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The Relics of the Stigmata of St. Francis of Assisi

Carla Salvati

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

Religious Studies

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Abstract

Relics of the Stigmata of St. Francis of Assisi

Carla Salvati
Concordia University, 2005

Francis of Assisi was the first saint in the history of Christianity to receive the stigmata. In 1224, while meditating on Mount La Verna the wounds of the Crucified Christ appeared on his hands, feet and side. The subject of this dissertation is the cult of the relics of the stigmata of St. Francis. These include tiny ampoules of blood from the wounds, the habit Francis was wearing when he received the stigmata, the bandage worn over the side wound as well as a sock and shoe worn to protect the wounds on his feet. The hypothesis of this study is that the relics of the stigmata of St. Francis of Assisi do not fit the categories developed to account for the relics of Antiquity and the early Middle Ages; they introduce unique, new kinds of relics to medieval Christianity. The devotional practices and reflections around the relics of the stigmata of St. Francis show that his wounds were treated as the physical embodiment of a mystical experience. The relics of the stigmata were, I argue, relics of the points of contact and union between Francis and Christ. Devotional sources from the 16th and 17th centuries are examined which express the belief that Christ had crafted the wounds in Francis's body, transforming him into a living artifact. The relics were believed to be the only remaining traces of what Christ had crafted with his own hands. This study examines how the relics of the stigmata were infused with the meaning of the physiology, the poetics and the theology of the wounds which bridged the gap between heaven and earth.

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To my mother and to the memory of my father

Abbreviations

Writings of St. Francis:

Parchment	The Parchment containing the Blessing given to Brother Leo by St. Francis
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Franciscan Sources:

1C	The Life of St. Francis by Thomas of Celano
2C	The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul
3C	The Treatise on the Miracles by Thomas of Celano
L3C	The Legend of the Three Companions
AC	The Assisi Compilation
LMj	The Major Legend by Bonaventure
Actus	Actus Beati Francisci et Sociorum Eius

Other Sources:

AFH	Archivium Franciscanum Historicum
CF	Collectanea Franciscana
MF	Miscellanea Francescana
SF	Studi Francescani

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Preface

Francis of Assisi was the first saint in Christian history to receive the stigmata. In 1224, while meditating on Mount La Verna, he had a vision of a Seraph in the sky and wounds appeared on his hands, feet and side. The unprecedented event sent a shock-wave throughout medieval society. The narrative, theological and iconographic explanations of this startling new miracle, all grappled with the nature and origin of the mysterious wounds.¹ What had caused the wounds to appear on Francis's body? The modality of the miracle became the subject of debate and speculation which lasted for centuries. The most enduring explanation was made popular by Bonaventure, who likened the stigmata to the impression left by a seal; Christ's wounds were impressed on Francis's flesh, made malleable by the ardour of his soul.² This allusion to a physical contact between the Seraph/Christ figure and Francis was rendered visually by Giotto, by means of five rays darting from Christ's wounds to pierce Francis's flesh.³ There were others who believed with Bartholomew of Pisa, that the wounds were produced by a more direct contact with Christ. But whether by piercing rays or by direct contact, the prevailing belief was that Francis's wounds were the result of "the touch of the hand of God."⁴ What impact would this perception have on the cult of the relics of those wounds, the physical traces of God's touch?

1. For other apparent cases of stigmatization in the 13th century, see, Herbert Thurston's "Some Physical Phenomena of Mysticism", *The Month*, Vol. CXXXIV, July-December, 1919, pp.39-51.

2. See LMj 6, 2-3.

3. Giotto produced three paintings of the Stigmatization of Francis: a fresco in the Upper Church of the Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi, a fresco in the Bardi Chapel in Santa Croce in Florence and an altarpiece for the Church of San Francesco in Pisa presently in the Louvre Museum.

4. See *Parchment*, "The hand of God touched Francis."

The subject of this dissertation is the cult of the relics of the stigmata of St. Francis of Assisi. Francis always showed great reverence for relics. Thomas of Celano tell us that when he discovered relics in an abandoned church "He felt very bad that they had been robbed of the devotion due them for a long time."⁵ The relics of the stigmata have in my view, been robbed of the attention due them for a long time. While scholarship has focused on textual and iconographic sources of the miracle, no study to date has considered the cult of the stigmata of St. Francis from the perspective of its relics. This thesis is an attempt to bridge this gap in scholarship by examining the historical sources for the following relics of the stigmata of St. Francis: a) the habit Francis wore when he received the stigmata, b) three ampoules of blood from the wounds, c) the chamois and a poultice used to care for the side wound, c) a shoe and sock that protected the wounds on Francis's feet. A chapter will be devoted to each of these four groups of relics, examined in light of devotional themes associated with the wounds.⁶

Walter Benjamin wrote, "Storytellers tend to begin the story with a presentation of the circumstances in which they themselves have learned what is to follow ..."⁷ Throughout my graduate studies I have been interested in the impact of the Stigmatization of Francis on Christian asceticism - the practice of *imitatio Christi*. While attending a seminar in Assisi on the *Vita Prima* of Thomas of Celano I was struck by a prayer by Celano asking Francis to turn and show his stigmata to Christ, so that Christ would in turn

5. 2C, 202

6. This is not an exhaustive study of the relics of the stigmata, which will be the subject of future research.

7. Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (New York, 1969), p. 92.

show his wounds to the Father, "reminding" him of his mercy for humankind.⁸ The prayer addresses a saint seen as uniquely "qualified" to intercede on behalf of his devotees and it drew my attention to how the stigmata affected the devotional lives of medieval Christians. I first learned of the existence of blood relics of the stigmata from a travel article on the Abruzzi region of Italy featuring the town of Castelvechio Subequo, its Church of St. Francis and its treasured relic of the blood of the stigmata. I suspected immediately that the relics of the stigmata would offer a unique vantage point from which to explore what had both shocked and captivated medieval Christians about the Stigmatization of Francis - the appearance of divine wounds on a human body. Whose blood was in the little glass ampoule in Castelvechio Subequo? Was it believed to be the blood of Francis, the blood of Christ, or a mixture of human and divine blood? These were the questions that first arose when I discovered the evidence of blood relics and they remained the questions driving this research.

My research did not begin with the ampoule in Castelvechio Subequo, but with one of the most beautiful Franciscan reliquaries, the one with the oldest depiction of Francis receiving the stigmata, now in the Louvre Museum in Paris. (fig.1) The 13th-century reliquary was designed in such a way that the quadri-lobed plaque with Francis receiving the stigmata pivots from the centre of the stem, to expose the relics magnified by five rock-crystal compartments behind. (fig. 2) The reliquary, designed to hold relics of

8. See 1C 118: "O father, place before Jesus Christ, son of the Most High Father, his sacred stigmata; and show Him the signs of the cross on your hands, feet, and side, that He may mercifully bare His own wounds to the Father, and because of this the Father will ever show us in our anguish His tenderness. Amen. See *Francis of Assisi : Early Documents*, Volume 1, The Saint, Armstrong, Hellmann, Short eds., (New York, 1999), p. 287, note a, "... this prayer of Francis's orphaned followers is copied from an antiphon, *Plange turba pauperula*, composed by Gregory IX immediately after the saint's death."

Francis and the stigmata, no longer contained Francis's relics at the time of the museum's acquisition.⁹ The reliquary did, however, contain a relic with special significance for my study; according to museum records in the left compartment was, "Terre enveloppée dans une

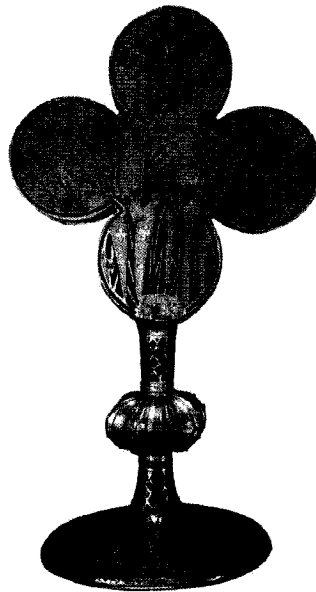


Figure 1

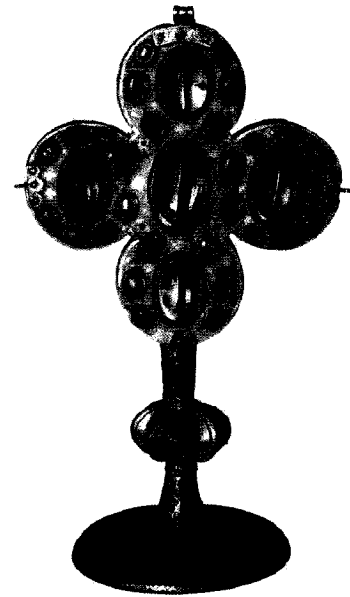


Figure 2

éttoffe bleue nouée d'un fil rouge. Etiquette en parchemin enroulée autour du paquet et maintenue par un second fil rouge: (*de terra nazarena ubi posuit Jesus pedes suos*)."¹⁰

The reliquary contained earth from Nazareth where Christ had walked and left his footprints. If, as I suspect, this contact relic of Christ was originally combined with a relic of the stigmata, the combination would have made a powerful theological statement. In a sense the earth from Nazareth was a relic of the stigmata - a relic of Francis's *sequela Christi*. Franciscans believed their founder was the only saint to have followed precisely in the footprints of Christ, a motif found in many Franciscan narratives. Bernardino of Siena tells the story of a merchant who saw Christ at the altar of the Duomo in Siena, his

9. On this reliquary see, Maria Maddalena Gauthier's article, "L'Art de l'email champlevé en Italie a l'époque primitive du Gothique" in *Il Gotico a Pistoia nei suoi rapporti con l'arte Gotica Italiana*, (Pistoia, 1966), pp. 291-293. By the same author, "Reliquaires du XIIIe siècle entre le proche orient et l'occident latin" in *Le Proche Orient et l'Occident latin au XIIIe siècle*, (Milan, 1979). See also Elizabeth Taburet Delahaye's "Reliquaire de saint François d'Assise" in *L'œuvre de Limoges émaux limousins du Moyen Age*, (Paris, 1995); and H. Matrod, "Le Stim-mate di S. Francesco nella rappresentazione piu antica che si conosca" in *MF*, X, 1906-1908.

10. From Louvre Archives: *Inventaire des reliques du reliquaire de Saint Francois* (OA 4083, MV110)

tracks still visible in ashes on the ground. The "saints of old" tried in vain to step in these footprints but it was only "... the little poor Francis, who placed his feet precisely where Christ had placed his ... because he showed himself to be so close a follower of God that there could be found no one who had followed in the footprints of Christ so much as he."¹¹ Seen in light of such narratives, the little parcel of earth from Nazareth is both a contact relic of Christ and a symbol of his *exemplum*. Framed by a reliquary with the Stigmatization, it also becomes a relic of the perfection of Francis's *sequela Christi*, which culminated in "contact" with Christ on Mount La Verna. The little parcel of earth from Nazareth crystallizes an important aspect of my study of the relics of the stigmata. It illustrates that relics had poetic as well as literal referents. The earth was both the literal and poetic terrain that Christ and Francis had tread. This dissertation is about the overlapping traces of the two journeys, the two bodies, which met on Mount La Verna.

11. See: *Saint Bernardine of Siena, Sermons*, Nazareno Orlandi ed. (Missouri, 1920), sermon XXIV.

Chapter 1

Introduction & Review of Literature

The hypothesis put forth in this study is that the devotional practices and reflections around the relics of the stigmata of St. Francis show that his wounds were treated as the physical embodiment of a mystical experience, and that the relics of those wounds were seen as the physical traces of a mystical experience.¹ The relics of the stigmata of St. Francis were, I will argue, unique new kinds of relics that did not fit the definition that accounted for relics from Antiquity to the 13th century. *Reliquiae* refers to the physical remains of a saint, as well as the objects that he or she made contact with, believed to be charged with the presence (*praesentia*) of the saint in heaven. I will attempt to show how the relics of blood from Francis's wounds, as well as the clothing and bandages that had pressed against them, were seen as traces, not just of Francis, but of the points of contact and union between Francis and Christ.

For purposes of this study, a distinction needs to be made between physical embodiment and physical manifestation of mystical experience. Historians generally view the Stigmatization of Francis as the watershed miracle for physical phenomena associated with the Christocentric piety of the late Middle Ages.² It is placed in the same category as levitation and rapture. But evidence in the sources I examine suggests that the

1. I use the term "mystical" to mean union with God.

2. See André Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, (Cambridge, 1997) translation of *La sainteté en Occident aux derniers siècles du Moyen Age* (Rome, 1988), pp. 427-443 on the bodily signs of sainthood. Christocentric piety is associated mostly with the religious experience of medieval women. See Caroline Walker Bynum's groundbreaking work, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*, (Berkeley, 1987). In a nutshell Bynum's argument is that the Eucharistic "flesh" of Christ, both body and food, became central to female piety since women's nurturing body, like Christ's, was food.

