

## Introduction

### Approaches to Voluntary Reclusion in Medieval Europe (13<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> Centuries)

Frances Andrews and Eleonora Rava

These two issues of «Quaderni di storia religiosa medievale» for 2021 contain a selection of the papers presented at workshops on the subject of voluntary reclusion in the Middle Ages, held at the University of St Andrews, Scotland in 2018, and in Rome and Viterbo in 2019<sup>1</sup>. This introduction sets out our rationale for the undertaking, some of the key starting points in the historiography from which it builds and an initial orientation to the papers in this issue. The discussion will continue in issue two with a second set of papers and responses.

Among historians of late medieval Christianity, recent years have seen revitalised interest in *la religion vécue* as conceptualised in the 1970s: the multiple connections between what people believed and how they *lived* those beliefs, how societies and individuals shaped and were shaped by religious ways of thinking and behaving<sup>2</sup>. In practical terms, this has produced widespread recognition of the inevitable everyday interdependence of “lay” and religious experience and expanded awareness of the extent to which devotional practices were embedded in domestic concerns and in the shared activities of a community. At the same time, acknowledging the creativity and agency of the laity has led to a renewed investigation of the alternatives available to those seeking a more rigorous form of devotion without making profession to a recognised religious rule. If we put this in terms of the normative ecclesial framework of clerics, monastics (regulars) and laity, one result has been greater awareness of those believers whose practices sat in the interstices between lay and regular forms of life, not

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\* For the Italian version of this introduction, see <https://www.rivisteweb.it/issn/1126-9200> (20 May 2021).

<sup>1</sup>The workshops were organised as part of the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellowship held by Eleonora Rava at the University of St Andrews, and supervised by Frances Andrews: *InSpeCo. Inside Speaker's Corner. Late Medieval Italian Anchoresses in European Context* (Marie Skłodowska-Curie Grant Agreement n. 751526): <https://arts.st-andrews.ac.uk/inspeco/> (19 May 2021).

<sup>2</sup>See in the first instance, Gabriel Le Bras, on the relationship of law and religion, in H. Desroche and G. Le Bras, *Religion légale et religion vécue. Entretien avec Gabriel Le Bras*, in «Archives de sociologie des religions», 29, 1970, pp. 15-20 (considering, for example, *ibidem*, p. 16, in relation to “rules”, the questions «pourquoi, pour qui, pour quelle société, dans quelles conditions sociales ont-elles été faites, et dans quelle mesure, cette société les a-t-elles reçues, les a-t-elles appliquées») and J. Delumeau, *Le prescrit en la religion vécue. Leçon inaugurale au Collège de France 13 février 1975*, in Id., *Le Christianisme va-t-il mourir?*, Paris, Hachette, 1977, pp. 177-211. A useful summary is in J.H. Arnold, *Histories and Historiographies of Medieval Christianity*, in *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Christianity*, ed. by J.H. Arnold, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 23-41. Evidence for recent engagement with this approach and an attempt to show its analytical capacity is S. Katajala-Peltomaa and R. Maria Toivo, *Lived Religion and Gender in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, London, Routledge, 2021.

matching the neat categorisations of theoreticians, medieval or modern. This focus on lay believers has also, of course, intersected with the enormous body of research undertaken since the 1970s on the history of women<sup>3</sup>. It is now self-evident that, although excluded from membership of the clergy, women were capable of extreme levels of individual asceticism and were fundamental to the spiritual life of their kin, whether in the home, as tertiaries or penitents engaged in hospital care or other charitable tasks, or in one of the many confraternal, penitential or monastic communities which multiplied in these centuries.

A significant beneficiary of these converging research interests has been the study of medieval recluses: the women and (less often) men, who embraced voluntary enclosure as religious solitaries, detached from the social and cultural expectations of life in community. The lack of a medieval corporate identity for recluses – perched as they were somewhere between lay and regular lives – makes the primary work in this field particularly challenging: there is no archive marked “medieval recluses” in any modern repository. But starting from work in the 1970s and 1980s (and occasionally earlier), the landscape of voluntary reclusion, as we will see, is now well-documented in many regions of medieval Europe and particularly in the territories equated to modern England, France, the Netherlands, Spain and Central Italy.

Appropriately enough, clear-cut characterisations of this “intermediary” form of religious withdrawal into a life of solitude are notoriously difficult to achieve and every new study adds to the discussion. Before going any further it is nonetheless important to pin down more carefully what we understand by “voluntary reclusion”. Just as the researcher approaching the subject of recluses faces the problem of locating them in the archives, so the terminology is often unhelpful. What was meant by *recluso* or *reclusa*? What was the difference between a hermit and a recluse? How did these differ from an anchorite? Chapter one of the rule of Benedict used *anachorita* and *eremita* as synonyms for the second category of monastic, those living the more strenuous form of solitary life to which, after years in the cloister, Benedict’s first category of cenobites might aspire. In English sources the terms *ancren* or *anchorite* were widely adopted to describe religious solitaries and in the fifteenth century the female form

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<sup>3</sup>In this field, perhaps the most influential contribution (still essential reading) is Caroline Walker Bynum’s *Holy Feast and Holy Fast. The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London, University of California Press, 1987, pp. 294-295, who argued that in depriving themselves of food, or performing the other «extravagant penitential practices of the thirteenth to the fifteenth century», medieval women ascetics «were not rebelling against or torturing their flesh out of guilt over its capabilities so much as using the possibilities of its full sensual and affective range to soar ever closer to God».

*anchoress* also emerged<sup>4</sup>: all these terms have been astutely analysed in previous work and linked to their roots in the Greek terms for withdrawing (*anachōrēsis*) and the desert (*eremos*)<sup>5</sup>. But the equivalents do not appear to have been the same in all European regions, where the list would also have to include a much wider range, as demonstrated in the papers below. Although “recluse” also appears in English sources such as the *Ancrene Wisse* (as *reclus*) we have therefore chosen to follow common practice in employing male/female anchorite (and, where appropriate, anchoress) for England, but we use “recluse” for everywhere else. This too requires some caution from the reader, since it may imply more coherence than the evidence allows. At times our sources seem to employ terms such as [*h*]eremita or *reclusa* interchangeably, while at others they suggest substantive differences, disparities which (convention has determined) allow us to assign different understandings.

Before we explore precise terminological definitions, however, the features of voluntary reclusion can perhaps be more easily clarified by adopting a typological approach to the components that constitute a religious solitary. An ideal-type of religious solitary is someone choosing to live alone, detached from human sociability, after some form of ritual, in domestic simplicity, enclosed in a small, distinct structure, over a long period, dependent on others for sustenance, committed to a life of prayer and contemplation, not professed to a specific rule of life (we are setting aside the Benedictine monastic model here), pursuing ascetic practices of self-denial, having religious expertise and exercising societal and spiritual functions. Any single solitary will acquire all or most of these characteristics, by different means, to different degrees and attain some before others. A religious solitary might choose to build a remote mountain refuge and not undergo any ritual of “entry”, or s/he might occupy an existing urban cell attached to a church, following a public liturgical performance and testing by a bishop; s/he might live in a single, isolated building, or a group of adjacent cells, participating in some sort of intermittent community (which sometimes makes them difficult to distinguish from

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<sup>4</sup>On “ anchoress” (*ancre*), see L. Herbert McAvoy, *Introduction*, in *Anchritic Traditions of Medieval Europe*, ed. by L. Herbert McAvoy, Woodbridge, The Boydell Press, 2010, pp. 1-21, here 11.

