

Down to Earth or Near to Heaven?: Religious Practice in the Abruzzi, 1154-1313

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Abstract

For decades, medievalists have been interested in the Christian religion, as it manifested among western Europe's lay population. Specifically, they have considered the extent that institutional, Church norms were accepted on a local level. There have been a variety of answers to this question, ranging from the notion that popular practice largely aligned with official doctrine, to the theory that the majority of Europeans were not Christianized until the early modern era. This paper examines this question through the case study of Italy's Abruzzi region, between the years 1154 and 1313. The Abruzzi was a mountainous and rural part of Europe with a complex history. To date, it has largely been overlooked in the English literature. However, most Italian historians have adopted a largely dichotomous view of religion in the area. Namely, they contend that the majority of people practiced a "superstitious" religion fundamentally different from that of the institutional Church, viewed as the locus of "true" Christianity. This paper uses a combination of hagiographic and canonization material, in the original Latin, to argue that no essential difference existed between clerical and popular religion in the Abruzzi, and that instead, there was a duality of religious sensibility, one that aligned with an urban-rural split. Theoretically, it employs a distinction between "material"- and "spiritual"-based faith that refers respectively, to "old" and "new" piety, as understood in the context of changing ecclesiastical norms. It argues that rural areas remained "material" in their Christian outlook, while in the city of Sulmona, an increasingly "spiritual" faith was emerging. This was partly due to the impact of St Peter of Morrone, whose popularity helped disseminate "new" piety among the locals. Additional consideration is given to the ways that the physical was intimately linked to the immaterial. Examples of everyday religious practice are provided throughout.

Preface

In early 2018, I received the news that I was accepted into Brock's M.A. History program. Almost from the beginning, I knew with immediate certainty and excitement what I wanted to research.

The Christian Middle Ages has captured my imagination since at least the beginning of my undergrad, when I took Dr. André Basson's first year MARS course. This, I can see now, was partly due to my background. I am someone for whom Christianity has always meant a great deal, whether for better or worse. As a baby, I was baptized a Catholic and later spent the entirety of my elementary and high school years in Ontario's Catholic education system. To the youthful me, being a good Catholic was synonymous with being a good human – and this, I thought (and continue to think) was our greatest calling. Things were, however, complicated during adolescence, when I was introduced for the first time to Protestantism and Evangelical Christianity. Suddenly my Catholic worldview, that had been developed since childhood, was called into question. Was there more to Christianity (and therefore, life) than what I had been told? Finding the answer seemed both pressing and essential. Indeed, my curiosity led me on a quest for knowledge that continues to this day; my work "Down to Earth or Near to Heaven?" being the most recent concrete expression of it.

Needless to say, this journey took me to places that I never envisioned myself entertaining. The work of Émile Durkheim, in particular, with its emphasis on religion's social function, threw a wedge into what I now view as a rudimentary understanding of the phenomenon. It also went beyond theory, to the realm of my quotidian experience. For, as my media literacy increased, so did my awareness of the inextricability of religion from politics – a fact that I believe to be especially true of the United States, whose culture permeates Canada. The "final nail in the coffin", so to speak, was probably a combination of personal crisis and an honest look into evolutionary biology. The result was a Nietzschean declaration of triumph over the tyranny of superstition – never again, I resolved, would I be so naïve.

At some point in the past year, this perspective began to change, however slowly. What if I had been missing the point? It is frankly, a bit embarrassing to admit that despite several years studying the humanities as a university student, I somehow managed not to pick up on the discipline's primary aim. Indeed, the humanities are not so much an exercise in obtaining some objective Truth, with a capital "T", as they are a means of negotiating collectively, as a species, a picture of the universe, our role in it, as well as the best way to navigate and ultimately flourish there. This is something that I think all people should agree on, regardless of religious or political affiliation.

This is where I see the main significance of the present work. To be sure, the European Middle Ages were radically different from our own society; as modern westerners, we are extremely fortunate that the constant threat of deadly disease (COVID-19 notwithstanding) or starvation do not oppress our spirits, as it did people then. Nor is it the case that we deal ordinarily with war or violence, something that without a doubt, was much more the concern of our medieval counterparts. Yet, from another perspective, the people that inhabited the world of Peter of

Morrone and Franco of Assergi were no different from us, for we share with them some of the same fundamental concerns, such as those that touch issues of redemption, orthodoxy, morality, heroism, salvation, suffering, and death – all themes that are alluded to throughout this work.

Like medieval people, we have our own answers to these questions. But we would do ourselves a disservice to assume that there is nothing to learn from people who lived hundreds of years before us. To do so would show more naïveté than that which was felt by the Christian student who had his worldview unceremoniously torn to shreds some years ago.

I would like to thank some people. First, my parents and sister, for their unwavering love and support. I would not be as interested in the humanities today were it not for their inspiring and lofty example. I also thank my *nonni* Corrado, Elena, Francesco, and Amalia, who immigrated to Canada from Italy in the 1950's. Their story has influenced me greatly, by showing me the importance of family and perseverance. Indeed, this work is in many ways a dedication to them and the beautiful Catholic faith that they practiced throughout their lives both in Abruzzo and the Niagara Region. Thank-you also to my Master's supervisor, Dr. Colin Rose, as well as the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for their generous scholarship.

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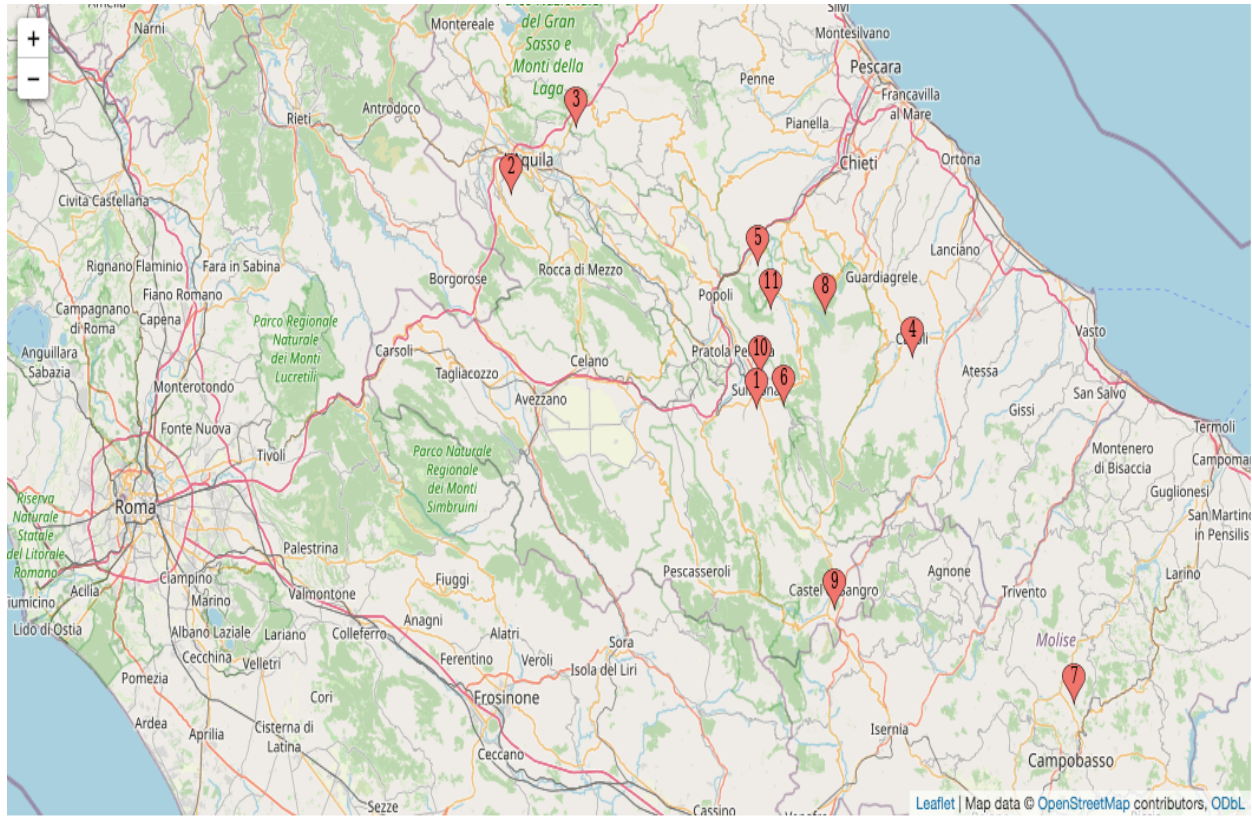
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Introduction

Compared to northern Italy, the Kingdom of Naples has received much less attention from English-speaking historians of later medieval religion.¹ This is perhaps due partly to its perceived status as a peripheral region. Existing on the fringes of Latin Europe, the South, with its overwhelmingly rural and mountainous landscape, seems to pale in importance with the communal north or France, where so many of the innovations associated with the later Middle Ages are held to originate. Indeed, the Kingdom remained quite conservative religiously, with the Cisterians arriving only from the 1190's,² and the very slow penetration of the mendicant orders, who did not establish a meaningful cultural presence until the fifteenth century.³ Additionally, the cult of saints remained traditional, as throughout the period, communities privileged long-held, often ancient, devotions, over newer medieval ones.⁴ This is in sharp contrast with central and northern Italy, which has been characterized as a “factory” of new

¹ Some relatively recent works are: Eleni Tounta, “Saints, Rulers and Communities in Southern Italy: the Vitae of the Italo-Greek Saints (Tenth to Eleventh Centuries) and their Audiences”, *Journal of Medieval History* Vol. 42.4 (2016): 429-455; Paul Oldfield, *Sanctity and Pilgrimage in Medieval Southern Italy, 1000-1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); G. A. Loud, *The Latin Church in Norman Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

² Loud, *The Latin Church*, 7.

³ Giovanni Vitolo, “Santità, Culti e Strutture Socio-Politiche” in *Pellegrinaggi e Itinerari dei Santi nel Mezzogiorno Medievale*, ed. Giovanni Vitolo (Naples: Liguori, 1999), 27. While the South did have its own reform movements of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, these tended overwhelmingly to morph into more traditional Benedictine observances. See, Loud, *The Latin Church*, 470. Two of the foremost proponents of the *vita apostolica* were the hermits William of Montevergine and John of Matera, who each extolled the virtues of strict asceticism, poverty, and manual labor. See, Loud, *The Latin Church*, 475, 477-78.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 23-33. The South's conservatism was apparently so pervasive, that in the Calabrian village of Pentadattilo, Tommaso Astarita has found that local customs dominated well into the eighteenth-century, despite attempts at state interference. See, Tommaso Astarita, *Village Justice: Community, Family, and Popular Culture in Early Modern Italy* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999). Pentadattilo was a village of widespread illiteracy, where the values of the institutional Church held little sway, and the centuries-old practices of the Greek rite remained strong. See Astarita, 34-41, 173-175, 172-181.

saints, and where the mendicants, from the early thirteenth-century, were stirring city-dwellers to novel forms of religious expression.⁵ At first glance then, the Kingdom of Naples might appear to offer little to a historiography so often preoccupied, at least in the twentieth-century, with explaining the origins of the Protestant Reformation;⁶ after all, how can the roots of social change be linked to an area generally immune to it?

However, historians are not exclusively interested in questions of “big change”. Thus, they have also produced local or even “micro” histories, as a means of understanding peripheral or overlooked cultures. Here, the work of Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie⁷ and Carlo Ginzburg⁸ are perhaps the most famous examples, but there is also an article from Julia M. H. Smith,⁹ which addresses the cult of saints in Brittany, that is instructive. Besides the fact that these studies are interesting in and of themselves, they can also be revealing in terms of the hegemonic institutions that, from the perspective of a remote town like Montailou, might seem distant and ineffective.

⁵ For the “factory” analogy, specifically, as it relates to the South, see Giovanni Vitolo, “Il Mezzogiorno come Area di Frontiera” in *Pellegrinaggi e Itinerari dei Santi nel Mezzogiorno Medievale*, ed. Giovanni Vitolo (Naples: Liguori, 1999), 11-23. For the later medieval “penance culture” of central and northern Italy, see Augustine Thompson O.P., *Cities of God: The Religion of the Italian Communes, 1125-1325* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2006).

Likewise, “new” religious orders, such as the Cistercians, flourished north of the Alps from the early twelfth century. See, C. H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism: Forms of Religious Life in Western Europe in the Middle Ages*, fourth edition (London: Routledge, 2015), 158-183.

⁶ The proof of this is seen in the fact that many of the most influential twentieth-century works on later medieval Christianity have come from historians of the early modern period. See, for example, Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1971); Jean Delumeau, *Catholicism between Luther and Voltaire: A New View of the Counter-Reformation* (London: Burns and Oates, 1977); Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580* (London: Yale University Press, 1992).

⁷ Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Montailou: Cathars and Catholics in a French Village 1294-1324*, trans. Barbara Bray (Bungay: Richard Clay (The Chaucer Press) Ltd., 1978).

⁸ Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, trans. John Tedeschi and Anne C. Tedeschi (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013).

⁹ Julia M. H. Smith, “Oral and Written: Saints, Miracles, and Relics in Brittany, c. 850-1250”, *Speculum* 65.2 (1990): 309-343.

Caroline Walker Bynum has placed this into sharper focus in her 2011 book on *Christian Materiality*. Indeed, during the later Middle Ages, the “spread of the parish system in the countryside [of Europe]” resulted in a fusion of popular and official practice, that placed greater theological emphasis on immanence.¹⁰ The Protestant Reformation is then viewed as a radical solution to the paradox of a religion that was turning simultaneously inward and outward. In this interpretation, the popular practice of a rural and remote region like the Kingdom of Naples, would have contributed in shaping Church doctrine – hardly irrelevant then, to the broader question of later medieval Christianity.

This thesis takes Bynum’s basic distinction between “interior” and “externalized” faith, and uses it to characterize popular religion in the later medieval Abruzzi, the northernmost region of the Kingdom of Naples. I have selected this area partly due to a dearth in the English scholarship, partly due to its peculiarity as a densely mountainous and remote area. As the land which connected Italy’s north and south, the Abruzzi were a frontier zone within a frontier zone.¹¹ They were thus, in theory, uniquely susceptible to the influence of central and northern Italy, and may be conceptualized as the meeting ground of cultures. It was the goal of this study to determine to what extent this is indeed true, and it has done so, in particular, by examining local religion.

My research question is: to what extent did local religion in the Abruzzi reflect a predominantly “material” or “spiritual” approach to Christianity? By “material”, I refer to all beliefs and practices rooted in the physical world; thus, interactions with relics and other holy objects, food, and places, as well as “practical” ritual, aimed at persuading the divine to provide

¹⁰ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe* (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 2011), 270-271.

¹¹ Vitolo, 33.

for one's mundane needs. I also include vicarious piety in this category, as it evoked an earlier time, before the "sanctification" of lay life, when individuals and communities relied predominantly on the prayers of contemplatives for grace. Incantations are also included. The descriptor, "material", thus does not directly encapsulate the full range of meaning that I have ascribed to it. More accurately, it is used as a catch-all term, for which it will be useful to conceive of a generally "traditional" religion, specifically, in contrast to the new piety emerging from the twelfth century. This last, I refer to as "spiritual" Christianity. Crucially, spiritual practice does not, for the most part¹², reject any material-based habits; rather, it exists alongside or in tandem with them. Thus, a belief is only considered material insofar as it functions "magically", and by this, I mean that the efficacy of the ritual is automatic and independent of any particular inner disposition. Indeed, spiritual practice includes all interior-based and individual-centred beliefs and practices, including private prayer, faith, belief, dreams, visions, fasting, religious vows, and morality-associated experiences and behaviours, such as, confession, conversion, and change of heart. These criteria were used to determine the extent that religion in the Abruzzi reflected the influence of ecclesiastical culture, which during the later Middle Ages, "spiritualized".¹³

Certainly, there are some weaknesses in this methodology. Specifically, by assuming that all spiritual behavior must indicate the penetration of later medieval Church ideals, it denies the possibility of a "home-grown" spiritual practice that predates the period. An instance of private prayer, for example, would be viewed as a later addition based on prevailing institutional norms,

¹² As will be seen, incantations could be viewed as problematic from a spiritual perspective.

¹³ This is well attested, and will be treated in more detail below. See, André Vauchez, *The Laity in the Middle Ages. Religious Beliefs and Devotional Practices* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993), 265-269.

when in truth, it may have a much older history in the region. This would be problematic, as it could lead to some mischaracterizations about the state of local religion. That said, for the purposes of this thesis, it was taken as a given that organic local religion existed *mostly* as a material phenomenon; or, in the words of Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M. Bell, was “essentially supplication, vicarious, turning upon the ritual function of priest and intervention of saints”;¹⁴ and, according to André Vauchez, reflected the idea that “a certain number of efficacious rites were supposed to generate bountiful harvests and protect the populace against natural calamities and enemy attacks.”¹⁵ It was also necessary, through close reading, to consider the context in which each practice appeared.

In terms of evidence, I drew primarily from various hagiographic texts produced in the Abruzzi between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries. This includes *vitae* as well as canonization material, specifically that of Peter of Morrone. I was concerned exclusively with hagiography written within one generation of a saint’s death. The use of saints’ *Lives* to shed light on local religion undoubtedly begs justification. To be sure, these are elite texts, both in terms of their clerical provenance, and the fact that the subjects they depict are, by definition, exceptional Christians. Yet, like Caroline Walker Bynum,¹⁶ I am nonetheless sensitive to the reality that they reflect aspects of a society’s exemplary religious values, by describing for us the people that constituted their pantheon of venerated heroes. Further, there is evidence that lay people themselves aspired to emulate saintly or monastic piety, whether through membership with a confraternity, which incorporated monastic culture into lay living, or the popular use of

¹⁴ Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M. Bell, *Saints and Society: The Two Worlds of Western Christendom, 1000-1700* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 170.

¹⁵ Vauchez, *The Laity*, 266-267.

¹⁶ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 7-8.

Books of Hours.¹⁷ *Vitae* are useful then, for determining the basic religious mentality of local people. Indeed, it was the masses who identified people as saints, not the Church, whose role was generally marginal.¹⁸

Additionally, there is the issue of historicity. It is no secret that the stories of saints are typically filled with miraculous events. However, this does not mean that they should be dismissed as having no historical value. Here, my thinking runs in the vein of Felice Lifshitz, who has drawn attention to the historiographical nature of what is usually called “hagiographical” writing.¹⁹ Nor should these texts be viewed, as has sometimes been done,²⁰ only as indications of perceptions of sanctity. Hence, Aviad Kleinberg is right to assert that there can be elements of these texts that reflect lived realities.²¹ For one thing, hagiographers (at least, the ones that wrote within a generation of a saint’s death) could not escape the fact that their work needed to satisfy people who had known the saint personally. Without concluding too much from this, it may be said (always depending on the case) that the general outline of a saint’s life can usually be taken as factual²², particularly when multiple independent sources

¹⁷ See, Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c.1400 –c. 1580* (London: Yale University Press, 1992), 209-233. There was undoubtedly a general feeling of reverence for institutional Christianity. The depth of later medieval Eucharistic devotion is further evidence of this, as veneration for Christ’s body and blood extended to the men who rendered it available to the masses - priests, who alone administered sacramental grace. See, Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 19.

¹⁸ Official canonization or condemnation of a cult was relatively rare in the later Middle Ages. See, André Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, trans. Jean Birrell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 91-99.

¹⁹ Felice Lifshitz, “Beyond Positivism and Genre: “Hagiographical” Texts as Historical Narrative”, *Viator* 25 (Jan 1, 1994): 95-113.

²⁰ See, Weinstein and Bell.

²¹ Aviad Kleinberg, *Prophets in Their Own Country: Living Saints and the Making of Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 50-69.

²² E. P. Saunders has proposed a list of facts about the historical person Jesus of Nazareth that are “almost beyond dispute”. Hence, it is taken as certain that Jesus was born around 4 BCE, spent

make the same claims²³, or when a detail contradicts the author's interests.²⁴ Thus, when the asceticism of Peter of Morrone is referenced by his hagiographer, other contemporary writers, as well as the lay witnesses that testified for his canonization enquiry, it is safe to conclude that this saint practiced asceticism.²⁵ Likewise, it is probably true that Franco of Assergi continued to ask for and receive money from his parents after becoming a monk, as this contradicts the image of the saint who has renounced all earthly ties.²⁶ There is also historical information to be gleaned about popular practice; I do not see any reason that hagiographers (again, depending on the case) would ordinarily fabricate descriptions of lay piety. They may have certainly exaggerated, or in rare cases invented details in an attempt at highlighting their subject's sanctity. Even in such cases, it is fair to assume that these descriptions were at least believable in the minds of the hagiographer and his audience, and therefore correspond, to some extent, to reality.

Saintly *vitae* also grant historians access to the mentality and theology of both the author and audience. Christian writers did not simply state narrative facts; they were also concerned with finding the religious significance in them. Thus, Bonaventure's *Legenda maior* not only provides us with information about the historical person of Francis of Assisi, but also reflects the author's theology of grace, his concept of *imitatio Christi*, and their relationship in the author's

his childhood in Nazareth, was baptized by John the Baptist, preached about the kingdom of God, and was executed on the orders of Pontius Pilate. E. P. Saunders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (London: The Penguin Press, 1993), 10-11.

²³ For example, Paul's letters were written before the Gospels, which themselves were composed before the collection and publication of his letters. Thus, the information about Jesus that is common to both sources is not likely to be fabricated. *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁴ Kleinberg., 66.

²⁵ For Peter's early hagiography, see Stefania Di Carlo and Ilio Di Iorio, *La Vita C: Ritorno alle Fonti Celestiniiane* (L'Aquila, 2002): 50-181.

²⁶ To temper this fact, the hagiographer reframed it in charitable terms, stating that a portion of the money was given to the needy. AS Junii 5, 2.

mind to Francis' story.²⁷ Carefully reading these sources with an eye to this aspect of the literature, allows us to piece together the religious mentality of the author, in addition to his audience.

The bulk of this thesis is based on the testimonies of witnesses for Peter of Morrone's canonization, as recorded by the Inquisition. A couple caveats must be addressed about this source. First, the depositions recorded are not word-for-word transcriptions of the witnesses' stories. Rather, they are the result of a clerical scribe listening to a person's vernacular testimony, switching from first to third person, and then translating the account into Latin. Clerical bias is thus an issue, and its effects can be seen directly, through the constant repetition of certain stock phrases. For instance, it is unlikely that in their depositions, people chose unanimously to describe miracles as worked "through the holy merits of brother Peter" (*per sancta merita fratris Petri*). Yet, this phrase is used ubiquitously throughout the text, and is nonetheless passed off as genuine. What this phrase actually indicates, however, is the clergy's attempt at reworking people's accounts in order to align with official Church teachings, namely, the idea that God worked miracles through the saint. This is quite problematic, especially considering that, as will be seen, there are indications that lay people held a more "magical" view of the mechanics of miracle.

If then, there were elements of people's testimonies that "got lost" in the scribal process, the question then becomes, how much? After several close readings of the source, my assumption is "very little." Indeed, despite some theological tempering, this is on the whole, a quite crude document. The anecdotes contained within are suggestive of day-to-day peasant life,

²⁷ Massimo A. Rondolino, "Prolegomena to a Comparative Reading of the Major Life of St. Francis and the Life of Milarepa", *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 35 (2015): 168.

with many witnesses providing the specific and banal details behind a miracle story, such as the woman Catania, wife of Giovanni, whose story begins with her spinning wool with her neighbors.²⁸ Not only this, but the testimonies are in general, strikingly frank when it comes to their theology, at times explicitly contradicting Church doctrine, as in the case of Giacomo di Pacentro, who testified that he asked Peter to say a spell over his relative.²⁹ The ecclesiastical filter is thus, not so strong as to suppress entirely the voices of the Abruzzi people. Their authentic voices mostly shine through, allowing a privileged look at later medieval religion in this area.

That said, how should the witness testimonies themselves be treated? Of course, the stories provided are non-exhaustive, and we may at any time and without notice be dealing with missing details, either due to memory lapse, willful silence, or accidental omission. It is also the case that facts may be either intentionally or accidentally distorted, giving us a picture that differs somewhat or even wholly from reality. In terms of willful distortion, this was likely rare, simply due to the general candidness of the accounts. But accidental omission or distortion surely took place, both because witnesses were asked to recall events sometimes several decades in the past, and because of the obvious fact that narrative requires the inclusion of some details to the exclusion of others. The former can be overcome by pointing out that what a person believes to have happened, independent of whether or not it truly did, indicates at least that they considered it possible or likely. Thus, if a witness falsely reports that he or she had a vision which spurred them to pursue Peter's aid, the veracity of this claim does not matter as much as the mentality that it reveals, namely, that visions were a part of this person's Christian repertoire,

²⁸ *Il Processo di Canonizzazione di Celestino V*, Alfonso Marini, ed. (Florence: Sismel, 2016), 55.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 167.

and that in this instance, its inclusion in the narrative seemed appropriate. The latter can be addressed in a similar manner; the details that a person chooses to include in his or her testimony indicate what they considered important to the story. In the end, whether dealing with truth or perception, the results of this inquiry reveal something about later medieval religion in the Abruzzi.

