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978-0-521-62191-5 - Nuns' Chronicles and Convent Culture in Renaissance and Counter-Reformation Italy

K. J. P. Lowe

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Nuns' Chronicles and Convent Culture in Renaissance and Counter-Reformation Italy

This innovative and well-illustrated book analyses convent culture in sixteenth-century Italy through the medium of three unpublished nuns' chronicles.

The chronicle of Santa Maria delle Vergini (known as 'Le Vergini') in Venice was composed or compiled in 1523 of works by one or more anonymous Augustinian canonesses, the chronicle of the Benedictine Santa Maria Annunziata (known as 'Le Murate') in Florence was composed by Suora Giustina Niccolini in 1598, and that of the Clarissan convent of Santi Cosma e Damiano (known as 'San Cosimato') in Rome was written by Suor Orsola Formicini in 1607. The book uses a comparative methodology of 'connected differences' to examine the intellectual and imaginative achievement of these nuns, and to investigate how they fashioned and preserved individual and convent identities by writing chronicles. The chronicles themselves reveal many examples of nuns' agency, especially with regard to cultural creativity, and show that convent traditions determined cultural priorities and specialisms, and dictated the contours of convent ceremonial life.

KATE LOWE is Professor of Renaissance History in the Department of Historical and Cultural Studies, Goldsmiths' College, University of London. Her previous publications include *Church and Politics in Renaissance Italy: The Life and Career of Cardinal Francesco Soderini, 1453–1524* (1993); *Crime, Society and the Law in Renaissance Italy* (1994) and *Marriage in Italy, 1300–1650* (1998), both co-edited with Trevor Dean; and (as editor) *Cultural Links between Portugal and Italy in the Renaissance* (2000).

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Acknowledgements

I wrote my first article on nuns fourteen years ago. Casting around for a suitable topic on which to base a paper for the Ecclesiastical History Society's summer meeting on 'Women in the Church' in 1989, I decided to follow leads on Argentina Malaspina, the sister-in-law of Cardinal Francesco Soderini, who had taken a set of rooms in the Benedictine convent of Le Murate in Florence, when life in the Palazzo Vecchio with her husband, Piero Soderini, the *gonfaloniere a vita*, became overwhelming. Giuseppe Mazzatinti, *Inventari dei manoscritti delle biblioteche d'Italia* (110 vols. so far, Forlì, 1893–Florence, 1997), IX, p. 140 alerted me to the existence of a sixteenth-century chronicle of the convent written by a nun from Le Murate in the Biblioteca Nazionale in Florence, and for four heady weeks over Easter 1989 I transcribed it. Nuns' chronicles became my next project.

I should like to thank Brenda Bolton (for suggesting I write the paper in the first place), Amanda Lillie (for listening to my tales of the chronicle every night over Easter 1989), Anna Teicher (for allowing me to use her flat in S. Frediano) and Dorothy Serrin (for accompanying me to the newly opened bar inside the old complex of Le Murate and toasting all the inmates forced to live there five hundred years ago). All four have also provided support and friendship in various ways throughout the project. It also gives me pleasure to acknowledge the contribution of Eugene McLaughlin, who provided companionship and a contemporary perspective during the long years this book has taken to write.

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Acknowledgements

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Notes on the text

Please note that many well-known surnames have been standardised but some names have been maintained in their dialect form (in particular Venetian ones). First names of nuns have also sometimes been left in the form in which they appeared in the chronicles or other contemporary documents.

All dates in the text have been modernised, but obviously dates in documents etc. have been left in their original formulation. During this period, in general the Venetian calendar year started on 1 March, the Florentine calendar year started on 25 March, and the Roman calendar year on either 25 December or 1 January.

For ease of reading (although in reality nomenclature and forms of address were not consistent), all the inmates at Le Vergini have been called canonesses, and all canonesses from Le Vergini are referred to by the title 'Madonna', whereas inmates of the other two institutions are called nuns, and are referred to by the title 'Suora'.

Please note in addition that on account of the large amount of unpublished material I have as a rule only discussed the chronicles and convents of Le Murate, Le Vergini and S. Cosimato in the text, and have put all other comparative material into the footnotes.

Abbreviations

AAF	Archivio arcivescovile, Florence
ACRS	Archivio delle corporazioni religiose soppresse
AS	Archivio di stato
ASF	Archivio di stato, Florence
ASPVe	Archivio storico del patriarcato, Venice
ASR	Archivio di stato, Rome
ASVe	Archivio di stato, Venice
AV	Archivio segreto vaticano
b.	busta
BAV	Biblioteca apostolica vaticana
BL	British Library, London
BMCV	Biblioteca del Museo Correr, Venice
BNCF	Biblioteca nazionale centrale, Florence
BNCR	Biblioteca nazionale centrale Vittorio Emanuele II, Rome
cass.	cassetta
col.	column
CRS	Corporazioni religiose soppresse dal governo francese
<i>DBI</i>	<i>Dizionario biografico degli italiani</i> (58 vols. so far, Rome, 1960–)
edn	edition
Eubel	<i>Hierchia catholica medii aevi</i> (9 vols. so far; vols. I–II ed. Conrad Eubel; vol. III ed. Conrad Eubel and Wilhelm van Gulik; vol. IV ed. Patrick Gauchat; vols. V–VIII ed. Remigio Ritzler and Pirmin Seffrin; vol. IX ed. Zenone Pietà; vols. V–IX entitled <i>Hierarchia catholica medii et recentioris aevi</i> ; Munster and Padua, 1898–)
f.	folio
MAP	Medici avanti il principato
NA	Notarile antecosimiano
n.	note
no.	number or numero
perg.	pergamena

List of abbreviations

pt.	parte
reg.	registro
RIS	<i>Rerum italicarum scriptores</i> , i.e. L. A. Muratori ed., <i>Raccolta degli storici italiani dal Cinquecento al Millecinquecento</i> (34 tomes in multiple volumes and parts, new edn, Città del Castello, 1900–Bologna, 1943), ed. Giosuè Carducci, Vittorio Fiorini and Pietro Fedele
SMdV	Santa Maria delle Vergini
t.	tomo
tav.	tavola
Vat. lat.	MSS Vaticani latini
Le Murate	The chronicle of Le Murate composed by Suora Giustina Niccolini, in Florence, Biblioteca nazionale centrale, II II 509
Le Vergini	The chronicle of Le Vergini, in Venice, Biblioteca del Museo Correr, cod. Correr 317
S. Cosimato	The chronicle of S. Cosimato composed by Suor Orsola Formicini, in Rome, Biblioteca nazionale Vittorio Emanuele II, Fondi minori, MSS Varia 5