<sup>5</sup>For extensive discussions of the terminology and its implications see, among the many, A. Benvenuti Papi, «*In castro poenitentiae*». *Santità e società femminile nell'Italia medievale*, Roma, Herder, 1990, pp. 594-595; G. Casagrande, *Religiosità penitenziale e città al tempo dei comuni*, Roma, Istituto Storico dei Cappuccini, 1995, p. 33; A.B. Mulder-Bakker, *Lives of the Anchoresses. The Rise of the Urban Recluse in Medieval Europe*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005, pp. 5-6. G. Cavero Domínguez, *Inclusa intra parietes. La reclusión voluntaria en la España medieval*, Toulouse, Presses universitaires du Midi, 2010, pp. 23-39; Herbert McAvoy, *Introduction*, cit., pp. 9-11; P. L'Hermite Leclercq and L. Brouillard, *Reclusion in the Middle Ages*, in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Monasticism in the Latin West*, ed. by A.I. Beach and I. Cochemin, vol. II, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2020, pp. 747-765, here 747-748.

other men and women living a life in common). A newly enclosed solitary would not be as likely to be recognised as having religious expertise as one who had lived in a cell for decades (though testamentary legacies suggest they might quickly acquire local esteem). And whereas one enclosed solitary might depend more or less entirely on the alms of the faithful to survive, another might hold onto some land and a degree of economic independence or be able to (do paid) work, leaving the cell to maintain her- or himself, or offer support to others. It is also likely that in some cases the choice was not entirely voluntary, but determined by contingencies of which we cannot be certain<sup>6</sup>.

Setting out these characteristics and the variables gets us closer to narrowing down the features innate in “voluntary reclusion”, but flexibility was key. It is telling that before the fifteenth century there was no medieval canon legal definition of a recluse<sup>7</sup>. It is nonetheless also important to acknowledge modern convention and a distinction that, though it does not match the interchangeable terminology of our sources in many regions, is by now widely accepted. It is also utilized here because it helps to clarify the distinctive elements of our research focus within the range of solitary forms of life. So we adopt the definitional and topographical distinction between hermit and recluse: whereas the essence of the medieval *hermit* ideal might be total abandonment of the world to live in solitude by retreating to somewhere remote or inaccessible, a *recluse* sought this same isolation in the city or its vicinity, withdrawing into a cell whose walls formed the boundary with the noise of urban life<sup>8</sup>. Unlike hermits, urban recluses were separated from the community that hosted them by the physical structure of the cell, a cramped space open to passersby only through small apertures, a window onto the street and/or perhaps a door into a church. A hermit too might live in an equally restricted space and hope for alms, like a recluse but, being able to move freely outside the hermitage, could also expect to obtain sustenance independently. In theory at least urban recluses – the focus of these papers – therefore relied more immediately on others, generating a process of mutual dependency with civic and ecclesiastical communities. It is important to remember,

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<sup>6</sup>See for example, E. Rava, *Eremite in città. Il fenomeno della reclusione urbana femminile nell'età comunale: il caso di Pisa*, in «Revue Mabillon», 21, 2010, pp. 139-162, here 158-159.

<sup>7</sup>An early definition is provided in *Provinciale, seu Constitutiones Angliae* by the canon lawyer William Lyndwood, who described it, almost certainly erroneously, as a copy of an earlier text issued by an archbishop of Canterbury. See E.A. Jones, *Hermits and Anchorites in England, 1200-1550*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2019, p. 24. On the definition of the status of recluses, see also our note in issue 2.

<sup>8</sup>Benvenuti Papi, «*In castro poenitentiae*», cit., p. 334.

nonetheless, that in several of the analyses that follow [h]eremita signifies what is here defined as an urban recluse<sup>9</sup>.

The societal and spiritual functions of the ideal type of late medieval urban recluse – as of the Holy men of Late Antiquity famously studied by Peter Brown – parallel the responsibilities attributed to regular communities of nuns, monks, canons and friars<sup>10</sup>. In virtue of the ascetic purity which might be communicated by some sort of ceremony and would be multiplied by their staying-power, a recluse might attain the role of mediator between the divine and the community that hosted them, dispensing consolations, prayer and pious counsel. Taking responsibility for the sins of the community, she or he would atone for them by the rigours of penance, embodying a sacred presence and an example of a different way of living. As intercessors on behalf of the laity they provided spiritual, emotional and material support. In the late medieval conception of sin and salvation moreover, recluses added to the ways in which the pious might hope to reduce the punishments of purgatory. The essays which follow include considerable new evidence for testators seeking out recluses to engage in activities *pro remedio animae*, perhaps by reciting prayers or reading the psalter for the soul of a deceased donor<sup>11</sup>. The recluse's cell has also, however, often been identified as a means for women to break out of conventional social roles, one route away from the normative female life-cycle of daughter, sister, mother, widow – or nun<sup>12</sup>. It is not now possible to be sure about the individual motivations of most religious solitaries, who came from all social classes and whose decisions were fundamentally personal. Yet for women, becoming an urban recluse may well have offered what previous writers have termed a “window of opportunity”<sup>13</sup>. In some cases, cells may even have become something akin to a “speakers’ corner”, a place to hear and debate words of faith and wisdom<sup>14</sup>. In this conception, a recluse's cell had the capacity to enable a

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<sup>9</sup>See, in this issue, below: E. Rava, S. Carraro, A. Esposito, and, in issue 2, Z. Ladić.

<sup>10</sup>P. Brown, *The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity*, in «The Journal of Roman Studies», 61, 1971, pp. 80-101, reprint. with more notes in Id., *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity*, Berkeley, California University Press, 1982, pp. 103-152.

<sup>11</sup>For the reading of a psalter, see Ladić in issue 2.

<sup>12</sup>See for example, M.C. De Matteis, *Introduzione*, in *Donna nel Medioevo. Aspetti culturali e di vita quotidiana*, a cura di M.C. De Matteis, Bologna, Pátron, 1986, p. 41; see also G. Signori, *Ohnmacht des Körpers – Macht der Sprache: Reklusion als Ordensalternative und Handlungsspielraum für Frauen*, in *Frauen zwischen Anpassung und Widerstand. Beiträge der 5. Schweizerischen Historikerinnentagung*, hrsg. von R. Ludi, R. Lüthi und R. Rytz, Zürich, Chronos, 1990, pp. 25-42.

<sup>13</sup>Herbert McAvoy, *Introduction*, cit., p. 9. M.L. Maggioni, *Introduzione ad Anonimo del Medioevo, Ancrene Riwle o la regola delle romite. Il libro della vita solitaria*, a cura di M.L. Maggioni, 2<sup>a</sup> ed., Milano, Ancora, 1997, p. 58.

<sup>14</sup>We used “speakers’ corner” in our original application for European funding, see note 2.

woman's voice, setting aside Paul's message in 1Cor 14,34, women should keep silent in the churches.