Historiography

Historians of later medieval religion in the Abruzzi have generally identified some recurring themes.³⁰ The most predominant is what I will call, to borrow from Peter Brown, the “two-tiered” model. According to this theory, the people of the Abruzzi practiced a religion fundamentally different from that of the institutional Church. Indeed, the latter is held to have espoused a predominantly spiritual faith, whereas the masses clung to their superstitious – at best, pagan at worst³¹ - world of instrumental ritual, aimed mainly at providing for their material needs. Importantly, the “spiritual” faith that is alluded to by these historians, differs significantly from my own conception. To quote Jacques Paul, ecclesiastical religion was “true” Christianity.³² It was that which resided firmly in the world of literacy, learnedness, and scripture. It was not “magical”, but moral, a thoroughly interior faith. Indeed, Raimondo Michetti has argued for the existence of two cultures, one ecclesiastical, and one peasant, with Peter of

³⁰ I have focused primarily on the literature addressing Peter of Morrone, which by implication, also addresses local Abruzzese religion.

³¹ Indeed, for Alfonso Marini, the widespread use of holy objects among the laity points to the survival of pagan ritual. See, Alfonso Marini, “Pietro del Morrone Monaco Negli Atti del Processo di Canonizzazione”, in *S. Pietro del Morrone, Celestino V nel Medioevo Monastico*, Atti del Convegno Storico Internazionale, L’Aquila, 26-27 agosto 1988, ed. Walter Capezzali, L’Aquila, 1989 (Convegni Celestiniani, 3), 88.

³² Jacques Paul, “Célestin V dans la Devotion Populaire” in *Celestino V Papa Angelico*, Atti del II Convegno Storico Internazionale, L’Aquila, 26-27 agosto 1987, ed. Walter Capezzali, L’Aquila, 1991 (Convegni Celestiniani, 2), 232.

Morrone caught in a position of ambiguity between the two. Thus, Peter added an interior component to his material cures, whereas his devotees only cared about the exterior.³³ According to George Ferzoco, in his analysis of Peter's canonization material, the Church took issue with the preponderance of references to popular practice in the document produced during the informative process. Hence, some of the more material-based cures were excised from the record in an attempt at cleaning it up.³⁴ Likewise, Alfonso Marini has said that references to the "faith" or "devotion" of people toward Peter were likely invented as a way of downplaying the religion of the masses, which, in contrast to the "interior" faith of Churchmen, was rich with "folklore".³⁵

The assumption of fundamental difference between official and local religion has shaped the way historians characterize Peter himself, especially if the former is held to be superior to the latter. Indeed, reading the literature, one gets the sense that they try to explain away Peter's regular involvement with ritual objects. Thus, for Ferzoco, Peter's behavior could be reduced to the fact that he was a people-pleaser, who embraced the magical worldview of his devotees only for their own sake.³⁶ Others, like Alessandra Bartolomei Romagnoli, have gone so far as to assert (in my view, without any evidence) that no, in fact, Peter did not carry out any instrumental

³³ Raimondo Michetti, "L'immagine della Santità in Alcune Fonti su Pietro del Morrone" in *«Magisterium et Exemplum»: Celestino V e le Sue Fonti Piu Antiche*, Atti del V Convegno Storico Internazionale, L'Aquila, 31 agosto – 1 settembre 1990, ed. Walter Capezzali (L'Aquila, 1991), 65.

³⁴ George Ferzoco, "Church and Sanctity: The Hagiographical Dossier of Peter of Morrone" in *Normes et Pouvoir à la Fin du Moyen Ages; Actes du Colloque "La Recherche en Etudes Medievales au Quebec et en Ontario"*, ed. M.C. Deprez-Masson (Montreal: Ceres, 1990).

³⁵ Marini, "Pietro del Morrone Monaco", 88.

³⁶ George Ferzoco, "Historical and Hagiographical Aspects of the Religious World of Peter of Morrone" in *S. Pietro del Morrone, Celestino V nel Medioevo Monastico*, Atti del Convegno Storico Internazionale, L'Aquila, 26-27 agosto 1988, ed. Walter Capezzali, L'Aquila, 1989 (Convegni Celestiniani, 3), 237.

cures.³⁷ This sentiment was echoed as recently as 2015 by Alfonso Marini, who claimed that Peter always supplemented exterior acts such as the signing of the cross, or the use of material objects in healing, with a corresponding instruction for interior change.³⁸ Curiously, Marini came closer to dealing squarely with Peter's material practice in his earlier work, where he argued that it was possible Peter simply shared a material-based mentality with the Abruzzi people. Still, even this was proposed only begrudgingly, as Marini simultaneously posited that the latter could also be reflective merely of "acceptance" of popular practice.³⁹ In short, the feeling of "unease" that Ferzoco ascribes to the clergymen examining Peter's dossier seems to have found a new home in medieval historians six hundred years later.

Historians have also commented on the significance of Peter's vocation as a whole, and here, the picture does not deviate far from that which depicts the saint as primarily a spiritual figure. Thus, for Romagnoli, Peter did not care at all about pastoral work. His true passion was for contemplation and worldly withdrawal, a stark contrast to the teachings of Peter Damian.⁴⁰ This sentiment is echoed by Robert Brentano, who views Peter's silence as his most important characteristic.⁴¹ The result seems to downplay the extent of Peter's preaching and involvement with lay people.

³⁷ Alessandra Bartolomei Romagnoli, "Religione popolare e Magia nei Miracoli di Celestino V" in *Celestino V tra Storia e Mito*, ed. W. Capezzali, L'Aquila, 1994 (Convegni Celestiniani, 7), 48.

³⁸ Alfonso Marini, "Introduzione" in *Il Processo di Canonizzazione di Celestino V*, eds. Alessandra Bartolomei Romagnoli and Alfonso Marini (Florence: Sismel, 2015), 58.

³⁹ Marini, "Pietro del Morrone Monaco", 87.

⁴⁰ Alessandra Bartolomei Romagnoli, *Una Memoria Controversa. Celestino V e le sue Fonti, Quaderni di «Hagiographica» II* (Florence: Sismel, 2013), 247.

⁴¹ Robert Brentano, "Sulmona Society and the Miracles of Peter of Morrone" in Sharon Farmer and Barbara H. Rosenwein, eds. *Monks and Nuns, Saints and Outcasts: Religion in Medieval Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 79-96. See also Robert Brentano, "Peter of Morrone, Space, and the Problem of Relics" in William L. North, ed. *Bishops, Saints, and*

Conclusions

After several close readings of the sources, I have come to the following conclusions about Peter of Morrone and religion in the Abruzzi. First, that, unlike the view of these scholars, religion here shared more with its ecclesiastical counterpart than it did not. Indeed, this was not a case of two fundamentally different faiths. Rather, all people, regardless of social background, agreed on key concepts, such as the role of vicarious piety, the use of instrumental ritual, and the basic association of spiritual greatness with holiness. This is a key point that has been missed in the historiography, and which frankly, accounts for historians' messy attempts at explaining why Peter, who is viewed as a stand-in for the Church, seemed to embrace material-based faith enthusiastically. After all, how could a saint, who is supposed to be the epitome of spiritual greatness, believe in something so "superstitious" as the thaumaturgical use of wooden crosses? Second, I found that - and here I give some credit to the "two-tier" model, albeit with an important qualifier - that there were significant differences between the religious outlook of the general population and that of the institutional Church, and this includes Peter.⁴² Rather than a difference of basic religion or culture, this is more aptly described as a gap in "sensibility". For, as the Church advocated an increasingly spiritual approach to religion, the masses of the Abruzzi, for the most part, remained attached to their material-based, yet authentically Christian, preoccupations. This was especially true of the region's rural areas. However, in the urban centre of Sulmona, a new piety was emerging that was reflective of more general later medieval trends. This was due partly to the peculiarities of city life, which saw greater literacy and wealth. It was

Historians: Studies in the Ecclesiastical History of Medieval Britain and Italy (Routledge, 2008), 75-80.

⁴² As I argue below, Peter must be viewed as a representative of Church culture *par excellence*, since he was canonized by the Holy See.

also a result of the teachings and popularity of Peter of Morrone, who, in his interactions with local people, challenged them to adopt a more spiritually focused faith. It is not right then, to assume that Peter's status as a hermit meant he did not engage meaningfully with the world. This is not the overall picture that emerges from the sources, which attest to the importance of his spiritual teachings. Altogether, my argument aligns the closest with that of Jacques Paul, who correctly identified the existence of both spiritual- and material-minded lay people in the Abruzzi.⁴³

Religious Background

The relationship between the material and the spiritual has a complicated history in Christian thought. To what extent should Christians interact with and make use of the material world, and to which extent should they suppress it, in favor of the spiritual? First, there were the theological arguments. On the one hand, it seemed, Christians were called to repudiate the world. Thus, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor..."⁴⁴; and: "For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it."⁴⁵ At the same time, Christians could not dwell too long on the evils of the material world without falling into cosmic dualism, which had been denounced as heresy since Late Antiquity.⁴⁶ Indeed, acting as a counter, was the doctrine of the Incarnation, which held that God himself had descended to earth to inhabit a human body in the form of Jesus Christ.⁴⁷ The flesh and bones of

⁴³ Paul, "Célestin V", 220-221.

⁴⁴ Mt 19:21 NIV.

⁴⁵ Mt 16:25 NIV.

⁴⁶ For Gnosticism, see, Kevin Madigan, *Medieval Christianity: A New History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 4-7.

⁴⁷ This necessitated an understanding of the body as made in the image of God, a body that was fated to be reunited with its creator. Kevin Corrigan, "Christian Asceticism: Mind, Soul and Body" in *A History of Mind and Body in Late Antiquity*, eds. Anna Marmodoro and Sophie Cartwright (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 228.

this man, it had to be conceded, were divine; this affirmed the possibility of holy matter, and indeed reaffirmed what was already believed about saint relics.⁴⁸ In addition, throughout his ministry, Jesus healed the sick, cleansed lepers, and dined with prostitutes and tax collectors. Far from retreat from the world, then, Jesus engaged fully in some of its most shocking undercurrents. The material world, it seemed, was not to be eschewed, but loved. Thus, Christians could hope that one day, in the ultimate sign of love for his creation, God would resurrect their uncorrupt bodies to be united with himself, a fact which they symbolized evocatively in the sacrament of the Eucharist.⁴⁹ This tension can be seen in St Paul's own thinking, who, on the one hand, made statements like, "For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh", while also believing that the Spirit was, in real time, transforming Christians in body and spirit.⁵⁰

But this was also an issue that extended beyond theology, to the realm of people's basic assumptions about the world. Thus, there existed the ancient, western Mediterranean belief that nature was inherently good and divine, alongside an equally strong Neoplatonist impulse, which held matter to be evil and thus God's opposite, an idea that achieved mainstream prominence due to the legacy of Augustine of Hippo.⁵¹ In other words, this was a deep-seated tension, whose trickiness would result in diverse practices throughout the Christian Middle Ages.

Perhaps one of the starkest expressions of the world-rejecting tendency was the culture of early medieval monasticism. Inspired by the examples of the Desert Fathers, men and women

⁴⁸ Bynum, *Christian Materiality*, 33.

⁴⁹ Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336*, expanded 2017 edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 56.

⁵⁰ Corrigan, 228-229.

⁵¹ See, Giovanni Catapano, "Augustine" in *A History of Mind and Body in Late Antiquity*, eds. Anna Marmodoro and Sophie Cartwright (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 343-373.

left the world behind and retired to monasteries and nunneries, where they devoted themselves to lives of regular observance, involving asceticism, prayer, and manual labor.⁵² One of the most valued aspects of monastic living, however, was the contemplatives' devotion to chastity, which represented the essential boundary between the world of the spirit and the flesh.⁵³ Hence, monks and nuns were expected to abstain from sexual intercourse for the duration of their lives, a fact that distinguished them from the rest of the ordinary faithful, who generally were relegated to the bottom of the spiritual hierarchy due to their status "in the world" as married, non-chaste people. For these last, one of the only hopes of propitiating God came vicariously through the contemplatives (and their heavenly counterparts, the saints), whose repudiation of the flesh granted them privileged access to the divine.⁵⁴

That said, from about the year 1000, a new religious sensibility was developing, one that was more friendly to the body and material world. Thus, by the later Middle Ages, Eucharistic piety with its emphasis on corporality became an integral part of western Christian practice. Holy men and women now sought to imitate Christ in body as well as mind. Indeed, rather than impede one's spiritual journey, the body became for some an especially potent locus of spiritual greatness.⁵⁵ Thus, Bonaventure wrote that Francis' spiritual journey reached its apogee when he received from God the holy stigmata, that is, the exact wounds that Christ himself had bore at the Crucifixion miraculously appeared on Francis' own body.⁵⁶ Likewise, holy women such as

⁵² At least, according to the Benedictine Rule, whose observance was the most widespread throughout western Christendom. Madigan, 52-53.

⁵³ Weinstein and Bell, 73.

⁵⁴ To be sure, one's local priest also played an important role as the guarantor of the various "sacramentals", such as the eucharist, sacraments, and other prayers and blessings. Madigan, 85.

⁵⁵ Bynum, *Holy Feast*, 252.

⁵⁶ Saint Bonaventure, "Legenda maior" in *The Little Flowers of St. Francis; The Mirror of Perfection; St. Bonaventure's Life of St. Francis* (J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1973), Chapter 13.2 – 13.10.

Margaret of Cortona and Angela of Foligno, understood their *imitatio Christi* in bodily terms; indeed, as a means of sharing in Christ's passion, the former reportedly sought to disfigure her own face, while for the same reason, Angela of Foligno could “hardly refrain” from beating herself.⁵⁷

Alongside the turn to corporality came an increasing acceptance of lay life. Thus, by the fourteenth century a new model for Christian living was articulated, that mapped out a vision of the individual soul's journey to God through the practice of virtues and the sacraments of the Church.⁵⁸ Rather than depend wholly on the intercession of others (such as monks and saints) for grace, ordinary people themselves could now lead lives pleasing to God despite their lay status.⁵⁹ In other words, living fully “in the world” as a person engaging in sexual intercourse was no longer an automatic forfeit of one's spiritual potential. Thus, preachers began to expound with new enthusiasm the ways that ordinary people such as, husbands, wives, merchants, and knights, could all gain eternal life.⁶⁰ And female beguines and tertiaries combined a life of partial renunciation and charitable service conducted fully within a lay context,⁶¹ while in the cities of north and central Italy, penitential groups such as that which coalesced around the church of S.

⁵⁷ Daniel Bornstein, “The Uses of the Body: The Church and the Cult of Santa Margherita da Cortona” in *Church History* Vol. 62, No. 2 (1993): 165; Angela of Foligno, *Memorial*, trans., Paul Lachance in Paul Lachance and Romana Guarnieri, *Angela of Foligno: Complete Works* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1993), 197.

⁵⁸ Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 17.

⁵⁹ To be sure, this was hardly a uniform development, as the sacraments themselves (and thus, the grace conferred through them) entered increasingly under the exclusive control of the clergy. Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 19.

⁶⁰ Sermons preached *ad status* addressed the particular spiritual needs of one's own social group. See, Carolyn Muessig, “Audience and Preacher: *Ad Status* Sermons and Social Classification” in *Preacher, Sermon and Audience in the Middle Ages.*, ed. Carolyn Muessig (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 255-276.

⁶¹ Carol Neel, “The Origins of the Beguines,” *Signs* Vol. 14, No. 2, Working Together in the Middle Ages: Perspectives on Women's Communities (Winter, 1989), 321-341.

Desiderio near Vicenza, lived humble lives of charity, while simultaneously retaining their secular profession.⁶²

Nonetheless, there remained within medieval Christianity a level of dualism that tended to relegate the body and material world to an inferior sinful state, as Augustine of Hippo had done centuries earlier.⁶³ Thus, it was also during the later Middle Ages that western Europe saw a resurgence and reformation of traditional monasticism.⁶⁴ Perhaps in protest to a rising commercial economy⁶⁵, men and women sought with renewed enthusiasm to escape the sin of the world, reshaping or returning to the original Benedictine vision to demand a greater austerity of living. Out of this movement was born groups like the Cistercians, for whom manual labor, poverty, and worldly retreat were paramount.⁶⁶ Indeed, the eleventh and twelfth centuries saw in general, a strong impulse toward the “desert” and the harsh asceticism and solitude that this entailed. A principle example is the later medieval eremitic movement, in which the monks of new monastic foundations such as Vallombrosa and Camaldoli, lived solitude-based lives within the context of group living.⁶⁷ There were also so-called “wild” hermits, such as the ascetic Torello of Poppi, whose flight to the solitude of the Tuscan Appenines never formally coalesced into a community of followers. One of these, Franco of Assergi, was active in the Abruzzi in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and will be dealt with in Part 1.⁶⁸

⁶² Thompson O.P, 72-74.

⁶³ Giovanni Catapano, “Augustine” in *A History of Mind and Body in Late Antiquity*, eds. Anna Marmodoro and Sophie Cartwright (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 343-373.

⁶⁴ Lawrence, 135-153.

⁶⁵ Madigan, 125.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 167-68.

⁶⁷ Lawrence, 183-86.

⁶⁸ All this said, one must nonetheless be wary of simply conflating asceticism and solitude with a distaste for the material as it appeared in material *objects* such as the eucharist and saint relics. Although the newly reformed monastics increasingly shut themselves off from the world, there nonetheless remained strong belief in and veneration of the bodily or contact relics of holy

Local Context

Like the rest of the Kingdom of Naples, the Abruzzi underwent an expansion of Benedictine monasticism in the later Middle Ages. Thus, from the eleventh century, abbeys such as that of San Clemente a Casauria, were rising to new prominence, to the detriment of bishops. On the one hand, these institutions were benefitting from large-scale lay giving in the form of land and especially church buildings⁶⁹; while on the other, they were consciously expanding their territory and influence, by building churches near to the many newly formed fortified communities.⁷⁰ A consequence was that monks, not the secular clergy, distinguished themselves as the primary exercisers of pastoral care.⁷¹ It is important to note that, like the rest of the South, the growth of monasticism in the Abruzzi translated overwhelmingly into a resurgence of traditional Benedictine practice, and it was only from the 1190s that reforming groups like the Cistercians began to play a significant role in the area.⁷² There was one exception, however: a community of hermits founded on the Maiella mountain around 1010 called San Salvatore.

people. Increasingly in the later Middle Ages, this included relics believed to have belonged to Jesus, Mary, and other New Testament figures. See, Charles Freeman, *Holy Bones, Holy Dust: How Relics Shaped the History of Medieval Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 94-186. Indeed, as Caroline Bynum has shown, preoccupation with immanence grew increasingly strong into the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. See, Bynum, *Christian Materiality*, 270-71.

⁶⁹ Laurent Feller, *Les Abruzzes Médiévales: Territoire, Économie et Société en Italie Centrale du IXe au XIIIe Siècle* (Rome: École française de Rome, 1998), 825. This was spurred by contemporary notions about the sinfulness of lay ownership of churches. See, Loud, *The Latin Church*, 432.

⁷⁰ Feller, *Les Abruzzes Médiévales*, 840. Sometimes these churches were even staffed by teams of monks, rather than secular clergy. See, Loud, *The Latin Church*, 457. An example of one of these new monastic churches is that which was founded near Pacentro, by the eleventh-century hermit Adalbert, on behalf of the abbey of San Clemente. See, Feller, *Les Abruzzes Médiévales*, 837.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 839-40.

⁷² Loud, *The Latin Church*, 488. The first Cistercian monasteries were established in the Abruzzi in the 1190s.

Unlike the other contemporary eremitic foundations of the South, the Maiella hermits remained, throughout the twelfth century, devoted to the anchoritic ideal, presumably with each monk living in his own individual cell.⁷³ Nonetheless, even this community was traditional in its administration, as it quickly became a significant land-owner in the region and maintained close ties with local secular rulers.⁷⁴

In terms of cultural influence, here in the north of the Kingdom, the situation was quite unique. To be sure, the impact of Eastern Christianity was felt⁷⁵, and there was an Italo-Greek community of monks, originally from Calabria, established near Casoli (modern-day province of Chieti); the town of Guardiagrele even adopted as its patron one of its holy monks, Nicola Greco (d. c. 1012).⁷⁶ Still, this was not a historically Greek region of Italy - at least, not to the extent that a place like Calabria was. Rather, what likely pulled more on the Abruzzi imagination was the influence of nearby Lazio and Umbria. Indeed, Bianca Lopez has found that the Franciscan piety of an aristocratic Sulmona woman resembled practice in contemporary Lazio, suggesting a common zone of central Italian religion.⁷⁷ This seems probable. For instance, the local mendicant influence was, at least in terms of number of convents, more pronounced here than in the rest of the South, perhaps due to proximity with Umbria. Indeed, the history of the Franciscan order in the Abruzzi begins with Francis himself, who travelled through the region, reaching places like

⁷³ Ibid., 482.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 482-83.

⁷⁵ Paolo Golinelli has pointed out that the description of Peter of Morrone's asceticism borrows from that of the fifth-century eastern saint Simeon Stylites. See, Paolo Golinelli, "Monachesimo e Santità: i Modelli di Vita di Celestino V" in *San Pietro del Morrone. Celestino V nel Medioevo Monastico*, Atti del III Convegno Storico Internazionale, L'Aquila, 26-27 agosto 1988, ed. Walter Capezzali, L'Aquila 1989 (Convegni Celestiniani, 3), 64.

⁷⁶ Gennaro Luongo, "Itinerari dei Santi Italo-Greci," in *Pellegrinaggi e Itinerari dei Santi nel Mezzogiorno Medievale*, ed. Giovanni Vitolo (Naples: Liguori, 1999), 53.

⁷⁷ Bianca Lopez, "Between Court and Cloister: The Life and Lives of Margherita Colonna," *Church History* 82.3 (September 2013): 572-73.

Pescina and Celano, and likely many more along the way.⁷⁸ Despite its sparse and rural population, the Abruzzi would go on to house a surprisingly large number of Franciscan settlements, even in the thirteenth-century.⁷⁹ In 1283, for example, the Franciscan Province of Penne, which stretched from the Tronto river in the north, to the Sangro river in the south, contained some forty-nine convents. For comparison, this is roughly equal to the number in Tuscany, where Francis had received the stigmata and dictated part of his Testament,⁸⁰ and nearly double that of Sicily in the following century.⁸¹ An additional indication of a central Italian religious zone is found in the cult of saints, as in the fifteenth century, the city of L'Aquila resembled more an Umbrian community like Assisi, when its people chose to venerate alongside their ancient protectors the medieval saints Bernardino of Siena and Peter of Morrone, in such aligning themselves with trends then dominant north of the Tronto.⁸²

Despite all of these external influences, the Abruzzi remained by and large isolated from the outside world. Indeed, despite its proximity to Rome, the region overall maintained little contact with the Eternal City, as well as with the rest of the peninsula.⁸³ This it owed to geography. The Abruzzi was an extremely isolated and remote area, hedged in on one side by the dense Appenine mountains, and the Adriatic Sea on the other - only with difficulty did one travel to or from the Abruzzi. Not even within the region itself was movement easy, as its various sub-

⁷⁸ Felice di Virgilio OFM, *Insedimenti Francescani in Abruzzo nel Duecento e Sviluppo nel '300 e 400 con la Riforma Osservante* (CITY: Global Academic Publishing, 2000), 2. By 1241, the city of Sulmona was itself home to a Franciscan community. See, Ezio Mattiocco, *Struttura Urbana e Società della Sulmona Medievale* (Sulmona, 1978), 31.

⁷⁹ Most of these however, were in non-mountainous areas; that is, in the modern-day provinces of Teramo, Pescara, and Chieti. See, Di Virgilio, 13-14.

⁸⁰ John Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order From its Origins to the Year 1517* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 159.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 160.

⁸² Vitolo, 33.

⁸³ Feller, *Les Abruzzes Médiévales*, 87.

regions were in general, poorly linked.⁸⁴ It is perhaps unsurprising then, that the political⁸⁵ and social⁸⁶ history of the Abruzzi diverged significantly from that of the rest of the peninsula.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 87-88.

⁸⁵ In the later sixth century, the territory of the Abruzzi became part of the Lombard Kingdom through its inclusion in the Duchies of Spoleto and Benevento. The former included territory stretching roughly from Sulmona to Assisi, while, at its height, the latter extended from Apulia to Ortona. The Duchy of Spoleto eventually fell to Charlemagne in 776, and would remain attached with northern Italy as part of the Franco/German Kingdom until the Norman conquest in the eleventh century. See, Wickham, 28-63. By the year 1200, the region was fully integrated into the newly formed Kingdom of Naples, linking the Abruzzi politically with the south, rather than the north, of Italy, thus drastically shifting its historical trajectory. See, Laurent Feller, “The Norman Frontier of Norman Italy, 1060-1140” in *The Society of Norman Italy*, eds. Graham A. Loud and Alex Metcalfe (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 47-73. Indeed, the Abruzzi would remain part of the southern Kingdom until Italian unification in the nineteenth century.