Chapter 1

Stigmatization of Francis retained its unique status over the centuries. Beyond the Franciscan Order's jealous guarding of the stigmata as the exclusive privilege of their founder, features intrinsic to the miracle were seen to distinguish it. Francis of Assisi had experienced ecstasies and visions in his life before receiving the stigmata. Thomas of Celano describes him "totally absorbed in a light;"³ Bonaventure speaks of Francis "transported into ecstasy;"⁴ sometimes while he prayed, "his whole body elevated from the ground and (was) surrounded by a glowing cloud."⁵ These physical signs of mystical union caused neither scandal nor alarm.⁶ They were side-effects, manifestations of the *soul's* union with God. These signs of saintliness, experienced by saints before Francis, posed no threat to the traditional hierarchical view of the body/soul relation. What was both shocking and awe-inspiring about the stigmata was the fact that the body became the terrain favoured by God for union with his saint. The stigmata were traces of the embodiment of the divine, signs of the merging of God with human flesh comparable only to the Incarnation itself. After Stigmatization, Francis's body became comparable only to Christ's. As Brother Elias writes in his encyclical letter announcing the miracle shortly after Francis's death, "Such a sign ... has never been heard of from the dawn of time except in the Son of God, who is Christ the Lord."⁷

3. 1 C 26

4. LMj 2,1

5. LMj 10,4.

6. For more on Francis's visions and ecstasies, see Octavian Schmucki, *The Stigmata of St. Francis of Assisi A Critical Investigation in the Light of Thirteenth-Century Sources*, (New York, 1991), pp. 124-141.

7. From the letter of the passing of St. Francis of Assisi attributed to Elias of Assisi, *Francis of Assisi, Early Documents*, Volume 2, *The Founder*, Armstrong, Hellmann, Short, eds., (New York, 2000), p. 490.

Chapter 1

Methodology:

One of the fundamental aims of this study is to examine how the challenge posed to the traditional Christian body/soul equation by the stigmatized body of St. Francis was constituted in the cult of its relics. After the miracle on Mount La Verna, the *imago dei* was no longer hidden in bodies made heavy and opaque by the Fall, it was "branded," "printed," "carved," "embroidered," "sculpted," "molded" onto flesh made malleable, "liquefied" along with a soul on fire with love. Francis's stigmatized body was viewed as a "redeemed" body, transformed, "transubstantiated" by Christ's touch. These are some of the ways the sources I examine strain to describe the physical process and meaning of Stigmatization, with metaphors that suggest Christ as the artisan of a "new man," restored (body and soul) to the perfect *imago dei*. One expression of this is found in the comparison made between the imprints Christ left on Francis with those left on the Shroud of Turin. In both cases Christ had imprinted a self-portrait. I will examine the significance of metaphors like "Living Shroud," "Living Image of Christ," "Living Eucharist" and "Living Cross" used to describe Francis's stigmatized body. These metaphors present Francis's body as a unique new site for *affectum devotionis*, and will serve as the thematic anchors for my analysis of the historical sources of the relics of the stigmata.

A further aim of this study is to uncover what David Freedberg refers to as the "symptoms of the relationship" between the relics of the stigmata and their devotees, "the active, outwardly markable responses of beholders, as well as the beliefs (insofar as they

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are capable of being recorded) that motivate them to specific actions and behavior."⁸

Though textual sources for the relics are exceedingly scarce, clues do exist that bring the objects to life, records of a pilgrim allowed to kiss a blood relic, and of a nobleman holding a relic on the Eve of the Feast of the Stigmata. Lengthier accounts of response exist only for the habit Francis was wearing on Mount La Verna. As we will see in chapter two, in the early 1500's the habit was stolen by the powerful Signoria of Florence and the official letters plotting its theft have been preserved. Also preserved is an eye-witness account of the translation of the habit to Florence, with its lively scenes of townspeople braving wind and rain just to catch a glimpse of the relic. Despite the penury of sources for most of the other relics, their reception remains discernable even in brief descriptions found in inventory catalogues and guide books for pilgrims. Clues are also found in treatises and sermons on the Stigmatization of Francis which make reference to the relics. These include the writings of Salvatore Vitale, a Sicilian Capuchin friar and great enthusiast of the stigmata,⁹ and the writings of the Spanish friar Antonio Daza.¹⁰ We will examine Augustino di Miglio's work on the devotional sites on Mount La Verna¹¹ as well as a devotional guide for the Confraternity of the Stigmata written by one of its members, Giacomo Dragondelli.¹² Sermons delivered in the Church of the Stigmata

8. See David Freedberg, *The Power of Images, Studies in the History and Theory of Response*, (Chicago, 1989), p. xxii. "When I use the term "response" I refer - broadly - to the symptoms of the relationship between image and beholder."

9. Salvatore Vitale, *Teatro Serafico delle stimmate di Cristo, Impresse nel santo, immacolato, e virginal Corpo del glorioso Padre San Francesco*, (Florence, 1629).

10. Antonio Daza, *Descrizione delle stimmate del nostro Serafico Padre San Francesco*, (Florence, 1619).

11. Augustino di Miglio, *Nuovo dialogo delle devozioni del sacro monte della Verna*, (Florence, 1568).

12. Giacomo Dragondelli, *Il divoto delle sacre stimmate di S. Francesco*, (Rome, 1664).

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in Rome by Antonio Vieira,¹³ Fausto Zerboni¹⁴ and Tomasso Mancini Romano will also be examined.¹⁵ None of these works have, as far as I know, been studied to date. They are all in the vernacular, reflecting views intended for a wide audience. While I am interested in records of the most inclusive impact of the stigmata of Francis, it is not my intention to focus on "popular vs elite" response to the relics of the stigmata. As Miri Rubin put it, "The model of elite/popular culture ... fails to account for sufficient phenomena, since it vouchsafed the primacy of determining power to extremely undifferentiated and static social categories."¹⁶ Rubin adds, "We should try to turn our optic on its head, starting with the culture and its many voices as the privileged entity."¹⁷ To the extent that this study does reflect "popular" religion, it is about the "popular mainstream and not the popular underground" to use Eamon Duffy's terms.¹⁸ The relics of the stigmata of St. Francis interested every strata of society, from the social, political and religious elite, to "ordinary" believers. My aim is to mine what Walter Benjamin describes as the "layers of a variety of retellings" of the miracle of Mount La Verna, in

13. Antonio Vieira, *Sermone delle stimmate di S. Francesco*, (Rome, 1672).

14. Fausto Zerboni, *Ragionamento delle sacre stimmate di S. Francesco*, (Rome, 1641).

15. Tomasso Mancini Romano, *La Triplice Santità, Ragionamento sagro in onore delle stimmate del Serafico Patriarca*, (Rome, 1726). *Il Cielo Nuovo Ragionamento in onore delle stimmate di S. Francesco*, (Rome, 1721).

16. See Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi, the Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture*, (Cambridge, 1991), p. 7.

17. *Ibid.*

18. See Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars, Traditional Religion in England, c. 1400-c.1580*, (New Haven & London, 1992). See p. 278. Referring to 16th-century prayers Duffy says, "This is not the devotional underground, it is the devotional mainstream ..." I agree with Duffy that the term "popular" has become problematic. See p. 2, "... much writing about late medieval and early modern religion has taken it as axiomatic that there was a wide gulf between "popular" and "elite" religion, that the orthodox teaching of the clergy was poorly understood and only partially practiced, that paganism and superstition were rife. ... It is my conviction ... that no substantial gulf existed between the religion of the clergy and the educated elite on the one hand and that of the people at large on the other. I do not believe that it is helpful or accurate to talk of the religion of the average 15th-century parishioner as magical, superstitious, or semi-pagan. Nor does it seem to me that the most interesting aspect of late medieval religion lay in the views and activities of those who ... rejected its central tenets and preoccupations."

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order to see what light the various hermeneutics of the wounds shed on the cult of their relics.¹⁹

While the broad framework of my study is historical, I will remain tightly focused on the history of the individual relics and reliquaries. The broad time sweep over four centuries, thirteenth to seventeenth centuries, makes it impossible to deal in any depth with the historical context of each object and/or text. My interpretive approach is multi-disciplinary, without any one overarching theory informing my analysis. The question driving this study is how the perception of Francis's wounds as artifacts of Christ, his imprints, was reflected in the cult of their relics. In this regard the work of art historians, in particular the theoretical work on the imprint by philosopher/art historian Georges Didi-Huberman is particularly pertinent.²⁰ The main characteristic of an imprint, Didi-Huberman points out, is that resemblance is transmitted physically not imitated visually, thereby changing the hierarchical relationship that normally exists between an original and its copy. This distinction is key for my study. Scholarship has tended to focus on the stigmata as images of Christ's wounds. This study will focus on perceptions of the stigmata as imprints of Christ which, as Didi-Huberman notes, " ... fait du résultat obtenu une "copie" qui est l'enfant charnel, tactile, et non le reflet atténué de son "modèle", ou

19. See Walter Benjamin, (1969) op. cit. p. 93. Benjamin is referring to the propensity for abbreviation in modern culture, exemplified in the short story "which has removed itself from oral tradition and no longer permits that slow piling one on top of the other of thin, transparent layers, which constitutes the most appropriate picture of the ways in which the perfect narrative is revealed through the layers of a variety of retellings."

20. Georges Didi-Huberman, *L'Empreinte*, (Paris, 1997).

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plutôt de sa *forme parente*...²¹ An unequivocal expression of stigmata as imprints is found in a 17th-century sermon by Cornelio Muso who calls Francis's stigmata "*reliquiae del suo caro amante*" (relics of his beloved).²² This perception has interesting implications for the relics of the wounds already viewed as relics of Christ. According to Didi-Huberman, an imprint is "ce "présent réminiscent", visuel et tactile, d'un passé qui ne cesse de "travailler", de transformer le substrat où il a imprimé sa marque..."²³ The challenge posed by the "imprints" on Francis's body was that they were at once reminiscent of the infliction of the original wounds by nails and a spear on Mount Calvary, and of Christ's wounding of Francis on Mount La Verna.

Didi-Huberman asks: "le processus d'empreinte est-il contact de l'origine ou bien perte de l'origine? Manifeste-t-il ... Le même ou l'altéré? ... Le contact ou bien l'écart? ... Je dirai que l'empreinte est "l'image dialectique", la conflagration de tout cela..."²⁴ As we shall see, the dialectic nature of the encounter on Mount La Verna was expressed in the belief that an exchange took place in which Francis was transformed into Christ and Christ into Francis, with again, interesting implications for the relics of the "exchange." For Didi-Huberman, the imprint also represents empty space, "un écart, une trace de disparition;"²⁵ in chapters two and four we will examine how tears (absences) in relics indicate the spaces occupied by Christ's/Francis's wounds, no longer visible on earth. Whether the footprints of the Buddha or those of Christ left before his Ascension, Didi-

21. *Ibid.* p.38. On the distinctions between originals and copies in historical and aesthetic discourse, in particular the distinctions between original works, reproductions and imitations, see, James Elkins "From Original to Copy and Back Again," *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, vol. 33, no. 1, January, 1993.

22. See *Il Secondo Libro delle prediche del Reverendissimo mons. Cornelio Muso*, (Ferrari, 1575).

23. Didi-Huberman, op. cit. (1997), p. 17.

24. *Ibid.* p. 19.

25. *Ibid.* p. 50.

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Huberman says, "...dans les deux cas le pouvoir de l'empreinte se décline comme la conjugaison subtile d'un proche et d'un lointain. Cette conjugaison porte un nom; c'est l'aura."²⁶ This thesis will examine evidence of the unique and complex nature of the *praesentia* of Christ's "imprints" on Francis's flesh, still embodied in the relics of his wounds.

The Christian Cult of Relics:

One of the most eloquent historians of the Christian Cult of Saints and Relics is Peter Brown. Brown captures the sense of novelty that the Christian Cult of Relics introduced to the world of Antiquity when, as he puts it, the map of the universe was "subtly redrawn."²⁷ According to Brown, "the rise of the cult of saints was sensed by contemporaries, in no uncertain manner, to have broken most of the imaginative boundaries which ancient men had placed between heaven and earth, the divine and the human, the living and the dead, the town and its antithesis."²⁸ He describes saints' shrines as places where "the chilling anonymity of human remains could

²⁶.*Ibid.*

²⁷.Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints, its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*, (Chicago, 1981), p. 4. For Peter Brown's legacy, see *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, Essays on the Contribution of Peter Brown*, (Oxford, 1999), eds.Johnston and Hayward. In particular see, "On Defining the Holy Man" by Averil Cameron, pp. 27-43, which gives an overview of Brown's major works.

