CONVENT THEATRE IN EARLY MODERN ITALY

SPIRITUAL FUN AND LEARNING FOR WOMEN

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CHAPTER 1

RENAISSANCE CULTURE IN ITALIAN CONVENTS, 1450–1650

However enclosed they might have been by walls and regulations, early modern convents were not isolated from the outside world. The urban institutions, especially, were in close and constant contact with the community that surrounded them. At the parlor and at the *ruota* (wheel in the wall for bringing items in and out of the convent) there was a continuous exchange of services and goods. Lay women visited relatives in the convents, they boarded and schooled their daughters there, and often as widows it was there that they retired. The social and political elite, the protagonists of public life, were patrons of the cultural life of the convents, and convent women too, who belonged to that same class, commissioned work from laymen, manual labor but also works of art. The cloister, of course, restricted the movements of the women it enclosed, but, freeing them from domestic cares it allowed them to engage in intellectual pursuits and cultural production in ways and to an extent not possible for most of their secular sisters. Women religious seized the occasions that their situation offered and enjoyed, even in the confinement of their convents, a cultural life closely allied to that of the surrounding community.

The following discussion of Italian convent culture concerns primarily the literacy of Italian nuns in the early modern period and their practice of the arts. It will provide a context for the study of the highly developed theatrical tradition that flourished in the women's religious communities of Italy and especially of Tuscany for nearly three centuries. The religious life of convent women, their rituals and particular forms of spirituality, concerns this study only insofar as it is reflected in the theatrical tradition.[1]

[1] On Italian convents in the early modern period, see the seminal study of Gabriella Zarri, "Monasteri femminili e città (secoli XV–XVIII)" in *Storia d'Italia. Annali 9: La Chiesa e il potere politico dal Medioevo all'età contemporanea*, eds. G. Chittolini and G. Miccoli (Turin: Einaudi, 1986), pp. 359–429, and Zarri's many articles on specific

To convey a picture of the general cultural level of the convents that housed upper-class women, and specifically the artistic excellence they would have expected to find in religious communities throughout Italy between 1450 and 1650, I will review some of the commissions of art made by and for those institutions and the evidence that has survived of the practice of the arts within their walls.[2] Although much of what once belonged to convents has been lost or drastically altered, historical accounts such as chronicles and guidebooks and a growing body of scholarly work can provide a glimpse of what was there. I will also discuss the literacy of convent women as it appears from written records they have left, especially their literary efforts, and the reports of their contemporaries. I make no attempt to give an exhaustive account of any aspect of convent culture, but only to point to evidence of a surprisingly high level of cultural expression in the urban convents of early modern Italy. First, however, it will be necessary to sketch a picture of the women religious themselves and of the relationship of the convents in which they lived to the secular world in this period. To appreciate the cultural achievements of early modern nuns we must first seek to bridge the gap that centuries and changes in society and in forms of spirituality have effected.

Convents were an important part of the urban landscape in Italy from the fifteenth century until their suppressions in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Even today the often imposing buildings that once held religious women still stand, yet they serve new functions which obscure their original use and significance. The thick walls that enclosed nuns now detain prisoners and house the military, and the spaces that for many years provided some education for women are appropriately the home today of institutions of learning, from nursery schools to

convents and convent traditions and on the social conditions, the culture, and spirituality of convent women cited in my notes and bibliography. An important overview of the scholarship on convents in early modern Italy and the state of the question today is provided by the articles of Zarri (for the sixteenth century), Francesca Medioli (seventeenth), and Paola Vismara Chiappa (eighteenth) in "*De monialibus* (secoli XVI–XVII–XVIII)," *Rivista di Storia e Letteratura Religiosa* 33 (1997), 643–715.

2 I do not mean to imply that all convents shared equally in cultural riches. Convents outside the city, those in small towns, and some convents in the cities were indeed poor, and all convents suffered a significant loss of income when enclosure was imposed on them in the latter part of the sixteenth century. There were, however, many daughters of the elite and of merchants striving to join the upper class for whom convents were built and whose convents were supported by their families. These convents, which grew in number throughout the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, shared in many aspects of the culture of the outside world.

universities.[3] Some of the most beautiful spaces in which religious women lived are now museums, whose collections include paintings that hung in convents and which have returned, so to speak, after peregrinations that followed the convent suppressions.

By the fifteenth century many of the convents that earlier were located outside city walls had moved inside for safety. New houses were established with increasing frequency, and their population grew rapidly throughout Italy. In Florence there were 16 convents in 1368, 20 in 1428, 30 in 1470, 45 in 1552, 63 in 1574, and 65 in 1595.[4] In 1552 it is estimated that women religious were between 11.5 and 13 percent of the city's female population, and the percentage of patrician women in

[3] To take only a few examples in Florence, the city with which I am most familiar, the Murate, originally the convent of the Benedictine nuns of the Santissima Annunziata (called the "Murate," the "Walled Women"), was until a few years ago a high-security prison. The former Dominican convent of San Jacopo di Ripoli in Florence is now the barracks of the Italian Army's Third Regiment. Santa Caterina da Siena in Florence is the headquarters of the Tosco–Emilian Regional Military Command. San Pier Martire has become a kindergarten and an elementary school run by a few nuns who live there. San Giovannino delle Cavalieresse di Malta is a middle school (the Scuola Media Leon Battista Alberti). Sant'Apollonia now houses the university dining hall and activity center, some military offices, and a recreation center; the refectory has become a museum. For a detailed history of the use of convent space in Florence see the work of O. Fantozzi Micali and P. Roselli, *Le soppressioni dei conventi a Firenze. Riuso e trasformazioni dal sec. XVIII in poi* (Florence: L.E.F., 1980).

[4] Pietro Battara, *La popolazione di Firenze alla metà del '500* (Florence: Rinascimento del Libro, 1935), p. 20; Roberto Bizzocchi, *Chiesa e potere nella Toscana del Quattrocento* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1987), p. 14; Arnaldo D'Addario, *Aspetti della Controriforma a Firenze* (Rome: Pubblicazioni degli Archivi di Stato, 1972), p. 283; ASF, Corp. rel. sopp. 81, vol. 100, fol. 62v. Gene Adam Brucker, "Monasteries, Friaries, and Nunneries in Quattrocento Florence," in *Christianity and the Renaissance: Image and Religious Imagination in the Quattrocento*, eds. Timothy Verdon and John Henderson (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1990; rpt. 1994), pp. 41–62. These figures cannot be considered entirely reliable, since convents were under a variety of jurisdictions and frequently changed their affiliations and locations; there were consolidations, and nuns were moved from one house to another, sometimes as their houses were being phased out or to bring their good example to bear at convents having difficulties (Zarri, "Monasteri femminili e città," esp. p. 363). Moreover, the increased number of houses may not always mean more nuns; there is evidence that convent populations actually decreased during the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries (see Samuel K. Cohn Jr., "Nuns and Dowry Funds: Women's Choices in the Renaissance," a chapter in his *Women in the Streets: Essays on Sex and Power in Renaissance Italy* [Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press], 1996, pp. 84–88). It is clear, however, that the numbers increased rapidly in the sixteenth century, especially after the Council of Trent and continued to climb into the seventeenth century.

convents was much higher.[5] Indeed, according to one study, in sixteenth-century Florence about half of the women of the urban propertied classes became nuns (regular nuns, also called choir nuns); because the conventS were built for them, they outnumbered the lay sisters (called *converse* or *servigiali*), who belonged to the lower classes, by 6 or 7 to 1.[6] The situation in Florence seems to have been typical.