In keeping with much of what has been written about recluses, the model of the cell as a window of opportunity, perhaps even facilitating some sort of "speakers' corner", stems above all from idealising texts – hagiographical, poetic or normative sources – or from a few outstanding cases, such as the recluse Julian of Norwich, author of the *Revelations of Divine Love*, who was visited by the singular visionary Margery Kempe in search of spiritual counsel, as recorded in *Margery's Book*<sup>15</sup>. The wealth of such literary sources for recluses in medieval England has made them a fruitful staple of late medieval literary and historical analyses. They are also an important element in histories of reclusion in other regions, including Italy. One of the first things reconfirmed by the research behind the papers presented here, however, was the stark divergence in the extant evidence from different regions and therefore, in part, the nature of the questions that could be productively investigated. Whereas in England the early thirteenth-century *Ancrene Wisse* takes pride of place among a body of at least seven guidance texts, little in the way of comparable norms has as yet been identified elsewhere<sup>16</sup>. Meanwhile, in Italy, the first paper here shows that the cluster of *Lives* of saintly recluses is much broader than previously recognised, including not only those ably analysed by Anna Benvenuti Papi (who focussed in particular on Tuscany), but also figures such as Artellaide of Benevento and Limbania of Genoa<sup>17</sup>. Yet none of the many English medieval saint's *Vitae* centred on a recluse. Keen to understand the social, political and institutional implications of voluntary enclosure in a cell, we started the project behind these essays with some core questions. How extensive was voluntary reclusion in a cell in Mediterranean Europe, and particularly in Italy, in the late Middle Ages? How did it relate to other religious institutions and what sources are the most useful for understanding the practice?

These lines of enquiry remain visible in the organisation of these two issues of «Quaderni», in twinned sections on "sources and themes" and "mapping", but they were of course modified as the research progressed by investigation of numerous other concerns. Why, in almost all

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<sup>15</sup>*The Book of Margery Kempe. A New Translation, Contexts, Criticism*, ed. and trans. by L. Staley, New York-London, Norton, 2001, pp. 45-46.

<sup>16</sup>M. Hughes-Edwards, *Reading Medieval Anchoritism. Ideology and Spiritual Practices*, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2012. For one exception see below, text at note 35. And for the English rules, see E. Jones, *Everyday Recluses: Some Notes on the English Sources*, below.

<sup>17</sup>Benvenuti Papi, «*In castro poenitentiae*», cit., pp. 263-414. For the new census, see A. Bartolomei Romagnoli, *Le recluse nello specchio della letteratura agiografica. Appunti per una ricerca*, below.

cases, do there appear to have been so many more female than male recluses?<sup>18</sup> What was the socio-economic status of women and men who became recluses? How did the lives of male and female recluses compare and how did this relate to life cycle? To what extent did politics or urban topography condition the distribution of cells? What was the nature and impact of interventions by contemporary churchmen and secular authorities, whether priest-confessors, bishops, monastic neighbours or lay elites? How does the chronology of reclusion differ across the various regions of Latin Europe? What assumptions might prove less convincing if the horizons of systematic research were again stretched beyond the territory familiar from previous studies? How far could any common ground be documented? What more can we say about the “lived religion” of women (and men) who adopted the life of the cell without going on to become the focus of a cult? And would a close focus on sources *per se*, including hagiography, but also placing the *vitae* of the holy alongside other types of documentation, allow us to deepen the analysis? Some of the initial answers are summarised below. First, however, it is important to say more about the historiographical context for this approach.

In writing about voluntary reclusion, the primacy of England is clear: there is a long and important tradition of research on the subject of anchorites, beginning with the work of Rotha Mary Clay in 1914 and renewed by Ann Warren in 1985<sup>19</sup>. These remain essential points of reference for anyone approaching the subject. Yet in the decades since 1985, our understanding of voluntary reclusion in England has been transformed, particularly by the numerous contributions of members of the Anchoritic Society – and of its president Liz Herbert McAvoy – who, as well as organising regular conferences, have produced a series of monographic studies and essay collections dedicated to the theme<sup>20</sup>.

In terms of the geographical scope of these issues of «Quaderni», a significant precedent is a collection of essays put together by McAvoy in 2010, the first attempt to establish a general landscape of “anchoritism” in medieval Europe<sup>21</sup>. *Anchoritic Traditions* aimed to remedy the

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<sup>18</sup>For an exception, see the work of Andrea Czortek, *Nuove ricerche sull'eremitismo in Alta Valle del Tevere nei secoli XIII-XIV*, in «Bollettino per l'Umbria», 113, 2016, pp. 5-34.

<sup>19</sup>R.M. Clay, *The Hermits and Anchorites of England*, London, Methuen & Co, 1914. A.K. Warren, *Anchorites and their Patrons in Medieval England*, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London, University of California Press, 1985.

<sup>20</sup>See, for example, *Rhetoric of the Anchorhold. Space, Place and Body within the Discourses of Enclosure*, ed. by L. Herbert McAvoy, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2008; *A Companion to Julian of Norwich*, ed. by L. Herbert McAvoy, Cambridge, D.S. Brewer, 2008; *Anchorites, Wombs and Tombs. Intersections of Gender and Enclosure in the Middle Ages*, ed. by L. Herbert McAvoy and M. Hughes-Edwards, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2005; L. Herbert McAvoy, *Medieval Anchoritisms. Gender, Space and the Solitary Life*, Woodbridge, D.S. Brewer, 2011; *Medieval Anchorites in their Communities*, ed. by C. Gunn and L. Herbert McAvoy, Woodbridge, D.S. Brewer, 2017.

<sup>21</sup>*Anchoritic Traditions of Medieval Europe*, cit.

lack of «cross-pollination» between research areas and demonstrate the central role of religious solitaries across the continent, whilst recognising «pockets of varying intensity and concentration based on the particular micro and macro influences to which they were subject»<sup>22</sup>. In her introduction, McAvoy sought coincidences and contrasts, advocating both a diachronic and a synchronic approach while highlighting, for example, the importance of general factors for the growth of voluntary reclusion such as the economic revival and the birth of towns. The volume blazed a trail in its pan-European scope, with contributions on the German-speaking regions, Italy, Spain, France, England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales (the last two revealing very little evidence for reclusion at all). That account, a decade later, can now be up-dated, revisiting some questions and, though with a smaller geographical reach, adding new evidence from Italy, Dalmatia, and the German-speaking regions<sup>23</sup>.

In the large body of work in English, one other volume has particular relevance to the primary focus in what follows. In a collection published in 2019, while our project was underway, Eddie Jones, also a contributor here, introduced readers to everyday solitaries in England by translating dozens of texts, setting extracts from the norms that shaped their routines alongside the records which allow us to approach daily experiences, from the size of cells to the scale of alms. The result is a compelling account of the changing nature of voluntary reclusion between the thirteenth and the mid-sixteenth centuries<sup>24</sup>. In his careful collation of evidence, Jones thus builds out from the traditions of recent research on England, which have tended to centre around normative texts and spiritual writings and, by reconnecting with the flourishing vein of work established by Clay and Warren, provides a fuller understanding of the lived religion of ordinary solitaries (and not just for those unable to access the original sources).

Of course, other areas of Europe also have long-established traditions in this field, sometimes predating Clay: early researchers everywhere were fascinated by the oddities of religious reclusion and how to fit it into the wider religious landscape<sup>25</sup>. But the last two decades have seen some significant landmarks across multiple regions. In 2005, for example, Anneke Mulder-Bakker's account of the lives of recluses was built around case studies of five saintly

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<sup>22</sup>Herbert McAvoy, *Introduction*, cit., pp. 2, 13.

<sup>23</sup>It was not possible to publish the papers on Catalunya, Friuli and Portugal.

<sup>24</sup>Jones, *Hermits and Anchorites*, cit.

