as to reveal contempt for the holy books, they at least regard them with a certain squeamishness, or indifference, which is a clear and obvious indication of an unfaithful heart".<sup>51</sup> Equally significant were his early pastoral letters, which invited people and the clergy to fully participate in religious feasts, though these celebrations stood in contrast to the practices that granted "satisfaction to the unbelievers".<sup>52</sup>

His vicar general was Agostino Albergotti (1755-1825), a nobleman from Arezzo who was close to the Redi family and who at that time was involved in the work of promoting the new cult. Albergotti's counsel was crucial for Antonio Martini, who, faced with the problematic case of the young Carmelite, was so wary and suspicious that he prevented the publication of a biography that was ready to be printed. He feared being caught off guard by "some kind of surprise to his modesty", which was consistent with his "meek reluctance" and with "his uncompromising

51. *Nuovo Testamento del Nostro Signor Gesù Cristo secondo la vulgata tradotta in lingua italiana e con annotazioni arricchite*, Turin, Stamperia Reale, 1769, p. X, also quoted in P. D. Giovannoni, "Gli orientamenti culturali e politici di Antonio Martini tra il 1750 ed il 1769 nelle lettere ad Antonio Niccolini", in *Antonino Baldovinetti e il riformismo religioso toscano del Settecento*, ed. by D. Menozzi, Rome, Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2002, p. 79. See also C. Lamioni, "Tra giansenismo e riformismo: la nomina di Antonio Martini ad arcivescovo di Firenze (1781)", *Rassegna storica toscana*, 22 (1976), pp. 1-46: "Non è ignoto ad alcuno, come il secol nostro ferace sia di certi spiriti, i quali se non ardiscono tra noi di avventurarsi fino al manifesto disprezzo de' Libri santi, gli riguardano almeno con una certa schifiltà, o indifferenza, chiaro ed aperto indizio di un cuore infedele".

52. *Antonio Martini per la Grazia di Dio e della S. Sede Apostolica Arcivescovo di Firenze, prelato domestico di Nostro Signore, Vescovo assistente al Soglio Pontificio, e Principe del S.R.I. Al suo amatissimo Popolo della Città di Firenze salute, e Spirito di vera Divozione*, Florence, Moucke, 23 May 1782, p. VII. See also *Antonio Martini per la grazia di Dio e della S. Sede Apostolica Arcivescovo di Firenze, Prelato Domestico di Nostro Signore, Vescovo Assistente al Soglio Pontificio, e Principe del S.R.I., all'amatissimo Popolo della Città e Diognesi di Firenze salute nel Signore, e la Nostra Pastorale Benedizione*, Florence, Moucke, 5 January 1782; *Antonio Martini per la grazia di Dio e della S. Sede Apostolica Arcivescovo di Firenze, Prelato Domestico di Nostro Signore, Vescovo Assistente al Soglio Pontificio, e Principe del S.R.I. Al suo Dilettissimo Popolo della Città, e Diognesi salute, e la Pastorale Bendizione*, Florence, Moucke, 11 February 1782. More in general, see P. Stella, *Il giansenismo in Italia*, vol. II, *Il movimento giansenista e la produzione libraria*, Rome, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2006, pp. 325, 341-344; M. Pieroni Francini, "Immagini sacre in Toscana dal tumulto di Prato al 'Viva Maria'", in *Culto dei santi, istituzioni e classi sociali in età preindustriale*, ed. by S. Boesch Gajano and L. Sebastiani, L'Aquila-Rome, Japadre, 1984, pp. 841-842: "satisfazione agl'Increduli".

beliefs, worthy of a Church father from the first centuries”.<sup>53</sup> But the sight of Teresa’s body would soon cast all caution to the wind.

The drafting of the exhumation report was once again entrusted to the surgeon Antonio Romiti, who attended the event with other doctors. In the report, Romiti made an effort to use scholarly language and dwelled on unusual details. In both of Teresa’s eyes, we read, “the shiny and transparent cornea, convex on the outside and concave on the inside”, maintained “to some degree, its natural convexity”, revealing a “round hole of very small diameter, commonly called the pupil”, which retained “its natural form and roundness”.<sup>54</sup> The evidence, which in truth was rather deficient and vague, seemed to suggest that the body was in an excellent state of preservation. The final word was left to a more reputable voice, however: that of the Tuscan academic Lorentino Presciani (1721-1799). He confirmed that “the white colour of the flesh and the elasticity of the muscles” proved the absence of “true desiccation”. The conclusion left no room for doubt: Teresa’s body was incorruptible for reasons beyond the “ordinary and known laws of nature”.<sup>55</sup> However, there is one detail of absolute importance that must be emphasised: Presciani was not present at the exhumation but was content with simply reading the expert opinion of his colleague to formulate circumstantial conclusions, not caring that he had not inspected the body himself. In the end, everything seems to suggest a conception of scientific knowledge that was subordinate to ecclesiastical power and ever at the ready to authenticate miracles and respond to incoming requests.

In general, attention to canonical procedures was one of the cornerstones on which the whole enterprise was built. The promoters of the beatification process were aware that any small mistake could be costly. Already at the beginning of April 1783, the lawyer Vincenzo

53. ASA, Archivio domestico Albergotti, 22, B XXXI, *Vita della serva di Dio*, ch. XV: “qualche sorpresa alla sua modestia”, “umile ritrosia”, “dottrine sue severe, degne di un padre dei primi secoli”.

54. ASAF, *Processus beatificationis Ven. Servae Dei Sororis Theresiae Margaritae Redi*, vol. I: “la cornea lucida e trasparente, convessa al di fuori e concava al di dentro”, “in parte la sua naturale convessità”, “foro rotondo di piccolissimo diametro, chiamato comunemente la Pupilla”, “la sua forma e rotondità naturale”.

55. ASDA, *Memorie sacre*, vol. II. Pesciani’s account is also in *Breve compendio della vita della Serva di Dio*, pp. 176-177: “il color bianco delle carni e l’elasticità dei muscoli”, “vero disseccamento”, “ordinarie e note leggi di natura”.

Maria Bergamelli (who worked for the pontifical Congregation of Rites) had proposed useful corrections for the drafting of the *Super non cultu* process or report, which was useful to show that the devotion exhibited by the followers of Teresa Redi was spontaneous and not directed from above, from the authorities, from the Redi family or from the ranks of the Carmelite Order: “The first paragraphs, which describe in too much detail all the circumstances surrounding Teresa’s death and the interment of her body, could be shortened since the purpose of the present *non cultu* process should only be to prove that this Servant of God had never been publicly worshipped”.<sup>56</sup>

Bergamelli’s carefully chosen words should not fool us, however. The creation of the cult of the young Carmelite was also achieved through unconventional means and entrusted to a large and active group of individuals ready to work in the shadows. Just think of the fact that the account of the events of June 16 was printed very quickly at the request of Ignazio Redi and the Carmelites. The printed copies were scrutinised by the Habsburg-Lorraine government, which chose to withhold the necessary licenses needed for their publication. This prohibition, however, did not have the desired effect. As in previous years, stories about the prodigious corpse began to circulate clandestinely, and several clerics were summoned to testify before the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs. Their answers were evasive: their reticence thwarted the efforts of the secular authority and helped to intensify people’s devotion to Teresa Redi.<sup>57</sup>

Idelfonso di San Luigi had good reason to rejoice. On 20 June, he wrote to Sister Anna Maria Piccolomini, a fellow sister of the candidate saint, recommending that she preserve all objects that could be used for the creation of relics: “The casket, dust, habit, and everything else, and for the time being keep everything in a very airy room, locked and carefully guarded, with the key left in your keeping, and make it so that the dust can circulate, but not be dispersed by the wind”. Then he recounted:

56. ASAF, *Processus beatificationis Ven. Servae Dei Sororis Theresiae Margaritae Redi*, vol. I. Bergamelli’s account is dated 3 April 1783: “Potrebbero rendersi più ristretti i primi articoli che descrivono troppo minutamente tutte le circostanze della morte e tumulazione del cadavere della med.ma giacché lo scopo del presente Processo del non culto deve essere solamente di provare che alla Serva di Dio non è stato mai prestato culto pubblico”.

57. ASDA, *Memorie sacre*, vol. II; ASF, *Segreteria del Regio Diritto*, f. 540, pp. 232-233.

Personally, I looked on admiringly and with such devotion [...] that I was unable to reply and pay attention to the things that were being said to me. It seemed that everyone else around me had been affected in the same way, and those who were affected the most [...] were the professors who were in attendance; and I saw something in some of them that in due time, if I am still around to tell you, will seem strange. I saw that everyone was making a great effort to not overly express their admiration and devotion [...]. I hear that all of Florence is full of wonder and joy, even though news of me being there has not yet left my mouth, not even here in the convent; and yet for some reason everyone knows about it.<sup>58</sup>

This endeavour – which began in 1770 – now seemed to have wind in its sails, but the astute Carmelite was not so naive as to be under any illusions. There were still many obstacles to overcome, and the controversy surrounding the body of the candidate saint was now leaving the realm of scientific knowledge and taking on distinct political significance.

58. Fr. Melchior a S. Maria O.C.D., “Quattro direttori spirituali”, pp. 252, 255: “Cassa, polvere, abitino, ed ogni altra cosa, e per ora tener tutto in una stanza molto ariosa, serrato e ben custodito, con chiave presso di sé, e la polvere tenerla in modo che possa esalare, ma non essere dissipata dal vento”; “Io per me ammirai con gran tenerezza [...] che non mi lasciava luogo di rispondere a tono e ad attendere ad altri discorsi che mi si facevano. Mi parve che lo stesso affetto cagionasse in tutti gli altri circostanti, e quel ch’è più, negli stessi [...] professori assistenti; ed osservai qualche cosa in alcune di loro, che se a suo tempo, essendo vivo, avrò luogo di dirle, avrà del singolare. Vidi che tutti si facevano forza di non esternare troppo la loro ammirazione e tenerezza [...]. Sento ripieno tutto Firenze di questa maraviglia e consolazione, benché dalla mia bocca non sia ancora uscito, ne pure qui in convento, di esservi stato; ma per altro si sa da tutti”.

### 3. Writing About, Painting and Talking About Saints

#### 1. *The lives of female saints and the glorious past of the Medici*

Those advocating for the beatification of Teresa Redi found themselves operating in a moment of fraught political stakes. The House of Habsburg-Lorraine, which governed Tuscany at the time, tried to hinder the publication of pamphlets describing the blessings obtained through the intercession of the candidate saint. The report on the incorruptible nature of her corpse written by the surgeon Antonio Romiti after she died came under the scrutiny of the Ministry of Royal Law, an institution that claimed to possess complete authority over public expressions of worship and devotion. Nevertheless, under the wise leadership of Ignazio Redi and Idelfonso di San Luigi, the Carmelites had found affordable publishers to print and disseminate their pious books. Though admonished multiple times between 1770 and 1780 and into the early years of the following decade, efforts to stop them were unsuccessful: faith in the miracles performed by the young woman from Arezzo seemed to override the obstacles posed by grand-ducal censorship.<sup>1</sup>

Though many years had transpired since 1743 when the Grand Duchy of Tuscany had passed a law regulating book publishing, its enforcement was proving difficult. The government had entrusted the royal branch with the regulation of all book production, ignoring the prerogative of the ecclesiastical authorities. Problems immediately arose, and there were no easy solutions in sight. Publishers had reached high levels of productivity,

1. ASF, *Segreteria del Regio Diritto*, f. 540, pp. 232-233.

and the new law risked severely damaging a flourishing industry. More and more authors, disseminators and popularisers of content of every kind were bypassing Tuscan typographers and taking their business to foreign companies (namely, from outside the Grand Duchy of Tuscany), while many members of the clergy found their way around the problem by circulating simple handwritten texts.

Within the religious domain, counter-reformist policies contributed to limiting the spread of the so-called “devozioncelle”: pamphlets featuring litanies and sacred images that promoted messages steeped in the tradition of the Church of the Counter-Reformation. Every effort was made to avoid stirring up unrest among the lower classes over the plans of the secular authorities. However, the censors’ weapons had been blunted, and the entire system regulating reading material was riddled with uncertainties, for it was not easy to rein in the dense network of relationships linking commissioners, authors, typographers and book dealers. Secular power could seldom limit the printing of certain texts or their diffusion; thus, at this time we witness a deceptively harmless type of literature circulating freely that even historians tend to underestimate. It consisted of pamphlets and flyers that portrayed the stories of miracles and saints, with the intent of teaching readers and listeners practices of worship and orations.<sup>2</sup> Idelfonso di San Luigi, Ignazio Redi and other supporters of Teresa being granted the glory of the altars relied heavily on this type of literary production, absorbing both its contents and forms of expression. It is therefore important to learn more about these texts and to try to interpret their messages and motives, as well as to understand the social, religious and political inclinations of their authors and commissioners.

This chapter considers the definition of the theoretical models that were enforced by the Church of Rome in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, discusses the new candidates to sainthood identified in that same period throughout the Italian peninsula, and focuses on hagiographic texts. I will also try to understand the relationship between texts and holy images, as well as the more general debates specific to the topic of sanctity. To achieve these goals, it is important to understand how promoters and hagiographers,

2. See S. Landi, *Il governo delle opinioni. Censura e formazione del consenso nella Toscana del Settecento*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2000, pp. 16-17, 122-135, 320-341. On the relationship between ecclesiastical and secular censorship, see P. Delpiano, *Il governo della lettura. Chiesa e libri nell’Italia del Settecento*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2007: “devozioncelle”.

though engaged in different types of activities, one legal and the other propagandistic-literary, operated at times in complementary fashion to identify or define new strategies to disseminate worship. We can also better define the social and political connotations of the candidates to sainthood, especially their potential ability to represent either conservative or innovative ideologies, by acknowledging the communicative and dynamic relationships uniting those promoting sainthood and devotees.

Thus, the thrust of this study can already be identified: the authors of *vite di santi* (lives of saints) focused their efforts on politicising hagiography, considered both a literary genre and a communicative act at the intersection between the private and public sphere.<sup>3</sup> These “lives of saints” expanded the social function of the servants of God while highlighting their ability to resolve conflicts that were tearing apart *ancien régime* communities, to counter deviant behaviour, and most of all to hinder the messages coming from a rationalistic culture that sought to relegate religion to a position of secondary order, in favour of a new lifestyle based on secular values.

Since Italian hagiography defies wholistic definition, we shall start with Tuscany, focusing on the hagiographical works about women that were published in the first few decades of the Lorraine government. Ironically, a man, Cosimo III de’ Medici, is the dominant figure here, described by authors as the driving force behind the fame achieved by any number of devout women alive during his reign. Cosimo III allegedly endorsed their heroic virtues, sharing their visions and their prophecies. On 29 June 1714, he sent a large delegation to Modena with the task of bringing back to court Vittoria Domitilla Tarini and Margherita Livizzani, two mystics from the Order of the Visitation of Holy Mary. Vittoria had received the stigmata, and Margherita was renowned for her exemplary monastic life.<sup>4</sup>

3. On “public space” and “public sphere”, see M. Rospocher, “Beyond the Public Sphere: A Historiographical Transition”, in *Beyond the Public Sphere: Opinions, Publics, Spaces in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by M. Rospocher, Bologna-Berlin, il Mulino-Duncker & Humblot, 2012; G. Delogu, P. Palmieri, “Chi ha paura del potere? Politica e comunicazione negli studi sull’età moderna”, *Studi Storici*, 2 (2022), pp. 373-406.

4. See M. Fantoni, “Il bigottismo di Cosimo III: da leggenda storiografica ad oggetto storico”, in *La Toscana nell’età di Cosimo III*, ed. by F. Angiolini, V. Becagli and M. Verga, Florence, Edifir, 1993, pp. 394-395. The main hagiographical sources are M. M. Livizzani, *Vita della venerabil madre Maria Vittoria Domitilla Tarini professa dell’Ordine della Visitazione di S. Maria di Torino [...] data alle stampe per opera della M. rev. Madre Maria*



Raimondo Maria Corsi (of the Congregation of San Marco) was one of the most prolific apologists of his time, and he wrote a rich description of the ritual performed by the Medici, who welcomed the two women with all the honours reserved for foreign princesses. They were en route to Pistoia, where bishop Federico Alamanni (1696-1775, in office from 1732 until his death) wished to restructure the practices and rules of the old monastery of the Virgins, which was on the wane and torn apart by internal quarrels. Deep conflicts of interest had risen because the monastery housed women who belonged to the “most exquisite nobility” side by side with women from the lower classes, and only the direct intervention of secular power could resolve them.<sup>5</sup>

Corsi’s passages in celebration of Vittoria and Margherita contain a clear and crucial message: these women were seen as catalysts capable of ushering in a golden period in the history of the Tuscan state. They had lived under a dynasty capable of enacting a successful policy within the clergy, based on a close collaboration between secular and religious powers. Nostalgic celebrations of a more archaic type of authority were related to the defence of a type of religiosity that also belonged to the past and that was resistant to new approaches such as those elaborated by Ludovico Antonio Muratori and other men of letters, who favoured a “regulated devotion”. Corsi was well-informed about the many ongoing debates within the Catholic world, and he criticised all forms of scepticism and rationalism. In his own words:

I don’t consider my mind to be wild, or even stupid, as other people’s minds can be. As soon as they hear about revelations, apparitions, etc., they censor them abruptly as illusions of a twisted fantasy without taking the time to perform an attentive and critical analysis. I understand that some people perceive them as jokes because they can’t fit them within their worldview [...]. Contemplation, rapture, ecstasy, the holy care of God’s love, the dreams and visions of the melancholics are seen as the product of a weak and unstable mind [...]. Some critics [...] are even more vile and obtuse because they think their opinion is wise, since they don’t believe in anything that is the product of marvel and that isn’t part of ordinary life.

*Margherita Livizzani*, Florence, Albizzini, 174; R. M. Corsi, *Vita della serva di Dio suor M. Margherita Livizzani religiosa dell’Istituto di San Francesco di Sales [...] descritta dal M.R.P. lettore Fr. Raimondo Maria Corsi*, Florence, Gaetano Viviani, 1760.

5. Corsi, *Vita della serva di Dio suor M. Margherita Livizzani*, pp. 25-28, 48-75: “più fiorita nobiltà”.

Corsi concluded that the authorities should be able to uncover deception, simulation and hypocrisy only in the interest of strengthening the overall credibility of supernatural phenomena.<sup>6</sup>

At the end of Cosimo III's reign, Caterina Biondi (1667-1729) became a renowned visionary. She was very close to some of the ladies at the Medici court, such as Anna Minerbetti Ginori, Olimpia Orlandini, Maria Francesca Capponi and most of all Eleonora Gonzaga di Guastalla – also known as Lionora Medici, the grand duke's sister-in-law. Biondi, however, became the awkward object of public derision after she gathered many devotees to witness her own agonising death, which she had foreseen in a vision, but then death never came. Her bold move ultimately backfired because the Inquisition decided to investigate the origin of her ecstasies and convulsions. After lengthy examinations, the judges' verdict was clear: Caterina did not have any mental illness, but she seemed to enjoy performing crude simulations to easily gain consensus among the devotees.<sup>7</sup>

Just as complicated was the promotion of the cult of Maria Caterina Brondi, who died on 28 July 1719, before Cosimo III and his sister Anna Luisa were able to successfully bring her to Florence to make of her a model of Christian virtue for their subjects. Cesare Nicolao Bambacari, a Lateran priest, wrote a hagiographic text in 1743 where he compared this candidate saint to the mystic women of the Late Middle Ages who could win over kings at times of deep political turmoil.<sup>8</sup> Bambacari emphasised the political role of Maria Caterina, who came to Lerici in 1708 wanting to sail East to join the fight against the Turks but who found herself a few years later following the famous Jesuit preacher Paolo Segneri Juniore in his missions around Tuscany.<sup>9</sup>

6. *Ibid.*, pp. VII-VIII: “regolata devozione”, “Non è che io mi vanti di essere di mente tanto indocile, o per meglio dire insensata, come sono taluni, i quali appena sentono i nomi di rivelazioni, apparizioni, ecc., senza rievocare il tutto ad uno scrupoloso esame, le censurano aspramente quali illusioni di fantasia stravolta: ma conosco bene, che non trovando il mondo [...] il suo conto in così fatte cose, gli paiono degne di riso, siccome presso di lui i contemplativi sono riputati deboli, e di mente non sana; e i rapimenti, l'estasi, e le sante dolcezze dell'amore di Dio, i sogni, e visioni de' malinconici [...] Alcuni critici [...] sono d'ingegno tanto più vile, e ottuso, quantoché si persuadono di acquistarsi opinione di saggi, per questo solo perché nulla credono di quanto ha del meraviglioso, ed eccedente il corso ordinario”.