[5] According to Pietro Battara, *La popolazione di Firenze*, pp. 8 and 79, in 1552 out of a female population of 26,267 there were 2,786 professed nuns and 40 other nuns and novices, a total of 2,826 women in Florentine convents; that would be about 11 percent of the female population. Richard Trexler, "Le celibat à la fin du Moyen Age: Les religieuses de Florence," *Annales* 27 (1972), 1337–8, estimated 13 percent, counting professed nuns and lay sisters who lived in convents (English trans. "Celibacy in the Renaissance: The Nuns of Florence," in Richard Trexler, *Dependence in Context in Renaissance Florence* [Binghamton, NY: MRTS, 1994], pp. 354–55; in a rpt. in *The Women of Renaissance Florence*, *Power and Dependence in Renaissance Florence*, vol. 2 [Asheville, NC: Pegasus Press, 1998], pp. 15–16). See also p. 442 of R. Trexler, "A Widows' Asylum of the Renaissance: The Orbatello of Florence," ibid., pp. 415–48 (essay which first appeared in *Old Age in Pre-industrial Society*, ed. Peter N. Stearns [New York: Holmes and Meier, 1982], pp. 119–49). For Bologna, according to Gabriella Zarri, "Monasteri femminili e città," pp. 421–22, women religious were between 9.8 and 13.8 percent of the female population; Zarri uses figures taken from Athos Bellettini, *La popolazione di Bologna dal secolo XV all'unificazione italiana* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1961), table 6, p. 58. For Prato's population of 13,994 (including the *contado*, i.e., the surrounding countryside) in 1591 there were ten convents, counting city and vicinity, and 1,200 nuns, 400 of whom were from the city proper, according to D. Guglielmo Di Agresti in *Sviluppi della riforma monastica savonaroliana* (Florence: Olschki, 1980), pp. 59–60. Prudence Renée Baernstein, in "The Counter-Reformation Convent: The Angelics of San Paolo in Milan, 1535–1635" (Ph.D. diss. Harvard, 1993, pp. 7 and 221) estimates that convent women were 3 to 6 percent of the female population of Italian cities in the sixteenth century and that the percentage of patrician women may have been as high as 20 percent. For Milan she estimates that in 1565, when the population was 110,000, there were as many as 5,000 women religious (that would be about 4.5 percent of the entire population and a little more than double, over 9 percent, of the female population).

[6] R. Burr Litchfield, "Demographic Characteristics of Florentine Patrician Families, Sixteenth to Nineteenth Centuries," *Journal of Economic History* 29 (1969), pp. 191–205; and, in Italian, "Caratteristiche demografiche delle famiglie patrizie fiorentine dal sedicesimo al diciannovesimo secolo," in Carlo A. Corsini et al., *Saggi di demografia storica* (Florence: Dipartimento Statistico-Matematico, Università di Firenze, 1969). This article is cited by Judith C. Brown, in "Monache a Firenze all'inizio dell'età moderna, un'analisi demografica," *Quaderni storici*, n.s. 85 (April 1994), p. 119. Anthony Molho's statistics, derived from his study of the Florentine Dowry Fund (the Monte delle doti), give similar results. Molho shows that between 1425 and 1499 only 1 out of 5 girls whose family invested in the fund became a nun: between 1500 and 1529 the figure was 2 out of 5, and slightly more after 1530. These figures do not account for women who were destined for the convent from birth, or very early on, and for whom there was no investment in the dowry fund. See Anthony Molho, "*Tamquam vere mortua*. Le professioni religiose femminili nella Firenze del tardo Medioevo," *Società e storia* 43 (1989), 6–8.

Studies of convents in Bologna and Milan show an analogous rise in the number and proportion of women in convents from the fifteenth through the seventeenth century.[7] In Venice, too, the monachization rates were rising: by the early seventeenth century, between 60 and 70 percent of patrician women were living in one of the city's forty-six convents.[8]

Convent buildings were often clustered near the city walls, just inside the gates.[9] Not only were they protected there, but they protected the city, serving as a spiritual bulwark; the prayers of nuns were sought, in fact bought, when the city was threatened by invasion, disease, or famine.[10] The government and the nuns were involved in an exchange,

[7] For Bologna, see Gabriella Zarri, "I monasteri femminili di Bologna tra il XIII e il XVII secolo," *Atti e Memorie della Deputazione di storia patria per le province di Romanga*, n.s., 24 (1973), 133–234. There were 26 convents in 1366, and, after a decrease in the fifteenth century, due in large part to the population decline following various episodes of plagues, a low point of 20 convents was reached in 1490. Then in the late fifteenth and throughout the sixteenth century the number of women in convents rose rapidly, and some new houses were founded: there were 29 convents in 1573 and 33 in 1634. For the increase in the number of nuns in Neapolitan convents from the end of the sixteenth through the mid-seventeenth century, see Carla Russo, *I monasteri femminili di clausura a Napoli nel secolo XVII* (Naples: Università di Napoli, Istituto di storia medioevale e moderna, 1970), pp. 40–42. For Pisa, see Gaetano Greco, "Monasteri femminili e patriziato in Pisa (1530–1630)," in *Città italiane del '500 tra Riforma e Controriforma.* Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi, Lucca, 13–15 October 1983 (Lucca: M. Pacini Fazzi, 1988), pp. 313–39. Baernstein, "The Counter Reformation Convent," Appendix 1, pp. 219–28, notes that the Milanese convent population increased over the course of the century she studies, but that most of the documentation available is unreliable, as it provides the limit fixed by authorities rather than the actual number of nuns, which she shows in many instances to be far larger. On Milan, see also Lucia Sebastiani, "Monasteri femminili milanesi tra medioevo e età moderna," in *Florence and Milan: Comparisons and Relations* (Proceedings of two Conferences at Villa I Tatti in 1982–84), eds. Craig Hugh Smyth and Gian Carlo Garfagnini (Florence: La Nuova Italia Editrice, 1989), II, pp. 3–15, and Dante Zanetti, *La demografia del patriziato milanese nei secoli XVII, XVIII, and XIX* (Pavia: Università, Istituto di Storia Economica, 1968).

[8] Jutta Sperling, *Convents and the Body Politic in Late Renaissance Venice* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999), chapter 1, passim, especially pp. 26–28.

[9] Gabriella Zarri, "I monasteri femminili a Bologna," and her *Istituzioni ecclesiastiche e vita religiosa a Bologna (1450–1700)*, vol. 10, Part 2 of *Storia illustrata di Bologna*, ed. Walter Tega (Milan: Nuova Editoriale Aiep, 1989), esp. Figure 1, p. 182, which shows the location of convents at the end of the eighteenth century near the city walls. For the female houses in Florence, see Battara, *La popolazione di Firenze*, p. 21, who lists their locations in 1552 and observes " V'è senza dubbio una tendenza dei conventi a situarsi nelle zone periferiche della città, in vicinanza delle Porte."