<sup>25</sup>See for example, G. Garampi, *Memorie ecclesiastiche appartenenti all'istoria e al culto della B. Chiara di Rimini*, Roma, N. e M. Pagliarini, 1755, pp. 99-103; M. Boudet, *La recluserie du Pont Sainte-Christine à Saint-Flour*, in «Revue de la Haute-Auvergne», 3, 1901, pp. 335-355, and works cited in Cavero Domínguez, *Inclusa intra parietes*, cit., chapter 1. See also O. Doerr, *Das Institut der Inklusen in Süddeutschland*, Münster, Aschendorff Verlag, 1934, and B. Schelb, *Inklusen am Oberrhein*, in «Freiburger Diözesanarchiv», 68, 1941, pp. 174-253.



women who lived between the rivers Seine and Elbe in North-West Europe, using the hagiographical accounts of their lives to show how they could become bearers of wisdom, “common theologians”, knowing God through revelation, and capable of extensive influence and authority as priest-like figures or “living saints”<sup>26</sup>. Like many cases in this field, some of the women examined adopted reclusion only briefly, perhaps hardly meriting the label “recluse”, but studying their experiences together built a picture of the potential range. Moreover, six years later Mulder-Bakker published a collaborative project including translations into English of the lives of three of the saintly women studied, allowing more readers to approach the sources directly<sup>27</sup>.

In the meantime, an international research project in France has been exploring the comparative history of enclosure over the *longue durée*, from the Middle Ages to the modern world (*Enfermements. Histoire comparée des enfermements monastiques et carcéraux*), directed by Isabelle Heullant-Donat of the University of Reims. Founded in 2009, *Enfermements* is designed to highlight the characteristics of and the relations between secular imprisonment and religious reclusion – monastic and non (a theme also pursued in the current project)<sup>28</sup>. The essays so far published by *Enfermements* have however dealt only marginally with voluntary reclusion, focussing instead on the broader comparative material available in evidence for monastic enclosure<sup>29</sup>. Instead, a recent contribution on voluntary reclusion comes from the pen of another French historian (also a contributor to *Anchoritic Traditions*), Paulette L’Hermite

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<sup>26</sup>On the idea of “living saints” see G. Zarri, *Le sante vive. Per una tipologia della santità femminile nel primo Cinquecento*, in «Annali dell’Istituto storico italo-germanico in Trento», 6, 1980, pp. 372-445; Ead., *Le sante vive. Profezie di corte e devozione femminile tra '400 e '500*, Torino, Rosenberg & Sellier, 1990; A.M. Kleinberg, *Prophets in Their Own Country. Living Saints and the Making of Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1992.

<sup>27</sup>A.B. Mulder-Bakker, *Lives of the Anchoresses. The Rise of the Urban Recluse in Medieval Europe*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005; *Living Saints of the Thirteenth Century. The Lives of Yvette, anchoress of Huy; Juliana of Cornillon, Author of the Corpus Christi Feast; and Margaret the lame, anchoress of Magdeburg*, ed. by A.B. Mulder-Bakker; trans. by J.A. McNamara et al., Turnhout, Brepols, 2011.

<sup>28</sup>As part of the Marie Curie Project, we delivered talks at the prison in Viterbo and a series of small class discussions of medieval and modern sources on voluntary reclusion with prisoners in Terni, which has resulted in a co-produced article, published in issue 2. After an initial meeting, a further series of encounters planned with prisoners in Rome was paused because of the pandemic.

<sup>29</sup>The exceptions are A. Benvenuti, *Cellanae et reclusae dans l’Italie médiévale. Modèles sociaux et comportements religieux*, in *Enfermements*, vol. I, *Le cloître et la prison (VI<sup>e</sup>-XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle)*. Actes du colloque international (Troyes-Bar-sur-Aube-Clairvaux, 22-24 octobre 2009), éd. par I. Heullant-Donat, J. Claustre et É. Lusset, Paris, Publications de la Sorbonne, 2011, pp. 249-260, who offers a panorama of the historiography and of her own earlier work and S. Duval, *De la réclusion volontaire. Étude sur l’enfermement des religieuses entre Moyen Âge et époque moderne*, in *Enfermements*, vol. III, *Le genre enfermé. Hommes et femmes en milieux clos (XIII<sup>e</sup>-XX<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, éd. par I. Heullant-Donat et al., Paris, Publications de la Sorbonne, 2017, pp. 53-69, who focuses on female monastic enclosure.

Leclercq, who first published on recluses in the south of France and, like Ann Warren, is one of those who proposed the model to which others have responded<sup>30</sup>. In a chapter dedicated to “reclusion” for the *The Cambridge History of Medieval Monasticism*, L’Hermite Leclercq draws fruitfully on her own earlier work to summarise the general features of this form of religious life and raise important questions, including the extraordinary lack of a clear definition of “recluse” by the Church (in part explained by doubts about a woman who “obeys only herself” and is vulnerable to hypocrisy or pride), the role played by gender differences and the factors that led to success or failure. She also offers important points of comparison with evidence for Italy, observing that in the south of France “reclusion was a municipal business”, a finding that chimes closely with several of the cases studied here<sup>31</sup>. Yet L’Hermite Leclercq suggests that reclusion became less common in Italy from the thirteenth century, a misunderstanding which demonstrates the need for continued and improved communication between different historiographical traditions, as advocated in 2011 by McAvoy and again pursued here<sup>32</sup>.

Other regions of Europe have also been studied in greater detail in the past decade or so. In 2010, another of the future contributors to *Anchoritic Traditions*, Gregoria Cavero Domínguez offered a full-length account of Spanish voluntary reclusion, from a chronological and spatial point of view, as well as in terms of the types of sources used. Starting from secular and monastic traditions before turning to urban voluntary reclusion, Cavero also provided a useful outline of the state of research in different geographical realities across Europe, from England to Portugal, France, Italy, the Germanic lands and Spain<sup>33</sup>. Her approach emphasised the flexibility and substantial social impact of voluntary reclusion, while also drawing attention to the lives of saintly recluses, some of whose *vitae* she transcribed in an appendix. Two years later, in a shorter study, Britta-Juliane Kruse presented further evidence for anchoritism especially in southern Lower Saxony and, significantly, included an edition of a Middle Low

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<sup>30</sup>Her early publications include, P. L’Hermite-Leclercq, *La réclusion volontaire au Moyen Âge: une institution religieuse spécialement féminine*, in *La condición de la mujer en la Edad Media*. Actas del coloquio celebrado en la Casa de Velázquez (5-7 noviembre 1984), ed. por Y.-R Fonquerne y A. Esteban, Madrid, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 1986, pp. 135-154, and P. L’Hermite-Leclercq, *Le reclus dans la ville au bas Moyen Âge*, in «Journal des Savants», 3-4, 1988, pp. 219-262.

<sup>31</sup>L’Hermite Leclercq and Brouillard, *Reclusion in the Middle Ages*, cit., p. 755.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibidem*, p. 747.

<sup>33</sup>Cavero Domínguez, *Inclusa intra parietes*, cit., esp. chapter 4.3, pp. 129-138.

German rule for recluses, presumably written in the fifteenth century<sup>34</sup>. Further south and more recently still, Nella Lonza has produced a concise study mapping recluses in Dubrovnik, where they were first recorded in 1234 and where many of their *reclusoria* can be documented until the end of the Middle Ages, though their numbers declined sharply in the 1400s, gradually out-competed, she argues, by new expressions of the religious life, whether tertiaries, new monastic houses, or charitable institutions such as hospitals<sup>35</sup>. In combining long chronologies with new types of evidence, these publications prefigure something of the agenda of our project.