²⁸.Brown, (1981), op. cit. p. 21. See also "The Saint as Exemplar in Late Antiquity", *Saints and Virtues*, ed. Stratton Hawley, (Berkeley, 1987), pp. 3-14, in which Brown elaborates on how Christianity caused a dramatic shift in the training of human discipline from a human relation between master and pupil in which literacy was the medium, to the joining points between God and humanity, exemplified by the holy man's power to channel God's presence.

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be thought to be still heavy with the fullness of a beloved person."²⁹ They were the "*loci* where Heaven and Earth met."³⁰ The notion of breaching boundaries goes to the core of my argument regarding the relics of the stigmata. If the miracle on Mount La Verna shocked the medieval world it is because it represented a new kind of breaching of boundaries between heaven and earth, soul and body, Christ and his holy man. I will argue that the relics of the stigmata embodied a new relation between these dualities, by blurring the distinction between the remains of the bodies of Christ and Francis. Brown refers to the Augustinian view of the martyrs as *membra Christi*- members of the mystical body of Christ; the belief that "The hand of God that had rested with unshakable constancy above Christ rested also above his elect."³¹ However, Francis's stigmatized body was believed to be a kind of "supplement" or "extension" of Christ's physical body, which would have interesting implications for the cult of its relics.

The relics of the stigmata were sometimes compared to the contact and bodily relics of Christ, making the latter important for my analysis. Patrice Boussel's *Des reliques et de leur bon usage* devotes three chapters to the relics of Christ and the Passion, including the blood, the nails, the wood of the Cross, and the Veronicas.³² He also lists the relics of Christ's footprints found in various churches of France and Italy.³³ In chapter two I examine the significance of comparing Francis's stigmatized body to the most

29.Brown, (1981), op. cit. p. 11.

30.*Ibid*, p. 10

31.*Ibid*. p. 72.

32.See Patrice Boussel, *Des reliques et de leur bon usage*, (Paris, 1971). On the corporal relics of Christ see also P. Saintyves, *Les Reliques et les images légendaire*. (Paris, 1912), pp. 109-184. On the reliquaries with relics of the Cross see A. Frolow, *Les Reliquaires de la Vrai Croix*, (Paris, 1965).

33.Boussel, (Paris, 1971), op. cit., p. 135.

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famous of Christ's contact relics - the Shroud of Turin. I will examine how, in the 1600's, Salvatore Vitale used evidence from the Shroud as empirical proof of the shape of Francis's wounds.³⁴ Art historical analysis of the relic/image typology of the Shroud and Veronica were useful for my study. For instance, Joseph Koerner describes how the Veronica functioned as a relic of Christ: "Through the material *praesentia* of his imprinted face, the power of one historical miracle worker, Christ, was conducted into the midst of a particular community."³⁵ The Shroud's origin as an imprint of Christ bears significance for the stigmata of Francis; Koerner says, "Although miraculously produced and linked to eternity, the likeness of Christ also recorded one person's body at a singular moment in time, thereby affirming history as a central reality of the Christian faith."³⁶ I will explore how part of the shock value of the stigmata was the sense that the historical moment of Salvation was deemed to require a repetition, a re-enactment in the body of Francis. Koerner notes, "The Veronica brings forth a theology of the sign. The Holy Face, as true icon of Christ and therefore as perfect match between image and model, *signum* and *res*, resembles the original divine signature on the face of man, as being made in the image and likeness of God."³⁷ He refers to the "proximity of signs to their referents" the "sublimation of likeness to identity" as preparing the devotee of the Veronica for the final

34. See Salvatore Vitale, *Teatro Serafico*, op. cit.

35. Joseph Koerner, *The Moment of Self-Portraiture in German Renaissance Art*, (Chicago & London, 1993), p. 83. See also the collection of papers in *The Holy Face and the Paradox of Representation*, (Florence, 1996), in particular Herbert L. Kessler, "Configuring the Invisible by Copying the Holy Face" and Jean-Claude Schmitt, "Les images d'une image. La Figuration du volto santo de Lucca dans les manuscrits enluminés du Moyen Age". On scientific studies of the Shroud of Turin see, P. Bollone, *Sindone e scienza all'inizio del terzo millennio*, (Turin, 2000) and A. Legrand, *Le Linceul de Turin*, (Versailles, 1980).

36. Koerner, op. cit., p. 83.

37. *Ibid.* p. 86.

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"face to face" encounter with God.³⁸ The proximity of *signum* and *res* bears particular significance for Francis's wounds; we will examine how they were believed to possess not just a similarity-relation, but an identity-relation with the wounds of Christ.

In addition to examining comparisons made between the relics of Francis and of Christ I will also examine the comparison between Francis's relics and the Eucharist. In "Church Law on Sacred Relics," Eugene Dooley points out how the relics of the Passion were to be considered of a higher class than other relics and treated with greater reverence.³⁹ Regulations regarding the exposition of relics maintain a distinction between relics of the Passion and other relics. He notes, "It is never allowed to place any relics even of the True Cross, on top of the Tabernacle or in front of the door of the Tabernacle. Neither is it allowed to expose relics on the altar where the Blessed Sacrament is exposed."⁴⁰ Furthermore, the reliquaries should not be similar to the Eucharistic monstrance. In chapter four I will examine how these rules were relaxed in the case of the relic of the chamois that covered Francis's side wound. We will explore how the unique framing of the relic in a Eucharistic monstrance placed it within the theological continuum that exists between the bodily relics of Christ and the Eucharist.

38. On the Veronica as "vision" of the divine see also Georges Didi-Huberman, "Face, proche, lointain: L'Empreinte du visage et le lieu pour apparaître" in *The Holy Face and the Paradox of Representation*, op. cit. p. 100-101: "... il n'y aurait de " sainte Face " efficace - c'est-à-dire capable de mettre en œuvre la conversion dialectique de la trace en grâce, du vestigium en visio - que lorsque la proximité que suppose son processus matériel d'engendrement (empreinte, contact) est présentée comme un lointain ... "

39. See Eugene Dooley, "Church Law on Sacred Relics," doctoral dissertation, The Catholic University of America, (Washington, 1931) pp. 104 -107. Also on the subject of relics and church law see, John M. McCulloh's "From Antiquity to the Middle Ages: Continuity and Change in Papal Relic Policy from the 6th to the 8th Century." See also B. Lorenzini, *Il rito onde venerare le reliquie de santi - istruzioni rituali e pratiche sopra il culto delle reliquie*, (Piacenza, 1760).

40. Dooley, op. cit., page 122.

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Studies on the Relics of the Stigmata:

There has been no study to date looking at the cult of the stigmata of St. Francis from the perspective of the relics. Some relics of the stigmata are listed in *Gloire de S. Francois d'Assise après sa mort*, written in 1867,⁴¹ as well as in a study by Alfano and Amitrano on blood relics of Italian saints and martyrs.⁴² Articles have been written on individual relics but they are invariably very brief, reflecting the lack of textual sources. The only exception is the habit Francis wore on Mount La Verna which has received some scholarly attention because it is the only relic for which there are substantial textual sources, notably a 16th-century eyewitness account of the habit's translation to Florence by Fra Mariano da Firenze.⁴³ With regards the blood relics, Egidio Ricotti wrote a two-page article on the blood relic in Castelvechio Subequo, as well as one on the ampoule of blood in Rome.⁴⁴ A brief article appeared in *Francesco Patrono d'Italia* in 1982 by Gustavo Parisciani who compared the blood relic of Francis in Ascoli Piceno with the

41. The author is identified as "le R.P. Bonaventure, des Frères-Mineurs-Capucins," *Gloire de S. François d'Assise après sa mort*, (Paris, 1867). See pp 42-46 on the relics.

42. See G. B. Alfano and A. Amitrano, *Notizie Storiche ed osservazioni sulle reliquie di sangue dei martiri, dei santi confessori ed asceti che si conservano in Italia e particolarmente in Napoli*, (Naples, 1951). This work focuses on relics in Naples where the author lists three blood relics of Francis which have gone missing and two which have been reduced to dust. See pp. 229-232.

43. See Z. Lazzeri, "Fra Mariano da Firenze, la storia della traslazione dell'abito di S. Francesco da Montato a Firenze," 1503. *SF*, 1924, pp. 545-559; C. Cannarozzi, "Storia dell'abito col quale S. Francesco di Assisi ricevette le Sacre Stimate," *SF*, 1924, pp. 261-282; and C. Cannarozzi, "L'abito che rivestiva San Francesco quando ricevette le stimmate", *Frate Francesco*, 1924, pp. 255-261.

44. E. Ricotti, "Il sangue di San Francesco", *Pax et Bonum*, 1944, p.6. See also G. M. Bastianini, "Scoperto un documento inedito sulla reliquia di San Francesco a Castelvechio Subequo", *Il Tempo*, December 28, 1968, p. 5; and E. Parsi, "Storia di una insigne reliquia," *L'Osservatore Romano*, December 30, 1948, p.2. E. Ricotti, "Una Reliquia del Sangue di S. Francesco a Castelvechio Subequo," *MF*, XXXIV, 46, 1934. pp. 357-358. See also S. Romano, "La Scuola di Sulmona fra tre e quattrocento e gli inizi di Nicola da Guardiagrele". *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa, Serie III, Vol. XIV*, 1984. pp. 727-728.

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blood of San Gennaro in Naples.⁴⁵ Only one very brief article exists on the striking relic of the chamois in the Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi.⁴⁶ These articles, however brief, were the sources of much of my historical information on the relics. My contribution to this scholarship consists of: a) presenting additional historical evidence for the relics, b) bringing to light relics that have received no scholarly attention to date, and c) exploring what the relics add to our understanding of the cult of the stigmata of St. Francis.

13th-Century Sources and the Stigmatization as Historical Fact:

Chiara Frugoni's 1993 study, *Francesco e l'invenzione delle stimmate*, ignited heated debates over the historical fact of the stigmata based on 13th-century sources.⁴⁷ Frugoni's controversial thesis is that in announcing the stigmata after Francis's death, Brother Elias, Minister General of the Order, was "forcing the meaning of the event," motivated by a desire to enhance the prestige of the Order.⁴⁸ Frugoni points out the absence of any mention of the stigmata in the process of canonization as well as the discrepancies found in the early sources. For Frugoni, Brother Leo's version of the Stigmatization contradicts Elias's as to the identification of the Seraph as the cause of the wounds; while Celano attempts to harmonize these two versions. According to Frugoni, the signs on Francis's flesh described by Celano were probably leprous scabs, and

45.G. Parisciani, "Il sangue di San Francesco come quello di San Gennaro?", *Francesco Patrono d'Italia*, 1982. pp. 333-336.

46.See B. Mariangeli, "Il reliquiario della "pelle di camoscio", " *MF*, XVII, 1916, pp. 92-95.

47.See Chiara Frugoni, *Francesco e l'invenzione delle stimmate, una storia per parole e immagini fino a Bonaventura e Giotto*, (Turin, 1993). A summary of Frugoni's thesis appears in, *Francis of Assisi, A Life*, (New York, 1998), trans. of *Vita di un uomo: Francesco d'Assisi*, (Turin, 1995), pp. 119-147.

48.Frugoni, (1998), op. cit., p.120.

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reference to them as stigmata was meant metaphorically, "... to signify a mental and not a physical identification of Francis with Christ."⁴⁹ It was Bonaventure who interpreted the miracle differently and, after all other biographies of Francis were ordered destroyed in 1266, "the only Francis known was that of Bonaventure and Giotto, his brilliant interpreter ... (who) makes the appearance of stigmata coincide with the precise moment when the Seraph vanishes."⁵⁰ Frugoni concludes, "the formula invented by Giotto has won the day."⁵¹ Though Frugoni's is a masterful study of the early sources, her theory of the "invention" of the stigmata did not convince many Franciscan historians. Medieval historian Giovanni Miccoli challenged Frugoni on several points.⁵² In Miccoli's view, Celano did not attempt to harmonize the versions of Elias and Leo; his version of events constitutes a third authoritative account of the miracle. Unlike Frugoni, for Miccoli the appearance of wounds in Brother Leo's account is distinct but not disconnected from the vision of the Seraph; when Leo chooses the term *impressit*, it is not, as Frugoni suggests, purely metaphorical, but a choice of words that indicates a physically perceptible event. For Miccoli, other descriptions which Frugoni considers to be metaphorical, such as Francis appearing to have been taken down from the Cross, were based on the observation of concrete signs. Miccoli concludes that the three primary sources for the Stigmatization present a unified perception of the body of Francis as displaying the stigmata of Christ; all three sources agree that Francis had a unique experience. Whether it actually occurred is

49.*Ibid.*, p. 134.

50.*Ibid.*, pp. 135-136.

51.*Ibid.*, p. 146.