⁸⁶ In terms of local social structure, the defining feature is the process of *incastellamento*. For a classic study of the phenomenon as it manifested in Lazio, see, Pierre Toubert, *Les structures du Latium médiéval. Le Latium méridional et la Sabine du 9e siècle à la fin du 12e siècle* (Rome: L'École française de Rome, 1973). From the late tenth century, imperial authority in the Abruzzi began to weaken, paving the way for alternate power-holders. Thus, local lords started to consolidate land, and the people who worked it, around independent fortified villages (*castra* or *castella*). The result was a strong hierarchical system with the organization of society around several centers. Importantly, this spelled the end of the old Carolingian order, which was based on the free peasant smallholding, a system then dominant in Tuscany. With the Norman invasion, a new system was established that further tightened the control *incastellamento* lords had over their peasants, making the Abruzzi seigneurial regime one of the strictest in central Italy. See, Feller, “The Norman Frontier”, 47-73.

Part 1

Hermits, Wild Animals, and Heavenly Bells: The Stories of Franco of Assergi and Peter of Morrone

Franco of Assergi was born sometime between 1154 and 1159 and lived into the first half of the thirteenth century. His life details are known to us primarily through his saintly *vita*, whose inclusion in the Bollandists' *Acta sanctorum* has been my center of attention. Born to an affluent family in the town of Roio Piano (modern-day province of L'Aquila), Franco entered the monastery of San Giovanni di Collimento as a monk, where he remained for twenty years, before fleeing to the Appenine wilderness in search of solitude. Here, he lived among the bears in a state of prayer and quiet. He soon attracted devotees from the surrounding area, which forced him to relocate, eventually settling in a cave above the town of Assergi. Franco could not escape the people's devotion, however, as he would enjoy a saintly reputation for the remainder of his life, and proceeded to become the patron saint of Assergi after his death.⁸⁷

The *vita* of Franco of Assergi survived in a thirteenth-century manuscript in Assergi's parish church at least until 1791. Today, there are five extant copies.⁸⁸ I have consulted the version from the Bollandists' *Acta sanctorum, Junii Tomus Primus*. According to the *Commentarius praeivus*, the text was probably written by an Assergi clergyman not long after Franco's death.⁸⁹ Overall, this hagiography tells a story more or less consistent with the eremitic movement of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Firstly, we are told that the young Franco is given over to the presbyter Palmerio to study letters; his parents likely envisioned a bureaucratic career for him, where he could rise through the ranks of administration to worldly greatness. Franco's own plan apparently differed. One day, when their parents were not around, Franco's older brother forced him to watch over the family's sheep, perhaps out of jealousy. Franco

⁸⁷ Stéphane Di Domenico, "Entre le Désir de la Montagne et les Appels du Village: Franco d'Assergi, ermite du Gran Sasso (XIIIe siècle)", *Médiévales* 28 (Spring 1995), 44-5.

⁸⁸ Di Domenico, 41.

⁸⁹ AS Junii 5, preamble.

complied for a time, ultimately deciding, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, to seize the opportunity and become a monk in the nearby Benedictine monastery of San Giovanni di Collimonto. There, he entered under the tutelage of abbot and family friend Luculano, and worked toward finishing the rest of his studies.⁹⁰

Franco's parents were unhappy when they found out. This was not the life that they had envisioned for their son, and they often cried, begging him to return. Like his contemporary Francis in nearby Umbria, Franco faced the difficult decision of contradicting his family's wishes. We are told that he decided to stay in the monastery, but continued to ask for money from his parents. When asked by the abbot why he so eagerly continued to receive goods from his kin, he is said to have responded, "Since I am their son, they owe me much of their means."⁹¹ As mentioned above, the hagiographer takes the opportunity to make a point about the saint's generosity. In such, the sanctifying process is clearly visible. Utterly convinced of this person's holiness, the clergyman writing Franco's biography reads and recounts anecdotes from his youth, likely preserved through oral tradition, through this interpretive lens. Indeed, one gets the sense that Franco's relationship with his family quickly soured after rejecting their will. Franco now had a new family, a spiritual one, in the monks of San Giovanni, and he heeded his earthly parents only insofar as he had a right to their money.

Ten years later, Franco was elected unanimously as the monastery's abbot. Apparently, he refused the position, and whenever the monks tried to persuade him into accepting other high-ranking positions, always gave the same answer. Next, the hagiographer skips ahead twenty years. It was then that Franco was allegedly inspired by John the Baptist and the Desert Fathers

⁹⁰ Ibid., 1.

⁹¹ "*Si eorum sum filius, plura mihi de eorum facultatibus debentur.*" Ibid., 2.

to leave San Giovanni and become a hermit in the wilderness. We are told that he left in the middle of the night, taking with him only a breviary, nine loaves of bread, a handful of salt, a dish for food and a flask for drink. The author assures us that Franco received the necessary authorization to make this move. Why then, did he need to leave during the night, “while the brothers were sleeping”?⁹² Here, the writer appears caught between depicting the saint as obedient, one of the Benedictine order’s foremost values, and telling the story as it happened. Did Franco have the assent of some of the monks, but not the abbot? Did he tell the abbot? We will never know for certain. But the contradictions in the narrative suggest that there may have been more to the story than is presented.

With the help of a bear who led him to the spot, Franco settled down in a cave deep within the forest, which is described as being “hedged in by sharp thorns” and having “a hollow oak stump filled with extremely clear water”.⁹³ It had been the home of a previous hermit. As this location’s new steward, Franco became next-in-line in a local tradition that ostensibly dated at least to the eleventh century, when western Europeans first began in earnest to return to the wilderness in search of spiritual retreat. Growing up in the later twelfth century, Franco must have been familiar with the fame of local hermits. As will be seen, these men lived far from solitary lives, and were known of and pursued tirelessly by local people. It is a possibility then, that Franco may indeed have known exactly where he was going that night when he left the monastery. This particular cave may have been known as a sacred retreat.

Here, Franco began a life of solitary prayer and poverty. Other than this, the hagiography gives very little detail about his holy lifestyle. In fact, the author seems disinterested, turning

⁹² “*dormientibus Fratribus caute sumptis...*” Ibid.

⁹³ “*spinis acutissimis circumseptam, et cavum quercini trunci, plenum aqua clarissima.*” Ibid.

immediately to relatively lengthy descriptions of miraculous events, such as, when a bear miraculously found him honey to eat.⁹⁴ At another time, when local people were beginning to pursue Franco, some travelling pilgrims became stranded in a mountain cavity after a boulder fell over them. Through Franco's intercession, they were able to lift the rock as if light as a feather.⁹⁵ Once, when seven wolves were chasing him, their mouths open and ready to pounce, Franco made the sign of the cross, and immediately they closed their mouths and turned away.⁹⁶ A lumberjack stuck under a fallen tree was freed after Franco commanded that "vegetative body without reason" to let go and not kill the being which had been "gifted with reason in the image of God."⁹⁷ The author recounts some further miracles, most to do with the saint triumphing over nature in aid of local people.⁹⁸

According to the *vita*, Franco was forced to relocate twice in order to escape the pilgrims that were coming to see him. Finally, in the mountains above the village of Assergi, he found a permanent spot in which to live, where he would remain until his death, sometime in the first half of the thirteenth century. At the hour of his passing, the cock crowed and the bells of the nearby monastery of Santa Maria in Silice rung miraculously before their appointed time, to announce the saint's death to the people of Assergi.⁹⁹

⁹⁴ Ibid., 3.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 4.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 5.

⁹⁷ "*O corpus vegetabile sine sensu, in eius virtute qui te fecit in altum crescere Creatoris, cave amplius ne flectaris; nec rationale animal, Creatoris imaginem referens interimere, praesumas.*" Ibid.

⁹⁸ The author does state that Franco "restored to health many people oppressed by various sicknesses, as they prove and testify in worthy faith." "*Plures etiam diversis oppressos languoribus, ut fide digna testimonia comprobarunt et probant, restituit illis temporibus sanitati.*" Ibid., 9. However, there is only one very short description of a man who could not walk, named Santorio del Guasto, whom Franco cured in front of a crowd on a feast day.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 9.

The overall picture here is of a fairly traditional hermit saint.¹⁰⁰ Franco spent most of his eremitic life alone in the wooded Abruzzi mountains, only visiting Assergi on the principal feast days, in order to receive eucharist.¹⁰¹ There is little mention of any prolonged contact with people.¹⁰² The most detailed descriptions in the hagiography are indeed the miraculous events that demonstrate Franco's power over nature. Fully submerged in the harsh Abruzzi wilderness, Franco became for the people of Assergi its master. After his death he continued in this role as protector from wolf bites, rescuer of lost children in the forest, and master over the elements, bringing forth rain during a time of drought.¹⁰³ Though a relatively short work, the lack of attention drawn specifically to Franco's way of life is striking. There is no true reference to his asceticism, beyond general statements like, "he led a life both harsh and unimportant."¹⁰⁴ The text leaves us in the dark about his monastic regime, and despite a few references to his lack of food, we do not know what his fasting habits were. No mention is made of virginity, nor works of mercy or charity. Furthermore, there is no explicit indication that people sought him out for his spiritual advice. It is not surprising then, that about three centuries later, it was decided that Assergi's parish church of Santa Maria would receive a new cycle of frescoes, which depicted the nature-based miracles of Franco's medieval *vita*.¹⁰⁵ These were the stories that local people cherished the most, both in the sixteenth and thirteenth-century. Franco's hagiography then,

¹⁰⁰ The saints of the eleventh and twelfth centuries tended to privilege worldly renunciation over service in the world. Weinstein and Bell, 105.

¹⁰¹ AS Junii 5, 7.

¹⁰² The *vita* does say that monks and priests would sometimes visit him to give alms. Ibid. In addition, some of the story's miracles involve groups of pilgrims going to visit him. Still, these are presented as subsidiary to the miracles themselves and the power over nature that they display.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 7, 11, 10.

¹⁰⁴ "*asperam et tenuem duxit vitam.*" Ibid., 6.

¹⁰⁵ Di Domenico, 44.

reflects his community's fascination with their saintly protector. They revered him as a saint primarily because he proved powerful in taming some of the Abruzzi wilderness' fiercest threats – wolves, avalanches, falling rocks and trees, and the scorching heat of the summer months.

How should this apparent dominance of the material be interpreted? In 1199 Pope Innocent III established a precedent for papal canonization, writing, “two things are required before someone can be regarded as a saint: virtue of morals and truth of signs, that is, works of piety in life and evidence of miracles after death.”¹⁰⁶ Thus, an official position was established that combined the popular preoccupation with miracles with an increasingly spiritualized cult of saints. As the thirteenth-century progressed, papal canonizations began to reflect this vision by privileging forms of sainthood then prevalent predominantly in northern Italy, that is, ones that valued asceticism, poverty, and charity.¹⁰⁷ In other words, preoccupation with the saint's moral character eclipsed notions of sainthood basically rooted in the image of the martyr or that of the “functional” saint, individuals such as political leaders, whose esteem of office was often enough to suggest their sanctity.¹⁰⁸

At first glance then, it seems that Franco's *vita* does not align with official (and northern Italian) practice because the emphasis is on miracles rather than virtue. However, no matter his status as a wonder-worker, Franco was ultimately a Christian hermit. This was a man that had renounced his family's wealth and moved to the wilderness with very little food and next to no personal belongings. He did so in the context of a contemporary eremitic movement within western Christianity, itself a revival of a Late Antique antecedent.¹⁰⁹ Franco owed his saintly

¹⁰⁶ Vauchez, *Sainthood*, 36.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 418.

¹⁰⁸ These notions of sanctity, as Vauchez points out, remained dominant in the north of Europe. See, *Ibid.*, 420-21.

¹⁰⁹ Madigan, 151-52.

status entirely to the fact that the people of Assergi associated the anchoritic lifestyle with Christian greatness, and thus, supernatural power. Indeed, his inner spiritual experience as a poor hermit was directly linked to his power over the material world – the two were inseparable. The *vita* of Franco of Assergi then, and the local worldview that it reflects, is essentially congruent with that of Innocent III’s 1199 formulation.¹¹⁰

But this does not necessarily mean that the people of Assergi cared very deeply about Christian spirituality, as it manifested in their own lives. In fact, the evidence suggests the opposite. As stated, there is little in the *vita* to suggest that Franco was anything more than a wonder-worker for the people of this area. Undoubtedly, he performed miracles because he was near to God, but for the people of Assergi themselves, this kind of spirituality was simply either unavailable or undesirable to them. Franco’s *vita* and later artwork would have indicated otherwise, either explicitly, or implicitly, by providing descriptions of his asceticism, virginity, or spiritual teachings. To be sure, the document does provide some indication of private prayer, such as in the case of the pilgrims stranded under a boulder.¹¹¹ However, this was likely uncommon behaviour - in this case, the result of extreme circumstance during a trip that ultimately, was an expression primarily of place-based piety. For people in this milieu, vicarious, rather than individual, piety was the preferred form of Christian practice.

After his death, we are told that the people and monks of Assergi unanimously (*unanimiter*) assembled together, at the noise of the bells. A brilliant light was shining in the direction of Franco’s cell, and the people immediately knew that the saint’s earthly life had come to an end. Then, “the Clergy and People, with sighs of devotion, quickly rushed to the cell,”

¹¹⁰ This is not necessarily due to a top-down dynamic of cultural assimilation.

¹¹¹ “...*qui ex illis remanserant, Dei et viri Dei suffragia devotissimis precibus implorantes...*” AS Junii 5, 4.

where those that were able carried his sweet-smelling body back to the monastery to be buried, with hymns and solemn canticles.¹¹² Franco became and remains the patron saint of the community of Assergi, whose parish church of Santa Maria, housed and continues to house his remains.¹¹³

How representative is the case of Assergi in the grand scheme of later medieval religion in the Abruzzi? Jumping ahead a few decades from Franco's death, fifty kilometres to the south-east of Assergi, another hermit saint was active near the town of Sulmona: Peter of Morrone. The case of Peter's cult will be highly instructive, due to the richness of the extant source material, with texts indicative of both official and local attitudes. Born in 1209 in the southern Abruzzi (modern-day Molise) to peasant farmers Angelo and Maria Angelerio, Peter grew up working the fields as the eleventh of twelve sons. Unlike Franco, a fair amount of information about Peter's youth is known, due to a very important source – Peter's "Autobiography", or *Tractatus de vita sua*.¹¹⁴ This short and sometimes bizarre text mainly survives accompanying Peter's main *vita*, the *Tractatus de vita et operibus atque obitu ipsius*, or, "Vita C" to scholars.¹¹⁵ Historians have debated its provenance, doubting whether Peter truly wrote the text, sometimes ascribing its authorship to a close but contemporary disciple;¹¹⁶ the text begins in the first-person but very early on switches to the third, which it continues to use throughout. Alessandra Bartolomei Romagnoli has recently restated the possibility of a Petrine origin of the text. She argues that

¹¹² "*Cuius corpus, quasi cynamomum et balsamum suavitatem emittens, cum hymnis et canticis et quibus valuerunt solenniis, detulerunt, in dicto monasterio tumulandum.*" Ibid., 9.

¹¹³ Di Domenico, 44.

¹¹⁴ I am using the text found in the AS Mai 4.

¹¹⁵ I am using the text contained in Stefania Di Carlo and Ilio Di Iorio, *La Vita C: Ritorno alle Fonti Celestiniiane* (L'Aquila, 2002): 50-181.

¹¹⁶ For this debate as it occurred between nineteenth-century scholars, see Arsenio Frugoni, *L'«Autobiografia» di Pietro Celestino in Celestiniana* (Istituto storico italiano per il Medio Evo, 1991), 25-55.

there is no reason to suggest falsification in the text's *incipit*, which states that the text had been written by Peter's own hand and left behind in his cell.¹¹⁷ Additionally, she notes that the text is not aimed at glorifying the saint, rather, its goal is to exult the power of God, who worked miracles through his servant. In the end Romagnoli favors viewing the *Tractatus* as "a foundation myth, in which a religious group rethinks the problem of origins and defines the terms of its identity, in an effort to elaborate a shared memory."¹¹⁸

I do not doubt that Peter himself was behind this text's composition. There are simply too many anecdotes that only he would have known about his childhood and early years as a hermit, as well as the fact that, as Romagnoli argues, the text does not read like a typical hagiography, in the sense that its glorification of its subject is unusually restrained.¹¹⁹ However, assuming that

¹¹⁷ AS Mai 4, 1.

¹¹⁸ Alessandra Bartolomei Romagnoli, *Una Memoria Controversa. Celestino V e le sue Fonti, Quaderni di «Hagiographica»* II (Florence: Sismel, 2013), 17-21.

¹¹⁹ To be sure, Peter was understood in some sense to have been pre-destined from birth for holiness, as he apparently exited his mother's womb "wearing monastic vestments" (AS Mai 4, 3), and was the subject of a dream in which his mother saw him guarding over many sheep (Ibid.). Thus, he is eventually depicted as a divinely inspired spiritual mentor before his congregation of Morrone monks (see below, page 37). Nonetheless, overall, the Autobiography's depiction of Peter is relatively humble. Indeed, no matter the amount of premonitions, Peter's path to spiritual greatness appears, as far as the narrative is concerned, far from certain, with Peter often unsure of the way to proceed, spiritually. For instance, not knowing that a hermit could live with a companion, Peter was initially unsure about becoming a hermit because he feared nighttime phantasms. "*Puer vero magis ac magis anhelabat Deo servire, et maxime in eremo: sed quia nesciebat quod Eremita posset esse cum socio, imo credebatur quod semper deberet esse solus, et ipse multum timebat in nocte propter phantasias; sic dubitans, nesciebat quid ageret*" (Ibid., 5). Once this was overcome, he was then unsure of various other matters such as, whether to persist in his sacerdotal duties, and whether his nocturnal emissions invalidated his ability to say mass. (Ibid., 8-9). Crucially, the text also does not paint Peter as much of a miracle-worker; of all the miraculous events in the narrative, Peter's intercession is never explicitly stated to be their cause. In fact, the only instance of a saint's intercession comes when Peter himself prays to "the Lord and the Blessed Nicholas" to be saved from the danger of a thunderstorm (Ibid., 5). In stark contrast, Thomas of Sulmona's hagiography of Peter (the Vita C) ends with a lengthy list of the miracles that Peter worked directly through his intercession, most of which are to do with healing people of diverse illnesses (Di Carlo and Di Iorio, 135-181). Rather than highlight Peter's sanctity, the miraculous events of

Peter wrote the entire document himself goes too far, as it is not likely that he would suddenly shift to using the third-person. The only possible explanation is that the document was composed in different stages. The point near the beginning where the third-person begins probably indicates where one of Peter's disciples had begun to write in his stead. Indeed, the *incipit* states that Peter wrote the text and left it behind in his cell, "*dum inde factus Papa recederet.*" It is possible therefore, that Peter began writing the text (in the first person), but before finishing was interrupted by his election as pope and subsequent need to leave for L'Aquila. A Morrone friar could have then finished the work himself, relying on his own memory or the memory of others for stories that Peter had told about his youth. However, it is more likely that this second hand was essentially a scribe, who simply set to ink Peter's story as he told it from his own mouth, perhaps in haste. After making the difficult decision to step down from the papal throne in December of 1294, Peter's future rapidly grew uncertain. Less than a fortnight later, a new pope was elected, Boniface VIII who, if one can believe Peter's hagiographer, immediately became paranoid and sought to incarcerate the hermit indefinitely to prevent any potential threats to his legitimacy.¹²⁰ Defiant, Peter secretly returned to his cell near Sulmona, where he soon found out that an order had been made for his arrest, obliging him to flee south.¹²¹ Could it have been during this short window, after Peter first found out that he was being pursued and before his escape, that a companion persuaded him to tell his story, while he acted as a scribe? This could help to explain the text's lack of sophistication and erratic narrative. Certainly, the circumstances

the *Tractatus* demonstrate God's power and sign of approval of the Morrone monks. Beginning as a true autobiography in the modern sense, the narrative morphs into a rather ethereal account of the mysticism of Abruzzi mountain living.

¹²⁰ Di Carlo and Di Iorio., 35-36.

¹²¹ Ibid., 38-39.

of the *Tractatus*'s composition will never be known. Still, one should not be too quick to dismiss the claim of a document accepted contemporaneously as the saint's autobiography.

One thing that is certain is that this document was an important aspect of the saint's memory, as it is often found extant with the *Vita C* and following *lamentatio* and list of miracles.¹²² There is a further clue about the document's significance at the beginning of the text, which reads, "Come and listen to me, all of you who fear God, and I shall tell you about how much He did for my soul."¹²³, suggesting it was designed to be read before an audience, likely before the congregation of Peter's Morrone monks.¹²⁴ The Autobiography then, must be read in the context of Peter's religious order, which placed its founder at the center of their story. This was a tale full of wondrous and colorful little anecdotes, that functioned, like much medieval Christian literature, both to edify and entertain.¹²⁵

According to the *Tractatus*, Peter's parents chose their second born son to study letters, hoping that one day he would become a clergyman; but he died shortly after becoming a monk, leaving Peter's mother Maria, now also a widow, left unknowing what to do. She decided to

¹²² George Ferzoco, "Church and Sanctity", 59.

¹²³ "*Venite, et audite me, et narrabo vobis, qui timetis Deum, quanta fecit animae meae*" (Psalm 65:16), AS Mai 4, 1.

¹²⁴ The text continues, "Whatever we may say, may it be for the praise of God, and for the edification of neighbor." "*Quidquid dicimus, ad laudem Dei sit, et ad aedificationem proximi*" Ibid. George Ferzoco has argued that the Autobiography may have even been used for *lectio divina*, noting that one of the biblical verses quoted in the prologue is the same as that which the Rule of Benedict proscribes for meal-time refectory readings; Ferzoco, "Church and Sanctity", 57.

¹²⁵ Among others, the *Tractatus* tells of such things as a tempestuous storm, a dangerous summertime fire, a defecating donkey, as well as several richly depicted visions, such as that which Peter received while sleeping in the cell near Castel di Sangro, where he suddenly saw "Angels and Saints all around him ... and in their mouths ... red roses, and with these roses they blossomed delightfully." "*Et ecce turba magna Angelorum et Sanctorum circa se erat ita aperte ... et in ore cuiusque illorum erant rosae rubeae, et cum illis rosis vernabant delectabiliter nimis.*" Ibid., 6.

raise her eleventh born, Peter, in the footsteps of his deceased brother, handing over what resources she had to a teacher for his education. The text tells of the many temptations that befell Peter and his mother for making this decision. Indeed, the devil tried to persuade the boy away from a life of religion, by offering him riches, turning his brothers against him, and bringing Maria, for a time, to doubt his future.¹²⁶ Next, there is a fairly detailed section illustrating some of the miracles that God worked in Peter's mother's life. The *Tractatus* then skips to the point that Peter decided to become a hermit, remaining silent on the brief period that he spent as a monk at the nearby Benedictine abbey of Santa Maria di Faifoli. We are told that he eventually settled down in a cave near Castel di Sangro, where he remained for three years, before moving to the Morrone mountain near Sulmona for another five. Throughout, the text details the diverse temptations and visions that Peter experienced during these stages of his life. Finally, in search of greater solitude, he arrived at the nearby Maiella mountain, where he set up a cell that was more difficult to access than all the others. This third home was the most numinous of them all. Here, Peter and his followers were treated to the ringing of heavenly bells, flocks of flying doves, and invisible angelic singing.¹²⁷

Overall, this is an overwhelmingly spiritual text, functioning as a vivid account of Morrone's progressive ascent toward spiritual perfection. He began life literally in the dirt, as a poor agricultural boy from the countryside. Besides an apparent disposition toward piety, this was an ordinary young boy, who played with his friends, and said bad words when he was not supposed to.¹²⁸ The young Peter also suffered from ignorance, not even knowing who the Virgin

¹²⁶ Ibid., 2-3.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 12-14.

¹²⁸ "Likewise when the boy went to play with other boys, he was tempted by the devil to say words that were not allowed." "*Item cum adhuc puer iret cum aliis pueris ludendo, tentabatur a diabolo, ut diceret verba, quae non licerent...*" Ibid., 3.

Mary or John the Baptist were,¹²⁹ and constantly relied on others for religious guidance. Indeed, the start of Peter's vocation was initially delayed because he was ignorant of the logistics of hermit living, as "there was not, in his town, a servant of God, from which he could get advice."¹³⁰ Once a hermit, he initially displayed a desperate reliance on others for guidance. For example, when faced with the problem of whether or not to give up his sacerdotal duties, Peter resolved to go to Rome to seek the advice of the pope. Instead he received a vision in which he saw himself travelling on the road to Rome, but quickly lost his way. Seeing some monks ahead, he stopped and asked them for directions, but all they did was laugh at him. A woman then appeared and informed him that rather than go to Rome, he should ask God directly about his question. He took her advice, and later received another vision, in which he saw an abbot that he had known in life, who at the time was deceased. After some small talk, the abbot turned away from him, presumably to leave. Peter then reached out and grabbed him firmly by the hood, bringing him to a halt, to which the abbot protested, "Let go, son, let go, son!". Peter was desperate: "I swear to you through the living God, through the holy Trinity, and through the other Saints, that you tell me what I must do regarding [the mass]?"¹³¹

However, as time progressed and Peter retreated further and further from the world¹³², he likewise began to grow in illumination and discipline. This began in earnest when he made his move up to the Maiella mountain. Here, Peter was a spiritual teacher rather than student. In one

¹²⁹ "And because he had been a boy and simple, so much so that he did not know about the Blessed Virgin, and the Blessed John, who were depicted on the cross ..." "*Qui cum adhuc puer et simplex esset, in tantum quod non cognosceret Beatam Virginem, et B. Joannem, qui sunt depicti in Cruce...*" Ibid.