For the Italian peninsula, the focus of the majority of papers published here, it is important to acknowledge the initial, pioneering studies of scholars such as Romualdo Sassi, who listed seventy-four documents for recluses in Fabriano as early as 1957<sup>36</sup>. He was followed in the 1960s by Giuseppe Fabiani who first identified the presence of male and female recluses (*incarcerate/i*) in wills held by the communal archive in Ascoli Piceno, distinguishing them from the more “general”, widespread presence of hermits in the surrounding mountains already well known to local scholars<sup>37</sup>. Again, in the early 1970s, Attilio Bartoli Langelì, looking for penitents in the Spoleto valley came across groups of recluses and emphasised how they were the origin of numerous Augustinian monastic houses<sup>38</sup>. The *status quaestionis*, however, necessarily begins with the fundamental research of Benvenuti, published in 1990<sup>39</sup>. Revising and updating previous publications, she dedicated a first monographic study to the evidence for holy recluses in Italy (mostly in Tuscany) against the wider context of the choices available to nuns, penitents and tertiaries, or the *mantellate*, *pinzochere*, and *vestite* whose very variety

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<sup>34</sup>B.-J. Kruse, *Innere Einkehr, äußere Ordnung. Verhaltensregeln für Inklusen aus einem spätmittelalterlichen Rapiarium*, in *Mertens lesen. Exemplarische Lektüren für Volker Mertens zum 75. Geburtstag*, hrsg. von M. Costard, J. Klingner und C. Stange, Göttingen, V&R unipress, 2012, pp. 67-88, here 79-85. The rule is in a fifteenth-century prayer book, now Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, Cod. Guelf 1187 Helmst., fol. 71r-87r, and now available on <http://diglib.hab.de> (19 May 2021).

<sup>35</sup>N. Lonza, *The houses of recluse (reclusoria) in the urban and suburban setting of medieval Dubrovnik*, in *Scripta in honorem Igor Fisković. Zbornik povodom sedamdesetog rođendana/Festschrift on the occasion of his 70th birthday*, ed. by M. Jurković and P. Marković, Motovun-Zagreb, International Research Center for Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages/University of Zagreb/Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, 2016, pp. 301-307.

<sup>36</sup>R. Sassi, *Incarcerati e incarcerate a Fabriano nei secoli XIII e XIV*, in «*Studia Picena*», 25, 1957, pp. 67-86.

<sup>37</sup>G. Fabiani, *Monaci, eremiti, incarcerati in Ascoli nei secoli XIII e XIV*, *ibidem*, 32, 1964, pp. 147-158. On Ascoli see also A. de Santis, *Recluse e bizzoche francescane in Ascoli*, in *La Beata Angelina da Montegiove e il movimento del terz'ordine regolare francescano femminile*. Atti del Convegno di Studi Francescani (Foligno, 22-24 settembre 1983), a cura di R. Pazzelli e M. Sensi, Roma, Ed. Analecta TOR, 1984, pp. 495-503.

<sup>38</sup>A. Bartoli Langelì, *I Penitenti a Spoleto nel Duecento*, in «*Collectanea Franciscana*», 43, 1973, numero monografico, *L'ordine della penitenza di san Francesco d'Assisi nel secolo XIII*. Atti del Convegno di Studi Francescani (Assisi, 3-5 luglio 1972), pp. 303-330 and repeatedly republished, most recently in Id., *Studi sull'Umbria medievale*, a cura di M. Bassetti ed E. Menestò, Spoleto, Cisam, 2015, pp. 31-58.

<sup>39</sup>Benvenuti Papi, «*In castro poenitentiae*», cit.

of names highlights the creative energy of lay forms of religious life<sup>40</sup>. She thus placed the history of these holy women firmly in the context of the Mendicant renewal of the female religious life and the urban world in which they emerged.

Alongside Benvenuti, two Umbrian historians writing in the same years also require special mention: Giovanna Casagrande and Mario Sensi who, like Benvenuti, returned repeatedly to the subject. Both historians came to recluses through an interest in the various small and large scale penitential movements, expressions of personal piety and shared devotions, that were characteristic of the “new religiosity” of the thirteenth century and of the religion of the communes, major research themes in Italy in the 1970s and 1980s. Casagrande had started writing about penitential movements in Umbria in the late 1970s and in 1988 produced a first study focussed on recluses, expanded in later essays and as the opening chapter of a volume on the penitents of communal Italy, published in 1995<sup>41</sup>. Adopting an *Annales*-style concern with statistics, Casagrande sought to quantify the presence of recluses in different centres, particularly in Umbria, where for example, she identified as many as 68 in Perugia in 1290 (56 women and 12 men)<sup>42</sup>. In the same year, 1995, Sensi, who had already contributed the entry on “reclusion in Italy” to the *Dizionario degli istituti di perfezione* in 1983 – still a standard reference work in the field –, also collected together several earlier publications into a single volume on religious women of Umbria and the Marche. Fifteen years later he took up the theme again, reorganising and rethinking his account of voluntary reclusion as the first chapter of another volume dedicated to women in the church<sup>43</sup>. Like most of those approaching this subject, Sensi underlined the variety of possible labels and the difficulties of interpretation these entailed, but he suggested an expansive list it is worth reproducing, since it typifies some of the challenges of definition. For men, Sensi included *beghini*, *bizzochi*, *fraticelli*, *fratercoli*, *apostolini*, *inclusi*, *reclusi*, *incarcerati*, *cellani*, *solitari* and, for women, *beghine*, *bizzoche*,

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<sup>40</sup>Benvenuti also returned to the subject more recently: A. Benvenuti, *Sante donne di Toscana. Il Medioevo*, Firenze, Sismel – Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2018, pp. 46-59, 77-84, 92-101, 124-125, 129-130.

<sup>41</sup>G. Casagrande, *Il fenomeno della reclusione volontaria nei secoli del basso medioevo*, in «Benedictina» 35, 1988, pp. 475-507; Ead., *Forme di vita religiosa femminile solitaria in Italia centrale*, in *Eremitismo nel francescanesimo medievale*. Atti del XVII Convegno internazionale (Assisi, 12-14 ottobre 1989), Perugia, Università degli studi di Perugia/Centro di Studi Francescani, 1991, pp. 51-94 (a volume with contributions from several other writers on the theme); Ead., *Religiosità penitenziale e città al tempo dei comuni*, Roma, Istituto Storico dei Cappuccini, 1995.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibidem*, p. 41.

<sup>43</sup>M. Sensi, *Reclusione in Italia*, in *Dizionario degli istituti di perfezione*, a cura di G. Pelliccia e G. Rocca, Roma, vol. VII, 1983, coll. 1235-1242; M. Sensi, *Storie di bizzoche tra Umbria e Marche*, Roma, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1995; Id., «*Mulieres in Ecclesia*». *Storie di monache e bizzoche*, Spoleto, Cisam, 2010, pp. 3-70.

*incluse, recluse, incarcerate, encarcerate, cellane, murate, evangeliche*<sup>44</sup>. Some of these terms have become more closely associated with the communal movements typical of the Low Countries, or with groups viewed with suspicion by some of the clergy. For Sensi, the lack of rigid classifications for a movement that was “extremely malleable” necessitated attention to all these categories, which he documented in useful detail, but between which he tended not to differentiate. He therefore outlined the history of the “female penitential movement” from the early thirteenth-century urban revival, tracing the uncertain reaction of ecclesiastics, the institutionalising links to Franciscans and tertiaries and drawing parallels with the beguines of northern Europe<sup>45</sup>. Sensi also highlighted the continuity of this movement into the present: when he was writing, recluses or at least what he termed *bizzocaggi* were still to be found in central Italy (and indeed religious solitaries are still to be found elsewhere in Europe, as Jörg Voigt points out in his essay below)<sup>46</sup>.