52. See G. Miccoli, "Considerazioni sulle stimmate," *Il Fatto delle stimmate di S. Francesco*, (Assisi, 1997).

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difficult to confirm given the absence of Francis's testimony. Miccoli adds however that negating it ever happened, as Frugoni does, is just as impossible based on existing historical evidence. The impulse to negate the stigmata stems, in Miccoli's view, from a prejudice against events that do not have a rational explanation. The only conclusion that can be drawn from the primary sources is that it is highly probable that Francis received the stigmata. The sources do not permit the historian to say any more.

In "Il Fatto delle stimmate nelle fonti documentarie," Stanislaw da Campagnola also responds to Frugoni's thesis.⁵³ He agrees with Miccoli that along with Elias's and Brother Leo's accounts, the hagiographical accounts are also historically authoritative. Like Miccoli he believes that the question of the wounds' supernatural origin is beyond the competence of the historian. Da Campagnola does not agree with Frugoni that the signs described as stigmata could be confused with the signs of Francis's illnesses and concludes that the discrepancies are around the time, place and form of the wounds and not the fact of the wounds.⁵⁴

The most useful reference for the 13th-century sources of the Stigmatization of Francis is Octavian Schmucki's *The Stigmata of St. Francis of Assisi A Critical Investigation in the Light of Thirteenth-Century Sources*. Schmucki's view is that, "St. Francis undoubtedly revealed to Br. Leo, his confessor and secretary, the gifts of God he had enjoyed in a special way on Mount La Verna."⁵⁵ Evidence of this, according to

53. See S. da Campagnola, "Il "fatto" delle stimmate nelle fonti documentarie", *Il Fatto delle stimmate*, op. cit.

54. For da Campagnola's more thorough response to Frugoni's thesis, see "L'"invenzione" delle stimmate di Francesco. Una storia per ipotesi da frate Elia a san Bonaventura", *Commentari d'arte, Rivista di critica e storia dell'arte*, 2, anno I, 1995.

55. See O. Schmucki, *The Stigmata of St. Francis of Assisi, A Critical Investigation in the Light of Thirteenth-Century Sources*, (St. Bonaventure, 1991). p. 52.

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Schmucki, is found in *the Parchment* on which Francis gave thanks and praise to God; Leo added the following on the back of the Parchment: "After the vision and the discourse of the Seraph and after the impression of the Stigmata of Christ on his body, Francis composed these praises and he wrote them on the other side of the parchment with his own hands, giving praise to God for the gift bestowed on him."⁵⁶ According to Schmucki, "Br. Leo could have learned only from the mouth of the Saint that the stigmatization preceded the writing of the praises. Therefore, it is evident that the conversation about the graces received actually took place."⁵⁷

It is not within the goals of this study to speculate on the authenticity of the relics of the stigmata or present them as historical evidence for the Stigmatization of Francis. All perceptions of Francis's wounds and their relics are valid for purposes of elucidating their cult.

The Stigmata and Christian Asceticism:

In "De l'absence de stigmates dans la Chrétienté antique," M. Lot-Borodine speculates on the absence of stigmata in the early Church.⁵⁸ The main reason for the absence in his view is that the Church Fathers were essentially theocentric; in Patristic Christology Christ's humanity was inseparable from his divinity; "Ainsi les Anciens, et après eux leurs disciples byzantins, tout en distinguant ces deux natures, en fait ne les

56. *Ibid.*, p. 220.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 221.

58. See M. Lot-Borodine, "De l'absence de stigmates dans la Chrétienté antique," *Dieu Vivant : Perspectives Religieuses et Philosophiques*, vol. 1, 1946.

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séparent jamais ... l'Adoration médiévale de la sainte Humanité lui est restée étrangère."⁵⁹

Imitation of the sufferings of Christ was not part of the ancient conception of *imitatio Christi*; one became Christ-like by disciplining the will through obedience, thereby elevating the body through its submission to the spirit.⁶⁰ The Cross, notes Lot-Borodine, was not seen as a symbol of Christ's suffering but of his triumph. No tears, he says, were shed for the Passion of Christ, nor was there any desire to appropriate the signs of the Passion. There was no trace in Ancient Christianity of the "dolorisme" which characterized the late Middle Ages; no trace of that "mystique sensible et charisme physiques" prone, in Lot-Borodine's view, to morbid excess.⁶¹ Late medieval spirituality contrasted sharply with what he obviously considers the superior "... mystique austère des âmes Greco-orientales, nourries d'une forte substance spirituelle."⁶² He concludes, "donc pas de stigmates, sinon ceux invisibles, déjà présent dans le message Paulinien; aucune plaie sanglante mais luminosité et parfois lévitations, symbolisant la liberté de la créature charnelle dont le sens mêmes deviennent de pneumatiques antennes, pour se saisir d'ineffables réalités."⁶³

Lot-Borodine is tolerant of physical manifestations such as levitation because he views them as signs of the soul's victory over the flesh, evidence of a spiritualized body's defiance of the laws of physicality, of a body restored to its true nature. His analysis is consistent with the traditional view of Christian asceticism in which the body is tamed and polished to transparency through sensual deprivation, thereby allowing the *imago dei* in

59.*Ibid.*, p.85.

60.An excellent study of Christian asceticism is Peter Brown's *The Body and Society - Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, (New York, 1988).

61.Lot-Borodine, op. cit., p. 87.

62.*Ibid.*

63.*Ibid.*, p. 88.

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the soul to shine through. The oozing wounds of stigmata can only have a human origin for Lot-Borodine, they may be signs of pious emotion, but are not the signs of the soul's victory over the body. In contrast to the views underlying Lot-Borodine's analysis, in the sources I examine it is the very physicality of the wounds which makes them worthy of veneration. As we shall see in chapter five, for some Franciscans, Catherine of Siena's spiritual stigmata were deemed inferior to Francis's because they were not embodied, not incarnate, which is precisely what made Francis's wounds Christ-like. I will examine the contexts in which the relics of Francis's stigmata, the blood-stained clothing, shoes and bandages, were enlisted as proof of the superiority of Francis's wounds.

The Stigmata and the Representation of Christ:

One of the outstanding qualities of St. Francis, remarked by many scholars, was the apparent seamlessness between his inner life and its outward expression. Eric Auerbach describes St. Francis as someone who embodied "*sublimitas and humilitas*": his union with God was expressed in "concrete everydayness - with a resulting irresolvable fusion of action and expression, of content and form."⁶⁴ Octavian Schmucki points to the early biographies' accounts of the harmony between Francis's inner and outer life.⁶⁵ He describes Francis's "... remarkable genius for making known his interior experiences not only by his emotions, but also by symbolic and dramatic expression."⁶⁶ Hilarin Felder wrote: "Francis made his whole life one great Christ-epic and one overpowering drama, a

64. See Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis, the Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, (Princeton, 1968), p. 162.

65. See Schmucki, (1991), op. cit., p. 11 ff.

66. *Ibid.*, p. 115.

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concrete imitation and representation of the life and Passion of his Lord up to the day of His sacred wounds and His death on the hill of Golgotha."⁶⁷ In his brilliant seventy-page article on the impact of Francis on 13th-century Umbrian crucifixes, Daniel Russo also describes Francis's genius for re-enacting the Christ drama, " ... ses coups de théâtre, ses exhibitions répétées sont autant les moyens qui lui servent à dominer symboliquement la ville ... Il devient une figure rhétorique."⁶⁸ For Russo, from the moment that Francis stripped naked before the bishop of Assisi, renouncing all his worldly goods and any allegiance to his earthly father, he entered the field of representation, "un corps nu ne parle pas, il se tait ou plutôt il montre ... il ne possède rien, il fait peur ... il suscite l'émotion."⁶⁹ Francis's life became a representation of the Crucified right up until the day of the Stigmatization, when, Russo notes, the resemblance was no longer simulated, " les empreintes laissée dans la chair traduisent clairement le nouveau statue de François devenu une image."⁷⁰ Furthermore, the new " image of Christ" in Francis, influenced representations of Christ on the Cross : " L'épisode des stigmates, tel que ses disciples l'ordonnent, fait de lui la nouvelle image du Christ, en concurrence avec le type représenté sur la croix. Et la production contemporaine enregistre ces transformations : le Christ

67.Quoted in *Ibid.*

68.See Daniel Russo, "Saint François, les Franciscains et les représentations du Christ sur la croix en Ombrie au XIIIe siècle. Recherches sur la formation d'une image et sur une sensibilité esthétique au Moyen Age," *Mélanges de l'Ecole Française de Rome, Moyen Age et Temps Modernes*, Tome 96, 1984. p. 677. On Francis's expression through gestures see, Raoul Manselli, "Il Gesto come predicazione per San Francesco d'Assisi," *CF*, (1991).

69.Russo, (1984), op. cit., pp. 666-668.

70.*Ibid.*, p. 678.

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Triomphant devient peu a peu le Christ de Douleur."⁷¹ In chapter two I explore the writings of the 17th-century Capuchin friar Salvatore Vitale for whom the wounds on Francis's body not only conform to Christ's wounds, they also become evidence or proof of the original wounds.⁷² For example, for Vitale, the representation of Christ's Passion on Francis's flesh was so authoritative, that the four nails of flesh piercing Francis's hands and feet were seen as definitive proof that Christ's body was pierced by four nails. For Vitale, Francis's body was more authoritative than Crucifixes with Christ crucified with only three nails.

In "St. Francis as a Second Christ in Early Italian Painting" Henk van Os also makes reference to the harmony between Francis's inner experience and its outer expression.⁷³ This reached its pinnacle, he notes, in Bonaventure's account of the story of the Stigmatization, which made of Francis the *alter Christus*. Van Os identifies the first representation of Francis *alter Christus* as Taddeo di Bartolo's 1403 polyptych of St. Francis displaying his stigmata to the viewer. (fig.1) According to van



Figure 1

71. *Ibid.*, p. 677. For the influence of Franciscans on the symbolism of the body of Christ, see also, Sarah Beckwith's, *Christ's Body, Identity, Culture and Society in late Medieval Writings*, (London & New York, 1993) in particular pp. 52-55. On Franciscan influence on medieval paintings of Christ see Anne Derbe's *Picturing the Passion in Late Medieval Italy, Narrative Painting, Franciscan Ideologies, and the Levant*, (Cambridge, 1996).

72. Salvatore Vitale, *Teatro Serafico*, *op. cit.*

73. See Henk van Os, "St. Francis of Assisi as a Second Christ in Early Italian Painting", *Semiotus*, Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art, Volume 7, Number 3, 1974, p. 115.

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Os, Taddeo presents Francis as "an incarnate ideal."⁷⁴ The presentation of Francis as *alter Christus* is reinforced further by the panel placed above the figure of Francis depicting Christ showing his own wounds. Van Os does not address whether the iconography of Francis showing his stigmata influenced the representation of Christ displaying his wounds in a similar way. The only precedents for Taddeo's iconography of Francis with raised hands showing his wounds, according to Van Os, is found in thirteenth century Franciscan seals, evidence that this was an early devotional motif.

Iconography of the Stigmata in Seals and Engravings :

In "San Francesco nell' arte popolare" Servus Gieben examines the Stigmatization as a devotional motif on Franciscan seals.⁷⁵ Use of the Stigmatization as a motif on seals has special significance given that the stigmata were often compared to Christ's seal on Francis's body. The technique of pressing matrices onto receptive material, the "contrast between archetype and material realization," is a powerful metaphor for Stigmatization.⁷⁶ Herbert Kessler says, "Reversed and recessed, the outlines in the matrices were virtually unreadable; they became visible only when pressed onto matter: clay, metal, wax ..."⁷⁷ His description evokes the belief that Francis's body made the Passion visible once more for the benefit of all Christians. According to Gieben, the large 14th-century matrice of Francis receiving the stigmata, now in the Cluny Museum, is evidence that there was

74.*Ibid.* p. 120.

75.Servus Gieben, "San Francesco nell'arte popolare," *Francesco d'Assisi nella storia - secoli XIII-XV*, vol 1, (Rome,1983). See pp. 339-348.

76.See Kessler, (1998), op. cit., p. 132.

77.*Ibid.*

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probably considerable demand by pilgrims for lead or wax medallions of the Stigmatization of Francis.⁷⁸ (fig. 2) Seals from as early as the 13th century illustrate how the Stigmatization came to symbolize both the person of Francis and the institution he founded. While on the one hand the motif of the stigmata reflects the choice of the Franciscan Order, it is also, according to Gieben, an indicator of the tastes and interests of ordinary Christians.⁷⁹

In "San Francesco nell'arte grafica" Gieben describes a new development in the iconography of the stigmata in the engravings of the 1500's and 1600's.⁸⁰ Giotto's composition with five rays piercing Francis's hands, feet and side, which had previously dominated representation of the stigmata, gave way to a more interiorized interpretation. According to Gieben, this may be a reflection of the Capuchin Reform and the greater value it placed on solitude and meditation. In this period Francis is often depicted in solitary meditation of the Passion of Christ. Simonetta Rodino also examines the



Figure 2

78. See Servus Gieben, "San Francesco nell'arte popolare", *Francesco d'Assisi nella Storia - Secoli XIII-XV*, (Rome, 1983). On this seal see "Une moule en bronze du Musée de Cluny", *Etudes Franciscaines*, Tome XXX, July-December, 1913.