¹³⁰ "*non enim erat in patria aliquis servus Dei, a quo consilium accipere posset*". Ibid., 5.

¹³¹ "*adjuro te per Deum vivum, per sanctam Trinitatem, et per alios Sanctos, ut dicas mihi quid faciam de tali facto?*" Ibid., 8.

¹³² This occurred literally and figuratively.

instance while his disciples were singing the office, a group of demons suddenly appeared flying through the air, which startled the monks, causing them to stop what they were doing. Peter admonished them, taking the opportunity to teach a lesson, that “those who can should never abandon the Office.”¹³³ These are not the words of a mere mentor - Peter spoke with authority. Thus, one day when asked by his disciples where the miraculous ringing of bells was coming from, “[Peter], upon hearing their words, understood the cause, and said to them, ‘it is not far away from here’ ...”¹³⁴ Again, one day when the monks’ cell was on fire, Peter resolved to himself never to leave the place, even if his “entire body were burned up”. After saying these words interiorly, “right away that fire went away, as if it were a dream.”¹³⁵ His disciples then berated him for choosing such a remote and dangerous place of habitation, to which Peter responded, “Most dear ones, leave [this place], with the blessing of God, and then come back when you have greater desire to do so.”¹³⁶

It was also at the Maiella that Peter and his companions received their most powerful and vivid signs of God’s presence, indicating their increased nearness to the divine.¹³⁷ Indeed, here visions were numerous and beautiful. For instance, during one of these, Peter suddenly found himself in the oratory, where it seemed that it was time to say mass. All at once, several men appeared, wearing white vestments, accompanied by an abbot, who was the Holy Spirit. The abbot began to say mass, and at the elevation of the host, the sound of a bell rang out, whose

¹³³ “*penitus non dimitterent Officium qui poterant.*” Ibid., 16.

¹³⁴ “*Frater vero audiens verba illorum, intellexit causam, et dixit illis, Non est multum longe...*” Ibid., 12.

¹³⁵ “*Tunc iste confortatus a Deo, in corde suo dixit, Etiam si totum corpus meum incenderetur, non dimittam hunc locum. Et statim ille ignis evanuit, ac si somnium fuisset.*” Ibid., 10.

¹³⁶ “*Carissimi, itote cum benedictione Dei, et tunc venite quando de magna voluntate processerit.*” Ibid.

¹³⁷ See above, note 127.

power (*virtus*) knocked all who were present to the ground, dragging them toward the altar. Peter woke up and saw that his head was where his feet had been, still hearing the sound of that bell.¹³⁸ In another, while sitting in his cell reading, Peter suddenly observed through the window next to him “many glorious-looking people” (*plures gloriosi*), who said, “let us edify that cell” (*aedificemus cellam istam*). They began to say the Office of Dedication, walking in a circle around the cell’s perimeter. Peter was stupefied: “what is going on? I am not asleep!” After the office ended, the people immediately vanished.¹³⁹ One of Peter’s disciples himself had a vision in which there appeared to him a man of shimmering light (*vir splendidus*), who said, “see how this oratory has been edified by God, and this sign I give to you: this morning, when you enter the oratory, the lamp that is before the altar will move back and forth.” Sure enough, he was right. That morning, Peter and his monks saw the light miraculously move from side to side, all without spilling a single drop of oil.¹⁴⁰ Such miraculous signs were numerous at the Maiella. Indeed, shortly after the monks began to live in their new home, a dove appeared which came repeatedly to feed at a certain spot where the altar would later stand. Walking freely among them, the dove was tame as if domesticated. Nor did the building of the oratory scare it off, as it often entered that place during the office; sometimes, members of the public were present, who themselves saw the bird, one of whom, tried unsuccessfully to pick it up with his hands.¹⁴¹ Many

¹³⁸ Ibid., 15.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 16.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 11.

more doves appeared “in the air above that place”, during the monks’ stay at the Maiella,¹⁴² fully in correspondence with the oratory’s dedication to the Holy Spirit.¹⁴³

However, not all encounters with the supernatural were benign. Rather, as the monks ascended on the path toward spiritual perfection, so did the devilish attacks made against them intensify. Thus, Maiella living brought Peter and his followers some of their most dangerous encounters, such as when they saw “a great commotion of demons in a forest near to there, roaring and bleating like sheep, wanting to go in to [Peter’s habitation].”¹⁴⁴ Thankfully, some good spirits fought on their behalf and “did not permit them to enter.” Likewise, one Lenten night, while the men were observing silence and various abstinences, a demon attacked four of them, causing one to lose both his hands.¹⁴⁵ The Maiella was also where the monks experienced a dangerous fire, which Peter was ultimately and miraculously able to put out.¹⁴⁶

Peter’s spiritual journey therefore corresponds directly with his spatial ascent. Indeed, the higher up he travelled the closer he came to the divine. Thus, it is only in the narrative section that tells of Peter’s life on the Maiella (which dwarfs in height all of his previous abodes)¹⁴⁷ that the supernatural appears the strongest.¹⁴⁸ The association of high places with spiritual greatness

¹⁴² Ibid., 13.

¹⁴³ “Many and great were the signs that appeared there, by which God revealed that that place was picked out in honor of the holy Spirit.” *“Multa et magna signa ibi apparuerunt; quibus Deus ostendebat, quod locum illum elegerat in honorem sancti Spiritus.”* Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ *“Dum autem essent in cellis, percussit daemon quatuor Fratres magno timore, ita quod surgentes ad vigiliis coeperunt omnes vociferari et dicere, Adiuuate nos, adiuuate. Unus eorum amiserat ambas manus ...”* Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ See above, note 135.

¹⁴⁷ At its peak, the Maiella massif dwarfs the Morrone mountain by over two thousand feet.

¹⁴⁸ Likewise, it is only here that we get references to the “air” of the place, highlighting the abode’s ethereality, and Peter and his companions’ immersion in it. “...and all of the Brothers that were in the choir and in the church observed the demons in the air and in all parts”, *“et omnes Fratres qui erant in choro et in ecclesia per aerem in omni parte teterrima daemonia*

appears elsewhere in the source too. Indeed, when Peter and his companions faced the threat of demons, they remained safe only through the protection of good spirits, who came from “above (*desuper*) [that place]”.¹⁴⁹ In another instance, while unsure whether he is able to say mass after a nocturnal emission, Peter began to dream that he was climbing toward a high up fortification (*ascenderet quoddam castrum in alto positum*). Advancing to its gate, he saw a great monastery and a palace, flanked by several cells, each of which was home to a monk dressed in white. Peter wanted to enter that place, but had with him a donkey, at the time, which he could not get rid of (*quem dimittere non valebat*). Nonetheless, he began to climb the palace steps (*ascendere gradus scalae illius palatii*), but only made it up a few before the donkey (*ille malus asellus*) began repulsively (*turpiter*) to defecate, as if it had eaten tender grasses (*quasi manducasset herbas teneras*). Peter was disheartened at the sight. He sat himself down on the steps and did not dare to climb any further. Suddenly, he saw standing at the palace’s entrance three identical people, one of whom he understood to be Christ, and who called to him, “Climb, climb! Why do you not climb? For that which the donkey does out of habit? What is it to you? Climb, climb!” He immediately woke from his sleep and praised God for the vision.¹⁵⁰

The association is drawn also in the *vita* of Peter’s successor, the blessed Robert of Salle (1272-1341). This text reports that, sometime after Peter’s death, Robert entered into a state of spiritual ecstasy, during which his late teacher appeared to him, “wearing the most brightly shining robe of immortality and virtue”. After some brief conversation, Robert asked him, “Father, where do you wish to go?” He responded, “Most dear son, it is necessary that I ascend

aspiciebant...” Ibid., 16; “And many doves were seen in the air above that place”, “*Et columbae videbantur multae in aere supra locum.*” Ibid., 13.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 16.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 9.

the great mountain, because it is pleasing to the king”.¹⁵¹ Robert asked whether he could go with him; “Not now, but after having obtained great merits.” The “great mountain” is clearly that which leads to God in heaven. It continues: “Having said these things ... [Robert] saw the roof of the cell open and [Peter] climb (*conscendere*) into the heavens.” The chapter ends: “These are the things by which [Robert] began to ascend to greatness (*ascendere ... ad majora*).”

The parallel drawn between spiritual and spatial altitude was present also in other contemporary Italian works. The purgatory of Dante’s *Divine Comedy* is indeed a mountain that rises toward heaven. Thus, Dante quickly began to increase in knowledge as he made his way up the slope. Marvelling at the fact that the sun now appeared to come at him from his left side, he received a short astronomy lesson from Virgil, after which he remarked, ““Oh, sir!’ ... ‘With such great certitude I’ve never seen as clearly as I do...”¹⁵² At the end of their journey, reflecting back on the trip, Dante remarked: “I came back from that holiest of waves remade ... pure and prepared to rise towards the stars.”¹⁵³ Likewise, it was Petrarch’s climb up Mont Ventoux that inspired in him a spiritual renewal. It was there, on its slopes, that he opened up St. Augustine’s *Confessions*, and read that, rather than take interest in the world’s mountains, waters and stars, one should instead turn inward toward the soul. What began as simply a day of recreation thus ended with the realization that Petrarch needed to set his sights on that which truly mattered - his salvation. More than this, Petrarch used the image of the mountain as direct spiritual metaphor: “What thou hast repeatedly experienced to-day in the ascent of this mountain, happens to thee, as to many, in the journey toward the blessed life ... Yes, the life which we call blessed is to be

¹⁵¹ “*Fili carissime, ad montem magnum me oportet ascendere; quia sic placuit regi.*” AS Julii 18, 16.

¹⁵² Dante Alighieri, *Paradiso* in *The Divine Comedy: Inferno, Purgatorio, Paradiso*, trans. Robin Kirkpatrick (Penguin Books, 2012), 4.61-77.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 33.142-145.

sought for on a high eminence, and strait is the way that leads to it. Many, also, are the hills that lie between, and we must ascend, by a glorious stairway, from strength to strength. At the top is at once the end of our struggles and the goal for which we are bound.”¹⁵⁴

Many *were* the hills that lay between Peter of Morrone and his end goal of spiritual perfection, and one of these was the body and material world itself. To be sure, the vision of the defecating donkey teaches that Christians need not always worry about their bodies’ natural processes defiling them; things like defecation and nocturnal emission do not impede one’s spiritual growth. The point is reinforced by the seemingly unnecessary description of the donkey’s stool, which highlights its repulsion by earthly standards, making God’s indifference to it, all the more striking. But it would be misleading to suggest that Peter of Morrone’s spirituality was, like his Franciscan and female contemporaries, body and world-affirming.¹⁵⁵ Indeed, Morrone’s spirituality was on the whole, essentially rooted in solitude, quiet, and asceticism, and in order to fully realize this vision, it was necessary to flee from the world. Thus, Peter’s determination to remove himself from earthly society is the driving force behind his story, as told in the Autobiography. It is what causes him to consider giving up his sacerdotal duties, as well as make the move from the Morrone to the Maiella mountain because, searching “always for solitude”, “the forests of that place had been cultivated and destroyed by men.”¹⁵⁶ According to the text, were it not for his charity, Peter would have gladly refused all human contact, not

¹⁵⁴ “Ascent of Mont Ventoux” in Francesco Petrarca, *Epistolae Familiares*, <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/petrarch-ventoux.asp>

¹⁵⁵ See Bynum, *Holy Feast*, 245-268.

¹⁵⁶ “*Verum quia hic quaerebat semper solitudinem, et omnes silvae, quae fuerant circa locum, destructae erant et ab hominibus cultae; recessit ab eo loco, et venit ad Montem-Magellae.*” AS Mai 4, 10.

even to accommodate those who wished to emulate his way of life as disciples.¹⁵⁷ The theme of chastity is also prevalent in the text, with Peter often finding himself in combat with temptress women.¹⁵⁸

But it was quiet and solitude that formed the core of Peter's practice. At the Maiella massif, far from human habitation, Peter and his disciples heard the ringing of divine bells, which were audible everywhere, except "within the city or town."¹⁵⁹ The paradox was that the more one achieved stillness and quiet, one of the goals of earthly retreat, the more noise one heard. Hence, "the more one paid attention to the bells, the less one heard them!"¹⁶⁰ Likewise, when a disciple began mysteriously to hear other sweet-sounding voices while the monks were singing the office, these became louder only "when the voices of the Brothers came to a halt."¹⁶¹ In addition, while living on the mountain near Castel di Sangro, we are told that Peter began to hear the sound of a great bell each night at the same time. Then, after learning that a certain hermit owned a rooster that would sing during the night, he decided to acquire one himself. "But the rooster never sung, and the sound of that bell [during the night] disappeared ... he returned

¹⁵⁷ "Many people began to leave behind the world, and came to him: but as much as he could he refused to accept them, saying, that he was simple and desired to remain always alone: but, when having been conquered by charity, he would give [them] his assent." "*Multi coeperunt deinceps relinquere mundum, et veniebat ad eum: sed iste quantum poterat renuebat eos accipere, dicens, se simplicem esse, et desiderium suum fuisse, ut semper solus maneret: sed quandoque victus caritate assensum dabat.*" Ibid., 11.

¹⁵⁸ When on the road to visit the hermit near Castel di Sangro, Peter was accosted by two beautiful women, "who gravely fought with him, grabbing hold of his hands and saying, 'Do not go, for that hermit is not there! Come with us!'" "*quae graviter pugnaverunt cum eo, manibus illum capientes, et dicentes, Non eas, quia eremita non est in loco, veni nobiscum.*" Ibid., 6. In another instance when near Castel di Sangro, two attractive women that Peter had known in real life appeared to him at night, naked, and tried to have sexual intercourse with him. Ibid., 7.

¹⁵⁹ "*excepto intra urbem vel castra.*" Ibid., 13.

¹⁶⁰ "*et in tantum ille sonus replebat auditum, quod vix poterat portari.*" Ibid.

¹⁶¹ "*dum voces Fratrum pausarent, voces illae melius audiebantur.*" Ibid., 14.

the rooster, but he never found again the grace that he had lost [by it].”¹⁶² In this case, it was Morrone’s desire to hear noise that denied him the ability to do so. In another instance, this time while living on the Maiella, Peter fell asleep, only to wake up to the sound of voices singing the office in the oratory. It turned out that the voices were coming from, “boys, and one of them, who was seen to be chief among them, emitted a voice like a trumpet.”¹⁶³ Here, the stillness of sleep gave rise to a heavenly chorus.

The importance of stillness and the inverse relationship between quiet and noise are found also in the *vita* of Robert of Salle. Wishing to be like Morrone, Robert lived an ascetic life with him as a student at his mountaintop cell, until his teacher’s death. Shortly thereafter, as described above, the deceased Peter appeared to Robert in a vision, and the two made conversation. At one point, Robert asked Peter what he should do next, to which Peter instructed only that he, “Stand still, remain in solitude and keep calm in peace” (*Sta, remane in solitudine et quiesce in pace*). Thus, when asked to sum up his vision for one of his closest disciples, Peter is described as having asked only for stillness. This is the Celestine ideal in a nutshell, and is what Robert would aspire to for the rest of his life. Indeed, during times of Lent (which, according to his hagiographer, occurred six times a year) he would remain completely silent, forbidding all from speaking to him, hence the instruction that a monk “bring one pitcher of water and place it in the cell ... and after another twenty days, remove it, saying not a single word in the process.”¹⁶⁴ He also often spent much of his time in meditation and prayer. Once, when Robert

¹⁶² “*Sed et gallus numquam cantavit, et sonus illius campanae disparuit ... reddidit gallum, sed gratiam quam amiserat numquam ex toto reinvenit.*” Ibid., 7.

¹⁶³ “*intra quos erant pueri: et unus, qui super omnes esse videbatur, emittebat vocem sicut vocem tubae.*” Ibid., 14.

¹⁶⁴ “*Porta unam amphoram aquae et pone in cella ... et post vicesimum diem aliam asportabis, intermedio nullum communicans verbum.*” AS Julii 18, 18.

was located near to human habitation, “a multitude of people from all different places rushed to him out of devotion,” “whose noise brought great disturbance to his meditations.”¹⁶⁵ About this problem he exhorted God, who provided him with a divine solution: from then on, Robert lost his ability to hear during prayer, to the point that, “if the blaring of all of the world’s trumpets and bells rang out at the doorstep to his cell, he would hear nothing at all.”¹⁶⁶ However, when he was not praying, he “made use of highly sharpened hearing” (*acuto valde uteretur auditu*), clearly a result of his commitment to quiet. In another instance, while praying alone in the church of the holy Cross, Robert allegedly began to levitate from the ground (*a terrenis ... elevari*) “toward heaven” (*versus caelum*), being “taken above himself and placed into ecstasy” (*super se raptus et in extasi positus*). Shocked at the sight, one of his disciples apprehended him, calling out, “what is happening, father?” Robert immediately descended to the ground: “Son, you have done wrong, because I was being carried off, by my mind, in God” (*quia mente ferebar in Deum*).¹⁶⁷ In other words, the disciple’s voice interrupts Robert’s stillness, compromising his ascent to heaven – both literally and figuratively. Solitude, quiet, mental stillness, and the flight from the world that they represented, were therefore essential to the Celestines’ Christian vision.

What about the religion of ordinary parishioners? Perhaps the Autobiography’s most important lay person is Peter’s mother. Although Maria appears only in the first four chapters of the text, it is to her and specifically, her experiences as a rural Abruzzi peasant, that the author devotes a surprising amount of attention. Maria is described as a pious woman, who desperately wants to see one of her sons take up a religious life. One time, when Peter had just begun

¹⁶⁵ “*quorum strepitu in suis meditationibus non modicum portabat molestiam.*” Ibid., 25.

¹⁶⁶ “*ut si totus clangor tubarum, omnesque campanae de mundo ad suae cellulae pulsarentur portam, nihil penitus audiret.*” Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 41.

studying letters, a godmother apparently received a vision during the night, in which Maria's late husband appeared and told her to assure Maria that her son would someday accomplish great things.¹⁶⁸ This ultimately spurs her to pool the family's resources, despite opposition from her other sons, and pay for Peter's education.

Maria seems to have had a close relationship with her eleventh born, the two sharing a special spiritual bond. When one day, Peter saw the depictions of Mary and John on the church cross come to life and begin to sing, he went home to inform his mother, to which she instructed that he tell no one.¹⁶⁹ In another instance, when Peter was just twelve years old, Maria herself had a dream in which she saw her son watching over a flock of sheep. The dream saddened her because it suggested that Peter was destined to a shepherd's life, rather than a religious one. Nonetheless, the next day, when she was with her son and told him what had happened, Peter reinterpreted the dream for her, saying, "he will be a guard of good souls."¹⁷⁰ Morrone reportedly had several visions throughout his childhood, which he always told to his mother, and which she consistently prohibited him from revealing to others.¹⁷¹

But visions were likely exceptional experiences. Maria and her family also had religious experiences more to do with their everyday peasant concerns. Thus, when one of her sons hurt his eye on a sharp piece of wood, on account of which physicians feared the eye's loss, Maria took the boy to a church of the Virgin and remained there with him the whole night. The

¹⁶⁸ AS Mai 4, 3.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ "*Hic erit custos bonarum animarum.*" Ibid.

¹⁷¹ "This and other good things he always saw in visions: and when he reported them to his mother, she prohibited him from telling them to anyone, and he told them to no one." "*Haec et alia multa bona in visione semper videbat: quae cum matri referret, illa prohibebat, ne alicui diceret, et ille nemini dicebat.*" Ibid.

following morning the eye was found healed without a blemish.¹⁷² Another son of hers suffered an eye injury; one day when attempting to gather the harvest, a grain of cereal got irretrievably lodged in his eye, causing him to scream out in pain. Maria again turned to the Virgin, praying that she might restore the eye of her son. The next day, the grain was found protruding from the eye and was easily snatched out. In another instance, this time during a great famine, Maria turned to God at night, begging him to provide food for her family. The next morning, she instructed one of her sons to take his scythe to the field, where he discovered much grain that was ready to be harvested, despite it being only the beginning of the growing season; “he harvested [the wheat] on the same day, and brought it to the mill [to grind], and gave thanks to God.”¹⁷³ Furthermore, once, while suffering of an infirmity in her right side, Maria suddenly vowed in her mind to go to a certain holy place (*quemdam sanctum locum*). There, she stayed the night, and by morning was healed.¹⁷⁴ Maria also had great devotion to the saints, and always carefully observed their feast days. One year, on the feast of John the Baptist, when it was required to bake bread, she discovered that her flour had turned completely to worms. Praying to God, the flour immediately returned to its normal status.¹⁷⁵

Does this source reflect the historical Maria’s lived religiosity? On the one hand, this is a literary work of a monastic provenance, whose events in question would have occurred *at least* fifty-five years prior to the document’s composition.¹⁷⁶ That said, the statement at the beginning

¹⁷² Ibid., 4.

¹⁷³ “*quam ille eodem die collegit, trituvavit, et ad molam portavit, et Deo gratias reddidit.*” Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Peter was born in 1209 and, according to the text, began his eremitic life at the age of twenty, which would have been in 1239. This likely places the miraculous events that happened to Maria’s family sometime within these two years. Since the Autobiography was written sometime between the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century, the events that it describes would have predated its composition by at least, fifty-five years, and at most, about one hundred. Of course,

of the text promising truthfulness¹⁷⁷, as well as that which attempts to qualify the story of Peter's birth - "*sicut ipsa dicebat*"¹⁷⁸ - suggests at least that contemporaries believed these stories to refer to true events. Certainly, this does not necessarily mean that they do, nor is it possible to ever know as much. Still, this is significant insofar as it indicates that the episodes contained in the Autobiography did not contradict its audience's view of what was possible or likely. Thus, even if the real Maria Angelerio was nothing like the woman depicted in this text, her personage is nonetheless an important gauge for what people imagined a rural peasant woman could be like. This can be said despite the text's monastic context. For although the intended audience is surely the Celestine congregation of monks, these were not so cut off from the world as to maintain no contact with lay people.¹⁷⁹ Additionally, if we are to believe the text, many of these were recent converts, whose experiences in the "secular world" no doubt remained with them in memory. Even in cases where one had been a monk for virtually their entire life, none could say that they did not have a family (and or friends) that were lay.

What then, do we learn from this source about popular religion in the Abruzzi? To start, recourse to the supernatural was clearly not an automatic response to hardship. In the case of Maria's side infirmity, the text states that it took many years of suffering before she finally decided to go on pilgrimage. When her son became blind in one eye, she took him first to several physicians, and only when left with no other option, did she bring him to a church for healing. It seems then, that Maria opted immediately for supernatural aid only in the most urgent of cases,

this is assuming that Peter himself witnessed the events and that they are not family stories from before his birth.

¹⁷⁷ "Therefore, in everything that I will say, I will speak the truth in Christ, lying about nothing."

"*Ideo in omnibus quae dicturus sum, veritatem dicam in Christo, nihil mentiar.*" Ibid., 1.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 3.

¹⁷⁹ See below, page 50.

such as famine, when the family no doubt faced starvation, and in the case of her other son, whose eye pain was excruciating. Yet, these accidents must not have occurred on a regular basis. For the most part, Maria's religion manifested itself in the observance of feast days, for which, as has been seen, she could express her devotion in the kitchen through the baking of bread. This was no mere celebratory bread, however. This was a solemn affair, so much so, that it caused Maria great anguish when she was unable to complete the recipe because her flour was spoiled. Indeed, the sight caused her to "tremble" (*tremefacta*) and "fall to the ground" (*cecidit in terram*), where she cried out to God, "have mercy on me!" (*Miserere mei*).¹⁸⁰ This is the cry of a woman who, at best, mourns the loss of good fortune that she would have received through her ritual observance, and at worst, fears retribution at the hands of St. John.¹⁸¹ Maria could also pray at any point throughout the day or at night. Although there is no evidence that prayer was an everyday activity, the stories nonetheless suggest that prayer could be called upon spontaneously and as needed, although it seems probable that, as stated above, prayer was reserved as a last resort measure.