7. See Bottoni, *Scritture dell'anima*, pp. 88-98, 117-125.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 182-247. See also G. Zari, *Le sante vive. Profezie di corte e devozione femminile tra Quattrocento e Cinquecento*, Turin, Rosenberg & Sellier, 1990.

9. Bottoni, *Scritture dell'anima*, pp. 182-247; C. N. Bambacari, *Memorie storiche delle virtù, ed azioni di Maria Caterina Brondi vergine sarzanese, ricavate da copiose*

Women's biographies were not the only ones that celebrated the power of the Medici during the Habsbug-Lorraine age. In the 1740s Cosimo III became important even for the lives of male candidate saints, such as Father Filippo Franci. According to hagiographic accounts of the time, together the two men had faced the difficult challenge of controlling an unruly society that did not want to obey the powers that be. They managed to divert young men from sinful behaviours and gambling, dissuade pregnant women from seeking abortions, offer refuge to abandoned children and even impose a strict work ethic on poor individuals accused of laziness.<sup>10</sup>

Cosimo III was also key in promoting the cult of one of the most famous preachers of the Italian peninsula in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Friar Minor Leonardo di Porto Maurizio (1676-1751). In the minutes for the diocesan beatification process, which began in Florence in 1759, Cosimo III is featured as a strong supporter of the candidate saint's evangelical missions. According to the promoters of the cult, those missions led to disturbances of public order, as churches could not contain all the devotees who wanted to participate in the celebrations and local governors had to move them to the town squares. Leonardo also went to places where "corruption had taken over" and always managed to capture the attention of his audience. He also challenged usury and was capable of explaining in simple terms how to stipulate fair "contracts".<sup>11</sup>

The most important hagiography dedicated to Leonardo, *Vita del b. Leonardo da Porto Maurizio*, was published at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century by Giuseppe Maria da Masserano. It was based on a decades-old tradition of edifying anecdotes. Important details can be found in this work, and although it was dedicated to the candidate saint it still focused on Cosimo III to a large extent. The author recounted how the grand duke completely trusted Leonardo and advised him "to fire people up to attend the Stations of the Cross" of the Via Crucis and "to eliminate the many abuses and disturbances" that were common during the penitential acts of Lent.

*autentiche relazioni, e divise in sei libri. Opera del padre abate d. Cesare Nicolao Bambacari canonico regolare lateranense*, Lucca, Marescandoli, 1743.

10. N. Bechi, *Vita del venerabile Servo di Dio Filippo Franci sacerdote fiorentino. Fondatore dello Spedale di san Filippo Neri detto la Casa Pia del Regugio de' poveri Fanciulli*, Florence, Pietro Gaetano Viviani, 1741, pp. 51, 65, 255.

11. ASDF, *Processus super virtutibus Servi Dei Leonardi a Porto Mauritii*, art. 8-10, 37-38: "preso maggior piede la corruttela", "contratti".

Cosimo III also banned gatherings in taverns and inns that encouraged “public displays of immoderation” and forbade prostitutes from leaving their homes. These actions – we still read in the biography of Leonardo – led to the desired goal “of reforming behaviour” and “properly regulating the State”. The grand duke participated in the gatherings organised by the preacher, allowing his subjects to see him as a devoted ruler who cared about religious beliefs. He maintained this behaviour until the end of his life, showing his people “signs of improvement and reform”.<sup>12</sup>

Given the above-mentioned passages, we can now understand the points of reference for Idelfonso di San Luigi, who – as seen in the previous chapter – shaped his hagiography according to a precise style of nostalgia for the fallen Medici dynasty. His portrayals of Agnese di Gesù, Teresa Margherita Redi and other nuns from the Carmelite monastery of Florence were influenced by an extensive literary production that was critical of Lorraine power and celebrated a political and religious system that was reaching its final stage and that was now exposed to sweeping changes imposed by the new rulers. Simply put, he celebrated the Medici reign to criticise the current government.<sup>13</sup>

The biographer of Teresa Margherita Redi employed a strategy that derived from a larger trend. Different criteria had to be adopted to ensure that the cult could survive and hopefully gain the approval of secular and religious authorities. The opinions of the Holy See as well as the

12. G. M. Da Masserano, *Vita del b. Leonardo da Porto Maurizio missionario apostolico de' minori riformati del ritiro di S. Buonaventura*, Rome, Salomoni, 1796, pp. 29-31, 47-50: “d’infervorare la gente alla frequenza della Via Crucis”, “togliere i molti abusi e disordini”, “offesa pubblica della temperanza”, “per la riforma dei costumi”, “il buon regolamento dello Stato”, “segni di emendazione e di ravvedimento”. Da Masserano’s work is based on a rich hagiographic tradition: Raffaele da Roma, *Vita del servo di Dio p. Leonardo da Porto Maurizio missionario apostolico de' Minori Riformati*, Venice, Simone Occhi, 1754 (then reprinted in Genoa, Gexiniana, 1754; Florence, Stamperia Imperiale, 1754; Rome, Lorenzo Barbiellini, 1754). The hagiography published in 1796 was reprinted and revised in Florence, Genoa, Rome, Lucca, Bologna, Venice and Faenza.

13. On the relationship between politics and religion during the fall of the Medici’s power in Florence, see M. Rosa, *La contrastata ragione. Riforme e religione nell’Italia del Settecento*, Rome, Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2009, pp. 3-20. See also V. Becagli, “Biografie coeve di Cosimo III”, and M. P. Paoli, “Le ragioni del principe e i dubbi della coscienza: aspetti e problemi della politica ecclesiastica di Cosimo III”, both in *La Toscana nell’età di Cosimo III*, pp. 403-418, 497-520.

different needs of local governments had to be taken into consideration. It is therefore easy to understand why the “lives” of saints in the mid-1700s changed course, leaving behind ecstasies, prophecies, revelations and unbelievable miracles or visions in favour of celebrating the social roles of these new heroes of the Church. Many hagiographers found more solid ground in building a religiosity that emphasised the value of religious people for the public. The doubts and suspicion of foul play that arose from earlier demands for rational observation became less important in comparison with a concept of sanctity whose value stemmed from its ability to contribute to the wellbeing of the community and guarantee the functioning of the state as a whole.

Generally speaking, the goal of devotional literature was to defend traditional practices, current religious orders and the institutions on which the social hierarchies were based. The Order of Saint Stephen became a particularly important one because between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century it had represented a significant privilege of the nobility but by the mid-1700s was being challenged by Lorraine power. Ignazio Redi, Teresa’s father, had been *bali* (knight commander) of the Order of Saint Stephen and wanted to defend his privileges at all cost, even taking advantage of the public devotion to his daughter’s incorruptible corpse. He was not alone in this mission: many others used the promotion of new saints and new cults to achieve similar goals.

## *2. The Knights of Saint Stephen, Mediterranean corsairs and new saints*

The Order of Saint Stephen was created in 1562 by Cosimo I de’ Medici, and it served well-defined functions of both domestic and foreign policy within the Tuscan state. The order was involved in corsair warfare mainly against Turkish and Barbary vessels, allowing the grand duke to play the role of mediator among the European nations interested in extending their authority over the Mediterranean Sea. In terms of domestic policy, since the grand duke decided who could join the order, he could promote wealthy families to the nobility. The government was therefore guaranteed a more secure form of support from the upper echelons, compared to the more unstable feudal aristocracy of the past (which claimed the right to manage their own districts). Secular power also took advantage of the Knights of Saint Stephen to consolidate its

relationship with families of the civic nobility, which tended to be more independent.<sup>14</sup>

On 24 April 1738, a year after coming to power, Franz Stephan of Habsbug-Lorraine (1708-1765) became grand master of the Order of Saint Stephen at the Jesuit Church of Vienna. Although their more recent military campaigns had been conducted during the previous century, the Knights of Saint Stephen still retained an important social, political and economic position. The new administration, however, was set on changing the structure of the order, especially its ties with the nobility and power, to promote its members to the highest social status. The Count of Richecourt (1697-1759), reigning minister, was intent on initiating a new phase of maritime politics predicated on diplomacy and alliance with the so-called North African “Barbary States” rather than warfare. He believed that the future of Tuscan commerce was dependent on the re-establishment of trade routes with the Levant and the Maghreb. Therefore, in 1741, he decided to greatly reduce the number of men sent to fight corsairs, convinced that the struggle against Muslims contributed nothing to the political and economic modernisation of the state. He also believed the Order of Saint Stephen to be a breeding ground for enemies of the new dynasty, clinging to their privilege and incapable of hiding their filo-Medici nostalgia, a detail that is particularly relevant to the purposes of this research. In the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Richecourt enacted various laws to expand maritime trade and limit the authority of the Knights of Saint Stephen.<sup>15</sup>

It was precisely in this atmosphere of this anti-Knights of Saint Stephen sentiment that the Grand Duchy finalised agreements with the Barbary States. The atmosphere was rendered even more tense by the reflections of legal expert and politician for the Hapsburg-Lorraine government in

14. See D. Barsanti, “L’ordine di S. Stefano”, in *La Toscana in età moderna (secoli XVI-XVIII). Politica, istituzioni, società: studi recenti e prospettive di ricerca*, ed. by M. Ascheri and A. Contini, Florence, Olschki, 2005, pp. 261-262.

15. See F. Angiolini, “L’Ordine di Santo Stefano tra i Medici e i Lorena”, in *L’Ordine di Santo Stefano nella Toscana dei Lorena. Atti del Convegno di studi di Pisa, 19-20 maggio 1989*, Rome, Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali, 1992, pp. 1-11; C. Mangio, “Commercio marittimo e Reggenza Lorenese in Toscana (provvedimenti legislativi e dibattiti)”, *Rivista storica italiana*, 90 (1978), pp. 898-938; C. Mangio, “Richecourt e il miraggio dell’Oriente”, in *Il Mediterraneo delle città: scambi, confronti, culture, rappresentazioni*, ed. by F. Salvatori, Rome, Viella, 2008, pp. 363-376; C. Piazza, “L’Ordine di S. Stefano in età lorenese ed i paesi barbareschi”, in *L’Ordine di Santo Stefano*, pp. 166-175.

Tuscany Pompeo Neri, who was writing his 1748 *Discorso sopra lo stato antico e moderno della nobiltà (Discourse on the Ancient and Modern State of the Nobility)*, which thoroughly described the issues related to the institution of the Knights of Saint Stephen created by Cosimo I.<sup>16</sup> This marked the end of an era for the Order of Saint Stephen, as dismantling the order had significant symbolic consequences. It marked the beginning of a new model of absolutism that abandoned many moral and religious goals that had been dominant in the past. It is not surprising that the courts of Rome, Genoa and Venice accused the House of Habsburg-Lorraine of prioritising economic profit over the war against the infidels.<sup>17</sup>

As a matter of fact, the Grand Duchy of Tuscany was enacting new strategies inspired by a wider political and cultural turn that also involved the Kingdom of Naples, the other Italian state featured in this study. The first signs of such a turn date back to the beginning of the 1700s, when the cost of fighting corsairs had become unsustainable. In fact, in order to pay ransoms and bring home Christians who had fallen into Muslim hands, European institutions were willing to pay exorbitant sums.<sup>18</sup> In his *Istoria civile del Regno di Napoli (Civil History of the Kingdom of Naples, 1723)*, the famous jurist Pietro Giannone denounced the damage done by the system of “captive rescue”, which triggered a vicious cycle:

It cannot be denied any further that this is why the Turks become pirates. It is very useful and profitable to them, and almost all take up this life, because they know that if they make Christians into slaves, they will receive enormous amounts of money to free them.<sup>19</sup>

16. See D. Marrara, “L’Ordine di Santo Stefano nell’età della Reggenza. Le riflessioni critiche di Pompeo Neri e la legge sulla nobiltà”, in *L’Ordine di Santo Stefano nella Toscana dei Lorena*, pp. 48-60.

17. Angiolini, *L’Ordine di Santo Stefano*, pp. 24-25.

18. L. A. Muratori, *Della carità cristiana in quanto essa è amore del prossimo, trattato morale di Lodovico Antonio Muratori, bibliotecario del serenissimo signor Duca di Modena*, Bassano, Remondini, 1768, pp. 264-265. See also S. Bono, *Lumi e corsari: Europa e Maghreb nel Settecento*, Perugia, Morlacchi, 2005, pp. VII-VIII.

19. P. Giannone, *Istoria civile del Regno di Napoli* di Pietro Giannone, giureconsulto, ed avvocato napoletano. Edizione accresciuta di note critiche, riflessioni, medaglie, moltissime correzioni fatte dall’autore che non si trovano nelle tre anteriori. Tomo terzo in cui contiens la polizia del Regno sotto Angioini, ed Aragonesi, Venice, Pasquali, 1766, p. 250: “redenzione dei captivi”, “Non può negarsi ancora, che per quest’istesso i Turchi esercitano l’arte piratesca, riuscendo ad essi molto utile, e fruttuosa; onde quasi tutti vi si applicano, perché sanno, che ridotti i cristiani in servitù,

It was a harsh statement, but Giannone believed that religious and secular powers from the Catholic monarchies of Europe were in part responsible for the war against corsairs. Many confraternities and religious institutions requested the assistance of secular powers to carry out their mission of helping Christian slaves, but in doing so encouraged corsairs to capture more and more people as they knew they would receive a substantial reward for their release.

The need to change strategies became urgent. The “Mediterranean” policies put in place in various states in the period of 18<sup>th</sup>-century reform represented, in this sense, a meaningful response to the urgings of thinkers like Giannone, opening a new phase in which priority was given to trade and diplomatic relations with the Muslim world and Jewish minorities. European governments set aside religious and moral disagreements, seeking to curb the continuous actions of pirates that fuelled the lucrative slave ransom system. New treaties were signed to expand trade and attract foreign merchants to the ports of western Europe.

In the 1740s, King of Naples Charles of Bourbon engaged in diplomatic exchanges and achieved commercial treaties with other European States, the Ottoman Empire and North African states. He also agreed to give benefits and support to Jewish merchants.<sup>20</sup> Political and economic changes followed the spread of orientalist trends among travellers and men of letters. The terrifying Turkish “enemy” became the harmless protagonist of plays and ballads or was painted on pieces of furniture that decorated sitting rooms. More and more men of letters, scientists, politicians, merchants and travellers made their way to Constantinople and

vengono tosto immense somme per redimergli”. On Giannone’s reflections on slavery, see S. Bono, *Schiavi musulmani nell’Italia moderna: galeotti, vu’cuprà e domestici*, Naples, ESI, 1999, pp. 217-228.

20. A. M. Rao, “Napoli e il Mediterraneo nel Settecento: frontiera d’Europa?”, in *Il Mediterraneo delle città. Scambi, confronti, culture, rappresentazioni*, ed. by F. Salvatori, Rome, Viella, 2008, pp. 20-21. On the role of Jewish merchants in Italian ports in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, see S. Calonaci, “Le lenticchie di Esau: ebrei e fedecommissi a Livorno nel Settecento”, *Nuovi studi livornesi*, 26 (2009), pp. 151-170; *The Mediterranean and the Jews: Banking, Finance and International Trade (XVI-XVIII Centuries)*, ed. by A. Toaff and S. Schwarzfuchs, Ramat-Gan, Bar-Ilan University Press, 1989 (I especially recommend W. Angelini, “Tra Cinquecento e tardo Settecento: preparazione e maturità dell’attività mercantile degli ebrei ad Ancona”, pp. 13-28); J. P. Filippini, “Il posto dei negozianti ebrei nel commercio di Livorno nel Settecento”, *Rassegna Mensile di Israel*, 50 (1984), pp. 634-649.



other Islamic lands. Their travel journals were then printed and distributed to ever more curious European readers.<sup>21</sup>

Collections of chronicles and tales providing a more complex portrayal of the Mediterranean started to circulate in many Italian cities. Depicted as a place of crumbling borders, the Mediterranean Sea saw a constant exchange of people, goods and cultures, where concepts such as nation and religion became fluid.<sup>22</sup> During the 1700s, studies observed that the Italian publishing industry dramatically changed its approach toward Mediterranean cultures. Feelings “of fear and disgust that were common only a few years prior were replaced by unspeakable envy and attraction for this mysterious and seductive world, which thus became fascinating”.<sup>23</sup> Even the manuscripts written by missionaries in the East produced unexpected effects, tickling the interest of readers for faraway lands and inspiring “proto-ethnographical curiosity”.<sup>24</sup>

These changes caused strong reactions within the Catholic world. Faced with the unrelenting spread of a cultural atmosphere that had forgotten the religious fervour of the fight against Muslims, many priests and missionaries decided to rediscover old devotions and promoted new cults that were clearly anti-Muslim. Hagiographers and conspiracy

21. See P. Preto, *Venezia e i Turchi*, Florence, Sansoni, 1975 (new ed. by Viella, Rome, 2013), pp. 67-68, 378-380, 427-477; M. Formica, *Lo specchio turco. Immagini dell'Altro e riflessi del Sé nella cultura italiana d'età moderna*, Rome, Donzelli, 2012, pp. 133-211.

22. See Rao, “Napoli e il Mediterraneo nel Settecento”, pp. 15-53; A. M. Rao, “Il Mediterraneo del Settecento (conclusioni)”, in *Il Mediterraneo nel Settecento. Identità e scambi*, ed. by P. Sanna, *Studi Settecenteschi*, 29-30 (2010), pp. 449-457. For methodological debates on this topic, see R. Cancila, “Il Mediterraneo, storia di una complessità”, *Mediterranea – ricerche storiche*, 13 (2008), pp. 243-254; F. Canale Cama, D. Casanova, R. M. Delli Quadri, *Storia del Mediterraneo moderno e contemporaneo*, Naples, Guida, 2009; *Mediterraneo e'è Mar Nero, Due Mari tra età moderna e contemporanea*, ed. by L. Mascilli Migliorini and M. Mafrici, Naples, ESI, 2012. On the portrayal of the Turks in 18<sup>th</sup>-century Europe, see B. H. Beck, *From the Rising of the Sun: English Images of the Ottoman Empire to 1715*, New York, Peter Lang, 1987; A. Çirakman, *From the “Terror of the World” to the “Sick Man of Europe”*: *European Images of the Ottoman Empire and Society from the Sixteenth Century to the Nineteenth*, New York, Peter Lang, 2002.