Meanwhile, the historian of Naples and southern Italy, Giovanni Vitolo, like Casagrande and Sensi, also came to the subject of recluses in the late 1970s by means of research on the penitential movements of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries<sup>47</sup>. Vitolo was able to identify recluses in the Salernitano and in Naples (in part on the basis of testamentary legacies) and occasionally in other centres, including Benevento, Eboli, Formicola (Caserta), Gaeta, Taurasi (Avellino) and Valva but in this region there is much more information available about hermits, whose careers were more likely to evolve into some sort of institutional grouping and therefore to leave an archive. Francesco Panarelli, for example, investigated the presence of hermits in Puglia as a contribution to a conference dedicated to eremitical experiences in France and Italy but was able to add only Barletta, Terlizzi and Trani to the list of locations identified by

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<sup>44</sup>Sensi, *Storie di bizzoche*, cit., p. 26, note 85.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibidem*; Sensi, «*Mulieres in Ecclesia*», cit., p. 17.

<sup>46</sup>Sensi, *Storie di bizzoche*, cit. p. 17; See below, p. [ndr: ?].

<sup>47</sup>G. Vitolo, *Primi appunti per una storia dei Penitenti nel Salernitano*, in «Archivio Storico per le Province Napoletane», terza serie, 17, 1978, pp. 393-405; Id., *Eremitismo, cenobitismo e religiosità laicale nel Mezzogiorno medievale*, in «Benedictina», 30, 1983, pp. 531-540; Id., *Istituzioni ecclesiastiche e cura animarum nel distretto di Trani fra XI e XIII secolo*, in «Atti dell'Accademia di Scienze Morali e Politiche», 94, 1983, pp. 73-104; Id., *Esperienze religiose nella Napoli dei secoli XII-XIV*, in *Medioevo, Mezzogiorno, Mediterraneo. Studi in onore di Mario Del Treppo*, a cura di G. Rossetti e G. Vitolo, vol. I, Napoli, Liguori, 2000, pp. 3-34; G. Vitolo, *Forme di eremitismo indipendente nel Mezzogiorno medievale*, in «Benedictina», 48, 2001, pp. 309-323, reprint. in *L'eremita Francesco di Paola viandante e penitente. Atti del III Convegno Internazionale di studio* (Paola, 14-16 settembre 2000), Roma, Curia Generalizia dell'Ordine dei Minimi, 2006, pp. 178-191. Vitolo returned to the subject of the hermit life in the context of representations of the Thebaid, in G. Vitolo, *Eremiti, monaci e città nell'esperienza religiosa dell'Italia medievale*, in «Quellen und Forschungen aus italienischen Archiven und Bibliotheken», 95, 2015, pp. 3-42.

Vitolo<sup>48</sup>. The loss of archives makes tracing urban recluses particularly ticklish in the south, and Vitolo and Panarelli's work therefore remained in isolated splendour until the recent contributions of Rosalba Di Meglio, who has added new locations to the map, reiterating the importance of testamentary legacies for locating recluses (when they survive), the variety of terminology (including references to "enclosed" *bizzochi*) and the early importance of Benevento, where recluses were unusually well documented, themes she develops in a contribution to the present volume<sup>49</sup>.

As in other regions across Europe, studies of urban voluntary reclusion in Italy have often concentrated on ties with the institutional church, or on the lives of those who acquired a cult<sup>50</sup>. A long tradition of contributions – including many already mentioned – have instead focussed on the evidence for common or ordinary recluses, based on archival research, eschewing hagiography, and systematically surveying the phenomenon in specific locations. Already twenty years ago, Monica Bocchetta returned to the subject of the recluses of Fabriano studied by Sassi, setting out a detailed panorama and highlighting the ties between male and female recluses, testators and the civil and ecclesiastical institutions of the commune. More recently, Andrea Czortek has explored the unusually high number of male recluses in Sansepolcro, while Andrea Piazza has investigated the solitaries of Ivrea, identifying a former judge who became an urban recluse but continued to provide legal counsel and serve as an arbiter<sup>51</sup>. Anna Esposito, another of the contributors here, has also worked for many years on the religious women of Rome and approached the subject of voluntary reclusion in a study of a Jewish convert, Angela, *murata* in St John in Laterano<sup>52</sup>. Over the last decade finally, Eleonora Rava

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<sup>48</sup>F. Panarelli, *L'eremitismo in Puglia (sec. XI-XIV)*, in *Ermite de France et d'Italie (XI<sup>e</sup>-XV<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, éd. par A. Vauchez, Rome, École française de Rome, 2003, pp. 199-209.

<sup>49</sup>R. Di Meglio, *Esperienze religiose femminili e reclusione urbana nel Mezzogiorno medievale*, in *Ingenita Curiositas. Studi sull'Italia medievale per Giovanni Vitolo*, a cura di B. Figliuolo, R. Di Meglio e A. Ambrosio, vol. I, Battipaglia, Laveglia & Carlone, 2018, pp. 447-468.

<sup>50</sup>Beyond those already mentioned, see, for example, A. Bartolomei Romagnoli, *Verdiana: la storia di un culto*, in *Verdiana da Castelfiorentino. Contesto storico, tradizione agiografica e iconografia*, a cura di S. Nocentini, Firenze, Sismel – Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2011, pp. 3-36.

<sup>51</sup>M. Bocchetta, *Iacentes in carceribus. Reclusione femminile a Fabriano tra la metà del XIII ed i primi del XIV secolo*, in «Picum Seraphicum», nuova serie, 20, 2001, pp. 249-273; Czortek, *Nuove ricerche sull'eremitismo*, cit. A. Piazza, *In chiesa e nella vita. Luoghi istituzionali e scelte religiose nel XIII secolo*, in *Storia della Chiesa di Ivrea dalle origini al XV secolo*, a cura di G. Cracco, Roma, Viella, 1998, pp. 275-318.

<sup>52</sup>See, for example, A. Esposito, *S. Francesca e le comunità religiose femminili a Roma nel secolo XV*, in *Culto dei santi, istituzioni e classi sociali in età preindustriale*, a cura di S. Boesch Gajano e L. Sebastiani, Roma-L'Aquila, Japadre, 1984, pp. 539-562; A. Esposito, *St. Francesca and the Female Religious Communities of Fifteenth-Century Rome*, in *Mistiche e devote nell'Italia tardomedievale*, a cura di D. Bornstein e R. Rusconi, Napoli, Liguori, 1992, pp. 187-208; A. Esposito, *St. Francesca and the Female Religious Communities of*

has moved from substantial case studies mapping recluses in Pisa, Viterbo and Siena –which demonstrated for example, that in Pisa, over the course of the fourteenth century recluses' cells moved ever closer to the city – to considerations of the nature of voluntary reclusion in relation to different religious movements<sup>53</sup>. She has also begun to incorporate the Italian evidence into a wider European context<sup>54</sup>. In one sense, this collection is simply the next step in Rava's trajectory of work in the field.