[10] For example, during the recurrences of plague in the years 1630–33, the Health Bureau of the city of Florence paid the convents for their prayers. One instance is reported by suor Gabriella Angiola Baldovinetti of the convent of Saints Girolamo and Francesco, a Franciscan house known as "San Giorgio" because of its location

and the women were proud of the spiritual service they performed. They felt empowered by it. The Dominican nuns of San Pier Martire, who had been granted a tax exemption for their prayers on behalf of the city, boasted in their tax declaration of 1478 that their intercessions were "more useful than two thousand horses."[11]

Besides their spiritual acts, understood as civic responsibilities, the convents also performed important social and economic functions in the community. First and foremost, they provided a *sistemazione*, an honorable alternative for upper-class women who could not marry for reasons of a social and economic order or because they were deemed unfit physically or psychologically. In the early modern period the respectable vocations available to them were really only two – marriage or the convent.[12] In a play written by an anonymous Dominican nun, the *Rappresentazione di Santa Caterina di Colonia* (*The Play of Saint Catherine*

on the Costa di San Giorgio in Florence. She wrote: "l'uffizzio della Sanità fece molte limosine e mandorno qui al nostro monastero scudi cinquanta e ci imposano che per quaranta giorni continui e 40 notte stessero sempre quattro monache in coro in ginocchioni. E cosí s'osservò, e dette quattro monache si scambiavono di giugno 1633 come si vede a Entrata 39. E addí 28 di luglio 1633 il dett'offizzio della Sanità mandò un'altra limosina di scudi venticinque con imporci che stessero due monache per volta in coro dí e notte come alla prima limosina. Ne stettero quattro e si durò quaranta giorni, doppo il qual tempo cessò del tutto la peste." [the Bureau of Health made many offerings and sent fifty scudi to our convent and asked us to have four nuns in the choir on their knees at all times for forty days and forty nights. And so we did, and the four nuns were replaced in June of 1633 as is indicated in credit ledger 39. And on the 28th of July 1633 the above-mentioned Bureau of Health sent another offering of twenty-five scudi asking us to keep two nuns at a time in the choir day and night as we had for the first offering. Four of them stayed for forty days, after which time the plague ceased entirely] (ASF, Corp. rel. sopp. 96, vol. 12, fols. 129r–130r).

11 Trexler cites this record (ASF, Catasto 989, fol. 711v) in "Le célebat à la fin du Moyen Age," p. 1329; the English is his translation, see "Celibacy in the Renaissance," p. 343.

12 Some unmarried women remained at home, but not much is known about them. Treatises on the various *stati*, or social conditions, of women do not include them unless they were *dimesse*, *mantellate*, or women similarly dedicated to a religious life in lay society. Virginia Cox discusses the case of such women in Venice, whose families did not have the money to dower them for convent or marriage, in "The Single Self: Feminist Thought and the Marriage Market in Early Modern Venice," *Renaissance Quarterly* 48 (1995), 513–81, esp. 543ff. See also Stanley Chojnacki, "Marriage Legislation and Patrician Society in Fifteenth-Century Venice," in *Law, Custom, and the Social Fabric in Medieval Europe: Essays in Honor of Bruce Lyon*, eds. Bernard S. Bachrach and David Nicholas (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 1990), pp. 163–84; and Monica Chojnacka, "Singlewomen in Early Modern Venice: Communities and Opportunities," in *Singlewomen in the European Past 1250–1800*, eds. Judith M. Bennett and Amy M. Froide (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), pp. 217–35.

of Cologne), a priest explains to a young woman that these are her options:[13]

> perché duo stati ci son posti innanzi
> e un de' dua ci bisogna pigliare:
> lo stato verginale ch'i' dissi dianzi
> e 'l santo matrimonio ch'i' dissi poi.
> El primo questo assai par che l'avanzi
> Or dimmi, figlia mia, quel che far vuoi.
>
> [because we are offered two stations in life
> and we must choose one of the two:
> the virginal state that I spoke about first
> and holy wedlock I spoke about next.
> The former seems far the better of the two;
> Now tell me, my daughter, what you will do.]

The issues were not the same for women of the lower classes, who could remain in the world and work without losing respectability.[14]

The marriage strategies of upper-class families and the norms that regulated the inheritance of patrimony made it impossible for established and upwardly mobile families to marry off many of their daughters. As Judith Brown explains, when in the late fifteenth and in the sixteenth centuries primogeniture replaced the equal division of property among male heirs, the number of males inheriting property, who were suitable marriage partners, decreased. The number of women who could not marry increased correspondingly, and the competition among them for marriage partners drove up the cost of dowries, posing yet another difficulty for their families.[15]

[13] Cod. Ricc. 2931, fol. 115v. For a discussion of this play and its author see chapter 3, pp. 113–21.

[14] Giovanna Paolin, "Monache e donne nel Friuli del Cinquecento," in *Società e cultura del Cinquecento nel Friuli occidentale. Studi*, ed. Andrea Del Col (Pordenone: Edizioni della Provincia di Pordenone, 1984), p. 211: "Quando le figlie erano molto numerose, per il padre poteva diventare estremamente difficile risolvere il problema del loro collocamento. Esse infatti solo nelle classi povere potevano guadagnarsi da vivere con il proprio lavoro andando a servire o badando ad altre occupazioni che sarebbero state disdicevoli a persone di altra collocazione sociale. Quest'ultime non solo non potevano lavorare, ma erano altresí condizionate dai meccanismi della dote e dagli equilibri delle strategie matrimoniali. Dovevano infatti sposarsi entro un cerchio di famiglie di pari rango e per far ciò era necessaria una dote, che nel XVI secolo era ormai diventata estremamente onerosa per il patrimonio."

[15] For a detailed explanation of the rise in the cost of dowries and of the unavailability of suitable males for upper-class marriages, see Brown, "Monache a Firenze," 117–52. On the dowry system and measures taken by the Florentine government in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries to help finance them, see the work of Julius Kirshner and Anthony Molho on the Florentine Monte delle doti: Julius

The higher cost of marriage dowries was a difficulty, to be sure, but the option of paying lower convent dowries, averaging from one-fifth to one-tenth of the marriage dowries, does not fully explain the enormous increase in monachizations. Like Brown, Jutta Sperling in her work on Venetian marriage strategies argues that "both the dowry system and monachization practices have to be understood in the context of the asymmetrically gendered inheritance patterns of patriarchal societies," which required that family decisions regarding the future of their children be made in such a way as to keep the patrimony intact in the possession of a sole male heir and to uphold or increase family prestige. She shows that the patrician women of Venice, to maintain the social status of their families, married within their class or, when an appropriate husband could not be found, entered a prestigious convent. This practice reflected the effort of the patrician class, in Sperling's words, "to represent and reproduce itself as a 'noble' body politic."[16] The social issue seems foremost in the minds of the Florentine elite as well in this period, during which the old, wealthy merchant families acquired titles of nobility and their daughters who became nuns chose to call themselves "lady" (*donna*) rather than "sister" or "reverend mother" (*suor* or *madre*).[17] In 1636 the nuns of the very

Kirshner, "Pursuing honor while avoiding sin: the Monte delle doti of Florence," *Studi Senesi*, 87 (1977), pp. 175–256, Julius Kirshner and Anthony Molho, "The Dowry Fund and the Marriage Market in Early Quattrocento Florence," *Journal of Modern History* 50 (1978), 403–38, and Anthony Molho, *Marriage Alliance in Late Medieval Florence* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994). See also Samuel K. Cohn, Jr., "Nuns and Dowry Funds," pp. 76-97. On state attempts to regulate dowries, see the recent article by Stanley Chojnacki, "Daughters and Oligarchs: Gender and the Early Renaissance State," in *Gender and Society in Renaissance Italy* eds. Judith C. Brown and Robert C. Davis (London and New York: Longman, 1998), esp. pp. 75–84.