23. Formica, *Lo specchio turco*, p. 135: “di paura e disprezzo di pochi anni avanti lasciavano il posto a una sorta di inconfessabile invidia, a un'inesprimibile attrazione verso un mondo misterioso, sensuale e dunque, per ciò stesso, affascinante”.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 143: “curiosità protoetnologiche”.

theorists focused their attention on Jewish people, who were once again suspected “of fraternising with the Turks”.<sup>25</sup> Devotional literature could reach all corners of the country thanks to its flexible form, which was not subject to attentive editing. It consisted not only of written works, but also an oral tradition spread through the voices of priests, preachers and the promoters of cults,<sup>26</sup> who kept trying to warn the audience about an enemy that was not really perceived as dangerous anymore. According to moralist members of the clergy, Turks and Jews were once again either evil figures within society that had to be eradicated or foreign threats to be fought and mercilessly disposed of.

### 3. *Promoting a cult: establishing a particular notion of the state*

Gaetano Albizzini’s print shop in Florence was already renowned for producing important hagiographies, and in 1763 he published a book halfway between hagiography and adventure novel. It recounted the life of Count Domenico Bentivoglio (1629-1698), “an honourable knight and a perfect Christian” who lived in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and who came from a noble family of Bologna.<sup>27</sup> The author was Francesco Antonio Monaldi, an unknown priest

25. G. Ricci, *I turchi alle porte*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2008, p. 91: “di intelligenza con il Turco”.

26. Many devotional practices are associated with anti-Islamic and anti-Jewish discourses. See, for instance, S. Grassi, *Miracoli e grazie della santissima Vergine Maria del Carmine raccolte dal P. Simone Grassi Carmelitano Fiorentino Consacrate alla Santità di Nostro Signore Benedetto XIII*, Florence, Nestenus e Moucke, 1727, pp. 142, 221-225; *Relazione della solennissima festa celebrata nella città di Napoli nella Real Chiesa di Santa Lucia del Monte, da pp. Minori Scalzi di S. Pietro d’Alcantara per la beatificazione del loro glorioso martire Giovanni de Prado*, Naples, n.p., 1729; T. N. Venturini, *Storia Grandezze e Miracoli di Maria Vergine del Santissimo Rosario Secondo il Corso delle Domeniche, e Feste di tutto l’Anno*, Venice, Recurti, 1732; *Vita, morte e miracoli di S. Agnello Abbate, Protettore, e Tutelare della Fedelissima Città di Napoli, Fatta ristampare dal P. Abbate, e Canonico del Santissimo Salvatore di Santo Agnello, dedicata alla Maestà di Maria Amalia Walburga Nostra Regina*, Naples, Stefano Abbate, 1740; G. M. Rugilo, *Vita del venerabile padre Bonaventura da Potenza minore conventuale scritta da F. Giuseppe Maria Rugilo dell’istess’ordine*, Naples, G. Raimondi, 1754. On the anti-Islamic meaning of the devotion to Juan de Prado, see G. Fiume, *Schiavitù mediterranee, Corsari, rinnegati e santi di età moderna*, Milan, Mondadori, 2009.

27. F. A. Monaldi, *Vita del venerabil padre fra Giuseppe Maria da Firenze cappuccino al secolo il sig. conte Domenico Bentivoglio scritta da Anton Francesco Monaldi pievano*

from Val d'Elsa.<sup>28</sup> The story of Bentivoglio was rather complex and unfolded in various locales, as he had been captured by Barbary pirates while sailing from Marseille to Livorno. He had unsuccessfully tried to hide his identity as a Knight of Saint Stephen and had remained imprisoned for a total of 18 months in Algiers. Even once set free, he could not escape the consequences of that terrible experience and became a Capuchin friar. He had subsequently returned to Africa as a missionary to help Christian slaves. After experiencing various turns of fortune, he had been accused of secretly plotting with a Maltese traitor to sabotage the maritime enterprise of the Tunisian government and was tortured. Only through the intercession of our well-known Cosimo III and the arrival of ships belonging to Louis XIV, King of France (1638-1715), had he miraculously been able to escape death.<sup>29</sup>

Two years later, in 1675, the *Vita del servo di Dio padre Guido Maria da Lugliano* (*The Life of God's Servant, Father Guido Maria da Lugliano*) was published in Lucca. Guido Maria was a Capuchin missionary from the Tuscan countryside, recently deceased.<sup>30</sup> Following a conventional description of the candidate saint's youth, yet another Capuchin, Antonfelice da Siena, and author of this hagiography, decided to give Guido Maria's youth an "adventuresome" turn of events by abandoning the cramped landscapes of the Tuscan evangelical missions to focus on what had occurred across the Mediterranean Sea between 1714 and 1718 as the Spanish War of Succession was coming to a close. The Turks had challenged Venice again, invaded Morea and reached the island of Corfu. Their offensive seemed unstoppable, to the point that it threatened the extensive coast of the Italian peninsula.

Pope Clement XI (in office from 1700 to 1721), in a strong position through the support offered by Portugal, assembled a small auxiliary fleet by combining his own galleys with those from the Republic of Genoa, the Hiersolomitan Order (the Knights of Malta), and the Tuscan Knights of Saint Stephen to counteract the Turks. The Tuscan Knights availed themselves of the religious guidance of a special clergyman, Father Guido

*di S. Piero in Mercato in Val d'Elsa*, Florence, Gaetano Albizzini, 1763, p. VII: "un degno cavaliere e un perfetto cristiano".

28. *Ibid.*, p. IX.

29. *Ibid.*, pp. 181-217.

30. Antonfelice da Siena, *Vita del servo di Dio p. Guido Maria da Lugliano predicatore, e missionario Cappuccino della provincia di Toscana*, Lucca, Stamperia di Giuseppe di Jacopo Simoni, 1765.

Maria da Lugliano, who had been hand-picked by Cosimo III with the precise task of inculcating in the warriors the desire to sacrifice themselves in defence of the Holy Faith. It behooves us to revisit a few of the celebratory passages proposed by hagiographer Antonfelice da Siena in describing the Order of Saint Stephen:

Although the armament of this illustrious religious fleet from Tuscany was no longer at the prime it had enjoyed a century before, when it scored so many victories throughout the Levant, it still instilled a great deal of fear in Barbary pirates along the entire Italian coast, for its notorious ability to fight corsairs, its prowess and its honour in battle.

As reported in the pages of the *Vita*, we can discern how the Capuchin friar was honoured as a living saint on the galleys of the Order of Saint Stephen, capable of fighting the invisible enemy, the Devil, and at the same time of inspiring people to fight the visible enemy: the Turks. The hagiographer's ultimate message clearly indicated that the outcome of the war had been decided by God and by the worthiness of these men. Father Guido Maria instilled in the Tuscan sailors "complete faith in the God of the armies" sailing "headfirst into Muslim fire [...] with almost no losses whatsoever".<sup>31</sup>

We may draw important conclusions from an analysis of these texts: by the mid-1760s, when the biographies of Father Bentivoglio and Guido Maria da Lugliano were published, the Order of Saint Stephen had lost most of its privileges but was still a symbolic point of reference for the conservative aristocracy that remained close to Catholic tradition. The opposing sides were clearly delineated: Giuseppe Pierallini, an auditor of the administration in Livorno, which was the major port city of Tuscany, celebrated the creation of a new merchant marine in his *Osservazioni sopra la pace con gl'Ottomani* (*Reflections on the Peace Treaty with the Ottomans*, 1764), while the representatives of the Holy See accused the grand duchy of "submitting to Vienna" and of being incapable of fighting the "Barbary

31. *Ibid.*, pp. 50, 52, 59-60, 63, 65-66: "Quantunque l'Armamento di questa inclita Religione della Toscana, non fosse allora in quel fiore, che veduto erasi nel fin del passato Secolo, cotanto nobilitato da' trofie riportati in tutto il Levante, erano nondimeno in tanta riputanza di velocità nel corso, di tal destrezza, e valore nel combattimento, che conteneano in molto timore le piraterie Barbaresche per tutte le costiere almen della nostra Italia [...]"; "una pienissima confidenza nel Dio degli eserciti", "in faccia all'artiglieria musulmana [...] senza soffrirne quasi alcun danno".

ships”.<sup>32</sup> It is therefore easy to understand that there is a connection between the complaints lodged by the Holy See against Tuscany’s policies in the Mediterranean and new hagiographies that recounted the ancient glory of the Knights of Saint Stephen in their fight against the Muslims. Thus, the lives of the saints became a mirror of the political and religious conflicts that characterised the mid-1700s, becoming an actual accusation against the state, albeit an implicit one. Guilty of prioritising the pursuit of trade accords, the grand duchy had stopped fighting the war against Islam, thus becoming more vulnerable to outside enemies.

From this analysis we may also discern the foundational pillars in the reaction strategy developed from within the Catholic world. While secular governments were busy restructuring their institutions to expand economic progress, a substantial portion of the clergy pushed to erect higher walls between different religions. Foreigners and Muslims who refused to convert to Catholicism became the object of violent tirades and were blamed for the corruption of the moral social fabric. Hagiographers and apologists increasingly emphasised the merging of religion and the *raison d’Etat*, calling on sovereigns to intensify the defence of the borders. Turks, Jews and other foreigners who were present in the Italian peninsula were seen as the source of moral corruption that led to social disintegration. This is how they reprised old and outdated celebratory expressions that had all but been abandoned (in particular, those used during the Counter-Reformation) and infused them with new political meaning.<sup>33</sup>

By designing an ideological framework of “us” versus “them”, the authors of hagiographies and devotional literature could take on crucial topics such as the relationship between Church and State. They sought to redefine the balance between the different European monarchies and the authority of ecclesiastical hierarchies with regard to the control of certain territories. “Infidels” had to convert or be fought. The more conservative thinkers saw all favours, attempts at reconciliation and flexible approaches used by secular powers toward “infidels” as unforgivable signs of weakness that had undermined public institutions and morals.<sup>34</sup> Hagiographies

32. ASV, *Segreteria di Stato*, Florence, v. 152, ff. 534-536. See C. Mangio, “Richecourt e il miraggio dell’Oriente”, pp. 363-376: “subalterno a quello di Vienna”, “ai legni Barbareschi”.

33. See Palmieri, “I pericoli e le risorse del mare”.

34. See Formica, *Lo specchio turco*, pp. 116, 121-122: “gli infedeli”.

contributed to the shaping of a political discourse that legitimised petitions advanced by the state or powerful groups. It even defined the relationship between economic strategies and moral values. At the apex of this “Settecento riformatore” (i.e., the 18<sup>th</sup> century of reforms, to hark back to the formulation proposed by Franco Venturi), the re-establishment, albeit imaginary, of a Mediterranean divided by impenetrable barriers became the central theme of a political discourse aimed at preserving the alliance between throne and altar.

#### 4. *The war of images*

Eighteenth-century hagiographical developments were equally matched by those of an iconographical nature; indeed, bitter conflicts broke out on the topic of sacred images around the same time. Once again, an analysis of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany facilitates a better understanding of the complexity of the transformations that were taking place. Teresa Redi, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, was connected to the cult of the Sacred Heart. In the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, the devotional practices developed around the visions of Margherita Maria Alacoque were the object of increasingly fiery debates and underwent significant changes. The more conservative representatives of Catholicism focused on her socio-political significance, equating her figure with monarchical power to be employed as an antidote to the impiety of the “freethinkers”. A short time later, the type of worship preferred by Jesuits came to acquire stronger symbolic connotations, becoming a point of reference in the defence of ecclesiastic institutions against Enlightenment reform and to preserve Christian society as a whole. Protestantism, Jansenism and *philosophie* were described by apologists as three swords piercing Christ’s heart and invoking the fury of God upon men.<sup>35</sup>

Scipione de’ Ricci had to deal with this difficult situation while he was vicar in the diocese of Florence (1775-1780). To be sure, his task was not easy, as archbishop Gaetano Incontri had shown his favouritism toward the Sacred Heart multiple times, even in official documents such as *Spiegazione teologica liturgica e morale sopra la celebrazione delle feste* (*Theological, Liturgical and Moral Clarification on How to Celebrate Holy Days*,

35. See Menozzi, *Sacro Cuore*, pp. 30-35.

1762).<sup>36</sup> Ricci was only able to enact stricter regulations once he became bishop of Pistoia, removing the image of the Sacred Heart from multiple religious buildings and promoting the spread of argumentative texts such as *Pregiudizi legittimi contro la nuova devozione al Cuor carneo di Gesù* (*Reasonable Prejudices Against the New Devotion to the Bodily Heart of Jesus*) by theologian Paolo Marcello del Mare of Genoa. At the same time, the “*Annales Ecclesiastici*” – a very important periodical that was central to his reforming campaign – continued to monitor the developments of the debate around contested worship.<sup>37</sup>

Obstacles arose as a consequence to the attempts of former Jesuits to restore the Company after it had been disbanded by the pope. In a letter to Peter Leopold dated 5 April 1781, Ricci wrote:

However, there are still people who belong to an institution that miraculously almost does not exist anymore, thanks to the combined help of the two powers, neither of which is lacking in its willingness to try new roads to reestablish itself. This time, they are trying to resurrect the order around a false devotion, new in the Church of God [...]. I am referring to the devotion of the Heart of Jesus.

The bishop recounted how he had been deceived. He had been called to bless the bells of Santa Maria delle Carceri in Prato. He had noticed that the organisers, “with a well-plotted scheme” had hidden the inscription *in honorem Cordis Jesu* (“in honour of the hearth of Jesus”) behind garlands of sweet-smelling flowers and herbs. Former Jesuit Salvatore Salvi was considered the mastermind behind this bold episode:

Your Majesty, this is the behaviour of an institution that was eliminated to ensure peace within the Church and States. It will not cease to bother us with new cabals until the King eradicates it at its roots. This false devotion, under the shadow of the less enlightened and with most bishops left completely unawares, is allowed to slither and is fed by false principles that damage true and solid devotion. It deserves [...] to be eliminated once and for all, deprived of its protection and impeded from any further activity.<sup>38</sup>

36. *Ibid.*, p. 59; F. G. Incontri, *Spiegazione teologica liturgica e morale sopra la celebrazione delle feste diretta a' chierici della città e Diogesi fiorentina*, Florence, Moucke, 1762.

37. Menozzi, *Sacro Cuore*, pp. 59-60.

38. *Lettere di Scipione de' Ricci a Pietro Leopoldo*, vol. I, Pistoia, 5 April 1781, p. 109: “Esistono tuttavia gli individui d'un corpo estinto già quasi miracolosamente per il

On 9 April, Ricci wrote to Francesco Seratti, secretary of the Council of State, to denounce “a congregation of worshippers of the Heart of Jesus” that was conducting “some celebrations thanks to the charity and donations of their devotees”. A small group of friars from the dismantled Jesuit order was trying to promote the worship of the Sacred Heart with “secret projects”, sharing books full of heretical doctrines “in all of Europe and beyond, to the furthestmost corners of the world” and showing “images that belonged to a slaughterhouse rather than a sanctuary”.<sup>39</sup>

The conflict that developed around the Sacred Heart was ultimately connected to the intention of the monarchy to extend its authority to religious matters. In short, ecclesiology and politics went hand-in-hand as the reform of the Church was considered to be inseparable from that of the State. In his pastoral provisions for 1781, Ricci claimed that the contested Jesuitic cult of the Sacred Heart signalled the imminent advent of the Antichrist, which would cause an implosion in the fabric of society and cloud evangelical truth.<sup>40</sup> Ricci thought that performative types of worship would divert people away from truthful and authentic faith, so it was the grand duke’s responsibility to steer Christians back to the true path.

It is not a coincidence that other delicate matters were debated at the same time, in particular the claim that some holy images had miraculous powers. The Ministry of Royal Law had already been putting a great deal of effort into addressing this claim: many clergymen would resort to the cult

concorso delle due potestà, e che non mancano di tentare ogni nuova strada per ravvivarsi, prendendo per centro di riunione una falsa devozione nuova nella chiesa di Dio [...], voglio dire la devozione al Cuor di Gesù”, “con frode ben macchinata”, “Questo, Altezza Reale, è il contegno che tiene un istituto già estinto per la pace della Chiesa e degli Stati, che pure con nuove cabale non cessa di turbare, quando l’autorità sovrana non ne sopprime fino dai principi le trame. Questa falsa devozione che, sotto l’ombra dei meno illuminati e senza saputa per lo più dei vescovi, va serpeggiando e fomentata da false massime con tanto danno della devozione soda e vera merita bene [...] che colla sovrana sua protezione sia onninamente tolta, impedendone ulterior corso”.

39. ASF, *Carte Ricci*, Trascrizione dei Copialettere N/441, fasc. II, reg. 45, pp. 69-73: “Una congregazione di cordicoli che con limosine e questue tra’ loro devoti”, “facendo delle feste”, “segreti progetti”, “in Europa tutta e fino alle parti più remote del mondo”, “immagini più degne di macelleria che del Santuario”. See also the *Letters to Seratti*, 23 and 25 April 1781, pp. 80-83, 86-88. For more information on this case, see *Segreteria del Regio Diritto*, f. 510, pp. 386-402.

40. Menozzi, *Sacro Cuore*, pp. 62-63; *Istruzione pastorale di monsignore Scipione de Ricci [...] sopra la divozione al Sacro Cuor di Gesù*, Pistoia, Atto Bracali, 1781.



of saints to implore them to offer supernatural assistance against epidemics and natural disasters. Sometimes, however, these pleas backfired, spreading panic among the populace or resulting in adverse effects on economic activity.<sup>41</sup> In fact, in response to these ginned up threats, images of the Virgin Mary and the Crucifix were paraded through the streets with great pomp and solemnity, at an exorbitant cost.<sup>42</sup>

Thus, the government tried to react, limiting “the excessive number of lights used during the display of the Sacrament and during All Saint’s Day”. The grand duke stated multiple times that he “approved the promotion of monetary aid for the poor rather than tolerating a disastrous imitation of misinterpreted worship”. He thought it necessary that the people understood how “sentiments of piety and commiseration” deserved more consideration than “any glitzy human performance”.<sup>43</sup> Generally speaking, the government’s position was clear: “Extravagant and loud festivities arouse the populace to the point of actual profanation, rather than stimulating devotion and the true Spirit of piety”.<sup>44</sup> The government was particularly intolerant toward “celebrations of saints” organised by “private individuals [...] only to satisfy their sense of vanity”, and tabernacles placed in the streets to “elicit the participation of people”, as all these practices were considered to be against “true ecclesiastical discipline”.<sup>45</sup>

In that same year, 1786, Scipione de’ Ricci convened the Synod of Pistoia. The synod had agreed with the grand duke to recognise and enforce reforms that had already been approved, and to establish new laws to regulate religious life.<sup>46</sup> This project was summarised in a document called *Cinquantasette punti (Fifty-Seven Items)* which touched on crucial topics such as ecclesiastical privileges, training and duties of parish priests, and most importantly (for our research) the liturgical-devotional “system”.

41. ASF, *Segreteria del Regio Diritto*, f. 408, pp. 167-186.

42. *Ibid.*, f. 520, pp. 438-453.

43. *Ibid.*, f. 537, p. 304: “l’eccessivo numero di Lumi nell’esposizione del Sacramento, e Festa de’ Santi”, “gradimento nel promuovere la sovvenzione per i poveri, in vece di tollerare una disastrosa emulazione di male intesa devozione”, “sentimenti di pietà e commiserazione”, “di qualunque umano sfarzo”.