Overall, Maria's religiosity is a combination of interior and material-based practice. She engages in private prayer and receives visions, but also makes pilgrimage to shrines and bakes feast day bread. Though God provides for her family's material and medical needs, Maria interacts with this same God in her heart and in her mind's eye. Still, at times it was necessary to approach God through the holy matter of a shrine, indicating an ambiguity of practice that is not

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁸¹ It isn't difficult to find examples of medieval saints punishing people for their apparent lack of devotion or for some other grievance. In the *vita* of Robert of Salle, for instance, there is a story in which Peter of Morrone appears to beat up a bishop for falsely accusing Salle of fraud. See, *AS Julii* 18, 47.

easily pinned down. According to Vauchez's general framework, Maria appears to have one foot in the past and one in the future.¹⁸²

Luckily, the *Tractatus* addresses lay people more than the *vita* of Franco of Assergi does. Like this last, the Autobiography uses the theme of the saint needing greater solitude in response to the advent of people.¹⁸³ But the text also goes beyond such general statements, noting that despite his distaste for people, "having been conquered by charity" (*victus caritate*)¹⁸⁴, Peter did sometimes give them his assent. For instance, people would come to his Maiella retreat to hear mass in the oratory.¹⁸⁵ They also came to hear him preach. One day, some men from Peter's hometown in the southern Abruzzi arrived.¹⁸⁶ With them he sat and spoke "about the word of life" (*de verbo vitae*)¹⁸⁷, before another four from a different place arrived, exciting Morrone to the point that "he could hardly contain himself" (*vix poterat se continere*).¹⁸⁸ Sending his *paesani* away, he welcomed the new visitors, but quickly informed them that it was time to sing the office, and that afterwards they would regroup for consolation. During the office, the guests began to hear the sound of several bells. Two of them left the oratory, "raising their eyes and ears to heaven, and crying."¹⁸⁹ Stupefied, "with tears and great fear", they asked Peter where the sound was coming from. "[That place] is not far from here" (*Non est multum longe*), he replied. They continued to hear the bells for three days without end. Miraculously, the sound even

¹⁸² Vauchez points out that, especially in Italy and France, the years from 1300 saw a growing number of miracles worked at a distance from shrines. Vauchez, *Sainthood*, 447-448.

¹⁸³ See above, note 156.

¹⁸⁴ AS Mai 4, 11.

¹⁸⁵ "...one day, members of the public were in the oratory for Mass..." "...*quadam die forenses erant in oratorio ad Missam...*" Ibid., 11.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 12.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ "*levantes oculos suos et aures ad caelum, et plorantes.*" Ibid.

caused one of them to be healed of a sickness, while another was cured of his frequent nocturnal emissions.¹⁹⁰ In the end, we are told that all four of the men converted to God (*conversi fuerant ad Deum*), and right away assumed religious habits, giving everything they owned to the poor. After them, “many people heard the sound of the bells in that place ... and wherever they went, except within the city or town.” Indeed, “from one city there were twenty ... and from other places many men who were all lay and secular, and none of them were a Cleric or Monk, which is remarkable.”¹⁹¹

It certainly is remarkable that lay people are the first ones to hear the bells in the Maiella sequence, as it suggests that these spiritual sounds were not the preserve of a religious elite. All people could hear them, regardless of their level of Christian commitment. In fact, the deciding factor was spatial; anyone sufficiently removed from the towns and villages could hear them. They were rural sounds - heard exclusively amidst the quiet of the Abruzzi wilderness. The experience could be awesome, sometimes evoking a spiritual response in people, as in the men that became monks. But most people probably did not respond so dramatically. These ostensibly continued in their day-to-day lives, only being treated to the heavenly sound of the bells when they found themselves outside the town walls. Lay people were, in such, given a taste of the divine outside the context of monastic living. The spiritual privileges of the strictly religious life may have been out of their reach, locked behind cloister walls. But as long as there existed a wilderness to retreat to from time to time, the virtues of solitude were theirs to claim. Therefore, in line with the rise of lay spirituality in thirteenth-century northern Italy, these people exceeded

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ “*Solummodo de una civitate viginti fuerunt qui audierunt sonum illum, et de aliis partibus plures homines: qui omnes fuerunt laici et seculares, et nullus ex eis fuit Clericus vel Religiosus, quod mirum est.*” Ibid., 13.

what was expected of them, claiming, despite their lay status, to experience at least a fraction of the benefit of regular observance. That this was a cause for wonder reflects a conservative monastic attitude.¹⁹²

¹⁹² It is true that, beginning in the late thirteenth century, the priesthood began again, in some ways, to eclipse the laity in perceived spiritual power; Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 19. I do not however, believe that what appears here is reflective of that same trend, as the practice that underlies it, namely, an emphasis on eucharistic devotion, is not yet present in the sources.

Part 2

“Am I a God?”: Peter of Morrone as Charismatic Spiritual Teacher

Up till now, this paper has dealt exclusively with texts of a clerical provenance. Yet, if the goal is to learn about popular religion, it will be necessary to base the bulk of the analysis on what ordinary people themselves actually said. Luckily, there exists an extant process of canonization which, after Peter's death in 1296, was compiled as part of the effort to recognize him as an official saint. The first stage, the informative process, began in 1306 on the direction of Clement V, who placed at its head the archbishop of Naples, Giacomo da Viterbo and the bishop of Valva-Sulmona, Federico Raimundi de Lecio. The goal was to carry out an enquiry into the life and miracles of Peter of Morrone through the interrogation of many witnesses. The inquisition centred mainly on Sulmona, where Peter had spent the most time, but also took place elsewhere, where he had been active, such as Naples, Castel di Sangro, and Ferentino, where he was initially buried. Witnesses were interrogated based on a four-fold questionnaire, that respectively, prompted them to describe Peter's asceticism, monastic foundations, miracles, and public *fama*. Their answers were to be recorded and sent to the curia at Avignon for consultation.

Altogether, at least 324 witnesses testified as part of this initial informative process, the results of which have been handed down to us only in a single manuscript, preserved in the Archivio Capitolare di S. Panfilo in Sulmona.¹⁹³ The manuscript is written in a fourteenth-century cancelleresca miniscule, with numerous marginal notes, both of a contemporary and post-medieval hand.¹⁹⁴ The text itself is fragmented in numerous parts, leaving us ignorant of entire testimonies and parts of others. Indeed, the Sulmona manuscript only accounts for the testimonies of 127 of the total 324 witnesses, and eight of these are incomplete. Most of the witnesses that were heard appeared before the inquisition at Sulmona on May 29 and June 6. The

¹⁹³ III.I.10; I will be using the edited version contained in *Il Processo di Canonizzazione di Celestino V*, Alfonso Marini, ed. (Florence: Sismel, 2016).

¹⁹⁴ *Il Processo*, ed. Alfonso Marini, 10.

majority of these were people of low social status, likely common laborers, identified by their lack of title and recorded occupation. The rest included people of diverse backgrounds such as surgeons, priests, and knights.

To begin, I will report my statistical findings. Since my goal was to determine the relationship between material and spiritual-based Christianity in this region, I decided to classify all of the process's miracle stories as either exclusively material (M) or spiritual-based (S). I also identified a "mixed" category (MS) for cases that involve elements from both groups. My methodology was to identify each significant mention of a miracle in the text, regardless of whether it appeared more than once. By "significant", I mean, that the account provided enough detail about the miracle's circumstances to allow for adequate consideration. For example, miracles simply told in passing were not counted, due to their vagueness. As a general rule though, these were very scarce, and the overwhelming majority of the text's miracles have been accounted for. The next step was to analyze each miracle in terms of the means by which it occurred. By this, I mean the main mechanism that brought about the miracle's happening. This task was two-fold; the goal was to identify both the "expected" means (E) and "actual" means (A). These refer, respectively, to the witness's expectation for how the miracle would occur, and how it actually did. This distinction was designed to help determine if a cultural gap existed between the people, who sought the miracle, and Peter, who provided it for them. When either the (E) or (A) were unclear or absent from the anecdote, I consigned the miracle to a third, "none" (N) category. Next, I classified each (E) and (A) as belonging to one of the following categories:

(M) if story involves chiefly:

- objects / food / substances
- sign of the cross or blessing

- touching
- looking at the saint
- prayer or intercession on behalf of saint to God
- “special” prayers and incantations
- going to one of the saint’s monastic foundations after his death

(S) if story involves chiefly:

- private prayer on behalf of the individual
- dreams / visions
- receiving spiritual advice / preaching
- change of heart / change of lifestyle
- confession
- devotion / faith in the miracle
- fasting on behalf of the individual
- making a vow to God or the saint

I have tried to include in the (M) category all practices that, at least at first glance, appear opposed to the moral and spiritual aspect of medieval Christianity, and vice versa for the (S) section. This process was not always straightforward, and there were decisions that were made to facilitate the analysis. To begin, I have considered dreams or visions that inspire a person to seek Peter’s help as (A). I have also not included the miracle of the levitating cross that took place while Peter was on his death bed, because the saint himself was not responsible for it. In addition, as it was at times difficult to ascertain the (E) or (A) of a particular miracle, I have chosen to avoid making assumptions in such cases and instead report only what is explicitly stated or heavily implied. In other words, the criteria above were followed as literally and closely as possible. This means that, though the vast majority of cases involve going to Peter for a cure, and thus technically a place-based piety that is material-based, I have considered the mere

mention of this fact to be (N), except when accompanied by explicit mention of an (M) attribute. Certainly, the existence of place-based piety should not be taken as a given, nor is it irrelevant to the broader analysis. Still, I have excluded it from the data of Tables 1 and 2 in order to avoid a potential distortion in the results, with an over-reporting of (M) miracles. Indeed, a vast majority of these miracles took place during Peter's lifetime and were therefore almost certain to occur in his presence anyway. In other words, my intention was not to find out what is already obvious, that a majority of miracles involved travelling to a physical location to see a person, rather it was to highlight less obvious patterns in the data.

In terms of stock phrases, I have considered the ubiquitous, "*per sancta merita fratris Petri*", and its variants, as (N), because it does not refer to much beyond the Church's attempt at maintaining theological purity. Although the phrase refers to the saint's intercession, I have nonetheless refrained from considering it officially as a reference to such, and instead have categorized as "intercession on behalf of saint to God" only those testimonies that explicitly mention intercession, and thus break the generic phraseology. Additionally, I have not taken seriously references to people seeking Peter's aid out of "devotion", "hope", or "trust", and in cases where only these concepts are employed, I have used the (N) category. While the use of these terms is not inherently irrelevant, they are nonetheless very vague, nor is it certain that they represent anything other than scribal stock phrases.

Expected		
M:	42	29 %
S:	2	1 %
MS:	6	4 %
N:	94	65 %
Total:	144	

Table 1

Actual		
M:	82	57 %
S:	5	3 %
MS:	26	18 %
N:	31	22 %
Total:	144	

Table 2

If we consider all the cases in which, a miracle is brought about at Peter's cell while he was alive, but there is no mention of any other material element, which, as stated above, I have marked all as (N), and which account for virtually all of the (N) miracles, as (M), then the results become as follows:

Expected		
M:	136	94 %
S:	2	1 %
MS:	6	4 %
Total:	144	

Table 3

Actual		
M:	113	78 %
S:	5	3 %
MS:	26	18 %
Total:	144	

Table 4

The picture that emerges from these results is basically straight-forward. In every case, except Table 1, (M) forms a majority over the other categories. But even in the case of Table 1, the high percentage of (N) may be misleading because this number accounts almost entirely for miracles that describe people going to visit Peter, with no mention of any other aspect to the cure. If the mere act of going to a saint for a cure is considered an (M) trait, then, as stated above, the results shift to what is reported in Tables 3 and 4. The important thing to note about Table 1 then, is that even when discounting the role of place-based piety in a saint cult whose miracles disproportionately occurred while the saint was still alive, the (M) category still achieves a sizeable plurality over (S) and (MS).

An objection may be that these results pertain only to the cult of saints, which as Vauchez has pointed out, retained more than any other sphere a preoccupation with the earthier elements of Christian practice.¹⁹⁵ This would be true, if the cult of saints existed in a cultural vacuum. But it did not. Rather, the cult of saints saw the same changes that were occurring elsewhere in Christian culture, namely a “spiritualization” of its interpretation.¹⁹⁶ It is also worth pointing out that the vast majority of Peter’s cures were carried out while he was still alive (87 %). This makes our case different from those of most later medieval saints, whose canonization enquiries, for the most part, overwhelmingly report post-mortem miracles.¹⁹⁷ Indeed, out of all the saints for whom a process of canonization is extant between 1185 and 1417, Peter worked the most miracles while still alive, percentage-wise.¹⁹⁸ This means that Morrone’s case is uniquely able to gauge the extent of spiritualization on local religious culture, for it was through their interactions with spiritual advisors such as this, that men and women were most likely to encounter an (S) or (MS) experience, whereas post-mortem miracles, with their emphasis on a saint’s bodily or contact relics, tended anyway to skew in favor of (M).¹⁹⁹

If the (S) and (MS) categories are added together, they equal 5 % in the case of (E) and 21 % for (A). This latter number is important because it shows that over one-fifth of all miracles involved some spiritual or moral dimension, suggesting that, in this case, the cult of saints is not easily reduced to an essentially material phenomenon. This number is even more interesting when compared with the (E) number. Between these there is a difference of 16 %, meaning that

¹⁹⁵ Vauchez, *Sainthood*, 459.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 420-21.

¹⁹⁷ Romagnoli, “Religione Popolare”, 30.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 29-30.

¹⁹⁹ That said, post-mortem cures worked at a distance from a shrine did begin to increase in Italy from the fourteenth century. See, Vauchez, *Sainthood*, 447.

16 % of people who approached Peter expecting an (M) experience, left instead with an (MS) one. The people of the Abruzzi were being challenged to spiritualize their understanding of the material, and it was taking place through their interactions with the hermit Peter of Morrone.

There is proof of this in the testimonies themselves. One day, a certain Stefano Acciano, who had gone rabid and was assaulting people in his town, was strapped to a donkey and brought to Peter's hermitage for healing. Upon arrival, the saint rebuked his guests, telling them to return home "because the blessed Peter and Paul can help him wherever (*ubicunque*) you are."²⁰⁰ According to Roberto di Castel di Sangro, once, a mute boy was taken to Peter in the hopes of obtaining a miracle, but the saint objected, "why have you taken him to me, a simple man? You should have prayed to God and he would have liberated him."²⁰¹ Benvenuta di Sulmona testified that a certain sick woman had asked her father to go to Peter and request that he send her something for her healing. He did so, sending her a cross-shaped candle and some bread, but with the added instruction to fast every Saturday in honor of the Virgin.²⁰² Lady Granata, who was contracted for many years in her arms and fingers, sent her relative Filippo to Peter to tell him about her problem. After giving him two hosts, some bread, and an herbal powder for her to eat, Peter warned Filippo that Lady Granata should hope in God and say the pater noster, not hope to be cured through his [Peter's] own merits.²⁰³ A Sulmona archpriest, Don Gentile, who was suffering from two throat scrofulas, approached one of Peter's disciples, asking him what he could do so that Peter would make an incantation (*incantet*) over his scrofula. The monk warned him: "beware and ...[do not] do this, and instead ask for the sign of the cross". Don Gentile

²⁰⁰ *Il Processo*, ed. Alfonso Marini., 121.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 45.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 285.

²⁰³ "*et non speraret in meritis ipsius fratris petri*" *Ibid.*, 178.

complied, but before Peter carried out the ritual, he asked the archpriest if he believed that the cross would help him, adding a spiritual dimension to what the witness expected to be an instrumental cure. Before leaving, Peter admonished him, "...do not say to anyone that I have done this, because I am not a man for things like this, rather, that which God wants to do, he does through his grace."²⁰⁴ A similar situation unfolded with Don Giacomo di Pacentro, who took his teenage relative, suffering of epilepsy, to Peter, asking him to say an incantation over the boy. Peter admonished him, "Son, do not speak thus, because I do not know how to do incantations" (*Fili, ne dicas, quia nescio incantare*).²⁰⁵ The Vita C recounts how one day, a group of peasants (*rustici*) brought a mute boy to Peter for healing. The saint reportedly responded to their request with: "am I a God? ... let us instead pray to God [together], that he may bestow on him his benevolent mercy". The visitors complied and all prayed the pater noster together, which healed the boy. A few days later, the youth's father led two goats to the monastery in recompense, to which Peter only smiled, ultimately refusing to accept them.²⁰⁶ It is clear from these cases that there was, at times, a clash between the religious practice of Peter of Morrone and that of the people from the Sulmona area, who came to see him for healing. Arriving there with (M) expectations, people's requests for thaumaturgy were sometimes reframed with an added (S) component, and sometimes rejected completely.

That Peter of Morrone's spiritual teachings left a mark on local religious culture is well-attested. Unlike the *Tractatus*, the Vita C emphasizes Peter's preaching. Indeed, despite being a hermit, Peter appears to have spent much time speaking with people about religion. For this, he

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 163-65.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 166.

²⁰⁶ "*Sum Deus ego, ut possim dare loquelam hominibus? ... Oremus ad Deum, ut benignam suam misericordiam eidem largiatur.*" Di Carlo and Di Iorio., 162.

attracted people from all social backgrounds, including judges and magnates, and “neither great nor small, having seen and heard him [speak], left him without greatest edification.”²⁰⁷ When his audience included powerful people, we are told that he spoke of wealth redistribution, assigning each one a certain number of pater noster prayers to say for the remission of their sins.²⁰⁸ When he was with bishops, he spoke on the salvation of souls.²⁰⁹ In terms of the ordinary faithful, Morrone was tremendously popular among the poor, who came to him from everywhere (*undique*) and to whom he often preached about the beatitudes, which promised greatness to the needy. Hearing these words, many (*plurimi*) of them reportedly were converted and dedicated themselves to the Lord; he also instructed a certain number of them (*illorum certum numerum*) to say pater noster prayers.²¹⁰ After saying mass before large crowds, we are told that all people, *after confession and absolution*, obtained benediction from him, before returning with great joy to their homes.²¹¹ Peter also formed confraternities for lay people, charging members with giving alms, praying the pater noster, and avoiding mortal sin. These could be incredibly popular organizations, with (if we are to believe the hagiographer) one amassing about a thousand members, another five hundred, and another one hundred - each confraternity grew in accordance with the size of the community it served.²¹² When he became pope, Peter granted a plenary indulgence to all those who visited the church of Santa Maria Collegmagio on the feast of the beheading of St. John, as long as they fully confessed and were penitent.²¹³ All of this

²⁰⁷ “*Neque magnus neque parvus, viso et audito illo, absque aedificatione maxima recedebat.*”
Ibid., 56.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 78, 80.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 82.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 80.

²¹¹ Ibid., 92.

²¹² Ibid., 94.

²¹³ Ibid., 104.

apparently had such an impact that hagiographer Thomas of Sulmona believed that “nearly all the men and women of the surrounding areas seemed to be religious through the teaching of his doctrine and his example.”²¹⁴ At the end of the *vita*, there is a short *lamentatio* that follows, that addresses Peter’s death: “O holy devoted ones ... Why do you not all come to weep for our ... desolation, our pious and benevolent father who restored you with spiritual food ... [?]”²¹⁵; “Woe to us ... because ... there is no longer he who can say, like always, ‘We are going to our father and from him we shall receive advice for the salvation of our soul’”.²¹⁶ Peter of Morrone was not merely a wonder-worker. Rather, he also played an important role disseminating (MS) and (S) ideas to the Abruzzi population.

Still, the remark that nearly all people in the area seemed to be religious as a result of Peter’s teachings must be an exaggeration. Nor is it possible to know the extent to which people’s spiritual lives were truly enriched through their interactions with the hermit saint. In fact, there is evidence that people could be immune to the spiritual talk of Peter and his disciples. For instance, one day, Francesco Cavalerio brought his mute son to Peter to be healed, and after holding the boy for one hour, the Morrone monks told them to go home and pray to God for the boy’s healing. The prayer was apparently not needed, however, as the instant they returned home, the boy began to speak. In other words, the holy and prolonged touch of the monks sufficed to heal the boy.²¹⁷ Similarly, Riccardo di Roccamorice, who had a paralytic daughter, went to Peter one day for help, asking for his intercession with God, on his daughter’s behalf. Peter responded, “Brother, I am a sinner, I am not worthy to be heard by God due to my sins, you

²¹⁴ “*Sed viri et mulieres terrarium circumadiacentium paene omnes religiosi videbantur et propter suae doctrinae monitionem et sui exempli ostensionem.*” Ibid., 94.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 130.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 132.

²¹⁷ *Il Processo*, ed. Alfonso Marini., 41.

are more worthy than me ...” Needless to say, Riccardo departed without the intercessory prayer he had hoped to receive. Nonetheless, he did not return home empty-handed, for he carried with him a piece of pizza (*piczam*), which Peter had given to him for his daughter, according to the text, as an act of blessing. As soon as Riccardo opened the door to his home, “through the merits and the prayers of Peter”, the girl reportedly opened her mouth and asked for the pizza.²¹⁸ This is an interesting case. On the one hand, it describes an attempt at reframing Riccardo’s conception of healing in more spiritual terms. Thus, Peter first corrected the man’s appellation, referring to himself as Riccardo’s brother, rather than father. He then asserted the efficacy of individual prayer, denied his own ability to intercede with God, and by extension, downplayed the power of place-based piety. Yet, like in the case of Francesco Cavalerio, these ideas apparently did not stick with Riccardo, for whom the giving of the pizza was, in some mysterious way, the cause of his daughter’s healing.²¹⁹ Likewise, according to the testimony of diocesan canon Ser Alessandro di Sulmona, one day, his niece was taken to Peter for healing after having some accident while playing. However, Morrone denied the ability to heal the girl, clarifying, “that rests in God” (*hoc iacet in Deo*). He then proceeded to give her the sign of the cross three times, which allegedly healed her.²²⁰ Later, when the girl’s mother provided her testimony of the miracle to the inquisitors, she apparently recalled only that the sign of the cross healed her daughter.²²¹ In the case of Tommaso di Luco, whose visit to Peter healed him of a leg infirmity, the witness apparently thanked the saint, rather than God, for the miracle: “I have been liberated, I have been

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 253.

²¹⁹ It is curious too, that the text ascribes the cure to the “prayers” of Peter, who, only a few sentences earlier, had explicitly refused to pray for the man. This likely indicates an interpolation by the scribe, who inserted this topos in an attempt at downplaying the role of the pizza in the story.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 102.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 112.

liberated, because brother Peter liberated me.”²²² A similar confusion occurred with Lady Fiorenza, wife of goldsmith Master Goddredo, who upon being healed of an infirmity, enthusiastically told her neighbors, “the holy father healed me...” (*Pater sanctus sanavit me*).²²³ When Diotallevi di San Valentino found healing through Peter, who came to him in a dream, he is said to have “praised” and “blessed” the saint.²²⁴ Clearly, these people’s understanding of the mechanics of miracle contradicted Peter’s, which maintained that his own power was incapable of healing anyone.²²⁵ Despite his best attempts then, Peter’s teachings sometimes fell on deaf ears.

Yet, the spiritualizing effect of Peter of Morrone’s presence in the Sulmona area should not be downplayed, especially considering that 16 % of all miracles recounted in the canonization enquiry involve an “expected” (M) and “actual” (MS) cure. Hence, it is difficult to dismiss the evidence of the sheer impact of Peter’s vocation on the region. Indeed, he seems to have been a sort of celebrity. After establishing himself in a cell near Orfente, “such was the multitude of men, who from everywhere came to hear him speak, that almost all of the mountain seemed to be full of men, and hardly were they able to speak to him.”²²⁶ Even if they were unable to hear him speak, simply seeing Peter (*sola visio illius*) was a means of edification and consolation. When the monastery of Santa Maria di Faifoli, which Peter and his monks had previously taken over and turned into a base from which to administer to the spiritual needs of

²²² “*Liberatus sum, liberatus sum, quia frater Petrus me liberavit.*” Ibid., 84.

²²³ Ibid., 236.

²²⁴ “*laudabat et benedicebat eum*”. Ibid., 294.

²²⁵ In another instance, when Master Rainaldo di Gentile di Sulmona goes to Peter with his blind niece Catania to ask for his intercession, Peter responds with, “My brother, these are things for God and not for me.” (*Frater mi, ista sunt Dei et non mei.*) Ibid., 72.

²²⁶ “*Tanta enim erat multitudo hominum, qui ad eum undique concurrebant tempore quo ipse loquebatur, quod pene totus mons ille plenus hominum esse videretur, et vix aliquis habere posset suam habilitatem ad loquendum eidem.*” Di Carlo and Di Iorio., 88.

local people, was forced to close down due to the persecution of a secular lord, “there was great sadness throughout all of the province and [the people] said that they had been abandoned by God.”²²⁷ After moving to his cell on the Morrone mountain above Sulmona, the news quickly spread, and “such a great multitude of men and women from all places assembled there, that there was not a single road that was not full. All the people of that province, as well as from far away, came from everywhere to see him.”²²⁸ Out of great joy, the people of Sulmona made large candles and lamps, which they offered to him in devotion. Likewise, the city’s noblewomen offered him a cross and a silver censer, while the men from the nearby village of Pacentro went in procession to him, bringing great candles and lamps. Additionally, all of the Sulmonese clergy (*omnes clerici Sulmonenses*) rendered him such glory and honor that “never had been seen before to be given to another man.”²²⁹ In fact, “all people rejoiced as if Christ was seen to descend from heaven”,²³⁰ they all believed that through him (*per eum*), they would be saved and filled with divine grace. According to the witness Odorisio di Acciano, the path leading to Peter’s cell was seen, everyday, to be full with people coming from nearby as well as far away, such that he had never seen such a “general” (*generaliter*) devotion given to any other saint.²³¹ Desiring to flee from the crowds and achieve greater solitude, Peter’s disciples, in one instance, gave him a reality check, highlighting the extent of the problem: “You think you will hide yourself. But unless you were to die, you will never succeed.”²³²

²²⁷ “*Quo relicto, facta est magna tristitia in tota illa provincia, et dicebant se a Deo relictos esse.*” Ibid., 76.