[16] I quote from an unpublished paper by Sperling. She treats the subject extensively in chapter 1 of her recent book: Jutta Gisela Sperling, "Potlatch alla Veneziana: Coerced Monachizations in the Context of Patrician Intermarriage and Conspicuous Consumption," in her *Convents and the Body Politic in Late Renaissance Venice*, pp. 18–71. Sperling argues convincingly that in the Venetian case it is clear that, were the problem solely an economic one, forced monachizations could have been avoided by allowing poor patrician women to "marry out" to men beneath their social status. This was not the case, and in Venice the endogamy rate was upwards of 80 percent. Sperling also shows how this strategy of removing from the marriage market daughters who could not be properly married in or above their social status (she argues that the Venetians followed the logic of gift-giving, of the system of potlatch in which gifts that are too valuable to be reciprocated are destroyed), as it increased the convent populations, depleted the aristocracy, which by the mid-seventeenth century was half the size it had been in the late sixteenth century.

[17] See the cast list for a mid-seventeenth-century convent play from San Michele in Prato, the *Sposalizio d'Iparchia filosofa*, discussed in chapter 5 p. 206 and Figure 16.

prestigious convent of San Giovannino delle Cavalieresse di Malta in Florence received an order from Cardinal Giovan Carlo de' Medici to accept only noble girls as novices and even as *educande* (students), since the latter might eventually decide to join the convent.[18] These women sometimes wore secular clothes, even of the scarcely modest, fashionable variety (Figure 1). In her seminal study, Gabriella Zarri has given us a phrase that remains emblematic of the role of Italian convents in the early modern period: they were, she wrote, quoting a sixteenth-century manuscript, "il ridotto di quelle che maritar non puonsi" ("the sitting room of the women who cannot marry").[19]

Convents served also as a haven for battered wives, retirement home for widows, and correctional institution for penitent prostitutes, though the latter and sometimes the *malmaritate*, battered or abused wives, were kept apart from the nuns in special institutions.[20] The convent was not a solution always desired by the women themselves, and vocations, retirements, and internments could be subtly and unsubtly forced.[21] Childless wives could retire to convents to allow their husbands to remarry. A Florentine convent chronicle written by the Dominican nun

Those who played the important parts are all called "Donna" ("Donna Maria Laura," "Donna Francesca Maria," "Donna Cassandra," etc.) while the plebeian roles were assigned to "suor Maria Girolama," "suor Appollonia," and "una ragazza" (a girl), most likely lay sisters and a young boarder (cod. Ricc. 2974, vol. 3, fol. 1v).

18 ASF, Corp. rel. sopp. 133, vol. 60, pp. 367–68.

19 The words are those of Giovanni Boccadiferro in his *Discorso sopra il governo delle monache* (1550), cited by Zarri in "Monasteri femminili e città," p. 361.

20 Sherrill Cohen, *The Evolution of Women's Asylums Since 1500: From Refuges for Ex-prostitutes to Shelters for Battered Women* (Oxford University Press, 1992) and Trexler, "The Orbatello of Florence," pp. 415–48. The Orbatello was an enclosed community of separate dwellings that from *c.* 1370 until the late sixteenth century kept respectable but destitute widows, their daughters, and young sons together in a protected environment. The institution continued to exist until the eighteenth century, but when it began to house unmarried, orphaned girls, transferred there from the Ospedale degli Innocenti, its respectability came into question and the institution declined (pp. 444–46). See also P. Renée Baernstein, "In Widow's Habit: Women between Convent and Family in Sixteenth-Century Milan," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 25/4 (1994), pp. 787–807.

21 See Zarri, "Monasteri femminili e città," pp. 359–429, especially the section entitled "Il ridotto di quelle che maritar non puonsi," pp. 361–68; and Enrico Cattaneo, "Le monacazioni forzate fra Cinque e Seicento," in *Vita e processo di suor Virginia Maria de Leyva monaca di Monza*, ed. Umberto Colombo (Milan: Garzanti, 1985), pp. 145–95. See also Russo, *I monasteri femminili*, pp. 49–52, on various means of coercion, for example, the practice of putting young girls in convents for education as a way of easing them into convent life and making their "choice" of a religious vocation seem voluntary.

Figure 1 Giovanni Antonio Guardi, *Il parlatorio* (detail), seventeenth century.

Fiammetta Frescobaldi tells the story of Maria Lena, the barren wife of Giovanni Strozzi:

> On the 7th of June, a Friday . . . Maria Lena, the daughter of Baccio Carnesecchi, formerly the wife of M. Giovanni Strozzi, with whom she showed no sign of having children, left home in the company of a young girl [a relative] . . . and a young servant woman. Leading the way were nine porters who carried all of her belongings; and she went to serve God at Santa Lucia, without telling her relatives, and she was about 36 years old. God give her the strength to persevere. She is intelligent and very religious. She has always taken the advice of our friars, yet they did not counsel her to do this. She made her decision out of love for God . . . Maria Lena took our holy habit and in changing clothes and life she changed her name; they called her Sister Maria Vincenza. With her the servant girl also took our habit with the name of Sister Lena. On that same day there was very bad weather; lightning struck twice, though it seems to have done no damage. The rain was light but it brought considerable relief from the sweltering heat of the summer.[22]

Fiammetta Frescobaldi's meteorological observation would seem here to represent the convent as the calm after the storm, relief and a refuge from the problems of the world. It offered her a good life, and with this metaphor she recommended it to others. But women did not usually decide for themselves in these matters, and, even when it seems they did, they often deferred to what they felt were the best interests of others, of their families and society, recognizing that they had no other alternatives. For instance, a nun from a convent in Friuli, when examined by a pastoral visitor in 1601 as to whether or not she had entered the convent willingly, replied:

> I was 15 or 16 years old when I became a nun . . . and I became a nun voluntarily, because, having many sisters, it seemed to me that I had to do so, and when I took the veil I didn't believe the act implied any

[22] "A 7 di giugno in venerdí, il giorno dopo il Corpus Domini a ore 8, M. Lena, figlia di Baccio Carnesechi, di già stata donna a M. Giovanni Strozzi, col quale non ebbe mai segno di figliuoli, si partí di casa con una fanciulla, figlia di Daniello Carnesechi e una serva giovane e innanzi a·ssé 9 fachini carichi di quanto aveva in casa e andossene a servire a Dio in Santa Lucia, sanza saputa di nessun parente e di età di circa 36 anni. Dio gli dia perseveranza. È persona di buon cervello e molto spirituale. S'è governata sempre col consiglio de' nostri padri, se ben di questo no·ll'ànno consigliata. Lo amore di Dio l'à spinta a fare quanto è detto. Alli undici del detto in martedí il giorno di San Barnaba detta Maria Lena prese lo abito santo e, mutando panni e vita, mutò nome; chiamoròlla suor Maria Vicenza. Con lei si vestí la fanciulla serva e questa à nome suor Lena. E lo stesso dí fu assai maltempo; cascò dua saette, non però fecion danno che si sia saputo. La pioggia non fu molta ma refrigerò alquanto il grande ardore di questa state." Florence, Archivio di Santa Maria Novella, Fiammetta Frescobaldi, *Diario*, entry for 7 June 1577, fol. 41v.