44. *Ibid.*, f. 555, pp. 74-75: “Le feste straordinarie, e rumorose, piuttosto che eccitare la devozione, e il vero Spirito di pietà, servono di richiamo al popolo, e il più delle volte si risolvono in una vera profanazione”.

45. *Ibid.*, f. 592, pp. 339-342: “feste di santi”, “private persone [...] mosse solo da spirito di vanità”, “per attirare il concorso del popolo”, “alla vera disciplina ecclesiastica”.

46. See Rosa, *La contrastata ragione*, pp. 140-143.

Ricci played a pivotal role in the latter, providing ideas for the kind of directive to implement in Tuscan dioceses.

The first draft of the *Cinquantasette punti* stated that holidays, displays of holy images, and novenas had to remain simple and moderate, steering away from pomposity, illumination, backdrops and decorations. Musical accompaniment could only consist of voices and the organ. Natural daylight was to be preferred, limiting the extension of celebrations into the night, and thus avoiding any related issue with public order. All “suspicious or strange” relics that were kept in churches and monasteries had to be carefully evaluated by bishops to confirm their authenticity. “Statues and paintings” that were not “appropriate because of their antiquated state or bad condition” had to be removed. The directives concerning the principal altar in each church were even more revealing. Altars could only display images of Christ on the Cross and never a saint. Processions had to “be abolished”, except for “Corpus Domini and the Rogations outside of churches, and Palm Sunday and Candelara inside of churches”. Clergymen were called upon to “enlighten the populace” to purge them “of all superstitious devotion” and of their “abuse of indulgences”.<sup>47</sup>

The final draft of *Cinquantasette punti* was sent to various bishops in January 1786, but their responses to the work of Ricci and Peter Leopold were not positive. The strongest objections concerned the topics of “enlightened piety” and the cult of images. Tiberio Borghesi (1720-1792), chief of the diocese of Siena, thought it was necessary to maintain the old habit of covering the sacred images for long periods of time. This would create excitement in the devotees for the upcoming revelation of the image and generate strong emotional reactions as well as “aroused devotion”. Ranieri Mancini (?-1814) of Fiesole sarcastically observed that “if images are evil, we should eliminate all of them, with no exception, including the Crucifix”. Pietro Maria Franzesi of Montepulciano (1713-1799) boldly wrote that such a strong hostility toward existing habits could “cause some serious scandal among the populace”.<sup>48</sup>

47. *Lettere di Scipione de' Ricci a Pietro Leopoldo*, vol. I, pp. 255-257. The first draft of the *Punti* is in ASF, *Carte Ricci*, f. 59, pp. 71-111: “sospette e strane”, “pitture e statue”, “convenienti per la loro antichità e cattivo grado”, “da abolirsi”, “del Corpus Domini e delle Rogazioni fuori di chiesa e delle Palme e Candelara in chiesa”, “illuminare il popolo”, “tutte le devozioni superstiziose”, “gli abusi sulle indulgenze”.

48. Pieroni Francini, *Immagini sacre in Toscana*, pp. 841, 865; *Punti ecclesiastici compilati e trasmessi da SAR a tutti gli Arcivescovi e vescovi della Toscana e lor rispettive*

The day before Tuscan bishops gathered at the Assembly of 1787, an ample sector of those who published and publicised religious materials adopted an even more antagonistic stance toward the reforms. Peter Leopold had thought that the Assembly might serve as a prelude to a future nation-wide council, but one by one the members of the high clergy started to distance themselves from Ricci's views. The bishop of Florence, Antonio Martini, despite an outwardly prudent attitude, nonetheless butted heads with the grand duke, who in turn labelled him false and vindictive. On the other hand, Martini's colleague, the bishop of San Sepolcro and later Arezzo, Niccolò Marcacci (1739-1799) was an adamant defender of tradition and vocally expressed his opinion on sacred images: "The senses [...] can service faith, and peasants need them more than others [...]. Simple souls find truths inside images that they cannot learn through holy scriptures".<sup>49</sup> Both Martini and Marcacci maintained a close relationship with Agostino Albergotti, who worked for them as general vicar and who – as we already know – was one of the most active supporters of the cult of Teresa Margherita Redi.

Bishops started to gather on 23 April at Pitti Palace, where opposing views started to emerge right away. The loudest debates were still over sacred images, which, according to the few participants who espoused reformist positions, encouraged the spread of superstitions. Nonetheless, most bishops held a different opinion: "those things that are mysterious and inaccessible to human understanding" generated "veneration and respect" among the populace.<sup>50</sup> A few weeks later, on 20 May to be exact, the diocese of Scipione de' Ricci became the backdrop for a violent protest

*risposte*, Florence, Cambiagi, 1787. On Ranieri Mancini, see R. Rosa, "La biblioteca del vescovo di Fiesole Ranieri Mancini (1776-1814). Aspetti della cultura di un prelado toscano tra Settecento ed età napoleonica", in *La Toscana nell'età rivoluzionaria e napoleonica*, Rome, Ministero per i beni culturali e ambientali, 1994, pp. 681-716: "Se le immagini sono un male, conviene abolirle tutte senza riserva, non escluso lo stesso crocifisso", "cagionare nel popolo qualche grave scandalo".

49. Pieroni Francini, *Immagini sacre in Toscana*, pp. 841, 865: "coi sensi [...] si aiuta la fede e i contadini ne hanno più bisogno di altri [...]; le anime semplici rilevano nelle immagini quelle verità che non possono apprendere dalla meditazione dei libri santi". See Stella, *Il giansenismo in Italia*, vol. II, pp. 336-344.

50. Pieroni Francini, *Immagini sacre in Toscana*, p. 842; R. Tanzini, *Istoria dell'Assemblea degli Arcivescovi e Vescovi della Toscana tenuta in Firenze nell'anno 1787*, Florence, Cambiagi, 1788: "cose misteriose e celate all'umano intendimento", "venerazione e rispetto".

that was linked to both religious and economic motives. The people of Prato, influenced by the bishop's antagonists, were led to believe that he was going to take away one of the most venerated relics of the city, the Holy Girdle of the Virgin Mary. Armed with clubs and axes, they stormed the cathedral and destroyed the emblems of Ricci, stealing books and documents to be burned in the piazza. According to Angelo Paoletti's reconstruction of the events in his *Storia del sinodo diocesano di Pistoia (History of the Diocesan Synod of Pistoia)*, written in the early 1800s, the fury of the populace had been stoked by the conservatives (namely, the enemies of the bishop) to demonstrate the threat of destabilisation caused by "all changes to religious practice". A few days later, Ricci himself advised Peter Leopold "to cut the superstition off at its legs" by moving the "false relic" to Florence.<sup>51</sup>

Other religious figures opposing Ricci's reforms, like Oratorian friar Basilio Vannucchi, became advocates for a providential interpretation of the protest. According to them, God wanted to show people that the Synod of Pistoia was the fruit of a diabolic plot. The Virgin Mary had thus inspired a just war against the Jansenists to protect the Church of Rome. Various accounts from people at the time are useful to understand what happened. Pietro Razzai, a merchant, wrote in a little journal where he tracked things he wished to remember that the serious unrest was due to the bishop's desire to limit traditional worship practices. Also worthy of note are the opinions of the nobleman from Prato, Francesco Buonamici, and the archpriest Benedetto Morandi, both of whom reported that Ricci had been the victim of conspiracies within the order led by deceitful priests, but they nonetheless admitted that the devotees' religious enthusiasm had been offended by the decisions taken by the government of Habsburg-Lorraine.<sup>52</sup>

The fact that Tuscan bishops backtracked to a more conservative stance, more in line with the ideologies of Rome, did not discourage Ricci.

51. See M. Rosa, "Dalla 'religione civica' alla 'pietà illuminata': la cintola della Vergine di Prato", *Rivista di Storia e Letteratura Religiosa*, 38 (2002), pp. 266-269. Paoletti's text has been published by C. Fantappiè in *Il sinodo di Pistoia del 1786*, ed. by C. Lamioni, Rome, Herder, 1991, *Appendice*, pp. 479-533. Ricci's letter, dated 16 June 1787, is in *Lettere di Scipione de' Ricci a Pietro Leopoldo*, vol. II, pp. 960-962: "tutte le innovazioni in punto di religione", "togliere alla radice la superstizione", "falsa reliquia".

52. See C. Fantappiè, *Riforme ecclesiastiche e resistenze sociali. La sperimentazione istituzionale nella diocesi di Prato alla fine dell'antico regime*, Bologna, il Mulino, 1986, pp. 349-355.

In November 1787 he sent the grand duke a structured plan for the reform of the ecclesiastical system that expanded on the topics of liturgy and worship. The document describes how devotees did not need any “arousal of the senses”. Sacred images constituted “the book of the ignorant” whose only purpose was that of renewing “the memory of virtuous acts performed by saints” depicted in them. For this reason, it was necessary that all images remain “uncovered”, except for the period celebrating the Passion of Christ. Even the veneration of Mary had to be limited, because the many names attributed to her (the Addolorata, Annunziata, etc.) had “inspired and nourished a thousand troubles and strange ideas in the minds of people”, creating a “self-seeking and misunderstood form of piety”.

Ricci also stipulated that the relics owned by private individuals had to be confiscated by bishops, in order to preserve authentic relics and destroy those “rooted in mysterious popular traditions”. In addition to that, “all the so-called commemorative funerals and anniversaries” had to be abolished, as well as private devotional shrines, with the exception of those serving people who lived at a significant distance from a church, in which case they could be considered “useful to the public”. Pilgrimages also had to be immediately suspended, given the “concerns and turmoil” created by the arrival of crowds to “faraway sanctuaries”. Ludovico Antonio Muratori’s core ideas on the matter were adopted and followed: “Worship that is not based on truth and that does not respect the limits of regulated devotion cannot be pleasing to God”.<sup>53</sup>

It took two years of incertitude and animated debates within the state council before the government emanated the actual order to remove all the curtains and screens covering sacred images. At the end of the summer of 1789, while the French Revolution was breaking out, one of the most venerated images of the whole grand duchy was uncovered, that of the Virgin Mary of the Most Holy Annunciation in Florence. The apostolic nuncio tried to deal with that difficult situation by keeping in close contact with the Holy See, expecting outraged reactions from the public,

53. *Lettere di Scipione de' Ricci a Pietro Leopoldo*, vol. II, 23 November 1787, pp. 1049-1052: “alcun eccitamento sensibile”, “il libro degli ignoranti”, “la memoria delle azioni virtuose de' santi”, “scoperte”, “suscitato e nodrito mille inconvenienti e mille strane idee nel popolo”, “una interessata e mal'intesa pietà”, “fondate soltanto sopra vaghe tradizioni popolari”, “tutti i così detti mortori e gli anniversari particolari”, “comodo al pubblico”, “sconcerti e disordini”, “santuari lontani”, “Non può piacere a Dio un culto che non è fondato sulla verità e non mantiene i giusti confini di una regolata devozione”.

while the world of publishing, already stacked against Ricci, did not hold back. According to the bulletin *Voce della greggia di Pistoia* (*Voice of the Flock of Pistoia*, author unknown), the reformers were not even “embarrassed to borrow libel from Calvin”, accusing devotees of “venerating canvas, murals and paint”, and possibly also of “worshipping bulls, onions and leeks”. The veneration of the Sacred Heart, which was at the centre of the candidacy of Teresa Redi to sainthood, had been mocked. Visionary Maria Margherita Alacoque had been labelled “Owl Heart”. The anonymous piece *Saggio di alcune massime dottrine e costumanze introdotte in questi ultimi tempi nella diocesi di Prato e Pistoia* (*Discourse on Some of the Main Doctrines and Mores Recently Introduced in the Diocese of Prato and Pistoia*) contains even more resentful passages:

Some priests publicly described the images of saints as grotesque masks and soiled canvases, the statues of Mary as puppets, *parapattole* and *bambole*, dolls. “The doll walks no more”, they said, referring to the fact that the procession of Mary had been cancelled. The Holy Girdle of Prato is referred to by some as the *birracchio* (belt), *straccio* (rag), or *cencio* (rag) of the Virgin Mary [...]. The worship of the Five Holy Wounds is called worship “of Jesus’ holes”. The worship of Jesus’ Sacred Heart is called “the worship of the gutted Jesus” or “the hacked-to-pieces Jesus”.<sup>54</sup>

Many communities did not react well to the government’s new orders. News of the revolution that was shaking up France dealt a significant blow to the impetus for reform among the rulers of the Italian states, who began to mend their fences with the Holy See, rejecting the religious directives enacted in previous years by their governments. In particular, Cortona’s diocese saw its bishop, Gregorio Alessandri (1728-1802), challenge the grand duchy by refusing to give the order to his priests to uncover sacred images. Tensions between the bishop and the government had taken root in

54. Pieroni Francini, *Immagini sacre in Toscana*, pp. 847-850: “rossore di prendere perfino in prestito da Calvino le calunnie”, “veneratori di tele, di muraglie e di tinte”, “di adorare i buoi, le cipolle e i porri”, “Cuor di Civetta”, “Qualche parroco chiamò pubblicamente le immagini dei santi *mascheroni*, *tele imbrattate*, le statue della Madonna hanno nome di *fantoccie* e *paparattole*, di *bambole*. *La bambola non va più a spasso*: così si parlava delle processioni della Madonna levate. Il Sacro Cingolo di Prato è da alcuni chiamato i *birracchio*, lo *straccio*, il *cencio della Madonna* [...]. La devozione delle Cinque Piaghe si intitola quella dei *buchi di Gesù* e quella del di lui Sacro Cuore si chiama la devozione di *Gesù sventrato*, di *Gesù fatto a pezzi*” (italics original).

previous months. Devotees were upset because they were denied ancient traditions such as the celebration of the Madonna degli Alemanni, the Madonna del Calcinaio and Christ at the Column of the confraternity of the Santissima Trinità dei Laici. In August 1789 new unrest exploded around the incorruptible body of Saint Margaret and the Holy Cross, which were the most treasured and venerated relics of that area. Alessandri accused the state official of crafting a “hateful plan” with the sole goal of eliciting the “outrage of the populace”.<sup>55</sup>

In an attempt to settle the situation, Niccolò Fiascaini, vice-chancellor of the Ministry of Royal Law, was sent to Cortona to investigate. According to reports written by the functionaries of the grand duke, the bishop Alessandri had been deceitful for allowing his priests the freedom to decide what to do with the holy images, ensuring that the populace would in no way hold him responsible for whatever occurred. Fiascaini stated that the inspection of various churches had led to incredible discoveries. The nunnery of San Michelangelo, for example, housed “a puppet covered in cardboard and dressed as a warrior called San Felice Martire with some relics in its legs”. At the beginning of September, the government dismissed this issue as mere “rumour”, but this superficial verdict turned out to be shortsighted since other, similar events would later occur elsewhere in the Tuscan state.<sup>56</sup>

In the Spring of 1790, the death of Emperor Joseph II and the departure of Peter Leopold for Vienna to inherit his brother’s throne sparked new revolts in the cities of Pistoia, Prato, Pescia, Colle, Chiusi, Montevarchi, Livorno and even Florence. The holy images and relics that had been removed were placed back on the altars, and the government was forced to reinstate the religious orders that had been suppressed. A large group of angry peasants who wanted to reclaim their religious practices covered the famous Madonna of Montenero, Livorno, with veils. A report dated 5 June 1790 was sent from Pistoia to the nuncio of Florence, reformulating the causes of the revolts as less of an economic nature and more of a devotional one:

55. M. Pieroni Francini, *Un vescovo toscano tra riformismo e Rivoluzione: mons. Gregorio Alessandri (1776-1802)*, Rome, Elia, 1977, pp. 219-223: “odioso progetto”, “l’indignazione del Popolo”.

56. ASF, *Segreteria del Regio Diritto*, f. 684, pp. 41-52, 70-74, 138-140, 243-245: “un fantoccio ricoperto di cartone, e vestito alla guerriera, chiamato San Felice Martire avente nelle gambe alcune reliquie”, “un pettegolezzo”.

On one hand, the Jansenists do all in their power to stir up trouble, but to no avail. They had begun to plant the idea among the people that they should request lower taxes, or something of the sort, rather than making religious demands, so that they could claim that it was not religion that has mobilised the population.<sup>57</sup>

On 12 June 1790, the *Gazzetta Toscana* described the protests that were taking place in various dioceses, emphasising that people were restoring the altars that had been removed in previous years. At the same time Bernardino Cecchetti, a reporter who was eagerly gathering rumours and impressions, wrote that the bishop of Cortona, Gregorio Alessandri, was happy “to see the Jansenists humiliated and dejected”. Alessandri took advantage of this to reintroduce practices that celebrated the Sacred Heart. On 1 November 1791, he gave a homily at his cathedral to celebrate the new grand duke of Tuscany, Ferdinand III. What follows are his eloquent words:

Let it never be true, dearest children, that we who bask in the marvellous light of the Catholic Religion and among the splendours of the Saints should abandon ourselves to acts of perdition, which so demean and dishonour the dignity of our condition. The sanctity of the faith we profess is as sacred as the sanctity of our morals.<sup>58</sup>

Ricci followed the advice of the new grand duke and renounced his place as bishop of Pistoia and Prato. Pope Pius VI officially condemned the Synod of Pistoia on 28 August 1794, with the papal bull *Auctorem Fidei*.<sup>59</sup> This gave new energy to the members of the clergy who supported more conservative positions. The people continued to believe that sacred images

57. Pieroni Francini, *Immagini sacre in Toscana*, pp. 851-867: “I giansenisti per una parte fanno i loro sforzi per far nascere degli inconvenienti, ma finora non gli è riuscito. Avevano cominciato ad insinuare ai popoli che in vece di domandare cose riguardanti materie ecclesiastiche, chiedessero diminuzioni di tasse, e cose simili per poter dire che non avea mosso il popolo la religione”.

58. Pieroni Francini, *Un vescovo toscano tra riformismo e Rivoluzione*, pp. 230-233, 251: “vedere i giansenisti umiliati, e avviliti”, “Non sia mai vero figlioli carissimi che noi che siam nel lume meraviglioso della Cattolica Religione e fra gli splendori dei Santi ci abbandoniamo all’opere della perdizione, che tanto avviliscono e disonorano la dignità della nostra condizione. Alla santità della fede che professiamo è necessario che unita sia la santità dei costumi”.

59. Stella, *Il giansenismo in Italia*, vol. II, *Il movimento giansenista e la produzione libraria*, pp. 371-376, 434-464.



had miraculous powers and distanced themselves from the “regulated devotion” so dear to reformers. The long period of Enlightened ideologies and reforms had created conflicts that were difficult to resolve. While state officials such as vicars, local auditors and the Ministry of Royal Law had tried to uphold the grand duke’s secular authority over religious practice, the meticulous action of so many clergymen had kept alive the flame of popular religion taking a defensive stance toward tradition and reacting with hostility to all forms of change. It all took place in a nexus of communication based on the dense interplay between written and oral texts, images and gestures. Hagiography and devotional literature played an important role in this context, allowing for the revisiting and reintroduction of certain kinds of content, which contributed to the creation of reference manuals from which preachers could draw for their sermons, together with drawings, paintings and reenactments that were often bolstered by the distribution of relics and holy objects.