²²⁸ “*tanta multitudo virorum et mulierum undique concurrerunt, quod nulla via, nulla strata, nulla semita erat, quae plena non esset. Omnes de illa provincia et etiam de longinqua ad videndum eum undique concurrebant.*” Ibid., 90.

²²⁹ “*numquam ante alicui homini illic visum est conferri.*” Ibid.

²³⁰ “*Omnes enim in tantum gratulabantur, ac si Christum de caelo descendisse viderent.*” Ibid.

²³¹ *Il Processo*, ed. Alfonso Marini, 80.

²³² “*Et tu credis te abscondere. Nisi mortuus esses, numquam potes.*” Di Carlo and Di Iorio., 88.

Peter's way of life attracted many disciples, and in 1244, he founded his own monastic order, which eventually became a branch of the Benedictines. The group initially had as its headquarters the hermitage of Santo Spirito a Maiella in Roccamorice. It soon became necessary however, to build additional dependent monasteries, as well as restore others, for the purpose of accommodating greater numbers of converts.²³³ Indeed, the movement grew rapidly throughout the thirteenth-century and into the fourteenth. Already in Peter's lifetime, it grew to include thirty-six monastic houses, with about six hundred members, and stretched from the Abruzzi, through Lazio, Terra di Lavoro and Capitanata.²³⁴

Like his monastic houses, Peter's holy reputation quickly spread throughout the Abruzzi and beyond. According to law professor Lord Nicolo Verticello of Naples, Peter's miracles were public knowledge in the Abruzzi, Campagna, Terra di Lavoro, and other parts of the Kingdom of Naples.²³⁵ Additionally, Veletta, wife of Gerardo di Valentino di Acciano, stated that Peter's sanctity was known in Sulmona, Acciano, and almost all of Puglia. That Peter sometimes received visitors from as far away as Puglia is confirmed by witness Giovanni di Riccardo di Luco, who testified that he saw a man from Andria seeking healing at Peter's cell near Sulmona²³⁶; the news of his healing became public knowledge in his Pugliese home town. The master Nicolo, a builder from Sulmona, testified that while in Peter's cell above Sulmona, he saw the king of Naples and his son, the king of Hugnary, and "many other nobles and magnates that were going there to see him and many other innumerable people."²³⁷ There is even record of a certain leprous noblewoman from Calabria, who sent a priest on her behalf to Sulmona in order

²³³ Ibid., 64.

²³⁴ Ibid., 94.

²³⁵ *Il Processo*, ed. Alfonso Marini, 26.

²³⁶ Ibid., 124.

²³⁷ Ibid., 129.

to obtain some water from Peter with which to wash her hands.²³⁸ Leonardo di Roccamorice went so far as to claim that Morrone's fame extended not only throughout the Kingdom of Naples, but also "in other parts of the world". Thus, one day while with Peter, he saw a devotee there from Urbe, modern-day Liguria, in northern Italy.²³⁹

Peter was so renowned that in 1294 he was, in an allegedly unanimous decision, chosen to be Christendom's next pope. Initially reluctant, he eventually accepted the position, the news of which spread "throughout the whole world", causing all to rejoice and give thanks to God, that "he had deigned to send to his people a pope such as this".²⁴⁰ Peter of Morrone, the poor Abruzzi hermit, from a peasant farming family, was about to become one of western Europe's most powerful political leaders at the age of 79. In an effort to maintain his poverty and humility, he chose, against the cardinals' wishes, to travel on the back of a donkey from Sulmona to L'Aquila, where his papal coronation was to take place. The journey involved a large retinue, from cardinals, to the kings of Naples and Hungary, barons, counts, and "an innumerable number" of ordinary people.²⁴¹ Once in L'Aquila, he was crowned as pope in the basilica of Santa Maria Collegiata, an imposing structure, itself the product of a recent Morrone construction project. He decided to take on the name of Celestine V, signalling that he was to be a pope of heaven, not earth.²⁴² Indeed, in an age of intense eschatological fervor, the poor hermit, riding on the back of a donkey, renowned both for his spiritual teachings and supernatural power,

²³⁸ Di Carlo and Di Iorio., 150.

²³⁹ *Il Processo*, ed. Alfonso Marini., 221.

²⁴⁰ "*Diffusa est ergo fama ista per mundum universum; qui omnes laetabantur et gratias Deo referebant, qui dignatus fuerat plebem suam de tanto ac tali pontifice visitare.*" Di Carlo and Di Iorio., 98.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 100.

²⁴² The name "Celestine" comes from *caelestis*, or "celestial"; "heavenly".

must have been hailed as a sort of divinely-ordained saviour, sent to immanentize the eschaton, for a Church whose wealth and splendour were viewed as a colossal failure.²⁴³

Nonetheless, it was very difficult to be a “heavenly” pope, given the very secular demands of the office, and less than four months later, on 13 December 1294, Peter stepped down from the position. According to his hagiographer, the decision was met with widespread disapproval, as “the archbishop of Naples with all of the clergy, monks, and an innumerable multitude of men” travelled in procession to the castle that Peter was staying in, and “with tears and shouts” (*fletibus et clamoribus*) begged him to reverse the decision.²⁴⁴

²⁴³ Alfonso Marini has debunked the myth that, at the time, Celestine V fulfilled an apparent Joachimite expectation for an “angelic” pope. See, Alfonso Marini, “Celestino V nell’Attesa Escatologica del Secolo XIII” in *Celestino V Papa Angelico*, Atti del II Convegno Storico Internazionale, L’Aquila, 26-27 agosto 1987, ed. Walter Capezzali, L’Aquila 1991 (Convegni Celestiniani, 2), 33-94. That said, I do not think we should downplay the impact that Peter’s election as pope would have had on the collective imagination. As Jacques Paul points out, Peter enjoyed a very close bond with the countryside masses, with whom he cultivated a relationship as healer of both body and spirit. Not only this, but Peter himself was of peasant origin, which only increased his relatability. See, Jacques Paul, “Célestin V dans la dévotion populaire” in *Celestino V papa angelico*, Atti del II Convegno storico internazionale, L’Aquila, 26-27 agosto 1987, ed. Walter Capezzali, L’Aquila 1991 (Convegni celestiniani, 2), and, Edith Pasztor, “La Chiesa alla Fine del Duecento ed il Pontificato di Celestino V” in *Celestino V Papa Angelico*, Atti del II Convegno Storico Internazionale, L’Aquila, 26-27 agosto 1987, ed. Walter Capezzali, L’Aquila 1991 (Convegni Celestiniani, 2), 13-32. In addition, regardless of the true origins of the “angelic” pope myth, the later thirteenth-century remained a time of religious revival, which saw movements of radical poverty and mysticism, sometimes related to Joachimite, apocalyptic prophecy. As far as the latter is concerned, it was believed that a new age of the Holy Spirit was immanent, in which the values of monastic contemplation would supersede those of the secular clergy and Church hierarchy, making their role obsolete. As a “reformed” Benedictine, devoted to poverty, solitude, and indeed, the Holy Spirit, Peter would have been viewed as an ideal figure to usher in the new age, if not, simply to bring about a renewal in the Church. An indication, at least, that Peter himself understood this about his own role, is seen in the fact that, during his short papacy, he issued a plenary indulgence, as well as officially authorized Angelo Clareno’s group of spiritual Franciscans. See, Alessandra Bartolomei Romagnoli, *Una memoria controversa: Celestino V e le sue fonti* (SISMEL, Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2013), 235-288.

²⁴⁴ Di Carlo and Di Iorio., 106.

In sum, Peter of Morrone was no minor saint. Rather, he was an extremely compelling figure, who enjoyed popularity both throughout the Abruzzi and the rest of Italy. It follows then, that Peter's spiritual teachings must have had a significant impact on members of the local population and even beyond. In arguing such, I am largely disagreeing with Robert Brentano, for whom Peter's apparent "muteness" is his most important feature.²⁴⁵ To be sure, it is abundantly clear that Peter and his disciples espoused a practice that was essentially rooted in solitude. Thus, Peter was not always willing to see or speak with people, and especially not to women, whom he generally chose not to engage with.²⁴⁶

But even in this last case, it was nonetheless possible for women to absorb Peter's teachings elsewhere, such as during mass, which Peter often said on the plateau in front of S. Spirito di Valva; according to the notary Oddone di Sulmona, he had seen Peter singing mass

²⁴⁵ Brentano, "Sulmona Society and the Miracles of Peter of Morrone", 79-96. See also, Brentano, "Peter of Morrone, Space, and the Problem of Relics", 75-80. In this last work, Brentano goes so far as to compare the living Peter to a dead saint's relic. He points to Peter's preferred method of healing, the simple sign of the cross, as evidence of very quick and brief interactions between the saint and his devotees.

²⁴⁶ Witness Don Gentile, the archpriest of Sulmona, said that no one was allowed to speak to Peter except during certain times of the year, that is, when his Lents, which consisted of fasting and other abstinences, were finished. *Il Processo*, ed. Alfonso Marini, 160. That Peter generally repudiated the presence of women is clear. For example, when Giovanni di Riccardo arrived at Peter's cell with his wife Catania, the saint got angry, because, as he explained, he had prohibited all women from seeing him. Catania was forced to wait nearby. *Ibid.*, 54. Ser Alessandro di Sulmona's niece, who had had an accident while playing, was brought to Peter for healing, but not before disguising her as a boy in order to avoid the saint's reprobation. *Ibid.*, 103. This said, Peter did not always reject his female devotees. For example, when he was fleeing Naples after his papal renunciation, a woman approached him, carrying her paralyzed daughter, and Peter made the sign of the cross over the girl. Di Carlo and Di Iorio, 110. Likewise, in the case of the blind woman Trotta di Benedetto di Castel di Sangro, Peter apparently without issue agreed to make the sign of the cross over her. *Il Processo*, ed. Alfonso Marini., 35. Curiously however, this contradicts the testimony of Roberto di Raone di Castel di Sangro, who says that Peter was initially upset that Trotta had been brought to him, and in the end only agreed to pray for the woman. *Ibid.*, 45. Whatever the case, it seems clear that overall, Peter's refusal to interact with women was firm but not absolute.

and preaching to the people (*predicare populo*) there for thirty years.²⁴⁷ Lady Margherita, mother of Nicolo Zaurello di Sulmona, was herself present at one these masses. This was a special mass, however, because the “great multitude of people” in the audience, including herself, were able to see a miracle take place. Indeed, there was a woman there who was possessed, screaming before all of the people. After the mass’s end, Peter gave the crowd a general sign of the cross, which immediately cured the woman, who then vomited up some coal-like substance (*quasi carbones*).²⁴⁸ It was also during one of these masses that Giovanni di Riccardo di Sulmona’s daughter was healed of a foot problem.²⁴⁹ As communal events, the experience of hearing one of Peter’s masses was available to all.

In addition, it is clear that, regarding Peter’s interactions with his male devotees, he generally spoke to them willingly, entering easily into conversation, despite his preference for solitude. Thus, when Lady Gemma of Sulmona’s brother-in-law took her leprous son to Peter’s cell for healing, the saint, who previously had been “joined to [the man] out of devoted friendship” (*sibi erat devota familiaritate coniunctus*), asked, “Giovanni you have a son?”; “Father, I do not have a son, but my brother [does]... whom I consider my own.”²⁵⁰ Roberto di Raone di Castel di Sangro testified that he knew about Peter’s asceticism because he was friends with him (*eo amicabilem conversatus*) and visited him many times.²⁵¹ When the twenty-four-year-old Don Giacomo da Sant’Eufemia went to see Morrone to be cured of his blindness, the saint, who had known him, remarked, “you did not want to come to me while you could see and now you have come to me blind.” Peter then asked him about the remedies that physicians had

²⁴⁷ *Il Processo*, ed. Alfonso Marini., 234.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 108.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 206.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 62.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 42.

given him, before offering his own spiritual cure, “because [the diets and medicines] do nothing for you” (*quia nichil valent tibi*).²⁵² When the notary Giovanni di Riccardo went to see Peter on behalf of his wife’s illness, the saint started interrogating him on his own spiritual life. Clearly annoyed, Giovanni objected, “let us worry now about what we came here for, do not speak to me about my life.” Peter insisted, “my son, listen carefully to what I am saying to you” and began preaching to him, saying “many things regarding the divine words”.²⁵³

Accordingly, we should not downplay the interactions that Peter and his fellow hermits had with the outside world. Indeed, buried deep within a piety that valued worldly retreat above all else, lay the quintessential call to Christian charity. For as much as Peter would have preferred to focus his efforts on the next life, he simply could not escape the fact that there was important work to do in “the here and now”.²⁵⁴ As Thomas of Sulmona writes of Peter’s election as pope and subsequent descent from his mountain cell, “[God made him do this] because it is not right for a strong soldier to do battle hidden away, rather, sometimes hidden and sometimes in public, so that from his king he shall merit to receive the double crown.”²⁵⁵

²⁵² Ibid., 98.

²⁵³ Ibid., 56.

²⁵⁴ Paolo Vian rightly characterizes the life of Peter as a constant struggle to strike a balance between worldly retreat (solitude), and charity (helping people with their spiritual and material needs). See, Paolo Vian, “«*Predicare Populo in Habitu Heremetico*»: Ascesi e Contatto col Mondo Negli Atti del Processo di Canonizzazione di Pietro del Morrone” in Atti del Convegno Storico Internazionale, L’Aquila, 26-27 agosto 1987, ed. Walter Capezzali, 165-201.

²⁵⁵ “*quoniam quidem non decet fortem militem in abscondito praeliari, sed aliquando in occulto, aliquando in publico, ut a suo rege duplicem coronam mereatur accipere.*” Di Carlo and Di Iorio., 92.

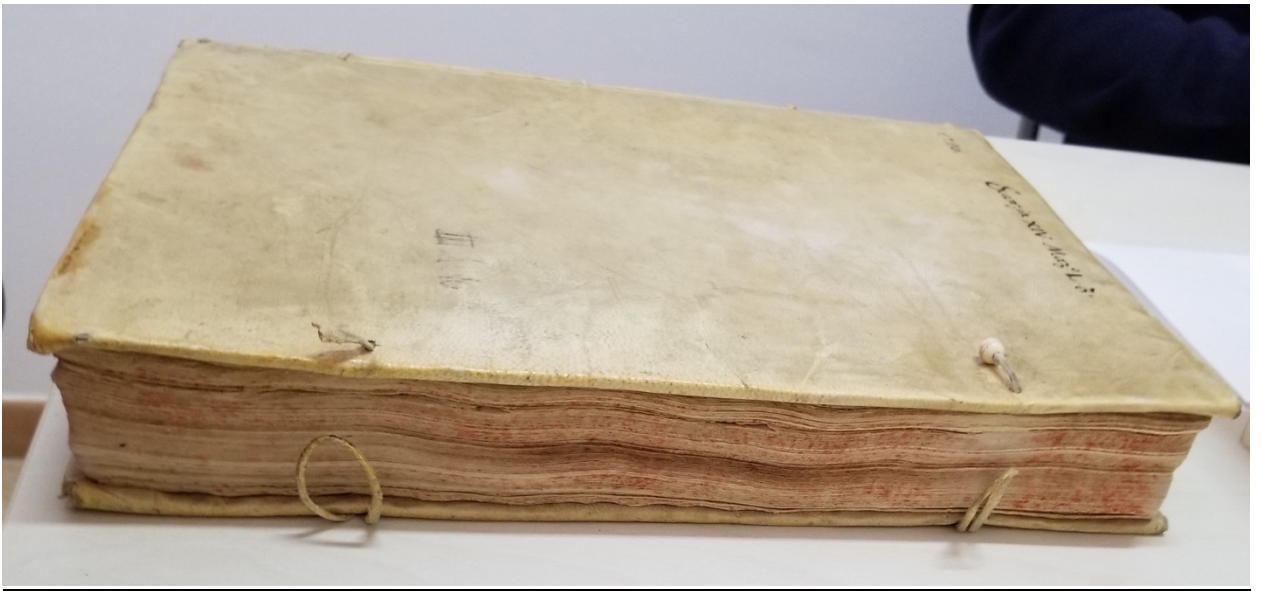


Figure 1: Peter of Morrone's Process of Canonization In Partibus - Sulmona codex (Archivio Capitolare di S. Panfilo, Sulmona).

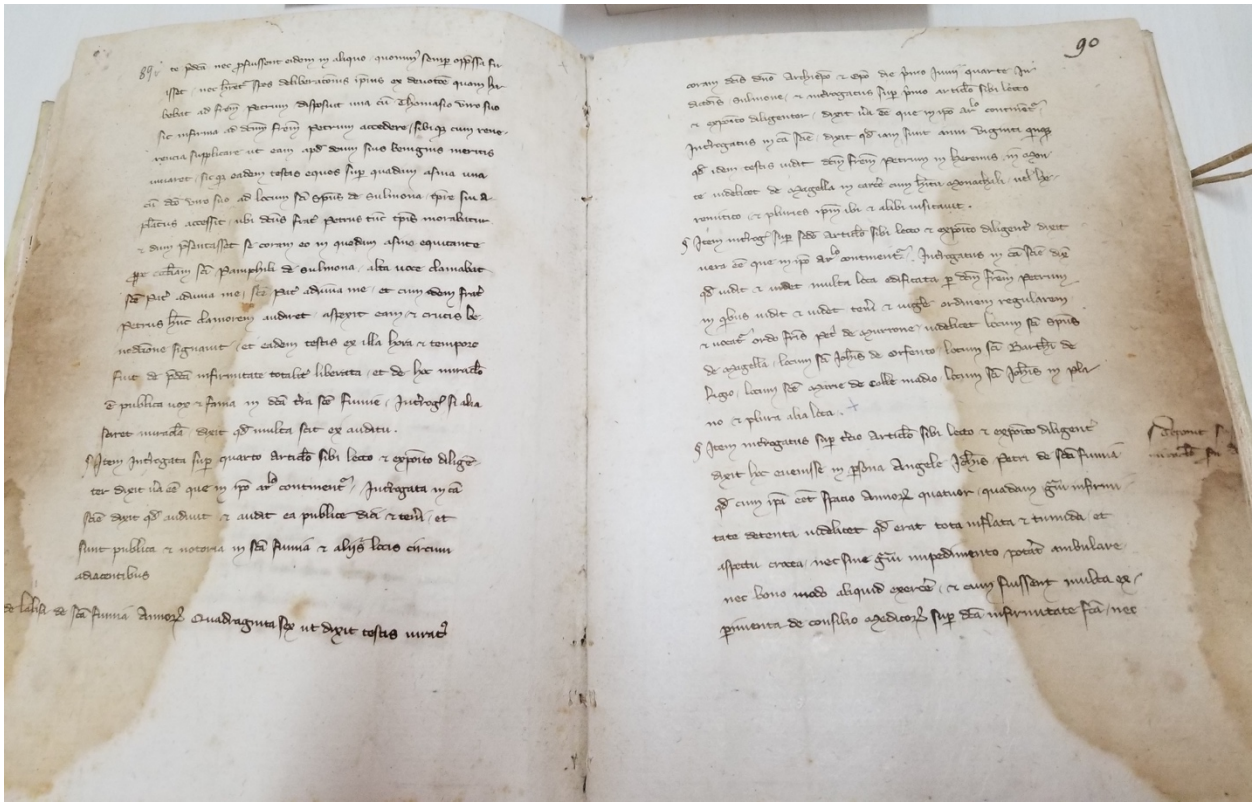


Figure 2: An example of one folio from the codex.

frat Petrus et notarius Johannes ad loquendum cepit sompnescere
et obdormire et in sompnis hinc visionem quandam et uidebat
sibi quod datus frater Petrus portaret per magnam hominum quantita-
tem ad ipsam testem et quod faceret sibi signum crucis sicut fit in
euangelio et hoc signo uidebat sibi quod uideret et quod uideret et
quod super oculos remaneret sibi quoddam pondus et quod ipsa peteret
ab eo dicens quid faciam pater de isto pondere quod est super
oculos meos et ille responderet accipe et liga illud et reponere
tibi et completa ista uisione datus notarius Johannes azur-
inus rediit ad eam et portauit sibi quandam crucem ligneam
pauam et dedit ei ex parte dei fratris Petri traditam ei per fratrem

Figure 3: Excerpt of the testimony of Catania, wife of Giovanni.



Figure 4: Cave where Peter of Morrone used to pray, according to tradition (Hermitage of Sant'Onofrio al Morrone, Sulmona).



Figure 5: Peter of Morrone's shoes (Cathedral of S. Panfilo, Sulmona).



Figure 6: Peter of Morrone's sandals (Cathedral of S. Panfilo, Sulmona).



Figure 7: Peter of Morrone's tunic (Cathedral of S. Panfilo, Sulmona).



Figure 8: Piece of Peter of Morrone's heart (Cathedral of S. Panfilo, Sulmona).

Part 3

**“What Must I do About this Weight that is
Over my Eyes?”: Intersections of Mind, Body,
Heaven, and Earth**

“Go, and around this man now bind a belt, formed from a single rush grown straight and smooth, then wash his features clean of filth and stains. It cannot be that any eye, still clutched by mist and murkiness, should meet the first of ministers who’ll come from Paradise.”

(Kirkpatrick 162)

-Dante’s *Purgatorio*

To insist on the spiritual legacy of Peter of Morrone’s vocation is to tell only half of the story. Thus, nowhere in the sources is there any evidence of a purely or even mainly spiritual Christianity, either in regards to Peter or among the general population. Rather, the opposite is true. As Tables 1 through 4 show, the material aspect was ubiquitous in the miracles of the process of canonization. (M) piety was an aspect of everyday religion that contemporaries took for granted, and which existed unproblematically alongside and sometimes in tandem with Christianity’s spiritual element. Indeed, as will be seen below, there is a point at which the material-spiritual dichotomy no longer becomes useful, for it ultimately obscures the complexity of reality, by ignoring the ways that both the material and spiritual co-existed harmoniously in, what was then considered, authentic Christianity.²⁵⁶

As shown above, 57 % of all miracles recorded in Peter’s process of canonization were carried out using *exclusively* (M) practice. This number becomes 78 % when considering as (M)

²⁵⁶ The assumption that a moral and spiritual-based Christianity opposed an essentially “magical” one is an anachronistic judgment that reflects a modern Protestant bias. It is a viewpoint which holds as inferior or “superstitious” all of the material-based practices of pre-Reformation Christianity, such as the cult of saints, ultimately viewing them as pagan intrusions that did not represent the “true” faith. According to this line of thought, these practices were the product of an early Church, which had begrudgingly accepted as orthodox non-Christian practices as a means of facilitating mass baptism. For an early but highly influential articulation of this bias, see Edward Gibbon, *History of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire* (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952). The idea was perpetuated into the 1970’s with people like Jean Delumeau and Keith Thomas. See Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1971) and Jean Delumeau, *Catholicism between Luther and Voltaire: a new view of the Counter-Reformation* (London: Burns & Oates, 1977). For a cogent and influential rejection of this paradigm, see Peter Brown, *The Cult of Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

all of the cases that only mention going to visit Peter as the mechanism of healing. It is also significant that the “expected” (M) numbers are not much higher than the “actual” ones; in the case of Tables 3 and 4 it is only a 16 % difference, suggesting that most people who visited Peter’s cell expecting an exclusively (M) cure were granted their wish. It becomes interesting when this same question is asked of Tables 1 and 2. Here, the data tells a different story. Just under one-third of people went to Peter expecting a material cure, independent of the fact that, in a majority of cases, they were already showing such an expectation through their decision to visit the saint in the first place. This often took the form of asking Peter for an object or food to heal them, or simply asking for his intercession. Despite this low number, more than half (57 %) of all people ended up receiving an (M) cure, meaning 28 % of witnesses received a material cure, at least apparently, without solicitation. At first glance, this seems to suggest that Peter himself could be more (M)-focused than his devotees, although such a claim may be misleading, due to the problem of interpretation that informs the difference between the first and last two Tables, a problem which, admittedly is difficult to resolve. Despite this, it can be said that in at least some cases, it was Peter, and not his devotees, who initiated an (M) cure.²⁵⁷ Overall, the difficulty in identifying Peter or his devotees as more or less (M)-minded than the other is instructive, and indeed, seems to me the true takeaway from the statistical analysis, as it relates to the (M) category, for it points to a shared preoccupation with the material - both Peter and his fellow Abruzzese men and women believed in the efficacy of (M) practices.

²⁵⁷ This is seen in the document itself, which includes many cases in which Peter “automatically” gives people the sign of the cross, some material object for healing, or some food to eat. For example, Guglielmo di Colle Alto was suffering of a leg issue and went to see Peter for help. Upon arrival, Peter gave him nine hosts and three pieces of bread. Guglielmo took one of the hosts and some of the bread and ate them. His body immediately broke out into tremors, and his leg was completely cured some days later. *Il Processo*, ed. Alfonso Marini., 39.