The experience of voluntary reclusion in Italy was by no means homogenous. There were multiple chronological and spatial differences in the social status and gender of recluses, in the forms in which voluntary reclusion appeared, in the attention paid by civil and ecclesiastical authorities and in relations with each local community. If the situation in central Italy and in specific regions of the north is now relatively well understood, much less is known about the south. In planning the workshops behind these two issues of «Quaderni», we therefore focussed first on the large areas of the rest of Italy that had not yet been studied or had been only partially investigated, but also invited papers on the key sources for reclusion in Italy, as well as on the lines of enquiry outlined above and on other regions of medieval Europe. It has not been

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*Fifteenth-Century Rome*, in *Women and Religion in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, ed. by D. Bornstein and R. Rusconi, Chicago-London, The University of Chicago press, 1996, pp. 197-218; A. Esposito, *Il mondo della religiosità femminile romana*, in «Archivio della Società Romana di storia patria», 132, 2009, pp. 149-173; Ead., *I gruppi bizzoccali a Roma nel '400 e le sorores de poenitentia agostiniane*, in *Santa Monica nell'Urbe. Dalla tarda Antichità al Rinascimento. Storia, Agiografia, Arte. Atti del Convegno* (Ostia Antica-Roma, 29-30 settembre 2010), a cura di M. Chiabò, M. Gargano e R. Ronzani, Roma, Centro Culturale Agostiniano/Roma nel Rinascimento, 2011, pp. 157-188; A. Esposito, *Un documento una storia: Caugenua ebrea poi Angela cristiana, prima sposa poi "murata" in S. Giovanni in Laterano (Roma 1537)*, in *Scritti per Isa. Raccolta di studi offerti a Isa Lori Sanfilippo*, a cura di A. Mazzon, Roma, Istituto storico italiano per il medio evo, 2008, pp. 357-368.

<sup>53</sup>E. Rava, *Eremiti in città*, cit.; Ead., *Le testatrici e le recluse: il fenomeno della reclusione urbana nei testamenti delle donne pisane (secoli XIII-XIV)*, in «Quaderni di storia religiosa medievale», 7, 2010, numero monografico, *Margini di libertà. Testamenti femminili nel Medioevo*. Atti del convegno internazionale (Verona, 23-25 ottobre 2008), a cura di M.C. Rossi, pp. 311-332; G. Casagrande ed E. Rava, *Santa Rosa e il fenomeno della reclusione volontaria a Viterbo*, in *Hagiologica. Studi per Réginald Grégoire*, ed. A. Bartolomei Romagnoli, U. Paoli e P. Piatti, vol. II, Fabriano, Monastero San Silvestro Abate, 2012, pp. 1017-1032; E. Rava, *Osservanza e reclusione volontaria: prime indagini*, in «Frate Francesco», nuova serie, 79, 2013, pp. 236-247; Ead., *Le recluse e il Corpus Domini*, in «Antonianum», 89, 2014, pp. 277-299; E. Rava and A. Clark Thurber, *Recluse: due casi a confronto (Siena e Pisa)*, in «Cristianesimo nella storia», 36, 2015, pp. 505-535, reprint. in *Beata civitas. Pubblica pietà e devozioni private nella Siena del '300*, a cura di A. Benvenuti e P. Piatti, Firenze, Sismel – Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2016, pp. 425-452. Allison Clark (Thurber) has also produced separate studies of Siena: A. Clark, *Spaces of Reclusion: Notarial Records of Urban Eremiticism in Medieval Siena*, in *Rhetoric of the Anchorhold*, cit., pp. 17-33; Ead., *Female Urban Reclusion in Siena at the Time of Catherine of Siena*, in *A Companion to Catherine of Siena*, ed. by C. Muessig, G. Ferzoco, and B.M. Kienzle, Leiden, Brill, 2012, pp. 47-72.

<sup>54</sup>E. Rava, *Il fenomeno della reclusione: esperienze italiane ed europee*, in *Vita religiosa al femminile (secoli XIII-XIV)*. Atti del Ventiseiesimo Convegno Internazionale di Studi (Pistoia, 19-21 maggio 2017), a cura del Centro Italiano di Studi di Storia e di Arte, Roma, Viella, 2019, pp. 43-54.

possible to publish all of the papers presented at the two workshops, but what follows is a sample of the research that is ongoing in this lively field of research.

### [A Brief Outline of the Papers in this Issue](#)

These outlines are intended only to help readers orient themselves in this issue of «Quaderni». The opening paper, an extended prologue for the collection from Eddie Jones, sets the scene by drawing on his recent work on late medieval English solitaries to establish what might be meant by “everyday recluses”<sup>55</sup>. Noting that many late medieval writers took the presence of recluses for granted, he samples the English evidence to demonstrate that this reflected a widespread, often mappable reality. He then moves to the lives of the recluses themselves, drawing on literary and documentary sources to reconstruct something of their daily routine, both liturgical and domestic.

The first section then turns to *Sources and Themes*. This begins by setting out the initial results of systematic study of voluntary reclusion in Italy in two essential source-types, saints’ lives and urban statutes, isolating them from the larger context to investigate and demonstrate their specific utility. The focus then turns to connections with other religious organisations, beginning with the relations with bishops as identifiable in central Italian synodal constitutions, before turning to the Cistercians and Franciscans.

In the first paper of this section, Alessandra Bartolomei Romagnoli presents the results of a first survey of female voluntary reclusion based on the *Acta Sanctorum* and similar repertories. Her census casts the net wide, including women identifiable as “hermits” living in the wild, and as “recluses” living in an enclosed space, whether they never left their cells or did so only for brief devotional activities. She also includes those who lived a life of withdrawal in a *recluserium* in the company of others but without professing a rule, or as “domestic recluses”, remaining in their own homes. The results are avowedly preliminary and as Bartolomei Romagnoli points out, again raise questions about the category of reclusion itself. They nonetheless confirm the large number of female saintly figures in the broad category of “religious solitary”: a total of 105 (53 in Italy), of whom 79 were “recluses” whether living next to a church, monastery, at home or in an independent cell. It also makes evident how this changed over time: from six women in the sixth century to twenty-nine in the fourteenth (of whom twenty-two were located in the Italian peninsula) and just eleven in the fifteenth.

The next contribution, from Eleonora Rava, offers a systematic analysis of the evidence for voluntary reclusion in communal statutes from Central and Northern Italy. These are familiar

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<sup>55</sup>See above, note 8.



sources for historians of Italy, the symbol of the *ius proprium civitatis*, but have never been treated as a single corpus for understanding the normative response to voluntary reclusion. Commencing with an initial sample from sixty-four communes, covering Piemonte and Trentino to Sardegna and Sicily, Rava has identified nineteen with extant statutes that refer to recluses. She enumerates the ways in which recluses and voluntary reclusion appear in these records: as the recipients of alms, as a category in need of particular protection and as either named individuals or specific cells. The paper demonstrates that legislators sometimes expected a cell to be occupied over successive generations, a fixture in urban religious life. It documents the active role of everyday recluses in some communes, undertaking functions such as burying the dead or maintaining a section of road. The overall impression is of a powerful presence in the urban landscape.

In the third paper, Simone Allegría summarises the general state of research on synodal constitutions, the instructions issued for the clergy at the close of diocesan synods. He pays particular attention to the sporadic extant documentation for Italy, before setting out the unusually specific norms for recluses promulgated by the fourteenth-century bishops of Gubbio and Nocera Umbra, a privileged angle from which to interpret the history of relations between voluntary reclusion and ecclesiastical institutions. Comparing these with norms issued by synods in Florence and Arezzo, which were much less engaged with the subject, nonetheless demonstrates that bishops shared a common concern and one which chimes with a prominent theme in the urban statutes studied by Rava: the physical and spiritual protection of the women who became recluses. The paper then juxtaposes synodal constitutions with the hagiographical account of the blessed Giustina of Arezzo to offer a paradigmatic example of how the bishops of the fourteenth century handled the phenomenon of voluntary reclusion: on the one hand they tolerated, directed and promoted certain forms of life in the service of God, on the other they pushed for their decisive regulation.