## 4. Saints of the Counterrevolution

### 1. *Conspiracy and defence of the faith*

The evolution of saintliness between the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the first years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century can only be understood by examining the dynamics that characterised relations between the ecclesiastical world and secular powers. In the opinion of many historians, in the first weeks after the siege of Bastille in 1789 there was few signs of particular concern to be found within the Catholic world.<sup>1</sup> The debate that was then underway centred on the contents of the volume entitled *De' diritti dell'uomo (Of Men's Rights)* by Nicola Spedalieri (1740-1795), a canon at Saint Peter's Basilica.<sup>2</sup> According to Spedalieri, the Church of Rome could take advantage of the new form of government proposed by

1. See D. Menozzi, *La Chiesa italiana e la rivoluzione francese*, Bologna, EDB, 1990; L. Fiorani, D. Rocciolo, *Chiesa romana e rivoluzione francese (1789-1799)*, Rome, École Française de Rome, 2004. For more bibliographical references on the relationship between the Church and the French Revolution, see A. M. Rao, M. Cattaneo, "L'Italia e la Rivoluzione francese (1789-1799)", in *Bibliografia dell'età del Risorgimento*, vol. I, Florence, Olschki, 2003, pp. 241-246.

2. N. Spedalieri, *De' diritti dell'uomo libri VI. Ne' quali si dimostra, che la piu sicura custode de' medesimi nella societa civile e la religione cristiana; e che pero l'unico progetto utile alle presenti circostanze e di far rifiorire essa religione. Opera di Nicola Spedalieri siciliano dottore e gia professore di teologia*, Assisi, Sagriglia, 1791. For the debate around Spedalieri, see Menozzi, "Tra riforma e restaurazione"; Fiorani, Rocciolo, *Chiesa romana e rivoluzione francese*, pp. 378-382; G. Schettini, "Intellectual Modernity: Nicola Spedalieri, the Catholic Church, and the French Revolution, c. 1775-1800", *Modern Intellectual History*, 17/3 (2020), pp. 677-705. On counter-revolutionary literary production, see L. Guerci, *Uno spettacolo*

French revolutionaries by placing as its sole condition that Catholicism continued to be recognised as the state religion. Spedalieri thus proposed a return to the “traditional pact that had characterised the *ancien régime*”, based on shared objectives between secular and ecclesiastical authorities in support of political order.<sup>3</sup>

The scales shifted further in 1790 with the introduction of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, which imposed a significant revision of rigid existing hierarchies and subjected the selection of parish priests and bishops to the will of the faithful. Faced with such a radical proposal, Pope Pius VI hardened his positions and, with the papal brief *Quod aliquantum* of 1791, foreclosed on any hope for compromise by letting it be understood that the doctrines and organisation of the Church were absolutely irreconcilable with the recognition of civil and political rights for non-Catholic subjects, the nationalisation of clerical property, the abolition of the legal validity of certain sacraments and religious vows and the introduction of new marriage legislation.<sup>4</sup>

Anti-revolutionary ideas found organic expression in the work of theologian Giovanni Marchetti (1753-1829) – already in the spotlight for his proud opposition to the doctrines of Scipione de’ Ricci – who expressed the need to return to medieval Christian universalism. Also considerable was the voice of ex-Jesuit Nikolaus Diessbach (1732-1798), who interpreted events in France as the natural conclusion to a progressive dissolution of authority initiated by Luther in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, at the will of Satan.<sup>5</sup> Though they differed in expression, these ideas contributed to the invention of a truly unique “conspiracy theory”, with one of its clearest manifestations found within *Memorie per servire alla storia del giacobinismo* (*Memoirs to Serve the History of Jacobinism*), published in 1797 by a Jesuit-educated abbot named Augustin Barruel (1741-1820) and subsequently translated into various other languages, garnering

*non mai più veduto nel mondo. La Rivoluzione francese come unicità e rovesciamento negli scrittori controrivoluzionari italiani (1789-1799)*, Turin, UTET, 2008.

3. Menozzi, “Tra riforma e restaurazione”, pp. 784-785.

4. *Ibid.*

5. G. Marchetti, *Che importa ai preti ovvero l’interesse della religione cristiana nei grandi avvenimenti di questi tempi. Riflessioni morali di un amico di tutti dirette ad un amico solo*, [Rome], Cristianopoli, 1796; N. Diessbach, “Memoriale ad Leopoldum II”, in *Manoscritti del fondatore Pio Brunone Lanteri*, Rome, Congregazione oblato di Maria Vergine, 1977, vol. V, pp. 14-49.

considerable approval throughout Europe. The root cause of the revolutionary disaster, according to the famous text, was *philosophie* – understood as a boundless faith in reason, which undermined the Christian faith. Barruel unambiguously accused Voltaire of leading the conspiracy, along with d’Alembert, Diderot and the sovereigns who listened to them, foremost among whom was Frederick II of Prussia, considered to be protector and confidant of these “evil” philosophers.

The spread of disbelief and dissolution of state structures frequently went hand in hand, opening up new spaces for writers who, like the Dominican Tommaso Vincenzo Pani (1738?-1817), set their sights on relaunching the Holy Inquisition so that it could perform once again as a powerful instrument of social control in the service of religion and kings.<sup>6</sup> In his *Lettere apologetiche (Apologetic Letters, 1789)*, Pani reiterated that the observance of state laws should be subordinate to respect for ecclesiastical statutes, particularly if one wished to avoid the knife’s edge upon which French monarchs found themselves: “Would you like an idea of what a hitherto cultured and civil society that loses Religion can become? Unfortunately, France will give it to you!”<sup>7</sup>

Pani’s accusation was directed without a doubt to all the “innovators” of the time who, in assigning to the Church “no other concept than that of a usurper power contrary to the rights of others and injurious to sovereigns”, had contributed “without noticing” to present “catastrophes”. The downfall of the Holy Office’s tribunal, owing “to the momentum and furor of blasphemous, implacable persecutors of every order”, had aided the spread of hordes “of blasphemers, sorcerers, violators of the sacred mysteries, and every kind of non-believer and seditious”.<sup>8</sup> The miseries of the state were blamed on failing to live up to a judicial body that, not forgetting the honour owed to princes and preserving their rights unscathed, had protected the dignity of bishops, adapted itself to the inclinations and customs of the populace and cultivated “consensus and obedience” with a loving and

6. T. V. Pani, *Della punizione degli eretici e del Tribunale della Santa Inquisizione lettere apologetiche divise in due tomi*, Faenza, Melzi, 1795.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 49: “Volete un’idea di ciò che può divenire una società colta ancora e civile, che perde la Religione? Ah che pur troppo ve la somministra la Francia!”

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 240, 318-319: “novatori”, “altro concetto che di una potenza contraria e usurpatrice de’ diritti altrui ed ingiuriosa a’ sovrani”, “senz’avvedersene”, “sciagure”, “all’impeto e furore degli empj persecutori implacabili di ogni ordine”, “di bestemmiatori, di sortilegi, di violatori de’ sagri misteri e d’ogni genere d’increduli e di sediziosi”.

permissive attitude. The Dominican friar also defended the legitimacy of inquisitorial procedures, which had been violently challenged in preceding decades and subjected to restrictive interventions by most Italian states.<sup>9</sup> In Pani's opinion – shared by numerous hagiographers between the end of the century and the beginning of the next – 18<sup>th</sup>-century reformism had reached the end of the line. He outlined that Italian territories were in danger of an unrest that could be avoided only by the restoration of the “ancient abandoned system” that, thanks to the work of ecclesiastical judges, had guaranteed stability and order by castigating deviant behaviour for the glory of God and monarchs.<sup>10</sup>

Catholic thinkers were alarmed by events in France and denounced the presence of a frontal assault on traditional religion and its instruments of authority. The theme of martyrdom returned to the centre of ecclesiological reflection. The faithful were to defend themselves from persecution, as they had during the first centuries of Christianity. The execution of Louis XVI and his wife Marie Antoinette elicited an unyielding response from the pope, who made clear that the “National Convention” had no authority whatsoever to lay down capital punishment, seeing the event as the inevitable conclusion of a decline begun decades prior thanks to over-permissive policies towards instances of anticlericalism and the distribution of Enlightenment thinkers’ “seditious” books.

Starting from these ideological assumptions, the Church mobilised the great potentates of Europe against subversive impiety, making it so that the war against Revolutionary France became, also from a symbolic point of view, a clash against the reformist and enlightened impiety that had unleashed all of its destructive force throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century, weakening the sacred foundation of legitimate authorities and the alliance between throne and altar. Influential apologists were tasked with facilitating the reconstruction of a theocratic system, founded upon the return to an idealised version of the medieval world.

The climate of growing intransigence did not completely snuff out the enthusiasm of reformist currents in which the bishop of Imola, Barnaba Chiaramonti (1742-1823), had participated; he was now on the

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 370, 452.

10. *Ibid.*, p. XIV of the *Avviso alla prima edizione*. On the laws of Italian states against the Holy Office, see Palmieri, “Il lento tramonto del Sant’Uffizio”; Palmieri, *La santa, i miracoli e la Rivoluzione*, pp. 139-146: “antico abbandonato sistema”.

verge of ascending to the papacy as Pius VII. The stubborn attempt to defend the Christian foundations of the state institution was accompanied by the desire to preserve the Church's central role in defending the values of fidelity and obedience on which the social order was to be built. All arguments for appeasement ended abruptly once the Roman Republic was proclaimed in 1798 and the French arrested Pius VI, exiling him in the city of Valence in Haute-Savoie. Catholic periodicals publicising Pius VI's removal by the French made a consistent effort to boost the popularity of the prominent exile, bestowing upon him the features of a humble and suffering pilgrim. The goal, in the end, was to build the triumph of the Church upon his "martyrdom", in what was considered a historic battle.<sup>11</sup>

Under these dramatic circumstances, twelve French bishops, convinced that the pope's condition was not dissimilar from that of many other religious figures who had refused to swear loyalty to the revolutionary government, strengthened their ties with the Holy See, hoping that immoral nations in the throes of corruption would rediscover their obedience, taking the figure of Christ's Vicar as an example. The pope himself countered immediately with a *Breve* dated 10 November 1798. He accused "perverse knowledge" that, "usurping philosophy's name", had shown itself to be "handcrafted from all manner of wickedness, licentiousness, greed, perfidy and lust, mother of all calamities, of grief, pain, and annihilation", shocking "all that is human and divine". Catholicism, surprised "by its enemies with violent storms of persecution", he concluded, must find new strength to reassert its presence in the world.<sup>12</sup>

Conservative controversialists responded with vigour to these exhortations, assigning royal and religious authorities a singular shared destiny of decay. Theologians, writers and preachers worked swiftly to transform the suffering body of Pius VI into an object of veneration. On 6 July 1799, Cardinal Ercole Consalvi (1757-1824) wrote to the Viennese apostolic nuncio Giuseppe Andrea Albani (1750-1834) that the Vicar of

11. Menozzi, "Tra riforma e restaurazione", p. 789.

12. Pious VI's *Breve* di Pio VI, dated 10 November 1798, was later published by P. Baldassari, *Relazione delle avversità e patimenti del glorioso papa Pio VI negli ultimi tre anni del suo pontificato*, vol. II, Modena, Solimani, 1841, pp. 135-137: "perversa sapienza", "usurpando il nome di filosofia", "artigiana di ogni empietà, licenza, cupidigia, perfidia e libidine e madre di tutte le calamità, di lutti e dolori ed estermini", "tutte quante le cose umane e divine", "da' suoi nemici con procelle gagliardissime di persecuzioni".

Christ was in such precarious health as to find himself almost always in bed: “He is truly a victim of religion, he is the Man of Sorrows for our times”.<sup>13</sup> The Prefect of the Papal Household Pietro Baldassari, who personally followed all phases of the exile, would go on to celebrate Pius VI in his *Relazione delle avversità e patimenti* (*Account of Adversities and Sufferings*), extolling the magnificence and heroism of papal authority and contrasting it with the wretchedness of other monarchies.<sup>14</sup>

It is important to understand that decisions reached during the 1790s bear witness to a radical shift in the communicative methods of the Holy See, which had realised that a simple strategy of repression was insufficient against Enlightenment thinkers, reforms and the Revolution (all considered to be three moments within the same degenerative process that threatened the social order), going so far as to seek consensus, or in some cases to challenge public opinion. Media pressures were already too strong to be ignored, as was the entire population’s desire to participate. Traditional methods such as the confession of sins and inquisitorial trials were no longer sufficient for maintaining power: it was instead necessary to confront the critical eye of the collective. In the end, the Holy See decided to challenge the new world born from the Revolution. It could no longer content itself with exercising control over the conscience of individuals, needing instead to try speaking to the collective and convincing as many people as possible.

This new media strategy included a push to reassert the sacred nature of the pontiff’s power. The Roman elite worked to emphasise the “regal identity” of Christ’s vicar, whose background was profoundly different from those of other European sovereigns.<sup>15</sup> As Gaetano Moroni would explain a few decades later in his *Dizionario di erudizione storico-ecclesiastica* (*Dictionary of Historical-Ecclesiastical Erudition*), there was an attempt to make the Christian population recognise the pope’s “sublime pulpit” as “the greatest and most sacred throne on Earth”, “an

13. ASV, *Segreteria di Stato, Germania*, 696°, quoted in Fiorani, Roccio, *Chiesa romana*, p. 426: “È veramente una vittima della religione, è l’uomo dei dolori dei nostri tempi”.

14. Baldassari, *Relazione delle avversità*, p. 334.

15. See M. Caffiero, *Religione e modernità in Italia*, Pisa-Rome, Istituti editoriali e poligrafici internazionali, 2000, pp. 72-73, 77. For more general information, see P. Prodi, *Il sovrano pontefice: un corpo e due anime. La monarchia papale in età moderna*, Bologna, il Mulino, 1982.

imposing structure of superhuman majesty” that perfectly reconstructed the “celestial hierarchy”.<sup>16</sup>

Facing the threat of revolution, the Neapolitan monarchy quickly distanced itself from the most radical supporters of anti-curialism. With the international situation coming to a head, sovereigns Ferdinand of Bourbon (1751-1825) and Maria Carolina of Habsburg-Lorraine (1752-1814) decided to join the coalition against the French, and as a consequence the progress of reforms came to a grinding halt. The project to use “*philosophie* to assist governments” that an entire generation of Enlightenment thinkers had been cultivating with conviction was clearly in crisis.<sup>17</sup> The entire world of reformers – including the followers of Jansenism, who in Naples had never had the same good fortune as their Tuscan counterparts – was viewed with increasing suspicion by the Bourbon authority, and in the end would face violent repression.<sup>18</sup> Anti-philosophical propaganda jumped to life in the pages of periodicals closely tied to the government with a flurry of treatises colluding to rebuild the alliance between throne and altar, railing against ideas that promised a regeneration of mankind. From *Effemeridi enciclopediche per servire di continuazione all’Analisi ragionata de’ libri nuovi* (*Encyclopedic Ephemera to Serve as a Continuation of the Reasoned Analysis of New Books*) in January 1794: “The Reform movement, which uncontrollably spews its ideas, is not only a perpetual insult to Religion, and to the Principality, but it also overturns all sacred ideas and politics”.<sup>19</sup>

On 25 March 1794, the *Accademia dei Sinceri e dell’Arcadia Reale* was launched, heir to the fellowship of the Immatures,<sup>20</sup> which had been formed in the 1750s with the explicit goal of fighting the Enlightenment and the Freemasons. Expressing a clear ideological orientation, the experiment referenced the dogma of the Trinity and sought to recuperate the moral and religious standing of the monarchy. In the swirling and traumatic events

16. G. Moroni, *Dizionario di erudizione storico-ecclesiastica da San Pietro fino ai giorni nostri*, vol. XCV, Venice, Tipografia Emiliana, 1859, p. 169.

17. See G. Galasso, *La filosofia in soccorso de’ governi: la cultura napoletana del Settecento*, Naples, Guida, 1989.

18. Chiosi, *Lo spirito del secolo*, pp. 244-245, 253-254.

19. “Effemeridi Enciclopediche per servire di continuazione all’Analisi ragionata de’ libri nuovi”, January 1794, p. 100.

20. The name of the fellowship was meant to sound ironic. Other fellowships in the early modern period called themselves “of the Uncultured” or “of the Imperfect”.



that shook southern Italy in the final years of the century, this academic circle, in sharp contrast with many others born during the *ancien régime*, opened itself up to a complex system of relationships, thus engaging with an extensive audience.

The Bourbon regime in Naples finally fell in 1799. The revolutionary uprising resulted in a Republic that lasted only six months (from January to June), ultimately unable to dismantle its strong reactionary opposition.<sup>21</sup> At the end of the same year, lavish celebrations accompanied the royal family's return to power and "the immortal Triumph of H.M. Ferdinand IV of Bourbon [...], with the memorable defeat of all the Jacobin Extremists, and all Enemies of the Holy Catholic Faith". It was an occasion on which the *Arcadia Reale* could boast of its function as a "constant and valiant opposition to all bizarrely mistaken atheist and heretical movements of the 18<sup>th</sup> century".<sup>22</sup>

The counterrevolution was, without a doubt, a resounding success of politically-motivated, as well as religious and cultural, Catholic intransigence: it demonstrated the enormous ability of religious organisations to mobilise and gather a large segment of the population around symbols of faith, uniting privileged groups, merchants, artisans, manual laborers, peasant farmers and the destitute.<sup>23</sup> In a climate of lingering tension, numerous theologians and hagiographers took up the task of reconstructing the ideological foundation upon which the society of the

21. See A. M. Rao, *La Repubblica napoletana del 1799*, Napoli, FedoaPress, 2021.

22. *Per l'immortale trionfo di S.M. regnante Ferdinando IV Borbone il Tito delle Sicilie, già restituito felicemente al suo trono, con la disfatta memorabile di tutt'i giacobineschi settarj, e di tutt'i nimici della Santa Fede cattolica*, Naples, Stamperia dell'Arcadia Reale, 1799; *Relazione a guisa di lettera di Patroclo Serifio, accademico sincero dell'Arcadia Reale di Napoli, che contiene un breve dettaglio delle presenti circostanze di questa città e regno, e precisamente della totale vittoria ottenuta da sua maestà Ferdinando IV Borbone contro le truppe francesi e l'infame setta de' Giacobini*, Naples, Donato Campo, 1799: "l'immortale Trionfo di S.M. Ferdinando IV Borbone [...], con la disfatta memorabile di tutt'i giacobineschi Settarij, e di tutti i Nimici della Santa Fede Cattolica", "costante e valorosa impugnatrice di tutti li correnti stravagantissimi errori ateistici ed ereticali del secolo XVIII".

23. See A. M. Rao, "Folle controrivoluzionarie. La questione delle insorgenze italiane", in *Folle controrivoluzionarie. Le insorgenze popolari nell'Italia giacobina e napoleonica*, ed. by A. M. Rao, Rome, Carocci, 1999. In the same volume, see J. A. Davis, "Rivolte popolari e controrivoluzione nel Mezzogiorno continentale", pp. 349-368. See also M. Cattaneo, *Convertire e disciplinare. Chiesa romana e religiosità popolare in età moderna*, Naples, Fedoa Press, 2022.

*ancien régime* had been built: to accomplish this task, they looked carefully at stabilising relationships between Church and State, which for a long time had been subject to philosophers and reformers' trenchant attempts at redefinition. Similarly, many journalists and preachers concentrated their efforts on defending the sacred nature of monarchic power.