This is confirmed in the document itself. Indeed, it is clear that the Abruzzese population shared with Peter an understanding of his role as a sort of “physician”, albeit one whose cures were supernatural in origin. Thus, like a medical doctor, he often prescribed food and lifestyle advice to his patients. He also used sacred objects in healings. Sometimes his own healing touch or the sign of the cross sufficed, sometimes he utilized a combination of strategies - it all depended on the individual case. For instance, Pandolfo di Giovanni di Sulmona testified before inquisitors how he took his nephew to Peter, in the hopes of obtaining for him a cure to his one blind eye. After explaining the problem to the hermit, Pandolfo asked that Peter pray for the boy, in divine intercession. Morrone apparently had a better idea, perhaps denying the ability to intercede with God, as he was known to do.²⁵⁸ He took a candle from the altar “that was said to be blessed, that is, those that one is given in church on the day of the purification of the blessed Virgin”,²⁵⁹ and gave it to him, saying, “go and return and bring this candle, and make from it a cross and wrap it in a small reliquary of wood and with a piece of thread tie it to his neck so that it can be easily brought up to his eyes without needing to be removed from the neck. And then say three pater nosters to it, and when this is done, you must often bring the cross up to the blind eye, and then perhaps God will provide for him.”²⁶⁰ In the case of Matteo Abbamonte di Roccamorice, his brother who was suffering from severe epilepsy, was brought to Peter on the back of a donkey to ask for the saint’s intercessory prayers. Peter touched the man “with his holy

²⁵⁸ See the case of Riccardo di Roccamorice; note 218.

²⁵⁹ “*quam dicebat esse benedictam, de illis scilicet que dantur in ecclesia in purificatione beate Virginis.*” Ibid., 156, 158.

²⁶⁰ “*Vade et revertere et porta istam candelam et facies de ea unam crucem et involves eam in una pecia parva lignea et cum quodam filo liga eam cum magna devotione sic longe ad collum ipsius pueri patientis, quod possit ea pendente ad collum usque ad oculum patientem portari habiliter absque totali elevatione dicte crucis a collo, et dicas ad hoc tres Pater noster; et cum sic ligata fuerit, sepe sepius facias ipsam crucem duci super oculum cecum et forte Dei providebit ei.*” Ibid., 158.

hands” (*sanctis manibus suis*), made the sign of the cross over him, and gave him some of his bread to eat. The man was immediately cured.²⁶¹ When Lady Fiorenza, wife of the goldsmith Master Goffredo, was severely ill and feared death as a result, she sent her father Filippo to Peter to ask for his intercession. Once there, Peter assured Filippo that his daughter would not die, and sent her a wooden cross and a linen tablecloth. The tablecloth was placed over the bedridden Fiorenza’s head. After one hour she was able to stand up, something that previously she could not do without help. She wrapped her head in the cloth and stepped foot outside. The neighbors were “greatly amazed and almost terrified” at the sight (*mirati sunt valde et quasi territi*)! After eight days, she regained her health entirely.²⁶² When Judge Leonardo di Sulmona’s seven-year-old son Marino was ill, the family sent a messenger to Peter for help, who later returned with a little wooden cross that was to be placed on the boy’s chest and an apple that he was to eat. The child did so and was immediately cured.²⁶³ When Lady Granata, wife of judge Leonardo di Sulmona, who had lost the use of her arms and fingers, sent someone to Peter for help, the first thing they did was to explain to the saint “what type of contraction” (*huiusmodi contractionem*) the Lady was suffering from. Peter gave him a piece of bread, two hosts and a certain quantity of herbal powder (*quantitatem pulveris herbarum*), with the instruction that Lady Granata consume these and say a pater noster. She did, and within a few days was completely healed.²⁶⁴ When Nicolo di Sulmona, who was suffering from epilepsy, went to see Peter for help, the hermit told him to lay his head over a wooden gate, and began to read from a book for about one hour, finishing by using holy water and incense on him. He then told Nicolo to avoid fire, water, and

²⁶¹ Ibid., 218, 220.

²⁶² Ibid., 234, 236.

²⁶³ Ibid., 90.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 92, 94.

the climbing of tall mountains. He was also not to seek the medicine of secular doctors for one month.²⁶⁵

Peter's devotees were likewise well aware of his role as physician, and were sometimes even familiar with the kind of cures he prescribed. Thus, Giuliana, wife of Complice di Torre, who was suffering from a throat problem, petitioned Giovanni di Bugnara to go to Peter and ask him "for the love of God and the blessed Virgin" to send her something because she believed it was her only hope. Peter sent her a candle in the shape of a cross and a little bit of bread, as well as the instruction to fast every Saturday in honor of the Virgin, which proved efficacious.²⁶⁶ Donna Gemma di Sulmona, who was ill, asked her father to bring her to Peter for healing. Her father responded, "Daughter, you know very well that Peter refuses to see women ... However, I will go to him and bring back some of his things."²⁶⁷ When Lady Bartolomea's young daughter suffered a fracture to her groin, she asked her male neighbor to go to Peter for help on her behalf. When he arrived, the neighbor *specifically* asked that the saint give him a wooden cross, some hosts, and two pater nosters made of bones for the girl's healing.²⁶⁸ The surgeon Master Stefano di Brizio da Capua testified that he had heard of a blind man that Peter healed "with the sign of the cross done to him in a special manner" (*per signum crucis specialiter sibi factum*).²⁶⁹

Peter of Morrone was thus unambiguously a kind of physician, who administered (M) treatments and to whom the severely ill could have recourse, when all else failed, for one last attempt at healing²⁷⁰ - and this, people did, in large numbers. The difference was merely that, in

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 105-107.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 284.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., 239.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 177.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 28.

²⁷⁰ Throughout the document it is common for witnesses to state that they sought Peter out of desperation, after having been despaired of by secular medics.

an attempt at retaining his humility (as well as orthodox theology), Peter denied personal responsibility for the miracles that people received. Yes, they were healed through his objects, his food, his “special” sign of the cross, and it was his advice that people followed. But everything ultimately occurred through the power of God, not his own; Peter was merely a vessel, a servant of the Most High, whose objects, food, and physical touch, were especially potent due to his status as a hermit, which ensured his closeness to the divine.

Altogether, the statistical and textual evidence presents the following picture. The majority of miracles recorded in Peter’s process of canonization involved an exclusively material element. This is seen clearly in the data collected. Sometimes people approached Peter expecting a material cure and were granted it. Sometimes they did not, and Peter gave them one anyway. Very few people went to Peter expecting a purely or even partially spiritual cure, although the fact that this number was not zero may reflect the existence of a local pre-Celestine spiritual dynamic.²⁷¹ There was also a significant portion of people who approached Peter expecting a material cure (or having no clear expectations at all) and instead received a mixed one. For the most part then, Peter and his devotees shared a common preoccupation with the material. Food, holy objects, and the sign of the cross, were all, in and of themselves, unambiguously powerful and efficacious forces for healing. But there were two differences. One was theological: Peter himself adhered to the orthodox view that God was the architect of all miracles, and not the saint, whereas ordinary people were less certain. Second, cures were not always instrumental, as sometimes Peter required that they be supplemented with a spiritual component, such as private prayer. Still, a majority of miracles were instrumental. In a large number of cases, we see Peter

²⁷¹ In truth, four out of the eight miracles that recount an “expected” (S) or (MS) cure come from witnesses outside of the Abruzzi (Naples and Capua).

simply giving a sick person the sign of the cross, which itself is enough to heal them. There are also many cases in which Peter merely gives food or some holy object to a sick person, without any added spiritual element.

What is to be made of this? There are two possible explanations here. First, Peter himself could have been inconsistent in his theology. Perhaps he espoused a nuanced, spiritual understanding of material cures without rejecting altogether the instrumental ones. Whether he consciously regarded this as an “inconsistency” is not immediately apparent. Second, the witnesses themselves may not have been telling the whole story. It is possible that, when asked to recall events usually decades in the past, people remembered only the material component to their cure because that was to them the most memorable aspect. It could also be the case that people did remember an added spiritual component, but instead related only what they found to be the most important details to their story, which could well have been the material elements. I do not think it very likely that the witnesses’ stories are missing important details, especially because of the sheer number of them that report these instrumental cures. Rather, the first option to me seems the most probable. One must simply wrestle with the fact that Peter both did and did not work instrumental cures.

Perhaps this would be striking if Peter were alone in this. But he was not. As mentioned above, 5 % of miracles involved an “expected” (MS) or (S) cure, indicating that even the ordinary faithful made use of both instrumental, as well as non-instrumental ritual, on their own initiative, without Peter’s prompting. For example, Diotallevi di San Valentino, who relied on a walking stick due to an illness in his hands and feet, went, after Peter’s death, up to the cell of Sant’Onofrio where the hermit used to live. There, he laid down and slept for the night, during which he received a vision, where he saw a white-bearded Peter appear to him in white

vestments, touching him with his hands. When he woke up, Diotallevi heard the sound of the bell of Santo Spirito del Morrone, and immediately was healed and able to stand up and walk on his own.²⁷² Like in Peter's Autobiography, the bells play a thaumaturgical role in this story. Most importantly, the tale combines the spiritual experience of a dream vision with the place-based piety of sleeping in Peter's old cell. A similar case is seen in Giovanni di Riccardo, or "Collo di Sulmona", who reported that at one time his daughter Florisenda was suffering from a foot problem, to the point that she was unable to walk. When he heard that Peter was to say mass at S. Spirito di Valva, Giovanni took his daughter there in the hopes of receiving a cure. After the mass ended, Peter gave a general sign of the cross to the audience. Right at that moment, Giovanni lifted his daughter's problem foot in the air, "asking God with a pious prayer that, through the merits of the most holy man, he would liberate his daughter from that disease."²⁷³ Judge Leonardo di Sulmona recounted a story about an illness in which his intestines were moved from their normal spot. Ashamed to show this to secular physicians, Leonardo turned his attention to the hermit Peter of Morrone. One night, while meditating (*contemplative meditaretur*) on Peter, he placed his hand over the affected area and was immediately and miraculously healed. Right away, we are told, he received a contemplative consolation in his mind and heart (*contemplativam consolationem mente et corde recipiens*). As mentioned above, Leonardo's son Marino was also ill, at one time. The cure, of course, was a little wooden cross and an apple. Thus, there are (M), as well as (MS), elements even within Leonardo's own

²⁷² Ibid., 292, 294.

²⁷³ "rogando Deum prece piissima ut meritis ipsius viri sanctissimi eius filiam ab ipsa egritudine liberaret." Ibid., 206.

testimony, which conceptually do not conflict. Rather, they exist alongside one another without apparent issue.²⁷⁴

But there is more here than simply the co-existence of instrumental and non-instrumental cures. In that vein, the case of Catania, wife of notary Giovanni di Riccardo and daughter of Sulmona medic Benedetto, will be instructive. The woman Catania appeared before the inquisition in Sulmona on May 29th 1306. She was forty years old. When asked about the miracles of Peter of Morrone, Catania responded with a vivid account of her own healing, which took place around 1291 - at that time, fifteen years in the past. One day while sitting with her female neighbors spinning wool, Catania suddenly came down with severe vertigo, which caused her to lose her vision. Noticing her distress, Catania's friends asked what the problem was, and after explaining to them what was happening, a girl was called to bring Catania into the house. The girl examined her face and discovered that one eye was protruding further out of its socket than the other. Catania lay in bed for several days with the affliction. Her family did what they could to help. Her own father, who was himself a medic, tried many things to cure her. Others were likewise called upon for their advice, yet none could restore the woman's eyesight. Finally, Catania thought about seeking the help of Peter of Morrone, who was famous as a local miracle-worker.

Then, one night she had a dream that she was in the church of San Pelino near Sulmona. At the altar stood an old man in vestments that she would later, in person, see Peter of Morrone wearing. Some people that were in the church said to her, "Go to he who stands before the altar for he will teach you the way" (*quia docebit te viam*). Following their advice, she walked up to Peter, who then grabbed her by the hand, saying, "Go down this path", and "he showed to her the

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 88, 90.

correct path on which she walked” (*ostendit ei viam rectam per quam ambulavit*). Catania woke from her sleep and asked her husband Giovanni to bring her to Peter in the hopes of regaining her vision. Giovanni, however was apparently a skeptic, and Catania was forced to beg him repeatedly. Indeed, it seemed to her that “he did not have devotion in that since he was until then a very dissolute man in his life to God” (*erat homo dissolutus valde in vita sua quoad Deum*). Finally, her husband agreed, and the horses were prepared for the trip. Catania was placed on the back of a horse, and the couple travelled, along with some others, to San Giovanni di Orfento to see the hermit.

Upon arrival, Peter showed annoyance that a woman was brought into his presence, and refused to see Catania. This irritated Giovanni, who in anger, answered back to him “without the proper devotion.” Peter responded by asking Giovanni about his own spiritual life, which eventually sparked a lengthy discussion, and ultimately had a lasting impact on Giovanni. Indeed, from that moment on, “he was changed into another man and was from then, until his death, a man of great abstinence, fastings, and prayers, and greatly devoted to God, going to churches by day and by night, and doing other good works, that all who knew him were amazed...” While all of this was happening, Catania was sitting alone at a spot nearby, before beginning to fall asleep. Again, she began to dream. This time, she dreamt that a large group of men (*magnam hominum quantitatem*) were taking Peter to her, who then made the sign of the cross over her, “as is done in the Gospel” (*sicut fit in evangelio*). Her vision immediately started to improve, but it still felt like “a weight” (*quoddam pondus*) remained over her eyes. She asked Peter in the dream, “Father, what must I do about this weight that is over my eyes?” He responded, “take this, tie it and store it for yourself”. Immediately, she woke up and saw her husband coming over to her. He was holding a small wooden cross, which he gave to her on

behalf of Peter. She took it and used it to make the sign of the cross over her body “from her head to her feet”. She then placed it over her eyes and right away, was miraculously healed of her blindness and reportedly began to see clearer than ever before (*habuit lucem clariorem solito*).

Wishing to thank Peter, Catania instructed her husband to relay this message to the saint: “I thank God and him, because, being blind and not seeing, he restored my sight and [now] I see. I wish to ask him that, given I am choosing from now on to serve only God, he teach me how I should conduct my life.” Peter’s instructions were only that she tell people that the Lord healed her, and that every day she would say a certain number of pater nosters and do genuflections. The couple set off for home, except this time, Catania refused the horse, and instead travelled on foot. When they arrived at the bottom of the mountain, they encountered a group of boys, who previously had seen the blind Catania going up the mountain on the back of a horse with the help of her relatives. Seeing that the woman was healed, they allegedly praised the Lord, saying, “Blessed be God, for this woman who went up the mountain blind, returns unimpeded and sees” (*ista mulier, que ceca ascendit montem, recedit libera et videt*). The news of the miracle spread throughout the city of Sulmona.²⁷⁵

The case of Catania is an interesting and complex one that is deserving of some extra consideration. We are told that the woman Catania, who lay in bed unable to see anything, begins to dream, seeing instead through her mind’s eye. Here, she sees the hermit Peter standing at the church altar, and at this point, readers expect the story to proceed like a typical medieval miracle account, with the infirm receiving instruction to go to the saint for healing. Instead, Catania is told to approach Peter in order to learn how to live, which she does, and is then shown

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 52-58.

the right “path”. The dream thus prefigures, in spiritual terms, Catania’s physical healing, a metaphor that is not lost on Catania herself, who wakes up and immediately knows what she must do: the dream was telling her that she needed to see Peter in order to be cured of her blindness. Next, readers meet, for the first time, Catania’s husband. We learn that like his wife, Giovanni is also suffering from an illness, that is, he suffers from lack of “devotion”, although perhaps it is more accurate to use the term “disbelief” - Giovanni initially refuses to take his wife to Peter because he does not believe it will help heal her. He is also described as a man “dissolute” toward God, adding a moral component to his disbelief. One gets the sense that it was ultimately Catania’s incessant petitioning that convinced him to take her, simply out of desperation. Thus, from the beginning of the narrative, we are presented with two people, equally in need of Peter’s saintly aid; both husband and wife are suffering of their own respective infirmities. Giovanni is the first to receive help. He “converts” at the behest of Peter’s preaching, choosing to change his bad behavior, and presumably losing his skepticism. Meanwhile, Peter appears to Catania in a dream, giving her the sign of the cross and telling her to make use of something, which turned out, in real life, to be a small wooden cross, which her husband then brings to her, upon waking. She places the cross over her eyes, is healed, and thanks Peter for curing her blindness; although, readers cannot help but question whether Catania also means “blindness” in a spiritual sense, as in being “blinded to the truth”. Indeed, her physical healing is directly linked with her spiritual conversion. Being healed of her blindness, Catania now wants to serve God for the rest of her life, and remaining true to her dream, asks Peter how to best go about doing this.

The deposition of Catania, wife of Giovanni, blurs the line between the material and spiritual, in ways that have yet to be seen in this study. Her story is, on the one hand, heavily

spiritual, with Catania experiencing two dreams, the first of which implies that curing her blindness is also about changing her heart. Her physical healing likewise turns out to be an opportunity for her husband Giovanni to change his life for the better. At the same time, the role of the material is nonetheless central to the story. Catania could not have been cured (whether physically or spiritually) without Peter's sign of the cross, as well as the physical cross, which she needed to place over her eyes, and which she was first made aware of in her second dream. Furthermore, it is the physical healing of her blindness that represents and evokes a spiritual awakening in her. Thus, it is impossible to say that this was either a material or a spiritual cure for Catania. Both the means by which the miracle took place, as well as the cure itself involve elements of both, and Catania, as well as her ecclesiastical inquisitors, before whom she spoke, understood this well and without issue.

It is significant that the metaphor of "blindness" appeared again in another witness's testimony. Fifty-two-year-old Don Giacomo da Sant'Eufemia, of the diocese of Chieti, recounted a miracle that took place when he was a young priest, some thirty years prior. According to the account, one day Giacomo had come down with an unspecified eye illness which caused him to lose his vision. After physicians made many unsuccessful attempts at helping him, Giacomo's father, who was a devotee of Peter, decided to bring his son to the famed hermit for help. Morrone was apparently surprised to see him: "You did not want to come to me while you could see and now you have come to me blind". It seems likely that like Catania's husband Giovanni, Giacomo was suffering from lack of "devotion" - the young priest was likely a skeptic; perhaps it even took some convincing on behalf of Giacomo's father to get his son to agree to come see the monk. Peter then asked him which medicines he had been taking on the advice of doctors, before asking him to stop following the instructions of the secular medics: "[the diets and medicines] do

nothing for you” (*quia nichil valent tibi*). Indeed, Giacomo’s problem was of a different sort. In order to regain his eyesight, he needed to have a change of heart: “I wish and I order that you cast away from yourself these blue garments that you wear and [that you] renounce the world and abandon all vices and iniquities that you have”.²⁷⁶ Giacomo then presumably stripped naked, followed by Peter covering him in a cloak, before leading him inside the church to lay down. Thus, like the Umbrian Francis of Assisi, Giacomo symbolically stripped himself of his previous worldly life and instead was covered in the cloak of godliness. In other words, his outer appearance reflected an inner moral conversion. Yet, even this was not enough. In order to regain his eyesight, Giacomo then needed to sleep in the church for the entire night, clearly as a means of benefitting from its *virtus*.²⁷⁷ When Matins came, Peter and the other monks lit a candle and began to sing. Immediately, Giacomo completely regained his eyesight and joined along in the singing.²⁷⁸ Like in the case of Catania, his blindness was both a physical and spiritual ailment, that required a combination of a spiritual and material cure.

These themes appear elsewhere in the text. Lady Gemma, wife of Panfilo di Riccardo di Sulmona, described how at one time, her son was suffering from a skin disease that ate away at his flesh, to the point that everyone considered him leprous. After the secular medics could not help him, she decided to take him to Peter because he was known to work miracles, but above all, because of the miracle which she saw her own sister-in-law Catania²⁷⁹ to have received. Gemma’s brother-in-law Giovanni, husband to Catania, brought the boy to Peter for healing,

²⁷⁶ “*Volo et mando tibi quod eicias a te hos pannos de bleueto quos portas et recusa mundum et relinque omnes malicias et iniquitates, quas habes.*” Ibid., 98.

²⁷⁷ This is an example of the ancient practice of incubation, which involved sick people spending the night at sacred sites in the hopes of receiving a cure.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 96, 98, 100.

²⁷⁹ Catania, wife of notary Giovanni.

who made the sign of the cross over him. Eight days later he was completely healed. The text then relates that the inquisitors themselves saw the boy before them completely healthy, and that according to people “worthy of faith”, the boy was living an “innocent” life and displayed “praise-worthy” behaviour.²⁸⁰ In other words, the boy’s good morals were conceptually linked to the clearing of his skin. Something similar is seen in the story of Matteo Abbamonte di Roccamorice, who testified that he brought his brother Pietruccio, suffering from severe epilepsy, to Peter for healing. Upon arrival, the hermit reportedly touched him with his hands and made the sign of the cross over him. Right away, Pietruccio got up, ate some of Peter’s bread, and from that moment, was completely and permanently healed. It then seemed appropriate for the scribe to add that at the time of writing, Pietruccio was “healthy and unharmed” and “dressed in monastic garb” (*est habitu monachali indutus*).²⁸¹ Likewise, Master Andrea di Bartolomeo di Sulmona testified how, when he was younger, he had an accident which caused a fracture to his groin, and that denied him the ability to walk freely. Accordingly, he went to see Peter at his cell of Sant’Onofrio for healing, and upon showing him the fracture, was told, “Perhaps God revealed [the fracture] to you so that, being, as a young person, a sinner, you would do penance for your sins.”²⁸²

Undoubtedly, this linking together of physical and spiritual sickness undoubtedly reflects the later medieval notion of the body and soul as psychosomatic entity. Indeed, in the early fourteenth century, theologian and advisor to King Charles II of Naples, Augustinus of Ancona, touched upon the subject, when he wrote that, “Men cannot be identical in number unless he has

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 62, 64.

²⁸¹ Ibid., 220.

²⁸² “*Quia forte peccator es ut iuvenis, Deus ostendit tibi istud ut peniteas te peccatorum tuorum.*” Ibid., 262.

body as well as soul, for these two make the integrity of human nature. For although soul separated from body may be more perfect ... speaking simply, the soul is more perfect joined to the body than separated from it, because body is an integral part of man.”²⁸³ The person is therefore defined as a combination of his or her physical and spiritual elements. On this point, contemporary thinkers such as Thomas Aquinas, Giles of Rome and Bonaventure were all in agreement, as they taught that, in various ways, the body was an expression of the soul.²⁸⁴ In practice, this belief manifested itself, for example, in the practice of contemporary mystic Angela of Foligno, whose *Memorial* describes a vision in which Christ was revealed to her as a physician. Indeed, “my soul saw that every part of my body had its own illness. And my soul began to assign to each part the corresponding sin, which was seen and identified in a wonderful way.”²⁸⁵

These ideas partly explain the ambiguity in Peter’s process of canonization between spiritual and physical cures. It also accounts for the apparent “dual” role that Peter assumed as both spiritual teacher and healer of the sick. Clearly, these were not understood as unrelated vocations. Rather, when taken together, they formed a mind-body whole which cemented Peter’s status as healer of the person in his or her entirety. Instead of viewing Peter as either a spiritual teacher or a worker of miracles, contemporaries thought of him more in terms of a general “nurturer”. Peter loved to feed people, and this meant both spiritual and material food. Time and time again, witnesses told the stories of how Peter gave them things such as bread, figs, “pizza”,

²⁸³ Quoted in Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, 245.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 261-62.

²⁸⁵ *Angela of Foligno’s Memorial*, ed. Cristina Mazzoni and trans. John Cirignano (Woodbridge and Rochester: D. S. Brewer, 1999), 49.

or a powder to consume.²⁸⁶ In one instance, while the church of Santo Spirito a Maiella was under construction, Peter reportedly instructed one of his followers to make food for a certain Signore Tommaso who was working on the building, but the monk reported that there was no oil left for cooking. Peter then instructed him to place the empty container near to the fire. When the monk looked again, the container was found to be full of oil and the meal could then be cooked.²⁸⁷ In another instance, in preparation for mass, Peter asked his followers to pass him the wine. There was none there, they reported. Still, Peter insisted on having the wine, and sure enough, when they looked again, both water and wine had miraculously appeared.²⁸⁸ The Vita C tells how both clergy and lay people went to Peter to gain edification by hearing him speak on the Scriptures: “Discussing these and many other things with them, they rejoiced greatly at such sweet and holy words, which they saw flow out from his mouth. After the delightful life discussion, he would distribute to them material (*corporeum*) food, so that, being restored in mind and in body, they would return home with joy.”²⁸⁹ Indeed, “wherever he found himself, no church, monastery, poor cleric, widow, nor ... sick person, remained deprived of the gift of his benevolence. He fed all, cherished all, sustained all, and, like a mother consoles her own children, so did this man given to us by God love everyone like his own children....”²⁹⁰

On the other hand, it may also be tempting to argue that the simultaneous existence of instrumental and non-instrumental cures points to a difference between local Abruzzi religion

²⁸⁶ In addition, the Vita C states how Peter had the habit of giving blessed bread to his devotees. Di Carlo and Di Iorio, 80.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 152.

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 154.

²⁸⁹ “*Haec et alia multa ipso cum illis ad invicem conferentibus, gaudebant nimium de tam dulcibus verbis et sanctis, quae de ore illius emanare conspiciebant. Post dulcia vitae colloquia cibum corporeum eisdem ministrare faciebat, ut mente et corpore recreati ad sua loca cum gaudio reverterentur.*” Ibid., 82.