> particular obligation, if not to live with the freedom that one had then to go out and to have relatives come in.[23]

She is referring to the relative freedom that convent women had enjoyed before the Council of Trent decreed that enclosure, *clausura*, be imposed or reinstated in all convents, a decree whose enforcement was actively pursued by the Church for about a half century following Trent, but which was strongly contested by nuns and their families.[24]

Pope Boniface VIII in 1298 had issued the constitution known as

[23] See Paolin, "Monache e donne nel Friuli del Cinquecento," pp. 217–21: "Aveva 15 o 16 anni quando mi feci monaca . . . e venni monaca voluntariamente, perché, avendo delle sorelle assai, mi pareva che fusse necessitata che io venissi, e quando io fui velata non mi credevo che quel atto obligasse a cosa nessuna, se non a viver con quella libertà che si faceva allora d'andar fori e che li parenti venissero dentro" (218). Another nun similarly: "Essendomi parlato da mio padre di diventar monaca, io le risposti che non voleva diventar monaca, e, dicendomi lui che non mi averia per figliola se non mi monacava, io mi feci monaca. Quando io mi velai non m'imaginai mai d'astringermi a voto alcuno . . . e mio padre, per aletarmi a farmi monaca, mi diceva che venissi voluntieri, perché sarei stata come le altre e vestirei a mio piacere" (219).

[24] See Norman P. Tanner S.J., ed. *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 2 vols. (Washington, DC: Sheed & Ward and Georgetown University Press, 1990), vol. 2, Council of Trent (1545–1563), Session xxv, chapter v, pp. 777–78: "Renewing the constitution of Boniface VIII which begins *Periculoso*, the holy council commands all bishops, calling the divine justice to witness and under threat of eternal damnation, to ensure that the enclosure of nuns in all monasteries subject to them by ordinary authority, and in others by the authority of the apostolic see, should be diligently restored where it has been violated, and preserved most carefully where it has remained intact; they should coerce any who are disobedient and refractory by ecclesiastical censures and other penalties, setting aside any form of appeal, and calling in the help of the secular arm if need be. The holy synod exhorts all Christian princes to provide such aid, and enjoins this on all magistrates on pain of excommunication automatically incurred. After religious profession no nun may go out of her monastery on any pretext even for a short time, except for a legitimate reason approved by the bishop, notwithstanding any indults and privileges whatever. And no one of any kind or condition or sex or age may enter within the confines of a monastery without the permission of the bishop or superior given in writing, under pain of excommunication automatically incurred. And the bishop or superior should give permission only in necessary cases, nor may anyone else give it in any way, even in virtue of some faculty or indult previously given or to be given in the future. And as monasteries of nuns are often to be found outside the walls of a city or town, and are exposed often without any protection to the plunder of wicked people and to other crimes, bishops and other superiors are to see, if it seems expedient, that the nuns from them are moved to new or old monasteries inside cities or populous towns, calling on the aid of the secular arm if need be. Those obstructing or disobeying should be compelled to obey by ecclesiastical censures." See also Carlo Borromeo, *Acta ecclesiae mediolensis*, 1 (Lyon: Anissoniana et Joan. Posuel, 1754), pp. 43–45, the section on enclosure: *De clausura, & quae ad eam tuendam aliquam ratione pertinent.*

Periculoso, which required that all nuns observe strict enclosure, regardless of the rules of their individual communities. Boniface intended it to apply to all convent women, but those whose houses had never been subject to the restriction often ignored his wishes, sometimes with papal dispensations allowing them to do so.[25] Over the centuries communities of tertiaries, women who generally did not take solemn vows, were established; their houses were even more "open" and the women were allowed the freedom to leave the cloister in certain instances.[26] During the final session of the Council of Trent which was held in late November and early December 1563, the bishops decreed that convents in violation of *Periculoso* must henceforth accept enclosure. They did not make their policy clear, however, for they made no reference to all the women religious who were not observing enclosure yet not strictly in violation of the rule, since it had not applied to them. Indeed, the Council seemed to intend enclosure only for Second Order nuns, but in the years that followed this issue became the subject of much debate. Popes and bishops settled on a broad interpretation of the decree and insisted upon profession and enclosure for all convent women, even those who had entered the "open" houses. Although specific rules and the manner of implementing them were eventually worked out, they were never fully effective because of the financial difficulties it created for convents that had been somewhat self-sufficient but could no longer easily support themselves collecting alms, and because of the opposition of convent women and their families.[27]

[25] On *Periculoso*, see Elizabeth Makowski, *Canon Law and Cloistered Women:* Periculoso *and Its Commentators, 1298–1545* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1997).

[26] For a study of the phenomenon in general and of two important Roman examples see Katherine Gill, "Open Monasteries for Women in Late Medieval and Early Modern Italy: Two Roman Examples," in *The Crannied Wall: Women, Religion, and the Arts in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Craig A. Monson (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1992), pp. 15–47.

[27] For a discussion of the history of the attempts to impose enclosure, see Raimondo Creytens, O.P., "La giurisprudenza della Sacra Congregazione del Concilio nella questione della clausura delle monache (1564–1576)," in *La Sacra Congregazione del Concilio*, Quarto centenario dalla fondazione (1564–1964). Studi e Ricerche. (Vatican City: n.p., 1964), pp. 563–97, esp. pp. 575–76. See also by Creytens, "La riforma dei monasteri femminili dopo i decreti tridentini," in *Il Concilio di Trento e la riforma tridentina*. Atti del Convegno Storico Internazionale, Trent 2–6 September 1963 (Rome: Herder, 1965), I, pp. 45–83, esp. 62–77, where Creytens discusses the papal interpretations of the intentions of the Council: Pius V, *Bull. Rom.* VII 447–50 "Circa pastoralis" (29 May 1566), VII 808–810 "Decori et honestati" (24 January 1570) and Gregory XIII, *Bull. Rom.* VIII 28 §2 "Deo sacris virginibus." See also Francesca Medioli, "La clausura delle monache nell'amministrazione della congregazione romana sopra i regolari," in *Il monachesimo femminile in Italia dall'alto medioevo al*

Civil authorities also provided resistence. They considered certain local religious matters to be largely their own affair and felt their authority threatened by interference from Rome. The governance of convents, homes to the daughters and aunts of virtually everyone, was one of the areas where they sought to exert local control. In 1421 Florence had established the Ufficiali di notte e conservatori dell'onestà dei monasteri (Officials of the curfew and the convent), whose initial charge, to pursue and punish sodomy, was extended to include safeguarding the convents, keeping secular persons out and religious women chaste. Pope Eugenius IV objected, but to no avail. This commission provided governors for the convents, nine men, all of whom had to be married and over fifty. Again in 1545 Cosimo I asserted his authority over local convents creating a new ministry, the Deputati sopra i monasteri (Deputies in charge of convents), consisting this time of four laymen to serve as overseers of the convents.[28] Other cities too – Venice was another important example – established their own magistracies for convent affairs, and such assertions of autonomy helped to undermine the authority of Rome in the matter of enclosure.[29] Local

secolo XVII a confronto con l'oggi, Atti del VI Convegno del "Centro di Studi Farfensi" Santa Vittoria in Matenano, 21–24 September 1995, ed. Gabriella Zarri (Negarine [Verona]: Il Segno dei Gabrielli Editori, 1997), pp. 249–82. On the reforms and their implementation in the convents, see Gabriella Zarri, "Gender, Religious Institutions and Social Discipline: The Reform of the Regulars," in *Gender and Society in Renaissance Italy*, eds. J. Brown and R. Davis, pp. 193–212, esp. 208–12 (also in "Monasteri femminili in Italia nel secolo XVI," *Rivista di Storia e Letteratura Religiosa* 33 (1997), 643–69, esp. 660–68).