## 2. *The moral justification of devotions to saints*

In order to understand the transformations that took place in the Grand Duchy of Tuscany during the age of revolution, it is useful to start, yet again, from events tied to the promotion of the devotion of Teresa Margherita Redi. The premature death of Ignazio's daughter had set off an important series of conflicts, which were deeply intertwined with Habsburg-Lorraine reforms. Many people expressed perplexity over the young age of the Carmelite nun and the marginal fame she had enjoyed while alive. Hagiographic narratives were met with scepticism from the shrewdest of readers, who were inclined to ridicule their contents and bring forth accusations of plagiarism and forgery. The process of beatification entered a new phase when Agostino Albergotti – an important member of the Albergotti family (they were among the main allies of the Redi's) and general vicar of the diocese of Florence – became the main promoter of the cult of Teresa Margherita. He reinterpreted the story of the candidate saint to put an end to these objections in the latter years of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, following the death of Idelfonso di San Luigi. Albergotti turned Teresa Margherita Redi into a model of humility and simplicity, in contrast with the impiety of 18<sup>th</sup>-century philosophers.<sup>24</sup> He was thus able to keep the beatification process going during the years of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Age, laying the foundation for its future success (which would arrive much later, given that Teresa Margherita Redi became a saint only in 1934, under the papacy of Pius XI, while Italy was governed by the Fascist regime). Albergotti adopted a skilful plan of action that kept the path of politics and faith intertwined. It is therefore worth taking a step back to explore his background, including the cornerstones of his cultural formation and the motives inspiring his pastoral action.

24. ASA, Archivio domestico Albergotti, 2-37, (22-B XXXI), *Vita della serva di Dio*, p. 5. *Breve compendio della vita della Serva di Dio suor Teresa Margherita Redi*, pp. XIII-XV.

Agostino Albergotti was born in Arezzo on 27 November 1755 to Albergotto and Angela Mancini, aristocrats who hailed from the city of Cortona. He attended Jesuit schools in his city before moving to the Cicognini boarding school in Prato, where he studied alongside Ignazio Redi's children. Following the suppression of the Jesuits, he was entrusted to the care of the clerics at the Scuole Pie in Urbino, where he distinguished himself with his literary abilities, above all in poetry. From 1775 to 1779 he studied law at the University of Pisa and, as soon as he obtained his academic title, he received his priestly ordination from Bishop Niccolò Maracci. He then went to Rome to further his studies. He began to spend time around the Holy See, placing himself under the protection of Cardinal Stefano Borgia, Pope Pius VI's right-hand man.<sup>25</sup> In this period he began his first work, a biography of Saint Donato, which was published first in Latin in 1782 and then in Italian three years later.<sup>26</sup>

In 1780 the young prelate from Arezzo, Agostino Albergotti, was called forth to examine the thorny case of the martyr Saint Andrew's presumed remains, along with those of his companions, known as Guasconi, which were preserved under the main altar in the church of the Compagnia di San Giorgio of Arezzo.<sup>27</sup> The history of devotion to the saint was controversial: in accordance with the Holy See, the diocesan authorities had ordered its suspension in 1725, only to overturn the decision a few years later. The vault containing precious artifacts had been reopened in 1778 in the presence of Bishop Angiolo Franceschi (1735-1806, in office from 1775 to 1778) and submitted to the scrutiny of renowned men of science. The skulls that were rediscovered – according to the report produced by two scientists – were in

25. *Memorie di Religione, di Morale e di Letteratura*, vol. XI, Modena, Soliani, 1827, pp. 533-536; F. Cristelli, "Agostino Albergotti vescovo di Arezzo (1755-1825)", *Atti e memorie della Accademia Petrarca di Lettere, Scienze e Arti*, 55 (1993), pp. 315-334. For more biographical information on Agostino Albergotti, see ASA, Archivio Albergotti, *Manoscritti Albergotti provenienti da casa Vasari*, num. Provv. in f. 13, *Memorie mss. della città di Arezzo*, vol. VI, *Comprende il diario dall'anno 1521 al 1797*, pp. 513, 784; *Documenti particolari di alcuni esponenti della famiglia*, 1 (A-2): *Catalogo delle opere pubblicate di Mons. Agostino, vendibili a profitto della Cappella di Maria SS. Del Conforto*.

26. A. Albergotti, *Augustini Albergotti presbyteri De vita, et cultu Sancti Donati arretinae ecclesiae episcop. et martyr. commentarius ex vetustis codicibus, et membranis absolutus notis auctus, et arretino clero propositus*, Arezzo, Bellotti, 1782; A. Albergotti, *Commentario storico-morale sugli atti di S. Donato, vescovo d'Arezzo e martire, opera del marchese Agostino Albergotti*, Lucca, Bonsignori, 1785.

27. Palmieri, *La santa, i miracoli e la Rivoluzione*, pp. 181-187.

poor condition and, in some cases, completely shattered, making it difficult to even understand how many dead were entombed in that location. The few skulls that remained whole, however, were peculiar: “some pieces and globes of petrified green sand” could be seen in their cavities, something typically found on the basin floors of stagnant water.<sup>28</sup> These delicate clues seemed to confirm the legend, according to which their bodies had been tossed into a well following their persecution by Emperor Valens (328-378 CE) in the fourth century.

Albergotti's position merits close examination. The Church of Rome – the prelate explained in a memoir produced for the Sacred Congregation of Rites – proceeded with “prudence, circumspection and caution” when it came to saints and the veneration of relics. It was necessary to remain guarded against the “great danger of carrying out acts of superstition, and of erroneous worship”, if the worship was neither regulated nor possessing a “bedrock of stable certainty in its favour”. According to decisions made by the Council of Trent, “confirming an ancient devotional cult” differed “considerably from establishing a new one”, since “sufficient causes for the first case” were not enough “for the second”. For saints from the first centuries of Christianity, evidence of authenticity could not “be demonstrated” in any manner, not only due “to the span of time, and of missing, or lost memories”, but also because the “majority of the documents extracted from the Passionals, and Lectionaries” were subsequent to the 10<sup>th</sup> century. It was therefore impossible to abide by the “strict rules of review”, and it was necessary to consider other factors, first among which were the habits and customs of the faithful, who were often led astray “by an inveterate devotional cult” for reasons that are theoretically quite valid, “but of little use in practice”.<sup>29</sup>

To support his thesis, the patrician from Arezzo referred to issues with the veneration of the Iron Crown, which was safeguarded within the

28. *Ibid.*, p. 182 (the source is in the Archivio storico diocesano in Arezzo, *Memorie sacre*, vol. I).

29. *Ibid.*, p. 183: “avvedutezza, circospezione e cautela”, “gran pericolo di commettere atti di superstizione, e d’erronea devozione”, “i fondamenti d’una stabile certezza in suo favore”, “confermare un culto antico” differiva “molto dallo stabilirne uno nuovo”, “le ragioni sufficienti al primo caso”, “al secondo”, “essere dimostrative”, “del lasso dei tempi, e della mancanza, o smarrimento delle memorie”, “la maggior parte de’ documenti estratti da’ Passionari, e Lezionari”, “strette regole della critica”, “da un culto inveterato”, “ma poco utili in pratica”.

Duomo of Monza. Since the Early Middle Ages, the relic had been used to crown sovereigns of Italy and, according to tradition, was obtained by melting one of the nails used in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.<sup>30</sup> The ritual had been suspended in 1687, only to be revived a few decades later by Pope Benedict XIV. Evidence countering the authenticity of the prestigious relic had been judged too weak with insufficient reasons given to take a symbol so charged with religious and political significance from the faithful.

On 25 March 1800, Agostino Albergotti completed his most important work, *Il culto di Maria Santissima*, dedicated to the image of Our Lady of Comfort, to which most of Arezzo's population attributed miraculous powers following the tragic earthquake that had shaken the city in 1796.<sup>31</sup> The Tuscan city's small and much-beloved maiolica tile came from a tavern near the Porta San Clemente. It was damaged ("in a manner arousing disgust and horror") because it was found above an oven, where fire would be lit "not only in times of wine production to do [...] the boiling, and to heat the barrels, but also frequently in winter, with the goal of warming oneself or cooking something".<sup>32</sup> Though washed many times, it was impossible to remove that "dark and yellow patina resulting especially from the glutenous vapor of must".<sup>33</sup>

On 15 February 1796, in the middle of the emergency, the icon became "shiny and white like milk". Ecclesiastical authorities tried to give credence to eyewitnesses, but serious doubts remained: the people gathered in the tavern could have organised a fraud for profit or a simple desire for attention. Albergotti abandoned any hope of finding definitive proof in support of the miracle's truth. He looked in particular at the moral significance of the growing devotion and the behaviour of his compatriots, who believed they saw the Marian image whiten before their very eyes. The event signalled the beginning of a "very happy change for the better".

30. *La corona ferrea nell'Europa degli imperi*, 2 vols, ed. by G. Buccellati, Milan, Mondadori, 1995; L. A. Muratori, *De corona ferrea qua Romanorum imperatores in insubribus coronari solent. Commentarius*, Milan, Malatesta, 1719.

31. Palmieri, *La santa, i miracoli e la Rivoluzione*, pp. 192-200 (the source is A. Albergotti, *Il culto di Maria Santissima*, 2 vols, Lucca, Bonsignori, 1800).

32. *Ibid.*, p. 196: "in maniera da eccitare anche ribrezzo ed orrore", "non solo a' tempi dei vini per fare [...] le bollite, e dar le stufe alle botti, ma anco non rare volte nell'inverno, affine di scaldarvisi o cuocervi alcuna cosa".

33. *Ibid.*: "patina oscura e gialla derivante dal glutinoso del fumo specialmente di mosto".

Many people dissolved into tears and began to pray, while the “contiguous districts” had “become places resounding in prayer” with “very fervent supplications”.<sup>34</sup> The author of *Culto di Maria Santissima*’s conclusions were unambiguous: consoling and rendering meek the faithful – according to him – was the highest demonstration of a religious credo’s good and could be considered, above all, as proof of its authenticity *a posteriori*. Worship’s ultimate justification was found in its political and moral consequences: the only acceptable society was one founded upon the commandments of Catholic doctrine, the Gospel, and other sacred texts, the founders of Christianity, the contents of the lives of the saints and the beatified and the teachings of the Church of Rome.

No different was the perspective of Abbot Giovanni Marchetti, who – beyond being a renowned theologian – was also the principal chronicler of Marian miracles in those years.<sup>35</sup> The facts are well-known: in the summer of 1796 the territory of the Papal States experienced a wave of purported miracles tied to the sacred image of the Virgin which took place in churches, convents, monasteries, sanctuaries, niches, private homes and the shops of artisans. Numerous witnesses from several towns claimed to have witnessed the movement of eyes, colour changes, sweating and tears, which were followed at times by a miraculous healing of those who requested divine aid for their illnesses. Wide swaths of the clergy did all they could to formulate a clear interpretive guide for the presumably supernatural events: saints and Madonnas were reacting, according to them, to the fury of the French Revolution, which threatened to sweep the entire Italian territory, subvert existing order and steal away the population’s basic necessities.

According to Marchetti’s telling, the miracles had been “guaranteed with proof fitting for the 18<sup>th</sup> century”.<sup>36</sup> Lenses, telescopes and compasses were used to measure the movement of the pupils of Madonnas, with results that claimed to be irreproachable from a scientific perspective. Eyewitness testimony was valued and important, and considered to be

34. *Ibid.*, p. 197: “brillante e candida come latte”, “felicissimo cambiamento”, “le contigue contrade”, “divenute luoghi di orazione risuonano” of “ferventissime suppliche”.

35. M. Cattaneo, *Gli occhi di Maria sulla Rivoluzione. Miracoli a Roma e nello Stato della Chiesa (1796-1799)*, Rome, Istituto nazionale di studi romani, 1995 (the source is G. Marchetti, *De’ Prodigj avvenuti in molte sagre immagini specialmente di Maria santissima*, Rome, V. Poggioli, 1797).

36. *Ibid.*, p. 131: “garantiti con prove adatte al secolo XVIII”.

definitive proof, with exceptions made for cases of “innocent illusion” or “malicious collusion”, in which groups of people would coordinate to bear false witness.<sup>37</sup> As to the rest, the people themselves began to demonstrate that they were “educated and observant of light phenomena” and “guarded themselves against various illusions”.<sup>38</sup> Still, what counted most was the political and moral dimension of the Marian cult. Marchetti – who on this topic appeared to fully agree with the ideas of Agostino Albergotti – maintained many times that miracles called people to penitence and to practicing good habits. Philological or scientific proof was unnecessary to defend worship: to claim authenticity, it was enough to evaluate its impact on the faithful.

### 3. *Maria Francesca, Alfonso and the counterrevolution*

In Naples, the collapse of revolutionary dreams and the first Bourbon restoration launched a new atmosphere of devotion, marked by the success of the cult of Maria Francesca delle Cinque Piaghe (“of the Five Wounds”: real name Anna Maria Gallo, 1716-1791), a tertiary nun – or “bizzoca”, to use the term that was in vogue in the kingdom’s capital – and member of the Alcantarine order. She was of humble origins and achieved great fame for her ability to speak with the faithful and understand their needs, even using dialect.<sup>39</sup> Hagiographers set their sights on describing the “trials and tribulations” the woman also known as the “saint of the Spanish Quarters” suffered, and underlined the importance of an apartment on Vico Tre Re a Toledo, which had become a destination for pilgrims seeking economic help and healing. The reconstruction of her biography was aimed at metaphorically representing a humiliated Church surrounded by a society dominated by secular values and a rational culture gaining an ever-greater hold, stealing spheres of influence from the clergy. In the last years of her life, as the first news of the Revolution increased social tensions, the “bizzoca” became a polestar for many of the faithful who tried to distinguish themselves for their loyalty to

37. Palmieri, *La santa, i miracoli e la Rivoluzione*, p. 214 (the source is Marchetti, *De’ Prodigj*): “illusione innocente”, “collusione maliziosa”.

38. *Ibid.*: “istruito ed accorto su’ fenomeni della luce”, “a cautelarsi contro le diverse illusioni”.

39. ASDN, *Processi di beatificazione, Maria Francesca delle Cinque Piaghe*, vol. I.

the monarchy, gathering to pray so that God would protect the “Holy Church” from the “great flagellation”.<sup>40</sup>

The Barnabite friar Francesco Saverio Maria Bianchi (1743-1815, who would later be beatified in 1893 and then canonised in 1951) was one of her most devoted followers and helped her amass disciples who related to each other through a faith built upon simple and popular devotional practices, far from the rigor of Jansenist precepts.<sup>41</sup> Step by step, the social circle around the “bizzoca” began to expand and even involved members of the elite: any number of intransigent thinkers, legitimists and supporters of the pope drew in closely around Maria Francesca delle Cinque Piaghe. They interpreted the downfall of European monarchic regimes as the consequence of reformist policy, which had subverted the ability of the clergy and religious orders to control society and lend it moral guidance. For these reasons, these same thinkers believed that a positive outcome of the counterrevolutionary struggle would be tied to the ability to re-establish the relationship between ecclesiastical and secular institutions, with a return to the alliance between throne and altar.

An important role was played by Bernardo Laviosa, a regular Somascan cleric of Palermitan origin, who helped spread the cult of the “santa dei quartieri” (saint of the Spanish neighbourhoods of Naples), as she was known across various Italian cities during missions carried out on behalf of his religious order.<sup>42</sup> During the years of the Revolution and the arrival of French armies in the peninsula (1796-1799), he managed to maintain close contact with those loyal to the Neapolitan nun, availing himself of significant epistolary correspondence with his brother Gaetano, who lived in close contact with the “bizzoca”. While in Pisa in 1797, Bernardo began to write a *Vita* about Maria Francesca, keeping Gaetano constantly updated on the writing of various chapters and receiving important news from him about developments in the beatification process and the most important testimonies that were released.<sup>43</sup>

40. Also quoted in D. Ambrasi, “Maria Francesca delle Cinque Piaghe: una santa della Restaurazione”, *Campania sacra*, 22 (1991), pp. 159-284: 206. The source is the deposition of Luigi Maria di Gesù: “Santa Chiesa”, “gran flagello”.

41. On the relationship between Francesco Saverio Maria Bianchi and Maria Francesca delle Cinque Piaghe, see G. Sodano, “Santi, beati e venerabili ai tempi di Maria Francesca delle Cinque Piaghe”, *Campania sacra*, 22 (1991), pp. 441-460: 451-452.

42. Ambrasi, “Maria Francesca delle Cinque Piaghe”, pp. 166-167.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 167; Gaetano Laviosa’s letters to his brother Bernardo are published in this same essay (pp. 228-271).



He dedicated the work to Charles Emmanuel IV of Savoy (1751-1819) and his wife Marie Adélaïde Clotilde Xavière of Bourbon (1759-1802), sister to the decapitated French King Louis XVI, a detail that is of particular relevance when considering the purpose of this research. They themselves were forced to flee their dominions (which included Sardinia) following the political turmoil in Europe, and took refuge in the Kingdom of Naples from 1800 to 1802, becoming protagonists of a hagiographic account constructed with the rhetoric of exile and martyrdom.<sup>44</sup> Thanks to these initiatives hastened by promoters of her cult, Maria Francesca delle Cinque Piaghe thus became a symbol of heroic resistance against a revolutionary onslaught.

In July of 1799 Gaetano Laviosa, who had remained in Naples during the Republican interlude, emphasised that many of the faithful had found in the home of God's servant "total peace and quiet until the moment they surrendered [...] while cannon fire rained down on nearby Castel Nuovo and Castel Sant'Elmo".<sup>45</sup> According to him, the growth of the Neapolitan "bizzoca's" popularity was an unmistakable sign of redemption for a Catholic community put on the ropes by the subversive blows that had shocked Europe. He would write to his brother Bernardo on 29 July 1800:

A thousand thoughts tormented me about poor Italy and the Church of Jesus Christ; but glory to God and I am always blessed and thankful for that, I fear nothing [...]: you have met the great Servant of God Maria Francesca delle Cinque Piaghe of Jesus Christ [...] All of us remain in sweet anticipation of hearing as soon as possible that she has been declared to be among the Church's most venerable.<sup>46</sup>

In the epistolary exchange between the Laviosa brothers, the candidate for sainthood was proposed as a vessel of loyalty for the monarchy's cause. At a delicate juncture for the authority of the monarchy, Gaetano cried

44. Sodano, "Santi, beati e venerabili", pp. 451-452.

45. Ambrasi, "Maria Francesca delle Cinque Piaghe", Gaetano Laviosa to his brother Bernardo, 14 July 1799, pp. 228-229: "somma quiete e pace, nel tempo che si stava [...] cannoneggiando il Castel Nuovo ed il Castel di Sant'Elmo in appresso da' moscoviti e dagli Inglesi, insino a tanto che si resero".