79. See Julian Gardner, "Some Cardinals' Seals of the Thirteenth Century", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 38, 1975. See p. 90 for influence of Franciscans. See also *The Treasury of Saint Francis of Assisi*, eds. Morello and Kanter, (Milano, 1999), p. 195 on bronze seals of the Franciscan Monastery in Assisi.

80. Servus Gieben, "San Francesco nell'arte grafica", *Francesco d'Assisi nella storia, secoli XVI-XIX*, (Rome, 1983), pp. 335-349. On Francis's stigmatization in 13th-century iconography see, P. Neri, "Iconografia delle stimate di S. Francesco nel secolo XIII", *SF* 1924. For an overview over the centuries see, Vittorio Facchinetti, *Le Stimate di S. Francesco d'Assisi nel VII Centenario del grande miracolo*, (Milano, 1924).

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evolution of the theme of the Stigmatization of Francis in engravings of the 1500's, noting Francis's depiction in states of mystical ecstasy and rapture.⁸¹ The Stigmatization of Francis is slowly dissociated, she notes, from its medieval representation in order to harmonize with the mysticism of the saints of the Counter Reformation, notably the mystic raptures of Teresa of Avila so characteristic of the 1600's. While Gieben and Rondino point to the greater focus on the interior transformation of Francis from the 1500's onwards, as we shall see in chapter two, in the early 1600's the Capuchin Salvatore Vitale and others reject Giotto's representation not for a more interiorized version of the Stigmatization but for an even more concrete physical contact between Christ and Francis on Mount La Verna.

The Stigmata and Christian Miracles:

The last stage in the Christianization of the miracle was, according to André Vauchez, its interiorization, its spiritualization.⁸² He notes that with the Stigmatization of Francis, the 13th century saw the manifestation, mostly in women like the beguines, of physical phenomena related to mystical states, such as ecstatic rapture and elevation. The later Middle Ages were characterized by new and diverse miraculous manifestations: "Avec l'apparition et la multiplication des miracles sacramentels, spirituels et mystiques, les efforts déployés par l'Eglise en Occident pendant près d'un millénaire pour christianiser les manifestations sensibles du surnaturel atteint leur but."⁸³ Alain Boureau

81.Simonetta Prosperi Valenti Rondino, "La Diffusione dell'iconografia Francescana attraverso l'incisione," *L'immagine di San Francesco nella Controriforma*, (Rome,1983).

82.See André Vauchez, "Miracle," *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'Occident médiéval*, (Paris,1999).

83.*Ibid.*, p. 738.

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also sees the Stigmatization of Francis as ushering in a new conception of the miraculous; he refers to the "naturalization" of the miracle in the 13th century. The novelty consisted in the fact that, "l'homme saint ou inspiré, avec la garantie du modèle christique, peut coopérer au miracle par le biais de la véhémence de son imagination."⁸⁴ Boureau refers to the new "physiology" of miracles exemplified by the stigmata of Francis, in which the imagination, at the border between body and soul, assists the supernatural in effecting the miracle. Boureau calls this a neo-Augustinian (scholastic-mystic) tendency, "l'imagination, instrument premier de la coopération entre l'illumination divine et l'effort (conatus) humain, paraît donc parfaitement habilitée à produire le miracle."⁸⁵ In the Stigmatization of Francis, Boureau sees an example of the role of human initiative in producing a miracle.

On the Detractors of the Stigmatization of Francis:

In 1968 André Vauchez wrote a ground-breaking article which focused attention for the first time on the existence of detractors of the stigmata.⁸⁶ Vauchez points to nine papal bulls issued between 1237 and 1291 denouncing those who denied the stigmata of Francis and threatening them with excommunication. Outrage over the miracle was sometimes expressed by effacing the stigmata from images of Francis. According to Vauchez, the causes of the opposition ranged from reaction to the Franciscans'

84. Alain Boureau, "Miracle, volonté et imagination: la mutation Scolastique (1270-1320)," *Miracles, Prodiges et Merveilles au Moyen Age*, (Paris, 1995), p. 169.

85. *Ibid.* p. 170.

86. André Vauchez, "Les stigmates de saint François et leurs détracteurs dans les derniers siècles du Moyen Age", *Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire*, Tome LXXX, 1968.

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exaggerated zeal for their founder, to the secular clergy's resentment over Franciscan encroachment into their role as preachers, and rivalry between Franciscans and Dominicans, especially over the invisible stigmata of Catherine of Siena. Vauchez points out how by the 16th century, it was not so much the fact of the stigmata which scandalized, but the divinization of Francis on the part of some Franciscans, the implication that Christ's wounds were not sufficient for Salvation. According to Vauchez, the opponents were bishops, priests and religious, almost never the laity. The sources I examine reveal that defense of the stigmata of Francis continued well into the 16th and 17th centuries. We will examine contexts in which the relics of the stigmata were presented as part of the defense and proof that Francis's wounds were open and bleeding, real wounds which could not be produced simply by the power of his imagination; they could only have resulted from Christ wounding Francis directly.

On the Modality of Stigmatization:

In "Miracles of Bodily Transformation, or, How St. Francis Received the Stigmata," Arnold Davidson examines the "techniques and modalities of persuasion" used by writers and painters in order to convince people of the supernatural origin of the stigmata.⁸⁷ Like the historians noted above, Davidson claims that the stigmata "contributes to making theologically and culturally possible a whole new range of bodily miracles, understanding its representations is a cornerstone in helping us articulate a

87. Arnold Davidson "Miracles of Bodily Transformation, or, How St. Francis Received the Stigmata," *Picturing Science Producing Art*, (New York & London, 1998), p.101.

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changing medieval sensibility."⁸⁸ He examines the differences between the accounts of Celano and Bonaventure along with their artistic interpreters. In Celano's account the Seraph is not identified as the cause of the stigmata. This version is represented visually by iconography like Bonaventura Berlinghieri's Stigmatization in a detail from a wood panel painting from 1235 in the Church of St. Francis in Pescia; no attempt is made to establish a direct link between the Seraph in the heavens and Francis kneeling in prayer.(fig. 3) Bonaventure and his interpreter Giotto on the other hand, present a clear causal connection between the Seraph and the appearance of wounds. Davidson says, "... Bonaventure's causal attribution has two components: the subjective state of Francis's soul and the objective nature of the vision itself that impressed the stigmata on Francis's body."⁸⁹ I believe Davidson was the first to point out the originality of Giotto's rays of light, which have no textual precedent. (figs. 4,5) He says, "They are I believe a complete innovation of the artist ... They are a modality of transmission that

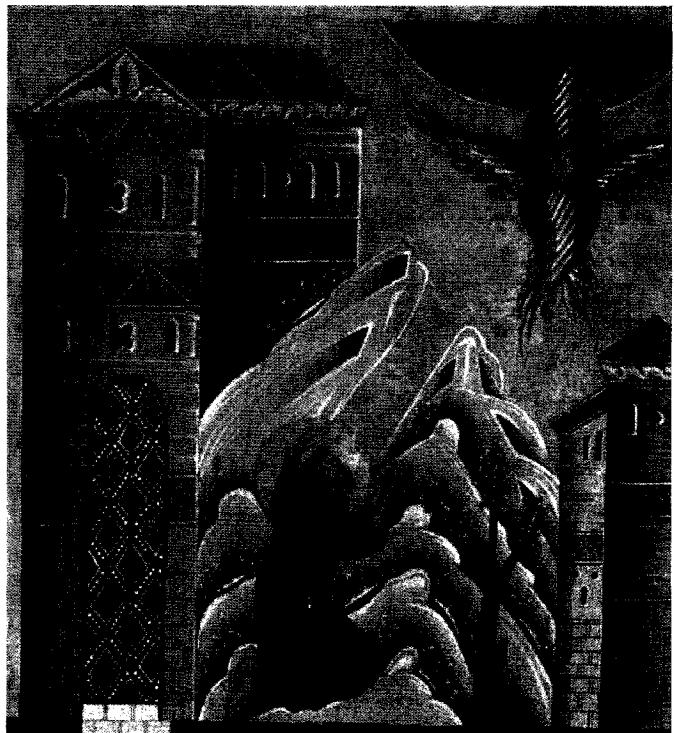


Figure 3

accurately captures a sense of *impressit*, while at the same time emphasizing pictorially

⁸⁸.*Ibid.*

⁸⁹.*Ibid.*, p. 110



Figure 4

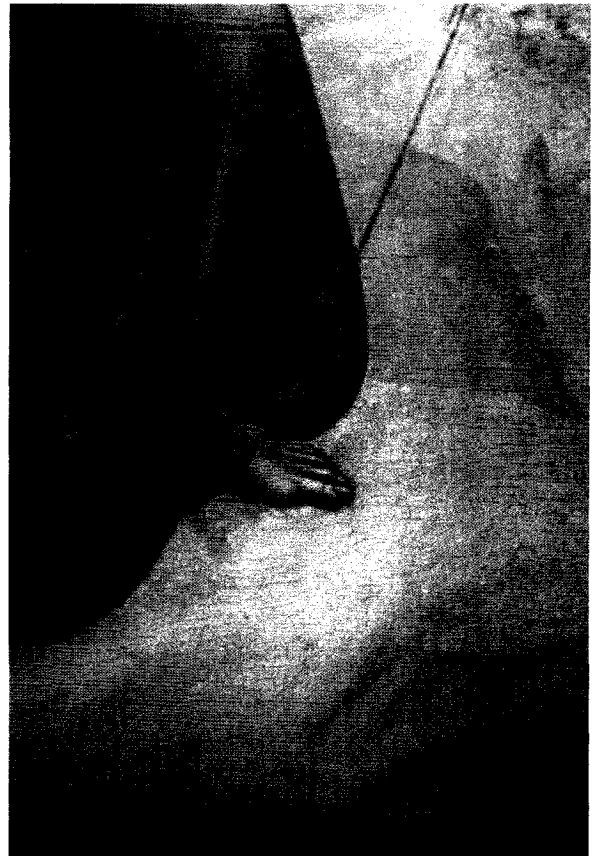


Figure 5

that these impressions are supernatural."⁹⁰ Giotto's rendering of the miracle on Mount La Verna by means of five rays piercing Francis's body, would have an enormous and long-lasting influence on all future accounts of the Stigmatization, both textual and visual. One example of the authority accrued over the centuries by Giotto's rays is their inclusion in François de Sales' account of the Stigmatization.⁹¹ For François de Sales, while Francis's soul may have been wounded by love, love alone could not account for external wounds. He explains, "... c'est pourquoi l'ardent séraphin venant au secours darda des rayons d'une clarté si pénétrante, qu'elle fit réellement en la chair les plaies extérieures du crucifix que

⁹⁰.*Ibid.*, p. 112.

⁹¹.See François de Sales, *Traité de l'amour de dieu*, (Paris, 1925) edition.

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l'amour avait imprimées intérieurement en l'âme."⁹² In his analysis of François de Sales' account, Etienne Gilson examines whether it represents a new or traditional interpretation of the Stigmatization of Francis.⁹³ Gilson notes that for François de Sales, the power of the imagination can only reach the inner limits of the body, but it cannot pierce through the body. This is where the Seraph comes in, making "incisions" by means of the rays, allowing a physical "outlet" of the love within. Gilson stresses that for François de Sales the miracle is not primarily the result of an external action, what he calls the "simple" explanation popularized by art, but results from the collaboration between internal and external forces. For Gilson, it is important that in François de Sales's version of the Stigmatization, the hierarchical relation between body and soul is preserved, that the "image" of Christ be formed first and foremost in Francis's soul, not his body, " ... dont l'âme est la forme, et qui doit par conséquent la représenter."⁹⁴ Gilson concludes that François de Sales's is not a new interpretation of the Stigmatization but coherent with the traditional explanations found in the early biographies, keeping from Celano the notion of *incendium mentis*, while the "incisions" correspond to Bonaventure's "impressions."

In "Un Sang d'Images" George Didi-Huberman's analysis places as much emphasis and finds as much interest in the liquefaction of Francis's body as his soul. He describes the Stigmatization as the transformation of a human subject into the trace, the sign, the impression of Christ. Francis becomes a vestige of Christ, " sa plaie vivante."⁹⁵

92.*Ibid.*, p. 247.