[28] For the earlier commission see Gene Brucker, *Renaissance Florence* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1969), pp. 192–93, and *The Society of Renaissance Florence: A Documentary Study* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1971), pp. 206–12. On the actions of Grand Duke Cosimo I, see D'Addario, *Aspetti della Controriforma a Firenze*, pp. 132–44, 480–83 and Eric Cochrane, *Florence in the Forgotten Centuries 1527–1800* (University of Chicago Press, 1973), pp. 60–62. Cohen, *The Evolution of Women's Asylums* pp. 30–31, gives a brief description of the clash between ducal and ecclesiastical authority over reform of Florentine convents. Michael Rocke's study of the Ufficiali di notte e conservatori dell'onestà dei monasteri, *Forbidden Friendships: Homosexuality and Male Culture in Renaissance Florence* (Oxford University Press, 1996), mentions the convents only briefly (see pp. 46, 262n33, 269n11 and 273n79), since it is primarily concerned with the history of homosexuality and the policing of sodomy.

[29] In 1521 the Venetian Concilio dei Dieci created a commission to investigate convent protests against reforms. This temporary body was soon superseded by the Magistrato sopra i monasteri, a magistracy charged with the general supervision and administration of the convents, which was later to become the Provveditori sopra i Monasteri di monache. See Innocenzo Giuliani, "Genesi e primo secolo di vita del Magistrato sopra monasteri, Venezia 1519–1620," *Le Venezie francescane* 28 (1961), 42–68, 106–76, and Andrea Da Mosto, *L'Archivio di Stato di Venezia. Indice generale, storico, descrittivo ed analitico* (Rome: Biblioteca d' Arte Editrice, 1940) I, p. 202.

authorities were more responsive to appeals from the women and their families.

Convent chronicles and letters tell of the attempts to impose the reforms and of the nuns' resistance. Convent writers depict the last years of the sixteenth century as very difficult times.[30] In these years the Church sought to enforce reform with mortar. They strengthened the walls that separated convent women from the outside world. Windows and doors that gave onto city streets were closed up; all openings, even those to the external church, were double-locked, from the outside and from the inside, and the prioress kept the internal key. The parlor grilles, through which convent women spoke to their families, were covered with sheets of perforated metal or drapes, so that voices could be heard but speakers could not be seen nor could their hands touch. Church authorities, unrelenting in their insistence upon the enclosure of the convents, severely reduced the avenues of access to relatives and friends in the outside world that had earlier been available to convent women, and they instituted new levels of male authority which effectively eliminated the autonomy that religious women had previously enjoyed. As it became more difficult for lay persons to attend their ceremonies and feasts, the convents lost much of their former

[30] The letters of the Archbishop of Florence to the convent of the Murate in Florence reflect these difficulties (BNF, Corp. rel. sopp. 81, vol. 100). On 3 March 1576 Alessandro de' Medici, Archbishop of Florence and Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, wrote that the nuns of the Murate were "immured" ("murate") in name only and that they wanted permission for their confessor to be admitted to the convent on occasions other than those permitted in the decrees of the Council of Trent, which allowed the confessor in the cloister only to administer the sacraments (fol. 161r). Three years later the women were still resisting the changes. On 6 September 1579 the archbishop wrote to the abbess that the convent was not in compliance with the rules of enclosure. On the 23rd he wrote again, explaining that the pope had declared that all the nuns in the world must comply, not just the Murate, and on 4 December of the same year he wrote that he was happy to hear that the convent had finally agreed to comply (see fols. 139r–144r). The brief biography of Maria Grazia Centelli in the list of all the nuns of the Dominican convent of San Vincenzo in Prato contains the following comment regarding her first term as prioress, 1578–80: "the convent was much troubled by the authorities over enclosure, and the result was, for this convent and all the others, that if we did not observe enclosure and lock ourselves up, we would not be allowed to accept any new postulants. Therefore, even though some convents were not bound by their rule to observe such strict enclosure, and San Vincenzo was one of them, nevertheless we acquiesced in order to be allowed to accept new postulants," from *Le nostre sorelle*, Prato, Archivio di San Vincenzo, 168A, fol. 30, published by D. Guglielmo Di Agresti, O.P., in *Santa Caterina de' Ricci. Cronache. Diplomatica. Lettere varie* (Florence, Olschki, 1969), pp. 105–6. See also Craig Monson, *Disembodied Voices: Music and Culture in an Early Modern Italian Convent*, pp. 163 and 293nn30 and 31.

visibility.[31] Although the efforts to impose reform were never completely successful, the effects of the Council of Trent on women religious cannot be overestimated. One cannot generalize about convent life in the sixteenth century without distinguishing "before" and "after" Trent and keeping in mind that the line of demarcation is not clear.

Another feature of the convent in the early modern period is the way in which the class system of the outside world was reproduced inside. The majority of the nuns were regular, or choir nuns (variously referred to as *regolari*, *corali*, *professe*, *velate*), those who professed, that is, who took solemn vows. Belonging to the city's patrician families, choir nuns were provided with servants: lay sisters (*converse*, also called *servigiali*), lower-class women who did not take solemn vows. The latter often paid no dowry, only an amount for their support, which was sometimes supplied by the nuns in whose service they worked.[32] Choir nuns, as we had occasion to mention earlier, paid dowries, though they were far inferior to marriage dowries of women of their class. At the beginning of the sixteenth century a marriage dowry in Florence had reached 2,000 florins, while for the convent it was much lower, around 700 or 800 scudi, and lower still in the convents of nearby towns, Prato, for example.[33] The Council of Trent established an upper limit of 1,500 ducats, but supernumerary nuns (those who entered after the maximum number permitted by authorities had been reached) could pay as much as 2,500.[34]

Most nuns had jobs to perform in the convent. Some held high offices: prioress or abbess, subprioress or *vicaria*, novice mistress, convent recorder, sacristan, pharmacist. Others oversaw the workroom, the wardrobe, the infirmary, the parlor, the *ruota*, the kitchen, the cells and dormitory, and other aspects of convent organization. Only those whose families paid extra for the privilege were exempt from such

[31] Zarri, "Gender, Religious Institutions and Social Discipline," p. 210, and "Monasteri femminili in Italia nel secolo XVI," p. 664.

[32] See Russo, *I monasteri femminili* pp. 62–63.