The final two chapters in section one turn to relations between recluses and religious orders. Joshua S. Easterling explores how early Cistercian communities fostered close ties with recluses, who often depended on direct spiritual assistance from their monastic neighbours. By the latter half of the thirteenth century, however, these “salvation networks” experienced a notable decline. Early spiritual bonds with Cistercians, which especially benefited female recluses, unravelled with the rapid changes in the culture of voluntary reclusion, including its expansion within urban centres and the concomitant rise of mendicant and clerical influence on the lives of local female recluses. Together with the increased presence of laypeople at the

recluse's cell, Easterling suggests that these developments rendered the question of spiritual oversight both more complex and more urgent.

Finally in this section, Marco Guida continues a line of research opened first by Luigi Pellegrini, and then by Rava<sup>56</sup>, addressing the question of relations between Franciscanism and voluntary reclusion, by returning to the role and value of the eremitical life in the Order of Friars Minor as it came into contact with the forms of solitary life present in thirteenth-century Umbria. Guida therefore examines the experience of female recluses of Franciscan inspiration, and how this mirrors in its complexity and variety the presence of the eremitical life among the Friars Minor. He pays particular attention to Chiara da Assisi, Margherita da Cortona and Angela da Foligno, whose *Vitae* he considers as examples which confirm the multiform typology of Franciscan female reclusion, various in time and space, but sharing the common ground of a strong penitential and devotional element. With regard to Chiara, Guida investigates the role of enclosure in the rule of the Saint and looks for possible references to voluntary reclusion in the writings by and about Chiara. This leads him to conclude that the points of contact between Chiara's community of S. Damiano and urban reclusion lie in the close ties with the city in the shape of mutual assistance, offered by the recluses through prayer and by the city through alms and material support.

In part two, *Mapping Voluntary Reclusion*, the focus shifts to topographical concerns. Rosalba Di Meglio revisits and expands her work on southern Italy, shining a particular light on the city of Benevento, where recluses are relatively well documented. She includes in appendix an edition of the execution of a will which shows a local man's generosity to the recluses of the city and confirms that his legacy was enacted. This incidentally reveals the precarious circumstances in which the will had been drawn up, when his wife was pregnant and their only child was seven, such that only afterwards did he inform his executors of outstanding obligations, which they nonetheless undertook to fulfill.

Silvia Carraro then uses the notarial archives of Venice to trace the extensive evidence for recluses on the islands of the Venetian lagoon. Unlike the fragments available in the south, this enables an understanding of their numerical presence, where they lived, their social identity and, in part, the forms of life adopted by hermits and recluses, while also highlighting the differences and similarities between male and female experience. Carraro's study also explores the relationships established – especially by women – with local religious institutions and in

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<sup>56</sup>L. Pellegrini, *A proposito di eremiti laici d'ispirazione francescana*, in *I frati minori e il terzo ordine. Problemi e discussioni storiografiche. Atti del XXIII Convegno storico internazionale* (17-20 ottobre 1982), Spoleto-Todi, Cisam/Accademia Tudertina, 1985, pp. 115-142; Rava, *Osservanza e reclusione volontaria*, cit.

particular with the clergy and the bishop. The analysis of a large number of testaments reveals the support of the Venetians for this religious choice and the role played by urban reclusion in the wider context of Venetian lived religion. Given the scale of the Venetian archives, Carraro's paper also points to the opportunities for further work in this field.

The exploration of female voluntary reclusion in Rome and Lazio presented in the next paper, by Anna Esposito, is once more based above all on last wills. She begins with the papal patrimony of St Peter in Tuscia and Sabina, and in particular the cities of Viterbo and Rieti<sup>57</sup>. At present, only sporadic evidence for recluses has been found in southern Lazio: in Veroli, Ferentino, Guarcino, but also in Fondi and (as we have already seen) Gaeta (both were in the *Regno*), but these are, Esposito argues, clues to a wider phenomenon, above all in the thirteenth century. The evidence for Rome, on the other hand, is much more substantial. In the early fourteenth century, the total number of female recluses in the city amounted to as many as 260 (compared to 470 nuns); already at the end of the century, however, and still more in the 1400s, their numbers dropped drastically (a parallel perhaps with Lonza's findings in Dubrovnik). At the same time, the information available for these women, who were located above all in the great basilicas (S. Pietro in Vaticano, S. Giovanni in Laterano), increased, especially in the early 1500s. On the whole, this suggests that voluntary reclusion by *murate* did not change their lay status as women without vows adhering to an "eremitical" and religious ideal (though a few can be documented as Franciscan tertiaries). Moreover, once again, the experiences of these women in Rome varied widely: from solitary reclusion, to living with a companion, or participating in a larger group. For the most part the female recluses of Rome also seem to have enjoyed fairly comfortable socio-economic circumstances, allowing them to interact on various levels with the world around them.

In the last paper in this first issue, Jörg Voigt, who – like most of the contributors here – has long worked on the history of women religious, offers an overview of the widespread presence of voluntary reclusion in German-speaking lands in rural and, by the late Middle Ages, urban contexts<sup>58</sup>. Voigt traces the presence of recluses from the early Middle Ages to the sixteenth

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<sup>57</sup>For an earlier study of Viterbo, see Casagrande and Rava, *Santa Rosa e il fenomeno della reclusione volontaria a Viterbo*, cit. For Rieti, an initial approach to the evidence, focussed on the recluse Filippa Mareri, is to be found in R. Brentano, *A New World in a Small Place. Church and Religion in the Diocese of Rieti*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1994, p. 266.

<sup>58</sup>Previous publications include: J. Voigt, *Die Inkluse Elisabeth von Beutnitz (1402-1445). Zum Inklusenwesen in Thüringen*, in *Religiöse Bewegungen im Mittelalter. Festschrift für Matthias Werner zum 65. Geburtstag*, hrsg. von E. Bünz, S. Tebruck und H.G. Walther, Köln, Böhlau, 2007, pp. 347-395; J. Voigt, *Beginen im Spätmittelalter. Frauenfrömmigkeit in Thüringen und im Reich*, Köln, Böhlau, 2012; Id., *Geistliche Frauengemeinschaften in*

century, paying particular attention to cases in the less-studied centre and north but also bringing in evidence from other regions. Although it cannot be comprehensive, the range of sources available for a study of this scale, from the legislation of episcopal synods (similar to those studied by Allegria), chronicles, saintly *Vitae*, municipal records and, of course, wills – as also a remarkable gravestone – allows him to demonstrate the long-term dynamism of voluntary reclusion and also provide details of everyday life. As elsewhere in Europe, recluses could be found in the vicinity of monasteries, parish churches, chapels, and other ecclesiastical institutions, including an episcopal residence. It is evident that some had servants and lived in well-furnished cells. In the final section of the paper, Voigt then focuses on the substantial body of evidence for one particularly well-off fifteenth-century recluse who lived in a cell attached to a parish church, which she herself financed, along with endowments for several altars.

These and other related questions are pursued in issue 2.

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*Hildesheim*, in *ZeitenWende 1400. Hildesheim als europäische Metropole*, hrsg. von C. Höhl und G. Lutz, Regensburg, Schnell & Steiner, 2019, pp. 131-137.