93. See Etienne Gilson, "L'Interprétation traditionnelle des stigmates," *Revue d'histoire franciscaine*, Tome II October, 1925.

94.*Ibid.* p. 468.

95. Georges Didi-Huberman, "Un sang d'images," *Nouvelle Revue de Psychanalyse*, vol. 32, 1985, p. 136.

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He characterizes the Stigmatization as an "Acte d'incarnation, non de mimesis."⁹⁶ Didi-Huberman points out that the stigmatized Francis is often defined as an "image-imprint," as though, he says, the iconic connotation of the first needed to be corrected by the indexical denotation of the second.⁹⁷ In addition to being the result of the vision of the Seraph, the stigmata are also "symptoms" of the liquefaction of Francis's soul, with Francis's flesh molding itself: " ... a travers cette liquéfaction même, la chair se met a figurer, immédiatement ... une chair figurale ..."⁹⁸ The result is not a mirror-image of Christ, but a kind of incorporation into Christ, " ... se liquéfier dans l'image (saint François se coule dans les plaies de Jésus)."⁹⁹ Didi-Huberman points out how this is reflected in 13th-century crucifixes in which a tiny Francis is often pictured next to Christ, touching or gazing into wounds large enough to engulf him. The relation is characterized by a movement from "contact-compassion" to "contact-passage" until Francis fuses with Christ's body and the same blood seems to flow from both their wounds.¹⁰⁰ In the sources I examine the Stigmatization is often characterized as an act of incarnation and not mimesis, implying Francis's wounds possess an identity-relation with Christ's wounds.

The relics of the stigmata examined in the following chapters offer a unique perspective on the cult of the stigmata of St. Francis. They offer an interesting vantage point for exploring the philosophical and theological challenges presented by Francis's wounds, sketched in the brief review of literature above. I will examine the often dizzying

96.*Ibid.*

97.*See Ibid.*

98.*Ibid.*, p. 137.

99.*Ibid.*

100.*See ibid.*

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cross-referencing between the dramas of Calvary and Mount La Verna found in hermeneutics of the Stigmatization between the 13th and 17th centuries. Frequently, the intent was to convince the devotee that Francis's wounds were "vanishing points" where the distinctions between body and soul, presence and absence, the miraculous and the mystical, original and copy, heaven and earth, Christ and his holy man, disappeared in the openings left on Francis's body. Furthermore, more powerfully than any narrative, the relics focus our attention on the lived experience of the wounds. Remnants of their care, the bandages soaked with blood, herbal remedies applied by Clare, and the footwear that facilitated walking, all tell stories, real or apocryphal, of the discomfort and pain endured by Francis after he became a living participant in the Passion of Christ.

Chapter 2

The Habit Francis Wore on Mount LaVerna, Francis of Assisi - "Living Shroud"

"... you...have clothed yourselves with Christ."
Gal 3: 27

Every stage in the life of Francis of Assisi was expressed by what he wore. As a young cloth merchant Francis was lavish in his tastes; he dressed above his social status with a flair for the original. According to Thomas of Celano," He was so vain in seeking to stand out that sometimes he had the most expensive material sewn together with the cheapest cloth onto the same garment."¹ During a visit to Rome, curious to know what it felt like to be a beggar, Francis exchanged clothes with one and "dressed in his rags, he spent that day in the midst of the poor with an unaccustomed joy of spirit."² At the climactic moment of his conversion, Francis divested himself of any allegiance to the world by removing all his clothes and returning them to his father before the bishop of Assisi. As Celano puts it, "Francis first gave away his clothes, then everything else."³ Francis found his life, when he put on a habit in the shape of a cross. But he would remain as finicky about his appearance after he embraced poverty as he had been in the extravagance of his youth; "he always wished to have and to wear a poor tunic made of bits and pieces, and occasionally he wanted it patched on the inside and out."⁴ He insisted his habits be made of the worn cloth from the brothers' discarded habits; and if a tunic was too soft, he used to sew pieces of cord on the inside. If, to provide Francis some warmth

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1. L3C, 1, 2
 2. LMj 1, 6
 3. 2C, II, 5.
 4. AC, 90

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in winter, the brothers sewed fur on the inside of his habit, he insisted some be sewn on the outside too. All of these exigencies were to ensure he "should not appear differently on the outside than he was on the inside."⁵ Throughout his life Francis's goal was the complete harmony between body and soul, between the inner and outer man, symbolized by the habit he wore. Toward the end of his life the brothers noted something new on his habit; they "... asked him for his tunic in order to clean it, and noted the blood."⁶ Francis's clothing never expressed his soul so fully as when, two years before his death, his habit became stained with blood from the side wound of Christ.

This chapter will recount the story of the first of Francis's habits to be stained with blood from the stigmata, the habit he wore on Mount La Verna when the mysterious wounds first appeared on his hands, feet and side. After examining the historical sources of the habit, I will explore the significance of its description by 16th-century writers as the habit that had been *between* the Seraph and Francis at the moment of Stigmatization. I will argue that this perception of the habit caught *between* two realms, human and divine, at the moment of encounter with Christ on Mount La Verna makes the habit a unique kind of contact relic, one which made contact with both Francis and Christ. This idea will be explored in conjunction with the writings of Salvatore Vitale who, in the early 1600's, defended a version of the Stigmatization in which Christ's contact with Francis was direct: hands pressing against hands, feet against feet and side against side, leaving behind traces similar to those he left on the Shroud of Turin. For Vitale, this direct contact made Francis's stigmatized body a "Living Shroud." The significance of this metaphor will be

5. 2C, XCIII, 130.

6. 2C, XCVIII, 136.

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explored in relation to the great devotion shown to the habit that had been caught *between* Francis and Christ during the great miracle of Mount La Verna.

The habit Francis wore when he received the stigmata was kept in the Franciscan Church of Ognisanti in Florence from 1571 to 2003, when it was moved to the hermitage at La Verna. Initially kept in a casket believed to have been a gift of Charlemagne, the relic became the object of devotion for princes and noblemen, including the powerful Medici family.⁷ The Archduchess Maria Anna Medici even had the measurement of the hood of the robe cut out of linen and sent to her in Austria, illustrating one of the ways *praesentia* was rendered mobile and could be transferred.⁸ The following is a description of the habit from an inspection made in 1913:

The robe is woven from light and dark rough wool. The hem measures 2.36 m, and is frayed and torn here and there. On the front right side, at the height of the breast there is a hole cut out with a metal instrument. Likewise at the back. The sleeves are almost entirely missing. The length of the robe, from the bottom to the seam of the hood measures 1.25 m.⁹

During its last years in Ognisanti the habit was exposed behind a glass frame on the wall of a chapel beside the main altar. (fig.1) The tear on the side of the habit, probably cut out to provide relics for other Franciscan shrines and patrons, appears familiar from the iconography of Francis with his habit torn open to expose the wound in his side.

7. See Cannarozzi, *Storia dell'abito*, (1924), op. cit., pp. 274-75.

8. Chapter four will examine the devotion to measurements of the wounds of Christ and Francis.

9. (Unless otherwise indicated all translations from the Italian and Latin are by the author.)

See Cannarozzi, op. cit., pp. 277-278. "La veste è tessuta di fili di lana bianca e scura greggia; nella parte inferiore che si apre a campana e misura m. 2,36 è molto spenerata; qua e là è sparsa di fori e di strappi; manca, per un taglio praticatovi con ferro tagliente, la parte anteriore del costato sul lato destro, dalla cintura all'altezza della mammella, e la parte posteriore corrispondente; vi mancano quasi interamente le maniche ... La lunghezza della veste, dall'estremità inferiore all'attaccatura del cappuccino è di m. 1,25."



Figure 1

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The habit Francis wore when he received the stigmata is the most richly documented of all the relics of the stigmata. This is partly due to the fact that in the early 1500's, the habit became embroiled in political intrigue, treason and revenge involving the City of Florence and the rebellious Tuscan towns under its dominion. In 1502, *the cappa di San Francesco* became the coveted prize of the Signoria of Florence, bent on stealing it from its custodians for almost three hundred years, the Counts of Montauto. The correspondence planning the theft of the habit, as well as a first-hand account of its eventual translation to Florence have survived and will be examined for what they reveal of the tremendous value the relic held for the religious and political elite as well as the general population of early Cinquecento Tuscany.

The habit Francis wore on that fateful visit to La Verna in September, 1224, never made it home to Assisi with him. On the long return journey to Santa Maria degli Angeli, Francis stopped to rest in the town of Montauto, where he spent the night in the castle of his old friend Count Alberto Barbolani.¹⁰ Tradition has it that Francis was close to Count Alberto whom he himself made a Third Order Franciscan and always visited on his journeys to and from La Verna.¹¹ On this particular visit Francis hinted to his friend that because of failing health, this could be their last meeting. Saddened, Count Alberto asked Francis for a keepsake, to which he responded, "I am poor and possess nothing in this

10. On evidence of Francis's itinerary from La Verna to Assisi and his friendship with Count Alberto, see Zefferino Lazzeri, "Fra Mariano da Firenze, La Storia della traslazione dell'abito di S. Francesco da Montauto a Firenze, 1503", *AFH*, 1924, p.546. While most sources for the relic date from the 1500's, Lazzeri points out a 14th century source: Fazio degli Uberti (d.1368) who refers to the *Cappa di San Francesco* in Montauto in *Dittamondo*; see Lazzeri, op. cit., p.549 note 8.

11. See Augustino di Miglio, *Nuovo dialogo delle devozioni del sacro monte della Verna*, 1568, p. 261. For sources on Count Alberto see Saturnino Mencherini's 1913 edition of Fra Dionisio Pulinari's *Cronache dei Frati Minori della Provincia di Toscana*, 1580, p.81, note 2. These two sources are my primary sources for the story of the habit before its translation to Florence.

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world except for this poor habit."¹² Count Alberto said he would gladly accept the habit and immediately sent his tailor to buy cloth and had a new one sewn for him. When the new habit was presented to Francis the following morning, he obliged his old friend by leaving behind the old habit, "the one that had been between the Seraph and St. Francis in that sacred impression."¹³ This is how Augustino di Miglio described the habit in 1568 and its significance will be examined below. Count Alberto had the precious relic enveloped in silk cloth with gold threading and placed under the altar of his chapel. There it remained, as the town's most treasured possession, for nearly three centuries, during which time the habit was revered by the inhabitants of Montauto as well as the many lords, bishops and cardinals who travelled there, despite the difficult journey, in order to see and touch the precious relic.¹⁴

This long tradition would come to an abrupt end in 1503 when the actions of Count Francesco Barbolani, a descendant of Count Alberto, would lead to the permanent removal of the habit from Montauto. It all began with a rebellion in Arezzo. In 1502, while the Florentines were engaged in battles with Pisa, Arezzo along with Cortona and Borgo S. Sepolcro, seized the opportunity to rise up against Florentine rule.¹⁵ The Florentines responded swiftly calling upon their ally, Count Francesco of Montauto, to help fight the insurgents. But Count Francesco sided with the rebellion, a decision that

12. Di Miglio, op. cit., p. 262 "Ris pose San Francesco, io son poverello, & non ho cosa alcuna in questo mondo, se non questo povero habito. Risposegli el Signore. Et io questo volentieri piglierò."

13. *Ibid.*, p. 262 "il suo vecchio... quello era stato intermedio, infra el Seraphino, & San Francesco in quella sacra impressione." The same is recounted in Pulinari's *Chronache*, op. cit., p. 81. "gli lasciò il suo vecchio, cioè quello col quale lui aveva ricevute le sacre Stimmate, che era nel mezzo fra il Serafino e lui, in quella sacra impressione." ("he left him his old one, that is the one with which he had received the stigmata, which was between the Seraph and him, in that sacred impression.").

14. See Di Miglio, op. cit., p. 263.

15. On the politics of the rebellion see Cannarozzi, *Storia dell'abito*, op. cit.

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would prove very costly. Within three months the Florentines defeated the rebels and had the instigators either exiled or executed.¹⁶ A different punishment awaited Francesco of Montauto. His castle and property would be destroyed, but not before securing his most cherished treasure, the relic of the habit St. Francis wore when he received the stigmata.

The Signoria of Florence took great pains to carry out its plot to steal the precious relic in secret; they feared that the slightest suspicion would lead to the habit's removal or replacement with a fake. The original letters between the *Dieci di Balia*,¹⁷ and Antonius Thebalduccius Giacomini, the General Commissioner of Arezzo chosen to carry out the theft, have been preserved.¹⁸ In two letters dated January 15, 1502, the Florentines gave Giacomini his orders, "... we want you to take possession of the habit of St. Francis, the one that is in the aforementioned place, and we for our part will organize who will come for it and bring it to its designated location."¹⁹ In a second letter, orders were given to destroy the homes of the family of Count Francesco and then with some urgency they repeated, "... above all take care to obtain the habit of St. Francis ... in such a way that it will be neither hidden nor exchanged ..."²⁰ The correspondence reveals how important and valuable the relic was for the Signoria of Florence, how eager they were to possess it.