[33] Chojnacki, "Daughters and Oligarchs," p. 77. D. G. Di Agresti, O.P., *Aspetti di vita pratese del Cinquecento* (Florence: Olschki, 1976), p. 38, and *Santa Caterina de' Ricci. Cronache – diplomatica – lettere varie*, p. xxvi. Zarri, "Monasteri e città," pp. 367, 422. Brown, "Monache a Firenze," pp. 127–29, gives a number of comparative examples and points out that the convent dowry could be much higher than the average in certain elite convents such as the Murate, where in 1493 Elena Orsini, sister-in-law of Alessandro Farnese, paid a dowry of 2,000 scudi (and even more money was later given to the convent by Alessandro), and in 1587 Leonora Cibo paid a 3,000 scudi dowry plus 960 scudi to buy new habits for all of the nuns.

[34] Russo, *I monasteri femminili* pp. 53–54. At Santa Chiara in Pistoia the dowry was 1,050 lire at the end of the sixteenth century (ASP, Conservatorio di S. Giov. Battista. Monastero S. Chiara 14, Libro giornale, 1561–1635, Entrate for 1594–99).

duties.[35] Especially in the seventeenth century, families who considered themselves noble paid for exemptions in order to give their daughters a mark of distinction even within the convent and because they found work of any sort inappropriate for their social status. The servant nuns performed the more menial convent tasks, certainly the cleaning and the cooking. Their number per convent was limited by Church authorities, but the choir nuns frequently petitioned to admit more.[36]

Convents helped to feed and clothe the poor;[37] and they were almost all engaged in child care. They took in young girls who could not be looked after at home, for which families paid them room and board until such time as their daughters could either properly return home, marry, or enter religious life. This practice was called *serbo* or *serbanza*, roughly translated "safekeeping."[38] Similarly, girls were sent to convents *in educazione*, for their education, which consisted most often of reading, needlework, and "the virtues," that is, the skills and comportment proper to their sex and station, which might also include writing, *abaco* (arithmetic), and even music. It was customary for their instruction

[35] For example, when Maria Maddalena Cristina de' Medici, the legitimated daughter of don Antonio (himself the natural son of Francesco I and Bianca Cappello), took the habit in the convent of San Giovannino delle Cavalieresse di Malta in 1623, the family paid an extra 300 scudi so she would not be obliged to do any work ("di disobligo da tutti gli ufizi," ASF, Corp. rel. sopp. 133, vol. 60 "Memorie del monastero di San Giovannino" by suor Maria Esaltata Ridolfi," p. 335). Enrica Viviani della Robbia was the first to recount what is known of the life of Maria Maddalena Cristina de' Medici in her *Nei monasteri fiorentini* (Florence: Sansoni, 1946), pp. 139–42. See Russo, *I monasteri femminili* p. 46, regarding the convent of Santa Chiara in Naples where many choir nuns claimed to be infirm in order to be excused from duties; when the situation came to the attention of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars (Sacra Congregazione dei Vescovi e Regolari), the Church body established in 1586 to deal with questions regarding members of religious orders , their privileges were revoked and it was decided that no others be granted (Cong. Vescovi e Regolari, Reg. Monial., 12, fol. 143v).

[36] Cardinal Alessandro de' Medici, BAV, Vat. lat. 10444, fol. 341v, notes that the unhappily "incarcerated" nuns always want more "servigiali," servant nuns.

[37] A common scene in convent drama is that in which a poor man or woman, a gypsy or other indigent, comes to the convent asking for food, usually willing to perform some service, often to sing a song or, in the case of a gypsy, to dance. See *Amor di virtú*, Act I, sc. 4, pp. 110–12; anon. Dominican nun, *Rappresentazione di S. Caterina di Colonia*, cod. Ricc. 2931, fols. 87r–88v; suor Annalena Odaldi, *Commedie delle monache di Santa Chiara*, cod. Ricc. 2976, vol. 6, 18r–19r, 50v–53v.

[38] The cost for their boarding and care (*vitto*) was 3 scudi (21 lire) per month at the Franciscan convent of San Girolamo in Florence in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries (ASF, Corp. rel. sopp. 96, vol. 29, dated 1612–21, fols. 74v, 88r, 92v, 98v and *passim*). Santa Chiara in Pistoia thirty to forty years earlier was charging only 150 lire per year (ASP, Conservatorio di San Giovanni Battista. S. Chiara 14, Libro giornale 1561–1635. Entrate for 1576–79).

to be entrusted to an aunt or another relative in the convent.[39] The young girls often stayed not only the time required for their basic education but, it seems, until their future could be decided by the family. In 1615, when Maria Maddalena Cristina de' Medici was five years old, she was sent for her education to San Giovannino delle Cavalieresse di Malta, which was near the family palace in Via Larga. There, according to the convent chronicle, she was assigned four nuns: three professed nuns taught her writing ("scrivere"), needlework ("i lavori"), and "the virtues" ("le virtú") and they arranged her hair, while a *conversa* cooked and cleaned for her, washed her clothes, and kept her company.[40] Being a member of such an important family, she received far more attention than was usual. She returned home in 1619, but in the fall of 1621 she was accompanied with great pomp and ceremony back to San Giovannino, where, after a short time in *serbanza*, she entered officially and later professed; the convent chronicle explains that her brothers paid all her expenses.[41] Following the Council of Trent, as part of the Church's attempt to discourage the practice of forced vocations, young girls were prohibited from taking monastic vows in the convent where they were educated. Obviously an exception to the rule was made in the case of this Medici girl.

Convents contributed to the city's economy. The schooling of

[39] See especially Gabriella Zarri, "Le istituzioni dell'educazione femminile," in *I secoli moderni. Le istituzioni e il pensiero*, vol. 5 of the series Le sedi della cultura nell'Emilia Romagna (Bologna: Federazione della Cassa di Risparmio e delle Banche del Monte dell'Emilia Romagna, 1987) and briefly also in her "Monasteri femminili e città," pp. 394, 422. On the nature of the curriculum and the purposes of convent education in Florence in the fifteenth century, see Sharon Strocchia, "Learning the Virtues: Convent Schools and Female Culture in Renaissance Florence," in *Women's Education in Early Modern Europe: A History 1500–1800*, ed. Barbara J. Whitehead (New York and London, Garland Publishing, Inc., 1999), pp. 3–46. For England, see Eileen Power, *Medieval English Nunneries* (Cambridge University Press, 1922), pp. 261–84. Russo, *I monasteri femminili* pp. 64–68, writes that in seventeenth-century Neapolitan convents most *educande* seem to have paid a yearly sum of around 50 ducats, but daughters of wealthy families occasionally paid as much as 100 to 130 ducats. Young girls were sent to study with relatives, often their aunts, or with religious women whose learning brought them to the attention of the outside world. The erudite seventeenth-century nun and writer Arcangela Tarabotti, for example, was entrusted with educating the daughters of the French ambassador to Venice (Arcangela Tarabotti, *Lettere familiari e di complimento* [Venice: Guerigli, 1650], pp. 190–1). For convent music education, see Monson, *Disembodied Voices*, esp. chapter 2, and Robert L. Kendrick, *Celestial Sirens: Nuns and their Music in Early Modern Milan* (Oxford University Press, 1996), esp. chapter 7, pp. 177–84.