46. *Ibid.*, Gaetano Laviosa to his brother Bernardo, 29 July 1800, pp. 232-233: "Mi funestavano mille pensieri riguardanti la povera Italia e la Chiesa di Gesù Cristo; ma viva Dio e ne sia sempre benedetto e ringraziato, io nulla temo [...]: avete conosciuta la gran Serva di Dio Maria Francesca delle Cinque Piaghe di Gesù Cristo. [...] Stiamo noi tutti nella dolce speranza di sentirla quanto prima dichiarata dalla Chiesa venerabile".

over the death of Princess Maria Clementina, Duchess of Calabria and Archduchess of Austria (1777-1801), wife to Francis of Bourbon (1777-1830), the son of Ferdinand IV and Maria Carolina of Habsburg, which occurred between the “sorrow of good and evil”. To the noblewoman he attributed various heroic virtues, first among which was her capacity to join “the Kingdom of Earth with that of Heaven”, recalling the details of suffering that accompanied her illness.<sup>47</sup>

In the last days of 1805, Gaetano Laviosa, faced with the aggressive expansion of the Napoleonic Empire, flavoured his letters with apocalyptic tones and invited his brother Bernardo to renew his faith in Maria Francesca and in other heroes of the Church, which during the 18<sup>th</sup> century had worked for the “conversion of the greatest sinners”:

Oh, terrible times, which prepare themselves for the universal justice of God! Blessed are those who love him in their hearts and serve God *in iustitia et veritate*. [...] Oh what joy it will then be to see souls sanctified, the worship of God’s house inspiring nothing but holiness, honor Glory to the Holy Trinity. [...] Let us hide ourselves in the loving wounds of our Lord Jesus crucified, and we will be safe.<sup>48</sup>

These information flows built around a new framework for holiness help us to understand a much larger trend that characterised the doctrinal considerations of the Catholic world. The fall of the *ancien régime* entered into the rigid belief systems of the salvation narrative, taking on the shape of an evil necessary for the achievement of God’s design, aimed at punishing the sins of man. Theologians, priests, preachers and the faithful began to hope to recover the fundamental nature of medieval society, gravitating around the earthly power of popes and the growth of ecclesiastical structures capable of guaranteeing spiritual assistance to the people and social harmony. Such ideas became even more meaningful in light of political signs the empire received from Napoleon Bonaparte, particularly

47. *Ibid.*, Gaetano Laviosa to his brother Bernardo, 16 November 1801, pp. 239-240: “dispiacere de’ buoni e de’ malvagi”, “il Regno della terra con quello del cielo”.

48. *Ibid.*, Gaetano Laviosa to his brother Bernardo, 10 December 1805: “conversione de’ più grandi peccatori: ‘O, i tempi terribili, che si preparano alla universale giustizia di Dio! Beati quelli che l’amano di cuore e servono Dio in iustitia et veritate. [...] O che gioia sarà allora il vedere santificate le anime, il culto della casa di Dio non ispirar altro che santità, onore Gloria alla Santissima Trinità. [...] Nascondiamoci nelle piaghe amorosissime del Signor nostro Gesù crocifisso, e siamo sicuri”.

after the agreement he stipulated with Pope Pius VII (in office from 1800 to 1823) in 1801. The French “first Consul” sought to establish the state’s prerogative over matters of faith and presented himself as a political and religious leader, enough to be described by journalists favourable to him as a modern Constantine.<sup>49</sup>

During those same years a crucial moment arrived for the promotion of the cult of Alfonso Maria de Liguori (1696-1787), who was founder of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer and author of successful theological papers, small prayerbooks and devotional songs in Neapolitan (among which is *Quanno nascette Ninno*, also translated into Italian and still known today as *Tu scendi dalle stelle*). The biographical details of this celebrated preacher have been the object of many studies.<sup>50</sup> I will therefore not linger on the most well-known aspects of his character, nor on philosophical, literary, doctrinal and pastoral matters, preferring to draw attention to the monumental hagiographic work that his fellow brother Antonio Maria Tannoia dedicated to him, published in four volumes between 1802 and 1804. Thanks to this text, we can understand how constructing models of holiness acquired new and specific political implications between the Revolution and the First Restoration and tie them to the complex evolution of relationships between Church and State.

In his work, Tannoia reserved a large amount of space for acts of persuasion that the Redemptorist priest carried out on King Charles of Bourbon, until he was convinced that a new corps of missionaries could satisfy both “the needs of souls” and “the interest of the State”, bringing into line many subjects who were disinclined to practice obedience toward the monarchy.<sup>51</sup> In a kingdom experiencing barbarism, homicide and robbery, the intervention of “good priests” capable of instilling respect for authorities would have been providential.<sup>52</sup> However, Bourbon ministers revealed themselves to be too obstinate and not interested in accomplishing God’s

49. See Menozzi, “Tra riforma e restaurazione”, pp. 786-793.

50. Tannoia, *Della vita ed Istituto del venerabile servo di Dio Alfonso Maria de’ Liguori vescovo di Sant’Agata de’ Goti e fondatore della Congregazione dei Preti Missionari del SS. Redentore, 1802-1804*, dig. ed. www.intratext.com. See at least M. Campanelli, *Centralismo romano e “policentrismo” periferico: chiesa e religiosità nella diocesi di Sant’Alfonso Maria de Liguori (secoli XVI-XVIII)*, Milan, FrancoAngeli, 2003.

51. Tannoia, *Della vita ed Istituto*, vol. II, pp. 149-168, 187-190: “il bisogno delle anime”, “l’interesse dello Stato”.

52. *Ibid.*, vol. II, pp. 191-192: “buoni preti”.

desires, preferring to follow the reformist project and limit the amount of control that ecclesiastical bodies could exercise over society.<sup>53</sup>

A strong political message emerged from Antonio Maria Tannoia's pages: the choice of reformists to limit the actions of Alfonso de Liguori had caused ill-fated consequences for the central government and rendered it vulnerable to subversion. Hagiographies were becoming an important vehicle of propaganda for a traditional and legitimist culture that sought to pave the correct path to restoring hierarchies undermined by the Revolution.<sup>54</sup> In this perspective, the candidate for sainthood became the cornerstone for reconstructing the alliance between throne and altar. According to the words of his hagiographer, Alfonso had understood before others and better than anyone else that, in difficult and "calamitous" times, only a population aware "of its own obligations toward God" could also become obsequious to the sovereign.<sup>55</sup>

#### 4. *The "servants of God who acted in the interest of the spiritual and earthly good of the city of Naples"*

In 1803, in the middle of the first Bourbon restoration, a large collection of biographies entitled *Elogi storici di alcuni servi di Dio che vissero in questi ultimi tempi e si adoperaron pel bene spirituale e temporale della città di Napoli* (*Historical Elogies of Some Servants of God Who Lived in These Recent Times and Acted in the Interest of the Spiritual and Earthly Good of the City of Naples*) was published in Naples. The author was Pietro Degli Onofri, an ex-Jesuit proven in preceding years to be a talented and eclectic writer, and a regular at the Bourbon court.<sup>56</sup> To understand the political and

53. *Ibid.*, pp. 193-195: "stretti di petto".

54. See Guerci, *Uno spettacolo non mai più veduto*; Menozzi, *La Chiesa italiana e la rivoluzione francese*; M. Rosa, "Di fronte alla Rivoluzione: politica e religione in Italia dal 1789 al 1796", *Rivista di storia e letteratura religiosa*, 31 (1995), pp. 293-319. On millenaristic views and prophecies, see M. Caffiero, *La nuova era. Miti e profezie dell'Italia in Rivoluzione*, Genoa, Marietti, 1991.

55. See E. Novi Chavarria, *Il governo delle anime. Azione pastorale, predicazioni e missioni nel Mezzogiorno d'Italia (secoli XVI-XVIII)*, Naples, ESI, pp. 6-7: "de' propri doveri verso Dio".

56. P. Degli Onofri, *Elogi storici di alcuni servi di Dio che vissero in questi ultimi tempi e si adoperarono pel bene spirituale e temporale della città di Napoli*, Naples, tip. Pergeriana, 1803; P. Degli Onofri, *Elogio estemporaneo per la gloriosa memoria di*

religious orientation of the *Elogi storici*, it would merely suffice to know the identity of the person to whom the work was dedicated: not a noble, as was typical, but rather Vincenzo Aulicino, a well-known businessman in Naples and brother to the priest Cosimo Aulicino, who had already shown evidence of his erudition in some writings. The most important were dedicated to the “true history of what occurred in Capua upon the arrival of the French armies in 1799 and after their departure” and to discrediting Scipione de’ Ricci’s synod of Pistoia and the principles of Jacobinism.<sup>57</sup>

The “historic annotation” present within the introductory pages quickly retraced the debate that had been ongoing between supporters and detractors of Pietro Degli Onofri’s book. While the former had admired “the truly divine zeal” with which the protagonists exercised their “duties in favour of Neopolitans”, the latter mocked the work believing that its contents could be attributed to the “prejudices” and “deceptions of friars”.<sup>58</sup> The author had responded to these sharp criticisms stating that he had “distanced himself from the path beaten by other historiographers of similar subject matter” and that he had given “a certain air of novelty” to his *Elogi*, enriching the subjects under consideration with previously unreleased information aimed at stimulating the curiosity of readers:

From experience I know that in our times few devotional legends are respected. Instead, they are rejected and considered boring, insipid and exaggerated: the worst of which do not even come close to the marvellous novels, nor love poems, nor charming Histories, nor even the vile works by these authors who come to us from beyond the mountains and across the seas.<sup>59</sup>

Despite openly deprecating Rousseau, Voltaire, d’Alembert, the “naturalists, materialists, indifferentists, deists, atheists” and all others who

*Carlo III. Monarca delle Spagne e delle Indie*, Naples, tip. Pergeriana, 1789. The author had been a Jesuit until the beginning of the 1770s: E. Chiosi, *Lo spirito del secolo. Politica e religione a Napoli nell’età dell’Illuminismo*, Naples, Giannini, 1992, p. 178.

57. Degli Onofri, *Elogi storici di alcuni servi di Dio*, pp. VI-VIII: “veridica istoria dell’accaduto in Capua per l’ingresso delle armi francesi nel 1799 e il di più avvenuto dopo la lor partenza”.

58. *Ibid.*, pp. IV and VI: “lo zelo veramente divino”, “apostolato a pro de’ napoletani”, “pregiudizi”, “imposture de’ frati”.

59. *Ibid.*, p. X: “Per esperienza so che le leggende devote sono poco ai di nostri pregiate, anzi sono rigettate come cose noiose, insipide, esagerate: la qual cattiva sorte non incontra mica i favolosi romanzi, né le amorose poesie, né le seducenti Istorie, né le pestifere opere di que’ autori che ci vengono di là da’ monti e di là da’ mari”.

seduced “simpletons and the weaker sex”, Degli Onofri was well aware of the fact that their books enjoyed enormous success even among those of high rank, who would caress them and put them back “safely on the shelves of their elegant libraries”.<sup>60</sup> To compete, therefore, with so many “capricious and extravagant titles”, he conducted his research conscious of a new communicative strategy and sought to combine doctrine and entertainment.<sup>61</sup> He was influenced, most likely, by reading works by the Swedish Jesuit Lorenzo Ignazio Thjulen who, in the revolutionary age, fused the traditional forms of controversialist writing with the agile and easily understood language of narrative and the effective communicative instruments of modern philosophical culture. In so doing, he made significant changes to a literary genre that had become predictable and that was drowning in stereotypes.<sup>62</sup>

The operation was met with approval by the censor Luigi Mercogliano. When interrogated by the Bourbon government over his conferral of the *imprimatur* to the work, he commented enthusiastically on the choice to take “a path not beaten by others”. He would write on 26 August 1803: “[The author] entices the curious to not throw out [the lives] from their hands, as is typically the fate these days for such works, but to instead read them with pleasure and avidity”.<sup>63</sup> His collection thus presented clear signs of discontinuity with the past and sought a different destiny from that of other devotional biographies, which were for the most part excoriating hit jobs with cutting judgments, not only because he borrowed narrative frameworks typical to secular literature, but also because he contextualised the actions of protagonists in relation to events and problems that were well known to the greater public.

As for the rest, this cross-contamination was already obvious in the 1700s, above all in the relationship between hagiography and novels. Beyond explicitly bellicose declarations about their novelist colleagues,

60. *Ibid.*, p. XVI: “naturalisti, materialisti, indifferentisti, deisti, ateisti”, “i semplici ed il sesso imbelle”, “ben custoditi nelle scanzie delle loro eleganti librerie”.

61. *Ibid.*, p. XVI. See Delpiano, *Il governo della lettura*, pp. 213-289: “titoli capricciosi e stravaganti”.

62. See A. Guerra, *Il vile satellite del trono. Lorenzo Ignazio Thjulen: un gesuita svedese per la controrivoluzione*, Milan, FrancoAngeli, 2004.

63. Degli Onofri, *Elogi storici di alcuni servi di Dio*, p. XVIII: “una via non battuta d’altri”, “[L’autore] adessa i curiosi a non gittare [le vite] dalle loro mani, come la sorte è ai di nostri di siffatte opere, ma a scorrerle tutte con piacere e avidità”.

hagiographers organised a conscious response, based on the development of new strategies that did not exclude imitation. They showed themselves to be open to producing narratives that could inspire wonder and enjoyment, while at the same time dusting off an idea of education founded on a dynamic relationship with a culture more inclined toward “pleasurable” works. Without betraying “Truth” (crucial to achieving a good outcome in beatification trials), they looked more judiciously at the public, no longer considered simply to be a passive recipient, but instead an influential interlocutor in the writing process. Hagiographers began to be ever more aware of the need to avoid boring their audience, choosing instead to surprise them with captivating and fast-paced stories.<sup>64</sup>

The first biography contained in the *Elogi storici* was that of Francesco De Geronimo of the Jesuits, who was born in Taranto on 17 December 1642 and who died in Naples seventy-three years later. During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, various authors dedicated themselves to this famous priest, drawing up a profile of holiness founded upon the virtue of charity, fully in line with the tradition of the Ignatian order.<sup>65</sup> Pietro Degli Onofri borrowed some fundamental themes from his predecessors, reserving considerable space for the candidate for sainthood’s pastoral activities which were focused on the conversion of the unfaithful, women of ill repute, arrogant youths and nonbelievers.<sup>66</sup> He also tasked himself with updating the moral lesson that could be extracted from the hagiographic account, emphasising that this model of virtue was missing from Naples during the political crisis at the end of the 1700s. The message that would emerge from the reconstruction was easily interpreted: the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1767 and reformist initiatives had eliminated the possibility of having an obedient and devout city.

The *Elogi storici* continued with the biography of another Jesuit: Gianbattista Cacciottoli, born in Castrovillari on 21 October 1668 and welcomed into the Institute of Gesù Nuovo in Naples (which hosted aspiring members of the Society of Jesus) after numerous missions carried

64. P. Palmieri, “Educare, evangelizzare, divertire. Agiografia e romanzi nel Settecento italiano”, in *Il libro. Editoria e pratiche di lettura nel Settecento*, ed. by L. Braida and S. Tatti, Rome, Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2016, pp. 263-278.

65. Among them, the Jesuits Carlo Stradiotti, Simone Bagnati and Carlo De Bonis. On Francesco De Geronimo, see Novi Chavarria, *Il governo delle anime*, pp. 269-290; Sodano, *Modelli e selezione del santo moderno*, pp. 88-99.

66. Degli Onofri, *Elogi storici di alcuni servi di Dio*, pp. 32-35.

out in Sicily, Calabria and Apulia.<sup>67</sup> We read in the text that Cacciottoli considered the Vicariate's prisons to be "a vast field open to zeal and charity for the amount of fenced-in space and the multitude of criminals who were well-known in Naples and elsewhere", just like the port and the slums, where he became an anchor for the population. Charles of Bourbon had been one of Cacciottoli's greatest supporters, seeking his aid when confronting the long-standing issue of prostitution, aware that religious fervour could be more effective than force. The missions had been supported, in many cases, by soldiers in order to "put a stop to anyone who dared keep the aforementioned women from hearing the divine word or from converting".<sup>68</sup>

The emphasis on the virtues of "God's servant" was further directed toward building an organic accusation against reformist policies put in place by the government throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century (after 1759, when Charles of Bourbon left the kingdom and took the throne of Spain), which redefined the clergy's prerogative over managing public life. Degli Onofri – using the past once again to speak of the present – claimed that the city of Naples had paid the consequence for these choices during the Revolution of 1799. Essentially, political stability had been easily undermined by subversive fringes due to a lack of fervently religious men like Cacciottoli who could speak to the "populace" and look out for its "benefit, both spiritual and temporal": "This is what was missing, among our other misfortunes, in the recent anarchy and turmoil. It would have greatly contributed to public morality!"<sup>69</sup>

In his voluminous collection, the hagiographer retraced the biographical affairs of another famous Jesuit preacher, also of note within reformist circles: Francesco Pepe, from Civita del Molise.<sup>70</sup> The pages of the *Elogi* highlighted the enormous success this religious man enjoyed among the people who attended and who were inspired by his bloody self-flagellations.

67. *Ibid.*, pp. 82-86.

68. *Ibid.*, pp. 109-110: "per ampiezza di recinto e per moltitudine di delinquenti assai note in Napoli ed altrove, furono il vasto campo aperto allo zelo e alla carità", "birreria e soldatesca", "por freno a chiunque osasse di frastornar le suddette femmine dall'ascoltar la divina parola o dal convertirsi".

69. *Ibid.*, p. 129: "popolo", "vantaggio sì spirituale che temporale", "È questo mancato, tra le altre nostre disgrazie, nella passata anarchia e sconvolgimento. Molto avrebbe giovato pel buon costume!"

70. *Ibid.*, pp. 130-132.



Many tried to rip his blood-stained clothing from him and hoarded them jealously, believing that they could bring about miracles and healings.<sup>71</sup> The rites and processions organised by Pepe were characterised by a meticulous attention to setting, and built on a preference for nocturnal atmospheres. The knowing exploitation of contrasts between dark and light and the constant callback to mourning made it so participants were emotionally involved (methods which Peter Leopold fought against in Tuscany).

In the days of the miracle of San Januarius – Degli Onofri would continue, talking about the patron saint of the city of Naples, and the famous “wonders” connected with the relics of his blood – especially when the wait for the blood’s liquefaction dragged on and grew wearying, with the people “working themselves into terror and confusion”, the Jesuit would placate spirits and, with his speeches, reinforce the faith and avert riots.<sup>72</sup> His effort to limit the operations of Jewish merchants in the port was also notable, along with seeking to discredit the lodges of the Freemasons, which in the 1740s had gained a significant number of followers, finding clear ideological inspiration within the *Lettera Apologetica* written by Raimondo di Sangro, prince of Sansevero (1710-1771). All these themes were intimately tied to the political message that the *Elogi* intended to spread. With the Revolution, faith in the saints had – we read in the text – “shrunk considerably”;<sup>73</sup> the “mixing of different nations” which professed non-Christian religions was “a great incentive for the corruption of morals”;<sup>74</sup> and the secret lodges had, in turn, sown the seeds of “anarchic” Jacobinism.<sup>75</sup> The conspiracy theory was proposed once again, in all its suggestive force: “Now after what happened, are Neapolitans no longer who they were before, fearful of God, faithful, cordial, disinterested? Fie! [...] Now we rob each other, kill each other, eat each other alive”.<sup>76</sup>

71. *Ibid.*, pp. 143-145.

72. *Ibid.*, p. 168. On the “miracle” of San Januarius, see F. Paolo de Ceglia, *Il segreto di san Gennaro. Storia naturale di un miracolo napoletano*, Turin, Einaudi, 2016; H. Hills, *The Matter of Miracles: Neapolitan Baroque Architecture and Sanctity*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2016: “mettea in costernazione ed in terrore”.

73. *Ibid.*, footnote p. 168: “molto rattrappita”.

74. *Ibid.*, pp. 196-197: “miscuglio delle differenti nazioni”, “un grande incentivo alla corruttela dei costumi”.

75. *Ibid.*: “anarchico”.

76. *Ibid.*: “Or dopo l’ accaduto i napoletani non son più quelli di prima, timorati di Dio, fedeli, cordiali, disinteressati? Oibò! [...] Or ci rubbiamo, ci assassiniamo e ci mangiamo l’un con l’altro”.