16. See Di Miglio, op. cit., p. 264 for details on the fate of the chief instigators.

17. See G. A. Brucker, *Florence the Golden Age 1138-1737*, (Milano, 1983) p.145. The *Dieci di Balia* was "the civic magistracy responsible for diplomacy and military affairs." Niccolo Machiavelli was the secretary of the *Dieci di Balia* from 1496.

18. Nine of the letters have been published in P.G.B. Ristori, *Notizie Storiche dell'abito di S. Francesco d'Assisi che si conserva nella chiesa d'Ognissanti in Firenze*, (Firenze, 1882).

19. See *ibid.*, Documento III, p. 33. "...voliamo avvertisca di insignorirti della cappa di Sancto Francesco, la quale, come ti e noto e in decto luogo, et noi intanto di qua orderemo chi abbi ad venire per epsa per condurla al luogo, dove habbiamo designato che la stia."

20. See *ibid.*, Documento IV, p. 34-35 "... avanti ad ogni altra cosa advertire bene ad insignorirti della cappa di S. Francesco la quale è in decto luogo in maniera che non fussi o trafugata o scambiata..."

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Giacomini carried out his mission successfully. Posing as a hunting party preparing to hunt in the nearby forest, he and his soldiers paid a visit to Count Francesco and asked to attend mass in his castle.²¹ The unsuspecting count agreed and even granted Giacomini's request to see the precious relic of the habit of St. Francis. Once it was in full view, Giacomini ordered the chapel locked, revealed his identity and declared that as General Commissioner of the Republic he had been ordered to take possession of the habit. Fearful that word would spread and townspeople would be up in arms to retrieve the relic, Giacomini then placed the chapel under guard and immediately sent word to Florence of his success. On January 22, 1502 he wrote, "Seeing the weather clear up last night, I deliberated on coming here this morning. And so I did, with thirty soldiers and twelve horses ... after hearing mass and seeing the habit of St. Francis, I had the entrance of the castle and of the palace, which serves as a fortress, seized ..." ²² The Florentines responded with the following orders, " we want the walls to be torn down and destroyed so that they pose no threat and as an example for others. Do it in such a way that they cannot be repaired quickly or at little cost." ²³ With regards the habit, "as for the *cappa di San Francesco*, one of our standard bearers accompanied by four friars will leave here tomorrow. You will hand it over to them immediately so it can be brought to San

21. The plan to disguise themselves as a hunting party is recounted by Fra Mariano da Firenze in *Istoria quomodo habitus Beati Patris Nostri Francisci de Monte Acuto Florentiam translatus est, 1504*; published by Z. Lazzeri, *AFH*, 1924. For the Italian translation see R. Razzoli, *La Chiesa d'Ognissanti in Firenze*, (Firenze, 1898).

22. P.G.B Ristori, op. cit., 1882, Documento V, p.35. "Visto hiersera allargare el tempo deliberai venire questa mattina qui. Così feci con XXX fanti e XII cavalli ...e giunto che fui udito la messa e vista la cappa che fu del beato Sa Francesco feci pigliare la porta del castello, così quella del palazzo, che serve a fortezza."

23. *Ibid.*, Documento VI p. 36-37. "... voliamo che Montaghuto si sfasci et si ruinino le mura in modo che ne viviamo securi per ogni tempo et si facci a dimostrazione exemplare a tucti li altri et ricordiamo di farlo in modo che con poca spesa et piccolo tempo non si possa riparare."

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Salvatore."²⁴ The expedition from Florence reached Montauto on January 26th, 1503 as planned. On the following day, the casket with the habit was loaded onto a horse and the expedition set off on the two-day return journey to Florence, ending a tradition of almost three hundred years as Montauto lost its cherished relic forever.

Transporting the precious relic to Florence safely was an onerous task. The Signoria had gone to great lengths to procure the habit and would tolerate no mishaps; the penalty for failing to deliver the relic safely was decapitation. We read this in the first-hand account of the journey from Montauto to Florence written by one of the four friars sent to retrieve the habit, Fra Mariano da Firenze. His account is entitled *Istoria quomodo habitus Beati Patris Nostri Francisci de Monte Acuto Florentiam translatus est*, 1503.

(How the Habit of our Blessed Father Francis was brought from Monte Acuto to Florence).²⁵ Fra Mariano admits to some nervousness about his commission, "We did not undertake the journey without apprehension. In fact it was said that some miserable obstinates were blinded when they attempted to take the habit from Montauto."²⁶ He is reassured when nothing unusual happened this time, "It would seem that on this occasion God Himself sanctioned its removal to Florence."²⁷ Fra Mariano rationalizes that Count Francesco had brought the calamity upon himself, "If he would have remained faithful to the Signoria of Florence none of the misfortune that rained on him would have occurred, but he repaid favours with ingratitude, he betrayed the Republic, taking the side of the

24. *Ibid.*, "Quanto appartiene alla cappa di S. Francesco domattina partira di qui uno dei Mazzieri nostri et con lui saranno certi frati di qui a'quali tu la consegnerai immediate per portarla quà in S. Salvatore vicino alla terra."

25. My translations are from the Italian translation by R. Razzoli, op. cit.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 103. "E tuttavia non fu senza timore il viaggio. Si diceva infatti tra il popolo, che alcuni infelici incaponiti di portar via l'abito da Monte Acuto erano rimasti ciechi..."

27. *Ibid.*, p. 103. "... parve che questa volta a Dio medesimo piacesse il suo trasporto a Firenze, poichè niente di sinistro c'incolse ..."

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rebels ... and so he merited his punishment."²⁸ Fra Mariano seems to be trying to appease his uneasiness about being complicit with the theft of the habit.

In his study of relic thefts, Patrick Geary asks, "... how could actions recognized as thefts by their reporters and publicized for political and economic reasons be reconciled with high religious sentiment?"²⁹ In fact they were not so easily reconciled in the case of the theft of St. Francis's habit. Fra Mariano's relief at not going blind belies his certainty regarding the will of God. While he suppressed his uneasiness with patriotism, another Florentine, Dionisio Pulinari responded differently. In his account of the theft in his chronicles written in the 1580's, Pulinari conceded only reluctantly that the theft of the habit was God's will, "If I were not a friar and a Florentine, I would say that such a thing was perhaps not pleasing to God or St. Francis, since while it was with that noble family, God performed countless miracles through it, but since that time not even one has been seen."³⁰ Unlike Fra Mariano, Pulinari did not consider the actions of Count Francesco so reprehensible, "If pushed, I would say that it seems most forgivable to err for love of one's homeland."³¹ A similar sentiment regarding the theft is expressed in the margins of the Incisa manuscript of Pulinari's chronicles, where someone wrote, "There have been too many signs that it was contrary to God's will, since once it was taken from the hands of that noble family there has not been a single miracle, when before God performed many

28. *Ibid.*, p. 100-101. "Se costui fosse rimasto fido alla Signoria di Firenze non sarebbero certamente nati tutti quei mali che poi gli piovvero addosso, ma, remunerando invece i benefici con l'ingratitude, tradì la Repubblica, ... ed in tal guisa meritò il castigo."

29. See P. Geary, *Furta Sacra Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages*, (Princeton, 1978), p. 133.

30. Fra Dionisio Pulinari, *Cronache*, op. cit., p. 86 " ... se io non fossi frate e Fiorentino, direi, che tal cosa forse non fosse stata grata a Iddio, ne a S. Francesco, dandone la ragione, che quando era appresso di quei signori, erano infiniti i miracoli operati da Iddio in quello; che di poi non se n'è visto neppure uno."

31. *Ibid.*, p. 86. "Se mi fosse buttata in faccia la cosa di quell' signore, direi, che a me pare molto scusabile chi erra, se però erra per amor della patria."

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through the merits of St. Francis, who gave the habit to those noblemen and not to the Florentines."³² Francis had promised Count Alberto that before the death of any member of his family, flames would appear in the sky as a sign of the imminent death. This special favour did not cease after the family's rebellion against Florence or the removal of the habit from Montauto. Pulinari writes in his chronicles:

"The Florentines may have been able, with God's permission, to take this sacred relic and bring it to Florence, but they could not deprive that illustrious lineage from one of the highest graces, known by no other family either in Italy or indeed all of Christendom. This grace bestowed by God through the merits of St. Francis is... that every time someone, male or female, from that lineage is about to die, a few days before the death, mysterious flames and lights appear clearly visible in the sky over the castle. The family is aware of the lights and when they appear, everyone prepares, realizing that one of them is about to die, which is just how it happens."³³

The uneasiness and sense of injustice around the theft of the habit, even among some Florentines, was due in part to the fact that stealing the habit from the Barbolani family was like cursing the family Francis had personally blessed.

Despite the questionable ethics around its removal, on January 28, 1503, the habit Francis wore when he received the stigmata left Montauto forever. It is fortunate for posterity that Fra Mariano da Firenze was one of the friars sent to retrieve it. A historian and a writer, Fra Mariano left an engaging and vivid account of the two-day journey to

32.*Ibid.*, p. 83, note 1, "Tropo si sono visti segni in contrario della volontà d'Iddio, perchè poi che fu cavato delle mani di quei signori, non s'e mai visto alcun miracolo: dove che avanti Iddio ne operava tanti per i meriti di S. Francesco, che avea dato quell'abito a quei signori e non ai Fiorentini." On the Incisa-Vivaio XVIIIth century manuscript of Pulinari's chronicles, see Mencherini, op. cit., p. xxi.

33.*Ibid.*, p. 85-86. "I Signori Fiorentini potettero, che così lo permesse Iddio, pigliare questa santa reliquia e trasportarla a Firenze, ma non potettero già privar quella illustre casata d'una delle grandi grazie, qual non si sa che abbia altra casata, nè dell'Italia, nè di tutta la cristianità, ottenuta loro dal grande Iddio per mezzo dei meriti e prieghi di San Francesco, la quale... ed io incidentalmente la voglio mettere qui, e è questa: che ogni volta che uno di quella illustre casata deve morire, secondo il corso naturale, o maschio o femmina, appariscono certe fiamme e lumi alcuni giorni avanti la morte di quel tale sopra il detto Castello, in aria, di maniera che si possono chiaramente vedere, e loro a questo ci tengono continue guardie. E quando si vedono questi lumi, tutti si preparano, giudicando che uno di loro ha da morire, e così interviene."

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Florence, revealing the immeasurable value of the relic for Tuscan society at the dawn of the Cinquecento.³⁴ He begins his story, "In praise of God omnipotent, of our Seraphic Father San Francesco and for the benefit of his sons and followers, I will tell the story of how his habit was brought to Florence on February 3rd, 1503."³⁵ He adds, "I will tell the true story because I too was present, and will narrate the events as they happened."³⁶ True to his word, Fra Mariano produces a lively eye-witness account, written "... simply and directly the only way I can, with honest and simple words, impelled by neither vanity nor pride, but a pure love for the *Poverello* of Christ, Francesco, and in order to gladden his followers."³⁷

Fra Mariano's narrative vibrates with the enthusiasm of someone swept up into the excitement of the events he is recording. "What tongue or pen could express the devotion felt by the reception of the habit on the journey through the Valdarno ... who could convey the joy, the festivities, and the jubilation?"³⁸ His account offers rare and precious glimpses of that most elusive of historical realities - the religious behaviour of the devout, in this case, the spontaneous devotion inspired by a relic of the stigmata. Fra Mariano appears genuinely moved by people's reception of the relic, evidently greater than anything he had anticipated. In every town along the journey, the expedition was greeted

34. For more on the life and writings of Fra Mariano da Firenze, see: P. C. Cannarozzi, "Ricerche sulla vita di Fra Mariano da Firenze", *SF*, 1930. According to Cannarozzi, Fra Mariano was chosen for the expedition precisely because of his competence as a writer.

35. Fra Mariano, op. cit., p. 100. "A laude di Dio onnipotente, del Serafico Padre nostro Francesco ed a perenne ricordo de' suoi devoti figli favellerò del modo col quale fu recato in Firenze l'habito suo nel giorno 3 di Febbraio l'anno 1503 ..."

36. *Ibid.*, "Favellerò secondo verità poichè io pure mi ci trovai presente."

37. *Ibid.*, "non con florido stile e lingua purgata, che per me sarebbe impossibile, ma con ischietta e semplice favella per quanto Iddio mi darà grazia; non da superbia o vanità sospinto, ma da un puro affetto ch'io porto al Poverello di Cristo Francesco e dal fine di rallegrare i suoi devoti."