[40] ASF, Corp. rel. sopp. 133, vol. 60, fol. 296. On Maria Maddalena Cristina, see also note 35 above.

[41] ASF, Corp. rel. sopp. 133, vol. 60, pp. 297, 314, 321–22, 325, 335, and 342. See also Viviani della Robbia, *Nei monasteri fiorentini*, p. 143.

young women provided income, and most houses had a workroom (*sala di lavoro*, *sala dei lavori*). There they did elaborate embroidery in silver and gold and lace work, often for liturgical use, but they also made veils, hairnets, various ornaments, and cloth for secular consumption.[42] Some convents specialized.[43] In Florence the Humiliate produced fine wool cloth; the nuns of Sant'Orsola made pharmaceuticals. The Dominicans of San Jacopo di Ripoli printed books, secular and religious; indeed, together with Dominican friars they ran the first printing press in Florence, 1476–84;[44] some convents had scriptoria

[42] Giuseppe Richa cites a preacher regarding the highly prized handiwork of the nuns of the Murate, which, he claimed, contributed to the vanity of women: "alcuni finissimi loro lavori d'oro, di argento, e di seta, cercati per la sua bontà anche da paesi lontani; ma perché essi se ne servivano le donne per fomentare la propria vanità, a quelle sacre vergini non dava egli la colpa." Archbishop Antonino, too, in a sermon of 10 March 1459, was "viemaggiormente zelante contra le *zacchere, reti, reticelle, rami di olivo di oro e di argento, e miniature*, che lavoravansi dalle Murate [Richa's italics]" *Notizie istoriche delle chiese fiorentine* (Florence: Stamperia di Pietro Gaetano Viviani, 1754), I, part ii, pp. 89–90.

[43] See Viviani della Robbia, *Nei monasteri fiorentini*, pp. 17, 21.

[44] On the press at San Jacopo di Ripoli, see the recent comprehensive study by Melissa Conway, *The Diario of the Printing Press of San Jacopo di Ripoli 1476–1484* (Florence: Olschki, 1999), a history of its publishing activities and the only complete transcription of the *Diario* of the press from 1476, when it begins *in medias res*, until 1484, when the Ripoli Press ceased to operate. The first to study the press was Vincenzo Fineschi, who discovered the *Diario*; see his *Notizie storiche sopra la stamperia di Ripoli* (Florence: Moücke, 1781). After Fineschi there were two more important early studies: Pietro Bologna "La stamperia fiorentina del monastero di S. Jacopo di Ripoli e le sue edizioni," *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana* 20 and 21 (1892 and 1893), 349–78 and 49–69, and *Il diario della stamperia di Ripoli*, ed. Emilia Nesi (Florence: Seeber, 1903). Recent studies include: Susan Noakes, "The Development of the Book Market in Late Quattrocento Italy: Printers' Failures and the Role of the Middleman," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 11 (1981), 23–55, esp. pp. 43–48; Mary A. and Richard H. Rouse, *Cartolai, Illuminators, and Printers in Fifteenth-Century Italy* (Los Angeles: Department of Special Collections, University of California Research Library, 1988), esp. pp. 34–56, 69–94; and the dissertation by Helen M. Latham, "Dominican Nuns and the Book Arts in Renaissance Florence: The Convent of San Jacopo di Ripoli, 1224–1633" (Ph.D. diss., Texas Woman's University, 1986). On the convent in general, besides Latham, see the study published by the Soprintendenza ai Beni ambientali e architettonici di Firenze e Pistoia on the occasion of the restoration of the outer church, *La chiesa di S. Jacopo a Ripoli. Restauro 1974–1976*, containing brief articles on the restoration by Nello Bemporad (pp. 7–15) and on the history of the convent and its artistic patrimony by Daniela Mignani Galli (pp. 19–39). The Ripoli press had a brief but distinguished history. It was run by Dominican friars with the aid of the nuns, who invested their dowries and did much of the labor – they are known to have worked as compositors. In the years of its activities Ripoli published, for example, the *Ars minor* or grammar of Donatus (1476), the biography of St. Catherine of Siena by Raimondo da Capua (1477), the *Confessionale volgare* (1477) of St. Antoninus, the archbishop of Florence, the *Liber illustrium virorum* (1478) then thought to have been by Pliny the Younger,

where they copied manuscripts.[45] Convents everywhere produced sweets; some distilled liquors too.[46] Richard Trexler and others have noted that nuns who in an earlier period had "sewn and woven," at the end of the Middle Ages began to devote themselves to "prayer and cult."[47] Yet they never gave up their economic activities completely. Through child care, teaching, artisanal production, and investments made with their dowry money, they contributed needed revenues to their houses to provide food and clothing for themselves and to pay for repairs, improvements, and art works for their convent and church. This source of income grew in importance after Trent when even the Third Order nuns could no longer personally seek alms in the city.[48] Convents owned property outside their walls which they leased and on which they earned rent and payment in kind. Gifts from wealthy secular patrons, especially those with daughters in the house, were a regular and essential source of income, food, and clothing.[49] Convent women, however, also satisfied many of their needs through their own work. The Franciscan nuns of Santa Chiara in Pistoia had to buy candles, quills, medicines, oil, spices, and for festive occasions meats from merchants. They themselves, however, sold wine and pigeons from their parlor; they made vestments and altar cloths, also for sale, and their

now attributed to Aurelius Victor, the *Ethics* of Aristotle with the commentary of Donato Acciaioli (1478), a lament for the death of Giuliano de' Medici (1478, 1479), Luigi Pulci's *Morgante* (1480 and 1482), Luca Pulci's *Driadeo* (1483), Boccaccio's *Decameron* (1483), an *Aesopus moralisatus* (1483), Ficino's translation of Plato's dialogues (1484), other secular works, and many religious texts, in all more than a 100 imprints, 40 of which were substantial productions (Conway, *The Diario of the Printing Press*, p. 19).

45 Strocchia, "Learning the Virtues," p. 8, mentions the scriptorium of the convent of Santa Maria del Fiore, known as Lapo, which flourished in the late fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries. Mirella Levi D'Ancona, *Miniatura e miniatori a Firenze dal XIV al XVI secolo. Documenti per la storia della miniatura*, preface by Mario Salmi (Florence: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 1962), p. 11, mentions the work of two Benedictine nuns of Sant' Ambrogio, the illuminator Angela di Antonio de Rabatti (active *c.* 1518) and her contemporary, the copyist suor Costanza. The *Cronache del venerabilissimo monastero di Santa Maria Annunziata delle Murate* (BNF II.II.509, fol. 88v), composed by Giustina Niccolini at the end of the sixteenth century, mentions that the convent of the Murate had several "scrittoi" situated above the loggia of the large courtyard. See also Latham, "Dominican Nuns."

46 For the sweets and other products of Bolognese convents, see the preface by Mario Fanti to his study *Abiti e lavori delle monache di Bologna in una serie di disegni del secolo XVIII* (Bologna: Tamari Editore, 1972).

47 Trexler, "Celebacy in the Renaissance," p. 7.

48 Creytens, O.P., "La riforma dei monasteri femminili," pp. 52, 75–76.

49 See Russo, *I monasteri femminili*, pp. 20–37, on the economy of Neapolitan convents. Archival documentation of these economic activities is abundant; see the *Entrate*, credit records, in convent books generally called *Ricordi*.