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 78.

and official ecclesiastical practice. But this is not, in fact, what the evidence reveals. The record does not, like George Ferzoco has argued, reflect a “total metamorphosis” of Peter’s image in which elements of popular practice and mentality were excised from his story, at least, not to the extent that seems to be implied.²⁹¹ In fact, as will be seen, the Church was actually accepting of and quite enthusiastic about many elements of Peter’s story that some modern Christians might consider “superstitious”.

After all of the witnesses had been questioned, the results of the inquest were then sent to Avignon for the next step in the canonization process. Now, the task was for the cardinals’ secretaries to go through all of the testimonies and group together Peter’s virtues, works, and miracles, for easier examination. The resulting document is called the *Compendium*.²⁹² Curiously, the proportion of (M), (S), and (MS) miracles that were included in this text resembles, to a striking degree, that of the initial inquest, as it is extant to us.²⁹³ As far as the types of (M) miracles included, these do not differ much from those of the *inquisitio*, with the sign of the cross, as well as holy objects, forming a majority.²⁹⁴ In other words, no serious attempt was made at “spiritualizing” the miracle accounts of the Abruzzi people.

²⁹¹ Ferzoco, “Church and Sanctity”.

²⁹² I am using the version found in *Il Processo di Canonizzazione di Celestino V*, Alessandra Bartolomei Romagnoli and Alfonso Marini, eds. (Florence: Sismel, 2015): 76-177.

²⁹³ Here, I am comparing Tables 2 and 5.

²⁹⁴ 53 % of the *Compendium*’s (M) cures involved the sign of the cross, while 30 % made use of material objects.

Actual		
M:	93	65 %
S:	6	4 %
MS:	8	6 %
N:	35	25 %
Total:	142	

Table 5

Next, the *Compendium* was sent to be examined by the pope and cardinals in a secret consistory meeting. After careful deliberation, it was finally decided that Peter of Morrone was to be recognized as an official saint. To announce this decision, Clement V issued a bull²⁹⁵ in 1313, a document that is instructive for our purposes as it reflects an official and ecclesiastical viewpoint *par excellence* of Peter's life and legacy. The bull begins by describing some of Peter's virtues and ascetic practices. For example, we are told that he lived for most of his life in remote and harsh places, macerating his flesh and starving his body of food in fast. He was a good monk, who was always attentive to the offices and engaged in manual labor to prevent idleness; never did he fail to exhibit piety, obedience, humility, purity, kindness, and constancy. In order that people might imitate these virtues, God chose to work countless miracles through his confessor. The goal of Peter's miracles then, in the eyes of the Church, was ultimately spiritual. Yet, this did not mean that the ways in which they were brought about could not be instrumental. Indeed, of the eleven²⁹⁶ miracles recounted in the bull, *all* eleven are material-

²⁹⁵ I am using the version found in *Il Processo di Canonizzazione di Celestino V*, Alessandra Bartolomei Romagnoli and Alfonso Marini, eds. (Florence: Sismel, 2015): 178-195.

²⁹⁶ I am not including the miracle of the suspended cross because it belongs to a category on its own.

based, instrumental cures, including those that used material objects, food, Peter's sign of the cross, as well as the practice of incubation. There is absolutely no mention of a complimentary spiritual element to these cures.

As is clear, rather than downplay Peter's (M) cures, the Church actually affirmed them without question. There was, in truth, no significant difference between the religion of Peter of Morrone and that of the ecclesiastical establishment. Both believed in instrumental cures. Both also believed in cures that combined the spiritual and the material. This apparent contradiction is partly explicable in light of what Caroline Bynum views as the paradox at the heart of Christianity - the idea that an eternal and invisible God became fully present and active in the physical realm, as the man Jesus Christ.²⁹⁷ This conundrum, she argues, grew increasingly acute into the later Middle Ages, as the parish system expanded into the European countryside, and the (M) practices of these people needed to be incorporated into a religion that was simultaneously, turning inward toward the soul. The tension ostensibly reached a breaking point in the sixteenth century with the Protestant Reformation, which by rejecting the material altogether, proposed a radical solution to the problem.

Even the religion of the ordinary faithful, which overall tended to focus on the material, reflected this paradox, to some extent. One must not forget that every witness who testified before the canonization inquest mentioned Peter's asceticism and way of life. To be sure, people were prompted to provide this information, according to the inquisition's articles of inquest, and it is, admittedly, unclear whether they would have brought it up themselves independently. It is also true that when asked, people spoke relatively little about Peter's way of life beyond broad generalizations, most of which appear highly formulaic. Yet, it is only natural that people would

²⁹⁷ Bynum, *Christian Materiality*, 284-286.

speak with the greatest passion about that which had a direct impact on their own lives, and for them, that was Peter's miracles. Additionally, even if they wanted to say more about his way of life, most witnesses simply were not in a position to elaborate on this information as, unlike Peter's close disciples, they lacked such close and prolonged contact with him. Indeed, the only account that provides an extended description of Peter's way of life comes from Bartolomeo da Trasacco, who spent much of his life at Peter's side.²⁹⁸ Finally, it is important to remember that, like in the case of Franco of Assergi, the Abruzzi people chose to recognize Peter of Morrone, a Christian hermit, to be their saint. Ultimately, it was his holy lifestyle of harsh asceticism and solitude that guaranteed Peter's closeness to the divine and that, by extension, provided him the power to work his miracles. This was one thing that all people could agree on.

I will end Part 3 by returning to the lived, day-to-day religion of the ordinary faithful, which has been this paper's main concern. What does Peter of Morrone's process of canonization reveal about this? After Catania, wife of Giovanni, received her cure from Peter, she returned to her home with the wooden cross that was partly responsible for healing her blindness. This, she "stored" (*reposit*) and "preserved" (*conservavit*) "with devotion" in her home, where it remained at least until the time that she appeared as a witness before the Sulmona inquisition in 1306. At that time, Catania related to inquisitors how she had placed the cross over many people who were suffering from eye problems, and that as a result, some of them were completely healed, while others simply received an amelioration to their condition.²⁹⁹ The touch of this cross was also, she said, sometimes efficacious for certain other ailments. Catania also noted that, after returning home from Peter's cell, she later received from him two loaves of

²⁹⁸ *Il Processo*, ed. Alfonso Marini, 298-304.

²⁹⁹ "*et multis patientibus malum in oculis ipsa testis imposuit dictam crucem et aliqui sunt exinde totaliter liberati et aliqui senserunt notabile iuvamentum*". Ibid., 58.

bread, one circular, and one long, “as it was his habit to give to people that went to visit him”, with the instruction that she and her family eat. Catania, her husband, some others, as well as a servant, complied and all ate as much of the bread as they wanted. This was no ordinary bread however, for in the end, there ended up being more of it to go around than there was when they first started eating (*superfuit de ipso pane plus quam esset antequam inciperent comedere de ipso*).³⁰⁰ Catania then took the excess miracle bread and preserved it in her home, which she still had approximately fifteen years later at the time of her testimony in 1306. Her reason for doing so was not made explicit, however it can be assumed that this piece of bread was kept as a relic, and potentially served, like her wooden cross, as a source of supernatural power. In the end, one gets the sense that Catania was, at least locally, renowned as a sort of popular healer herself. Indeed, her story seems to have been well-known in the Sulmona area, as it was repeated in several other testimonies, a fact which likely stemmed from her status as the owner of two holy relics, capable of curing disease. Most importantly, Catania’s case makes clear the active role that lay people could and did play in the religious realm. Indeed, lay people themselves used relics and other holy objects, for various purposes, in their daily lives. These they kept preserved in their home, or on their person, as will be seen in the next case, to be drawn upon as needed.

Giacomo di Giovanni di Sulmona told inquisitors about a story that happened to him around the year 1291. One day, Giacomo was on his way to go visit Peter to show him some ecclesiastical vestments and a chalice that a testator had left behind for him, when he came across a man who was heading in the same direction and who was screaming out that Peter pray for him. Giacomo approached to see what the problem was. It turned out that the man was suffering from a fracture so severe that his intestines were falling out of his body. Out of pity,

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

Giacomo covered him with one of his cloaks, as it was raining out. The two then entered into the church, where at the time, Peter was saying mass. At some point during the ritual, Giacomo looked up at the image of the crucifix which hung near to the altar, and began to see it bend its head (*inclinantem caput*) and start to emanate water from top to bottom (*emanantem aquam ... a capite usque ad pedes*). Right away, he went up to the the image, touched it, and took out from his person some pater noster rosaries that, at one time, Peter had given to him. These, he held under the dripping crucifix, until they were completely covered in its water. As he related, from then on, Giacomo used these prayer beads to heal both men and women from diverse illnesses. After the mass ended, the man with the fracture asked Peter for his divine intercession to save his life. He was instead given a powder to consume. He took some of it there on the spot and left the church with Giacomo. The two walked together for about four miles before Giacomo noticed that the man's fracture was healed, to the point that it seemed like he had never been injured. The two then parted ways, as their homes were in two different directions.³⁰¹ Once again, we get a glimpse of the very active role that lay people played in the cult of holy objects. In this case, Giacomo was carrying on his person two pater noster rosaries, presumably for protection or in case of unexpected injury. That he carried these on what started off as a "normal" day suggests that equipping himself with these objects was likely a daily, or at least regular, habit. Interestingly, these rosaries, though already powerful because they belonged originally to Peter, were nonetheless able to have their power yet enhanced - and this, Giacomo himself was responsible for, through his covering them in the crucifix's miracle water. The result was that he now owned two specially charged objects, which he certainly knew, could be used in healings. In other words, Giacomo had created for himself two new relics. The story also highlights the

³⁰¹ Ibid., 134, 136.

extent to which miraculous events truly could erupt at any moment, for what was intended as simply a casual visit to Peter, ended up becoming the occasion for not one, but two different miracles to transpire.

An eighty-year-old doctor named Master Rainaldo di Gentile di Sulmona, appeared before the Sulmona inquisition and gave the following testimony. One day, a couple years after Peter's death, he was walking near the church of Santa Maria in Sulmona, when suddenly he heard a great commotion coming from inside the building. He entered and saw a demon-possessed woman, whom many people were in the process of trying to control. This proved a difficult task, for the woman struggled, turning her head away from the images and figures of the Virgin and the saints (*figuris et ymaginibus beate Virginis et sanctorum*), that were being held before her, in an effort at exorcism. Rainaldo left and continued home to his property, where he had originally been heading. He soon came back, however, perhaps out of curiosity, and saw that still, the woman could hardly be controlled. Suddenly, Rainaldo thought about a little wooden cross that Peter had given to him while he was alive, and which he carried around on his person. This, he took, and with it, made the sign of the cross over the possessed woman, saying, "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ the crucified Nazarene, and through the good merits of brother Peter of Morrone", as well as "Our father ... may God liberate you" (*Pater noster etc. liberet te Deus*). He left the church. After some time, Rainaldo received word that the woman had later vomited, made the sign of the cross over herself, and was subsequently completely healed.³⁰² This is a story of tremendous lay initiative. In it, Rainaldo takes it upon himself to use a sacred object coupled with a prayer for exorcism, a bold act, which one might expect to be the preserve of the clergy. Not only this, but it is significant that the prayer for exorcism was known to

³⁰² Ibid., 74.

Rainaldo in the first place - further evidence of the overlap between clerical and lay religion.³⁰³

A similar case is that of Don Matteo Di Rainaldo Mancini di Sulmona, who testified that one day, while witnessing a certain Zaurello di Sulmona having a seizure (*morbum caducum*), he “said over [Zaurello] ... many special psalms” (*plures psalmos speciales*).³⁰⁴

But not all people owned sacred objects, nor did all have the knowledge of special prayers. Indeed, the average person likely needed to look elsewhere for supernatural aid, and when it came to desperate circumstances, people were willing to try anything in the hopes of saving a loved one. This meant that when one option did not work, as many more as were necessary would be attempted. For instance, Giacomo di Tommaso Luce di Caramanico testified that, a few years after Peter’s death, he and his wife decided to bring their paralytic son to the place of Santo Spirito in the hopes of receiving a cure for him, after the secular medics had been of no help, and it was clear that the boy’s life was in danger. Before reaching the abbey however, the family stopped when, from below, they were able to glimpse Peter’s cell on the Morrone mountain that he lived in while alive. Giacomo told his son to look up at the place and make the sign of the cross over himself. Initially, the boy struggled to do this, but ultimately was successful. Nonetheless, the ritual resulted in no significant mitigation to his condition. Next, the couple took the boy to the fountain that was near to Peter’s cell, which Giacomo reported to be called “*Aqua Sancta*”, in whose waters they bathed the boy. Nor did this work. Ultimately, the family continued on to Santo Spirito, their original destination, where Giacomo asked the

³⁰³ The story also represents a triumph of the new over the old. When the images of the Virgin and other (likely traditional) saints proved incapable of healing the woman, her liberation ultimately required the use of one of the objects that belonged to a contemporary saint – Peter of Morrone.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 272, 274.

Celestine monks if they had any objects that Peter used to own.³⁰⁵ The monks then presented to him an iron girdle that, at one time, Peter had worn around his body in penitence. This, they wrapped around the boy's head, neck, and other parts of his body. Right away, he began to walk and speak completely on his own, to the point that all who were present were greatly amazed (*mirabantur exinde valde*) and rendered thanks to God. The case of Giacomo and his wife is similar and different to the others, considered thus far. On the one hand, the couple exhibited initiative, when, in an attempt at healing their son, they initiated and themselves executed two healing rituals, while on the path to Santo Spirito. The difference was that, in this case, the lay rituals were not efficacious, as ultimately it took the help of Peter's monks to put an end to their child's disease. Indeed, the story shows how, when it came to religion, the couple were basically practically minded. Hence, when their first two attempts proved unsuccessful, Giacomo and his wife turned to a more efficacious cure, the use of a relic that Peter been in contact with throughout his life. When it came to their son's life, these people were willing to try anything, and in this attitude, I do not think they would have been alone. Interestingly, there is another testimony in which the sacred fountain, *Aqua Sancta*, does heal someone. Lady Maria di Gualtiero di Sulmona reportedly took her ill son Lorenzo to bathe in "the fountain near to the aforementioned brother Peter's cell ... in the praise of God and brother Peter" (*ad laudem Dei et ipsius fratris Petri*). When he emerged out of the water, he was completely healed.³⁰⁶ This is a reminder that, overall, no religious ritual was guaranteed to be efficacious; one can only imagine the amount of people for whom none of these options were any help, and whose stories have, as a result, been lost to history.

³⁰⁵ "*rogavit ipse testis fratres qui morabantur in ipso loco ut, si aliqua haberent de rebus que quondam fuerunt dicti fratris Petri...*" Ibid., 144.

³⁰⁶ Ibid., 64.

Still, everyday religion went beyond simply rituals of healing. It also involved place-based piety. Thus, when the fifty-year-old Lady Debene, wife of Maccabeo di Sulmona, appeared before the inquisition and was asked about Peter's monastic houses, she responded that of these, she herself was familiar with Santo Spirito near Sulmona, Sant'Onofrio, as well as "many others", in which she saw Peter's monks maintain regular observance, on a daily basis. She knew this because, according to her testimony, she frequented these places everyday (*cotidie frequentat*).³⁰⁷ Similar behavior is seen in the case of Diotallevi di San Valentino, who reported that he had "devotion" for Peter's monastic locations, implying that he too, liked to visit them.³⁰⁸ Although what these people did at these locations is not explicit in the text, it is safe to assume that they probably expected some benefit, perhaps grace or good fortune, from their physical proximity to such holy monks, as the Celestines.

Last but not least, ordinary people could also experience religion in quite simple and humble ways. Thus, the barber Ricco del maestro Ruggero di Sulmona testified that, he knew about Peter's monastic foundations, because when the place of Sant'Onofrio was under construction, "all of the men and women from Sulmona and the other surrounding places, who could, rushed to that place, and one was considered blessed if they could bring there a stone or other thing useful to the place's construction."³⁰⁹ In addition, Giovanni Peloso di Sulmona testified that he had seen Peter living an ascetic life in the Morrone mountain, and that "he and other men from Sulmona went many times during the winter to clear the path that led to him, which at times was so covered with snow that barely was it visible."³¹⁰ Overall then, when it

³⁰⁷ Ibid., 224.

³⁰⁸ Ibid., 292.

³⁰⁹ Ibid., 216.

³¹⁰ Ibid., 286.

came to their religion, the people of the Abruzzi assumed various levels of commitment, and engaged in a variety of practices. It is, as such, difficult to pinpoint one experience as typical of the whole.

Conclusion

This paper began with one question in mind. What did Christianity look like in the later medieval Abruzzi? It is clear now that, overall, religion here was complicated, and indeed, difficult to pin down as either predominantly material or spiritual in nature. To begin, I looked at the case of Franco of Assergi, whose hagiography reflected a cult essentially interested in the saint's miracles, rather than virtue, a fact which I argued indicates very little spiritual practice among the local population. At the same time, the fact that the people of Assergi identified the hermit Franco as a saint at all, also proved that at a minimum, they understood the link between spiritual greatness and supernatural power. They were thus in agreement with the dominant ecclesiastical and northern Italian culture of the time, which, as far as saints were concerned, privileged virtue over worldly greatness.

I then looked at the religion of Peter of Morrone and the order that he established. On the one hand, the hagiographic record revealed a practice that was principally an exercise in solitude, quiet, and asceticism. According to the Celestine vision, it was necessary to retreat increasingly from the world, in order to grow closer to God, a journey that was understood metaphorically and literally as a spatial ascent. There was nonetheless, a certain level of commitment to charity that inspired Peter to engage with the outside world in diverse ways. In general, this took the form either of giving people spiritual advice, or healing them of their various illnesses. When it came to his cures, Peter tended to prefer instrumental ritual, although he sometimes required an added spiritual component. This did not conflict with official Church policy, as Peter was ultimately canonized on the assumption that his instrumental cures were signs of God's approval. It was also clear that Peter shared with the ecclesiastical establishment his conception of the mechanics of miracle, which he held to be from God, and not the saint.

In terms of the ordinary faithful, it became apparent that like their Assergi counterparts, the people of the Sulmona area were mostly archaic in their outlook, that is, more often than not, they expected instrumental ritual, privileged vicarious over individual piety, and attributed miracles to the power of the saint. Yet, there was one key difference. Emerging out of this landscape was a growing segment of the population (although precisely how large is difficult to say) for whom Christianity was increasingly an inner spiritual experience. This was seen in Peter's Autobiography, in the case of Maria Angelerio, who had religious dreams. It also appeared in the text's reference to lay people who, remarkably, in the opinion of the author, reported hearing the miraculous ringing of bells, something that seemed to be the preserve of a contemplative elite. I explored this theme further in Peter of Morrone's process of canonization, and argued that in some cases, such as that of the blind woman Catania, it was related to notions of the psychosomatic origin of illness, as well as likely stemmed from Caroline Bynum's "paradox" at the heart of Christian thought – that a God who was, by definition, immaterial, incarnated himself in the man Jesus Christ.

On the one hand, this growing spiritual movement was attributable to the vocation of Peter of Morrone himself. As a trusted healer of both body and soul, the people of the Sulmona area visited him in large numbers, to be cured of various diseases, as well as to hear his spiritual advice. I argued that Peter's teachings had a significant impact on the local religious climate due to the extent of his popularity and indeed, celebrity-like status, which eventually propelled him to the highest office in Christendom – the papacy. At the same time, there was indication that the spiritual turn predated Peter's arrival in the area. This was seen in the process of canonization, in which some lay people seemed to embrace spiritualized practice without Peter's prompting; one of these, Leonardo di Sulmona, practiced nighttime meditation.

Last but not least, I addressed the day-to-day religion of the Abruzzi population. From the sources, I uncovered a variety of practices, some of which included: baking bread in honor of a saint, visiting holy places, praying, asking for a holy man's intercession, using sacred objects, waters, and food for their healing power, saying "special" prayers or incantations, and plowing snow as a means of devotion. I found that people looked to divine aid only in exceptional circumstances, such as famine, or severe illness that could not be dealt with medically. In terms of their choice of attempted cures, people were essentially practically minded and willing to try anything, although no ritual was guaranteed to be efficacious. Overall, people displayed considerable initiative in the religious realm. Indeed, they kept holy objects in their home or on their person, which could be used for their supernatural power, said "special" prayers or incantations during times of crisis, such as in the face of demon-possession, or an epileptic seizure, as well as made their own decisions about where to go for divine help.

Overall, the north-south cultural dynamic manifested itself in a variety of ways in the Abruzzi. Like the institutional Church and northern Italy, local mores attributed supernatural power to holy people who exemplified spiritual greatness. In this sense, the Abruzzi people aligned with ecclesiastical norms more so than, for example, the northern Europeans, who generally venerated as saints the unjustly persecuted, or politically powerful. It is unclear whether this similarity was the result of cultural hegemony, or simply the organic development of a pan-Italian religious sensibility - a question that future research can address.

Further, the "spiritualizing" trend of the later medieval Church was found to be present in Sulmona, but not Assergi. Here, there are two possible explanations. First, this could be due to a difference in chronology. As a saint who lived earlier in time than Peter of Morrone, Franco of Assergi's hagiography likely reflects a mid-thirteenth-century dynamic, whereas Peter's is

indicative of the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century, a time when, perhaps, northern ideas increasingly penetrated the region. The other possibility is that the Sulmona-Assergi difference is explicable in terms of an urban-rural dichotomy, as both communities differed considerably in size.

I do not think that the chronological argument is a very likely explanation, both because the time gap is not very large, as well as due to the problems in assuming a linear progression of cultural diffusion, that is, there is no reason to believe that a later chronology would necessarily translate into a context of increased external influence. In fact, if there is one thing that I hope has become clear from this paper, it is that the concept of a simple top-down model of cultural hegemony is itself deeply flawed – the similarities between official and local practice make this very clear. Rather, what is more useful in this case, is a model that takes seriously the wide range of experience that constituted medieval Christianity. In other words, religion was not a question of competing cultures, but one of competing *sensibilities*. For, what was important to townspeople was not necessarily the concern of the peasant, and vice versa.

This is why, in the case of the Sulmona-Assergi problem, it is useful to conceive of an urban-rural dichotomy. In an environment of poverty and widespread illiteracy, the people of Assergi did not have the time, resources, nor desire to cultivate a meaningful spiritual practice. Rather, theirs was a Christianity essentially concerned with providing for the material needs of their own peasant society, and to that end, instrumental ritual and vicarious piety were paramount. Thus, hundreds of years later, the sixteenth-century frescoes that adorned Assergi's parish church, depicted Franco's miracles, rather than virtue; in other words, time could not change the fact that this community held a predominantly rural outlook.

The situation in Sulmona, however, was much different. This was a burgeoning city, that witnessed an economic and demographic revitalization similar to that which occurred elsewhere in later medieval Europe.³¹¹ The proof is seen in the kinds of people who testified for Peter of Morrone's canonization, many of whom, such as Catania, wife of notary Giovanni, can be considered "middle-class". In this very different context of increased literacy and wealth, leading a spiritual life was both possible and desirable, whether as a result of access to books, or as a consequence of the stigma against wealth. This is partly why Peter of Morrone found such success when he settled near the Peligna Valley around the year 1240; that is, his teachings responded to a level of pre-existing spiritual "hunger", so to speak, a taste that could only be found in a literate, urban environment, like Sulmona - one which Peter himself ultimately intensified.

To conclude, religion in the later medieval Abruzzi mostly overlapped with official practice. Thus, all Christians believed in and practiced instrumental ritual, as well as affirmed the role of vicarious piety. The only difference was that the Abruzzi people tended to disagree with the doctrine that held God, rather than his saints, as the architect of miracles. This is an important distinction, that ultimately indicates a failure to maintain theological purity at the local level, however it does not take away from the fact that Abruzzi religion was mostly orthodox. Indeed, this was not simply a question of two competing cultures. Rather, it was first and foremost a question of different emphases within the same religion, a dynamic that roughly translated into an urban-rural dichotomy. In this sense then, the peasant woman Maria Angelerio, was likely an anomaly, in that she displayed a rich spiritual life, despite her rural milieu. As the mother of a

³¹¹ Indeed, Sulmona was one of the Abruzzi's leading cities in the thirteenth century; it was home to both a school of canon law and an office of justice, as well as held one of the Kingdom of Naples' seven annual fairs. See, Mattiocco, 29-30.

saint, this is unsurprising. But the vast majority of Maria's neighbours would not have cultivated such a rich spiritual practice – this they left to the experts: the contemplatives.

In the final analysis, the people of the later medieval Abruzzi inhabited a world that was both brutally unforgiving, as well as endlessly saving. On the one hand, danger lurked around every corner. The rugged Abruzzi environment was rife with diverse perils in the form of falling rocks, vicious wild animals, and crop-killing heat. There was also the constant threat of work-related injury or the sudden onset of disease, the prospect of which must have been frightening in a pre-industrialized context. Despite all this, people could remain hopeful. For, theirs was a world in which the miraculous power of God's grace could erupt at any moment, in any place, even in otherwise ordinary circumstances. It was this possibility of salvation that emboldened the Abruzzi people to transcend their suffering and carry their cross. Christ and his saints assured it.

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