The *Elogi storici* concluded with the biography of Gregorio Rocco, a Dominican preacher noted for having gathered in his popular missions the former followers of the Jesuits, after their expulsion was decreed in 1767. “Father Rocco” was described as a capable planner of rites and processions, heeded by the Bourbon court and the faithful, so much so as to be defined as the “Sovereign’s arbiter among the common people”. He had managed to assist the government in the fight against prostitution and the vice of gambling, and suggested issuing pragmatic sanctions threatening financial penalties and imprisonment for transgressors.<sup>77</sup> He played an important role during the eruptions of Vesuvius, contributing to the organisation of special ceremonies in honour of the patron San Januarius to invoke his heavenly protection over the people.

He also – and on this the text would offer many particulars to readers – contributed to the introduction of a lighting system in the streets of Naples. The Bourbon government’s previous attempts to achieve this goal had in fact failed on numerous occasions: the inhabitants of the poorest neighbourhoods had destroyed the light sources, judging them as an undeserved attempt at surveilling their lives. Rocco took the initiative himself and advised the royal ministries to attach wooden crosses and an image of the Virgin Mary to each lamp, inviting the faithful to take care of them. In Degli Onofri’s interpretation, those sacred images scattered throughout the city symbolised the return of a golden age, in which the Catholic faith had been able to resist the persecutions of “ancient tyrannical emperors”, showing that Christ had chosen to die with his shoulders to Jerusalem in order to turn his face not only toward Rome, “but also toward Naples and the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, so as to forever defend them from temporal and spiritual attacks”.<sup>78</sup>

It is important to note how the *Elogi storici* dedicated less space to some aspects that hagiography had consistently held to be central to the lives of these candidates for sainthood, first among which was the power to heal the sick. The author attributed to his “servants of God” the ability to communicate with the poorest classes, of reaching the most deeply hidden corners of the city in search of sinners to convert, of helping royal power

77. *Ibid.*, pp. 414-417: “padre Rocco, “arbitro della plebe presso del Sovrano”, “arbitro del Sovrano presso la plebe”.

78. *Ibid.*, pp. 378-379: “antichi tiranni imperatori”, “ancor verso Napoli ed i Regni delle due Sicilie, per così sempre difenderli dagli attacchi spirituali e temporali”.

discipline its subjects: their thaumaturgical power was primarily directed toward curing the evils of society. For these reasons, developing models of Christian virtue had to include a careful observation of the choices made, each time, by secular authorities. With the shift in political strategies, the scale of values on which the deeds and social functions of defenders of the faith were weighed also underwent a metamorphosis. The very concept of a saint's heroism, despite being inherited from the past, proved mutable, and was subject to the influence of context.

Ecclesiastical hierarchies and supporters of new cults perceived that it was no longer sufficient to invite believers to intensify their devotional practices and defend the social utility of religion in debates over reformist policies. It was necessary to demonstrate that the new heroes of the faith had carried out fundamental work to support the load-bearing structures of the Christian "civitas", in order to maintain popular consensus for "legitimate" rulers and the survival of the "sacred" bond between Church and State. Symbols of holiness clearly preserved various elements of continuity with a past in which the principal mechanisms of representation and narrative had been consolidated to align with universalistic dogma imposed by the papacy. The point of rupture that the decade 1789-1799 and the Napoleonic era represented, nevertheless, had signalled a final crisis for all the agitation towards modernisation that the Catholic community had gone through in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, radicalising demands for a strong reaction that would necessarily require a persuasive call to arms, which would in fact happen during the Vendean revolt in France and the anti-Jacobin insurgencies within the regions of Italy.

A final – but no less important – observation must be dedicated to the Jesuit order itself, which took on the undisputed role of protagonist within Pietro Degli Onofri's work.<sup>79</sup> Already at the beginning of the 1780s, members of the dissolved order were confirmed to possess a spirit of comradeship, skilfully repositioning themselves into some significant roles within the social apparatus.<sup>80</sup> They continued to occupy themselves

79. See Menozzi, *Sacro Cuore*.

80. See M. Rosa, "Gesuitismo e antigesuitismo nell'Italia del Sei-Settecento", *Rivista di storia e letteratura religiosa*, 42 (2006), pp. 248, 279-280. Moreover, see A. Trampus, *I gesuiti e l'Illuminismo. Politica e religione in Austria e nell'Europa centrale (1773-1798)*, Florence, Olschki, 2000; S. Pavone, *Le astuzie dei gesuiti. Le false istruzioni segrete della Compagnia di Gesù e la polemica antigesuita nei secoli XVII-XVIII*, Rome, Salerno, 2000; N. Guasti, *L'esilio italiano dei gesuiti spagnoli: identità, controllo sociale e pratiche*

with the education of aristocratic youth and descendants of the ennobled bourgeoisie. They were able to assert their presence in journalism and publishing, in scientific, literary and scholarly historical production, and in management positions in libraries and museums, demonstrating a surprising activism well beyond fields already steeped in evangelising, spiritual welfare and apologetic and controversialist treatises.<sup>81</sup>

Faced with revolutionary change, various groups gave life to initiatives directed at reconstructing the suppressed order, going around state and papal prohibitions in ways that were more or less clandestine. It was helped then, in 1796, by the birth of the Society of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which operated in the Netherlands under the guidance of Abbot Leonor Franz de Tournély (1767-1797), followed a year later by the foundation of the Societas Fidei Jesu in Rome, known also as Fideists or Paccanarists, from the name of their promoter Niccolò Paccanari (1773-1811), from Valsugana. When in February 1798 the Roman Republic was declared and the pope was exiled, the members of this recently born society were expelled as well. Some took refuge in Parma, secretly associating with their brothers who took refuge in Russia, protected by Catherine the Great and her successor Paul I. Others proceeded onward to Hagenbrunn in Austria, under the guidance of Paccanari, joining with some survivors from the Society of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.<sup>82</sup>

When the European political map was shaken up by the achievements of republican armies, the empire inherited by Francis II of Habsburg-Lorraine took on the role of France's primary antagonist. The empire became, from a symbolic point of view, the stronghold of an ancient continental equilibrium that seemed to be irreparably weakened. While this was an important area of activity for the relaunch of Jesuits, other states within the peninsula also leaned on religious men who had never completely rejected their membership in the Ignatian order, providing undeniable help to a political and social reorganisation capable of curbing the changes introduced by republican governments.

The ministry of the Jesuits thus continued to be an important reference point for aspiring saints and candidates for the altar. A clear manifestation

*culturali*, Rome, Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2006. See also the important suggestions by F. Alfieri, *Veronica e il diavolo. Storia di un esorcismo a Roma*, Turin, Einaudi, 2021.

81. Rosa, "Gesuitismo e antigesuitismo", pp. 279-280.

82. Trampus, *I Gesuiti e l'Illuminismo*, pp. 285-286.

of their central role can be seen in the endurance of the cult of the Sacred Heart, which cannot be seen as merely random or attributable to incidental factors. The Sacred Heart – as seen in the case of Teresa Margherita Redi – was an indelible brand, useful for defining a religious and political identity. Models of holiness built around the Sacred Heart rested upon solid foundations of a theological and political culture oriented toward reconstructing a system of power (ideally bestowed with some morals from the post-Tridentine era, and others from the Middle Ages) and focused on fully merging objectives between secular and ecclesiastical powers, defending the monarchy's legitimacy and reinforcing the alliance between throne and altar.

## Conclusion

The Spanish, Polish and Austrian wars of succession (1701-1748) disturbed the European political scene in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and had significant consequences for the equilibrium of political powers present in the Italian peninsula. Despite leaving in place the already consolidated organisation of regional states, they provoked a further retreat of Spanish hegemony, already in the midst of decades of crisis, to the advantage of growing Austrian influence. This change in the relations of power had tangible consequences even on the internal organisation of individual territorial bureaucracies. Some dynasties traditionally close to the papacy, such as that of the Medici family in Florence, were ousted at the conclusion of a progressive revision of their power. New princes and foreign ministries took their place (specifically the Habsburg-Lorraines), which showed themselves to be closer to jurisdictionalist culture and the emerging Enlightenment movement.<sup>1</sup>

Various transformative projects in society merged in the pursuit of the public good, springing from a radical cutback on the influence of religious institutions' power over the social fabric. Listening to the exhortations of economists, jurists and philosophers, governments in the peninsula managed to shrink the ranks of the clergy, suppress numerous monasteries and reshape the beneficiary system. In more sporadic instances, they also attempted to restore diocesan and parochial organisations, calling priests to transform themselves into public functionaries, with the goal of guaranteeing order and perfecting the machinery of the state. The historiography of those final decades is substantially in agreement in

1. See C. Donati, *Nobili e chierici in Italia tra Seicento e Settecento. Studi e ricerche storiche*, Milan, CUEM, 2002, pp. 258-260.

reading these innovations as a “secularisation of intellectual life and civil conditions of society”, followed by a “loosening” of the “organic network of ties and economic, social, cultural and familial interdependencies that had been consolidated in an enduring manner in prior centuries by the dominant groups and ecclesiastical establishment”.<sup>2</sup>

Scholars have nonetheless paid close attention to political and cultural dynamics of a different character as well, often extraneous to the separation of Church and State desired by the intellectual reformist scene, and oriented rather toward favouring a persistent osmosis between the two spheres of influence. In order to sustain their dynastic aspirations, the Bourbons of Naples and the Habsburg-Lorraines of Tuscany would make notable efforts to effect change in their territories, but their push for centralisation was unable to make a profound shift in the hierarchical structures upon which society’s organisation had been built, and which were instead inclined to preserve the intermingling of political and religious languages. Despite suffering attacks from the anticlerical alliance, the cross-class ties that held together broad sectors of the nobility and the clergy remained strong. Thanks to a notable *esprit de corps*, aristocratic and ecclesiastical hierarchies managed to preserve key roles in bureaucratic and administrative bodies and to build a strong dam to block the flood of other social groups. At the same time, they also worked to curb the actions of a monarchy determined to conquer for itself a more solid presence on the mental horizon of its subjects.

The construction of new frameworks of holiness was influenced by this complex milieu of innovation and preservation, much like the more general reorganisation of devotional life. It would, however, be an error to think of this as a simple or linear return to the past. In reality, the political and confessional system that had been dismantled following reforms began to move toward a new order, additionally carving out an important role for the people (meaning those who were untouched by privilege and dispensations) in the definition of social equilibrium. The first significant interventions concerned strategies for promoting cults, suspended tautly between the demand for consensus-building and the need to respect norms. Mystical visions, prophetic revelations and relics raised doubts of a medical-

2. Rosa, *Settecento religioso*, p. 118; Donati, *Nobili e chierici*, p. 262: “allentamento”, “organica rete di legami e interdipendenze economiche, sociali, culturali, familiari che nei secoli precedenti si era venuta consolidando in maniera durevole tra i ceti dominanti e l’organizzazione ecclesiastica”.

scientific and historical-philological nature. The discourse surrounding the authenticity of alleged supernatural phenomena seemed at times destined toward dead ends and to remain lacking in substantial solutions. For this reason, preachers, hagiographers and apologists shifted their attention to the impact that faith had on private and public morals, accentuating its capacity to stimulate correct behaviours and obedience to legitimate authorities.

Despite alternating success and defeat, celebration and condemnation, the cases of Salvatore Pagnani, Angela Marraprese, Maria Maddalena Sterlicco, Maria Antonia Colle, Isabella Milone, Teresa Margherita Redi, Ignazio Redi, Scipione de' Ricci, Agostino Albergotti, Maria Francesca delle Cinque Piaghe and Pietro Degli Onofri reveal a trend. The supernatural in fact allowed room for politics, configuring holiness as a catalyst of energy capable of reshaping society and carrying it toward an organisational model founded on the centrality of Christianity. Scrutiny over the supposed mental derangement of those who were alleged to have been miraculously healed, or over the authenticity of prophetic visions, took a back seat to matters that had gained central importance: celebrating the power of monarchies and reaffirming their legitimacy, while also making those same monarchs understand the importance of the clergy and their ability to serve as spiritual and earthly guides for the entire body of their subjects. In other words – and this is what I have sought to demonstrate in this book – the Church was able to maintain a privileged relationship with the Christian population, playing an important role during crises and the reorganisation of state apparatuses.<sup>3</sup>

It is therefore unsurprising that the crisis of Tuscan reforms set off the first important landslides within the Italian peninsula, having a huge influence on the course taken by other regional states, given the energetic internal disputes within the Catholic world that had already seen conservative positions prevail. The failure of Peter Leopold's projects can be considered to reveal a more general trend, not only due to the fact that the grand duchy gravitated within Austria's orbit, but also

3. See A. M. Rao, "Popolo e cultura popolare nel Settecento", in *Il popolo nel Settecento*, ed. by A. M. Rao, Rome, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2020, pp. IX-XXXIV: XIX. More in general, on "popular culture", see O. Niccoli, "Cultura popolare. Un relitto abbandonato?", *Studi Storici*, 56 (2015), pp. 997-1010; F. Dei, *Cultura popolare in Italia. Da Gramsci all'Unesco*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2018; *Un mondo perduto? Religione e cultura popolare*, ed. by L. Felici and P. Scaramella, Rome, Aracne, 2020; Delogu, Palmieri, "Chi ha paura del potere?", pp. 398-402.



because the proposals advanced by the Synod of Pistoia went beyond the usual course of 18<sup>th</sup>-century jurisdictionalism, and more specifically the leanings of the Neapolitan government, whose functionaries were molded by the works of Pietro Giannone and other proponents of jurisdictional thought.<sup>4</sup> To put it differently, the Bourbon monarchy of the Mezzogiorno focused on strengthening the power of the king in State-Church relations, and consequently played an important role in revising the relationship between the ecclesiastical authorities and devotees. Meanwhile, the Habsburg-Lorraine family explicitly aimed to reshape the very essence of people's feelings, as well as the way they approached Catholic devotion. Modernisation initiatives carried out by Scipione de' Ricci and Peter Leopold would, in great measure, go on to plunge their hands into religious practices and the sphere of the sacred. The bishop and the grand duke presumed to tell their subjects what to believe and how to believe it, even coming to specify which processions and rituals pleased God.

It is within this very territory – faith in saints, in relics, in sacred symbols – that the traditionalist front developed their countermeasures, managing to preserve their power to shape the people's imaginary. Moving in this direction were promoters of the cult of Benedetto Giuseppe Labre (1748-1783), a Mendicant of French origin who crossed Europe to visit the most important sanctuaries before dying in absolute poverty in the streets of Rome. The construction of his cult was an unquestionable success, and it is worth bringing it to mind at the end of this work since it can be considered as an ideal counterbalance to what was happening contemporaneously in reformist circles and later in revolutionary ones. Having been humiliated and marginalised in life, Labre was presented to Catholic society as a symbol of a Church subjected to ferocious attacks from the secular world. The process of his beatification involved many personalities close to the papal court, bound by blood, friendship or ideological affinities, all convinced of the need to rebuild Christian society and reinforce papal authority over secular powers. These same social actors also took advantage of the wave of miracles and prophecies that accompanied the first steps of the counterrevolution, and which managed to confer upon their initiatives a notable operating efficiency.<sup>5</sup>

4. See Rosa, *Riformatori e ribelli*, p. 211.

5. See M. Caffiero, *La politica della santità. La nascita di un culto nel secolo del Lumi*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 1996, pp. 239-240; M. Cattaneo, *Gli occhi di Maria*. On miracles in

At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the entire universe of holiness experienced profound transformations that travelled hand-in-hand with the reorganisation of established powers. Promoters of cults responded to changing socio-political conditions with a considerable shift in tone regarding the intellectual representation of holiness, pointing toward the social virtues of their candidates seeking the glory of the altar. A reciprocal relationship was established between hagiographical and counterrevolutionary literature. Devotional biographies began to spread ideas of a Christian revival, hoping for the reconstruction of a civil consortium built upon values of the faith. They often did so by employing a new media strategy, and more precisely by imitating the narrative frameworks of bestselling books, making an effort to combine pedagogy and entertainment. Candidates for the glory of the altar were presented as architects of a “land of devotion”, load-bearing columns of a social palingenesis founded upon the sanctity of established powers, as well as the interpenetration of secular and ecclesiastical authorities in the governance of the conscience: in more general terms, on the alliance between throne and altar.

The new accounts centred on heroines and heroes of the faith were to be read, therefore, not only as a counteroffensive against the spread of secular thought developing on the edge of assimilated concepts of modernity and decadence. They were in fact the fruit of a culture that, while maintaining strong ties to an underlying doctrinaire tradition, managed to transform itself from the inside, at times crucially absorbing parts of the Enlightenment era’s new ideas and communicative strategies. It was that very culture that completed an important transition: it acted upon the insufficiency of traditional control over individual conscience in order to preserve the Catholic faith, asserting the need to challenge public opinion, stimulating the participatory impulses of the faithful and asking them to staunchly support the preservation of the old socio-political order rather than demanding simple and passive obedience.<sup>6</sup>

the revolutionary age, see at least T. A. Kselman, *Miracles and Prophecies in Nineteenth-Century France*, New Brunswick (NJ), Rutgers University Press, 1983; P. Boutry, J. Nassif, *L'arcangelo, il contadino e il re. Storia di un'apparizione fra psichiatria e politica nell'età della Restaurazione*, Roma, Viella, 2000; M. Broers, *The Politics of Religion in Napoleonic Italy: The War Against God, 1801-1814*, London-New York, Routledge, 2002, pp. 52-66.

6. See Palmieri, *I taumaturghi della società*; Palmieri, *La santa, i miracoli e la Rivoluzione*; P. Palmieri, “Gli itinerari della devozione nell’Italia del Settecento”, in *Prima*

More generally, we have sufficient evidence to reiterate that the frameworks of the *historia salutis* (the “story of salvation”, whose plot leaned toward achieving divine providence’s design) were not immune to the successes of “Istoria civile” (to knowingly use an expression drawn from the title of Pietro Giannone’s celebrated 1723 work). Beyond tracing the revolutionary apocalypse back to the paths laid out by providence, hagiographers, preachers, painters and apologists were all tasked with developing a total reimagining of events in recent times. They thus confronted all critical moments that had changed ties between the Church of Rome and the Italian states during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, faulting jurisdictionalism, Jansenism, Episcopalianism, the success of Masonic lodges and the spread of Enlightenment culture. They gave shape to a conspiracy theory, identifying enemies – jurisdictionalists, Jansenists, Masons and the Enlightened – against whom to fight, accusing them of creating a plan to promote the triumph of the Revolution. They put the entire reformist movement up for debate, accusing it of being the source of all the “depravation” of the “new world”. They attempted to demonstrate, consequently, that the redefinition of religious identities remained inseparable from the evolution of political identities.

Such developments allow us to better understand one side of 18<sup>th</sup>-century history that until today has remained in the shadows, marked not only by elements of discontinuity with the past, but also by continuity and permanence, identifiable via long-term considerations. From this point of view one can recognise, by virtue of a necessarily synthetic and systematic interpretation, the presence of a common thread that finds one of its greatest and most visible achievements within the cult of saints. That same thread tied together a wide range of experiences – experiences that were nonetheless all clearly oriented toward playing a role in the changes that were under way – keeping plans for a devout and disciplined society, and ecclesiological and political reflection on track. That same common thread united influences, thoughts, voices, images, symbols and writing, which would continue to rest established powers upon sacred foundations and interpret them as faithful representations of celestial hierarchies.

*della nazione, oltre lo stato. Gli spazi mobili nella penisola italiana tra la fine del '700 e l'unità*, ed. by L. Di Fiore and M. Meriggi, Rome, Viella, 2013, pp. 25-44.

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