38. *Ibid.*, p. 103, "Qual lingua, del resto, qual penna potria narrare il devoto raccoglimento dei popoli del Valdarno scesi dai vicini monti per venerare, lungo il tragitto, il santo abito di Francesco? Chi potrebbe dipingere il loro gaudio, chi le feste e i tripudi?"

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by huge crowds of people who braved torrential rains in hopes of catching a glimpse of the habit. Fra Mariano was moved to tears when the townspeople of Laterina rushed towards them through mud and heavy rain, wanting to touch or kiss the casket with Francis's habit.

"The entire populace of the Laterina, men and women, young and old, mounted the town walls impervious to the pelting rain and inclement weather. They looked on with pious emotion as the sacred habit passed by to the glorious ringing of bells ... when we saw the devout people of Laterina leave the walls, despite the torrential rain and mud, and come running towards us to touch or kiss the holy habit of St. Francis, we could not hold back our tears."³⁹

In every town they passed the reception was similar. In Montevarchi,

"Almost the entire populace with a multitude of priests and an almost endless line of Friars Minor came to meet us with a cross. With their torches in hand and with sweet and joyful chants, they guided us to their Church of St. Francis. The church filled quickly with the multitudes, all eager to touch the casket with the habit of St. Francis. The friars, with all the people, began to sob and cry out: *Help us Padre Francesco, San Francesco help us*. Their outcries of devotion lasted so long that it was only with great difficulty that we were able to leave the castle."⁴⁰

In Figline, the reception was more exuberant still, "neither tongue nor pen could describe the devotion with which the people of Figline greeted us."⁴¹ Here is how Fra Mariano described the excitement generated by the habit:

39.*Ibid.*, "Tutto il popolo di Laterina, uomini e donne, vecchi e fanciulli, non si potendo accostare per la dirotta pioggia, salì sulle mura e di lì dimentico del cattivo tempo guardava con tenerezza il passaggio del sacro abito, al suono glorioso delle campane. ... quando vedemmo quel devoto popolo di Laterina abbandonare le mura, e malgrado la rovinosa pioggia e la mota, correre fino al nostro passaggio per baciare o toccare almeno il santo abito di Francesco noi non potemmo trattenere le lacrime."

40.*Ibid.*, p.103-104, "Colà ci venne incontro quasi tutto il popolo con la croce, con grande moltitudine di preti e una fila quasi innumerevole di frati Minori Conventuali, i quali, portando in mano torcetti accesi soavemente e lietamente cantando, ci condussero alla loro Chiesa di S. Francesco. La Chiesa si gremiva ben presto di popolo innumerevole cupidissimo di toccare l'urna ov'era l'abito di S. Francesco, e tanto i frati Conventuali che tutti gli altri cominciarono a gridare con singulti e lacrime molte: *Padre Francesco soccorrici, soccorrici S. Francesco*. Durò tanto il grido pietoso che con molta fatica potemmo partire da quel castello."

41.*Ibid.*, "ne lingua ne penna umana potrebbe dire la devozione con la quale ci accolsero i Figlinesi."

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"Bells rang out and streets were so bright from the torches of the procession that had I not seen it with my own eyes, I would not have thought it possible that there could be so many lights in the Valdarno. There were men and women, tall and short, almost all carrying lit torches, devoutly venerating the relic. Once we reached the town's main piazza, there was great pushing and shoving by the people wanting to touch and kiss the relic and at one point the horse and the girthy friar carrying the casket were lifted off the ground by the crowds. What on earth?"⁴²

Fra Mariano's delight changed to concern as the soldiers dispersed the crowd so the expedition could resume its journey, "... to tell the truth they did it so roughly, that I feared that at any moment there could be bloodshed."⁴³ The expedition finally left Figline and close to midnight came within sight of the castle of Incisa, "... full of such light and rejoicing that was a marvel to behold."⁴⁴ They stopped long enough to eat and rest and resumed walking through the night until they reached Florence.

"It was lucky for us that it was night!"⁴⁵ In the cover of night Fra Mariano and the expedition approached Florence where people from the surrounding countryside had stayed awake in anticipation of their arrival. "The streets overflowed with the crowds of people from the surrounding castles near and far, the bells were ringing and despite the heavy rains, many wanted to accompany us right to our convent of San Salvatore outside

42. *Ibid.*, "Sonavano le campane, sfolgoravano di lumi le vie, ed erano tante le fiaccole del popolare corteo che, se io non avessi veduta la cosa con questi occhi, mi sarebbe parsa impossibile tanta copia di lumi in Valdarno. Oltre a questo, maschi e femmine, grandi e piccini, quasi tutti insomma portavano in mano dei torcettini accesi venerando devotamente la reliquia insigne, ma come si giunse sulla gran piazza del paese, fu tanta la calca e ressa del popolo per toccare e baciare l'abito che il cavallo ed il pingue frate che tenevan fra le mani l'urna, per parecchio tratto di via furono dal popolo portati in aria. Ma che?"

43. *Ibid.*, "e per dire il vero fecero ciò con tanto mal garbo, che si temeva da un momento all'altro uno spargimento di sangue."

44. *Ibid.*, p.105 "Presso la mezzanotte ci apparve il castello dell'Incisa tutto pieno di lumi e di tripudio che era una meraviglia."

45. *Ibid.*, "E buon per noi che era notte!"

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Florence."⁴⁶ There, the friars who had been unable to sleep from the excitement, "watched from their windows for the appearance of the sacred habit."⁴⁷ At the first sign of the expedition, they ran out to meet them carrying the cross and lit torches. As with all the people of the Valdarno, the friars ran to meet, to greet, a *presence*. It would be difficult to imagine more reverence or excitement shown to Francis himself, as was shown for his contact relic. In Fra Mariano's descriptions of town walls flickering with torchlight, and people storming the casket with the relic, we get the sense of the spontaneous emotion that surrounds a rare opportunity. His descriptions bring us right in among the crowds; we can almost see people jostling for a better view and can almost hear the murmurings of stories being exchanged about the habit. Perhaps people voiced differing views about its theft or exchanged stories of the Stigmatization; one may have referred to a sermon heard, another to a painting seen. Some may have been there out of curiosity and become swept up into the emotions of the event; others may have brought their prayers and their sick. The vivid details of the rain, the mud, the flickering torch flames, the portly friar lifted off the ground, give Fra Mariano's account the ring of authenticity. His style is straightforward and unembellished by formulaic praises of Francis's holiness or the marvel of the stigmata. He remains focused on what he sees and hears around him: the tremendous excitement generated by the presence of the robe that had been *between* Francis and the Seraph on Mount La Verna.

46. *Ibid.*, " ... le vie rigurgitavano di turbe venute dai vicini e lontani castelli, sonavano le campane, e malgrado la fitta pioggia, parecchi vollero accompagnarci sino al nostro Convento di S. Salvatore presso Firenze." On the vying for the habit that took place within the Franciscan Order, see Cannarozzi, *Storia dell'abito*, op. cit., p. 266.

47. *Ibid.*, " ... stavano spiando alle finestre la comparsa del santo abito."

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It is not until its arrival in Florence that Fra Mariano mentions the habit's connection with the stigmata. He tells us that on the 29th of January, to the chiming of bells, a procession of friars carrying lit torches greeted the expedition and accompanied the habit to their Church of San Salvatore.

"Oh what joy, what happiness, what pure devotion the little brothers felt in their hearts at the arrival of the holy relic that recalled to their spirits the Blessed Padre Francesco and the mystery of the sacred stigmata! Neither tongue nor pen nor human intellect could describe the moving scene; the whole night was spent in sighing, sobbing and lamentation mixed with indescribable joy."⁴⁸

The habit "recalled to their spirits" Francis and the mystery of the stigmata. Its presence stirred the souls of the friars as it had all the townspeople of the Valdarno. On the following day the habit was to enter the city gates and be carried in procession through Florence. The excitement generated by the habit was such that many eager devotees could not wait for morning and were already pounding on the doors of the monastery at 3:00 a.m. It was not until 6:00 a.m. that the habit was finally taken out of its casket in the presence of many dignitaries. Fra Mariano describes its being placed under a baldachin and, amidst tears and sighs, carried in a procession made up of three Confraternities, an endless file of friars chanting through their tears, as well as countless men and women, all accompanying the relic into the city to the sound of bells chiming.

When the procession reached Piazza San Gregorio, the habit was placed on a kind of altar, the same altar the much venerated Madonna dell'Impruneta was placed on in

48. *Ibid.*, p.105. "oh qual gaudio, quanta letizia, quanta pura devozione sentirono nel loro cuore quei frati poverelli all'arrivo della insigne reliquia che ricordava alle loro anime il beato Padre Francesco e il mistero arcano delle sacre Stimate! Non lingua, non penna, non creato intelletto potrebbero narrare la commovente scena, poichè tutta quella notte fu da essi consumata in sospiri, singulti e gemiti mescolati ad indicibile gaudio!"

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times of need, and carried solemnly through the city.⁴⁹ The following is Fra Mariano's description of the scene:

"Behind the Gonfalone of the Cathedral came seven Confraternities of children from all the schools of Florence, all singing joyously and solemnly. They were followed by the friars of the Observance and the Conventuals from both the city and the surrounding countryside, then the clergy in ceremonial attire, followed by four more Confraternities, all carrying heavy torches. Then came the musicians and trumpeters of the Republic and finally, St. Francis's holy habit appeared under a rich baldachin. The official procession arrived at the Baptistery of San Giovanni, where the habit was deposited and the supreme magistrates and other officials of the Republic devoutly honoured St. Francis with the usual offerings. Then the triumphal procession resumed, passing by the Church of Santa Maria del Fiore, as it made its way to the Monastery delle Murate and Santa Croce, before finally returning to San Salvatore al Monte."⁵⁰

In San Salvatore, amidst a crowd of devotees so dense that it was impossible to move in

the church or surrounding streets, the habit was placed on the main altar of the church

where, " everyone longed to touch or at least to see the sacred habit, crying out: *San*

Francesco help us, San Francesco pray for us."⁵¹ The response to the habit described by

Fra Mariano recalls the emotions elicited by Francis himself along his journeys when,

Celano tells us, "Men and women came running from every direction to see him, and with

their usual devotion wanting to touch him ... They touched and pulled him, cut off bits of

his tunic, but the man seemed not to feel any of this."⁵² People longed to be sheltered by

the power of Francis's aura, "Driven by faith, people often tore his habit until sometimes

49. See Cannarozzi, *Storia dell'abito*, op. cit., p. 269, note 2.

50. Fra Mariano, op. cit., p. 107. " Dietro il Gonfalone della Cattedrale venivano sette Confraternite di fanciulli con tutta l'innumerabile scolaresca fiorentina solennemente e gioiosamente cantando; poi venivano i frati Minori Osservanti e Conventuali tanto della città che dei dintorni, il Clero tutto in pompa magna, altre quattro Confraternite con grosse torce accese lentamente procedendo; indi i musici e i trombettieri della Repubblica, e finalmente appariva l'onorando abito di S. Francesco sotto ricchissimo baldachino. Con questo corteo trionfale si giunse al Battistero di S. Giovanni, ed ivi, deposto l'abito, i Magistrati supremi ed altri ufficiali della Repubblica venerarono devotamente S. Francesco con le solite offerte. Ciò fatto, il corteo trionfale, traversato il Tempio di S. Maria del Fiore, si recava al Monastero delle Murate; indi a S. Croce, e finalmente risaliva alla Chiesa di S. Salvatore al Monte presso le mura."

51. *Ibid.*, p. 107. "chiascheduno sospirava di toccare o di vedere almeno il santo abito gridando: *S. Francesco aiutaci, S. Francesco prega per noi.*"

52. 2C, LXIV, 98.

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he was left almost naked. ... health was restored to some people through something that the Holy Father had touched with his hands."⁵³ People tore at his habit not for keepsakes but because it was imbued with his power.

Objects imbued with *praesentia* were taken very seriously at all levels of Florentine society in the Cinquecento; this is evident in the great lengths taken by the Signoria of Florence to procure the habit, and in the great pomp and ceremony surrounding its arrival in Florence. The friars held a special banquet in the relic's honour at San Salvatore. In attendance were four hundred friars, numerous seculars, priests from S. Giovanni, canons, the Minister General of the Dominicans with one hundred and twelve of his friars. The Provincial of the friars of the Observance was also present with two hundred and fifty friars. The seating arrangement alternated each guest with a Franciscan friar, which is how they entered the church, two by two. This must have been a rare show of unity between the Orders since Fra Mariano remarks, "it was such a moving scene to see so many friars united by fraternal charity that many citizens marveled at the sight."⁵⁴

In his study of the Florentine cult of the Madonna dell'Impruneta during the same period, Richard Trexler remarks that it would be a mistake to reduce its cult to "political cynicism on the part of the government, playing upon the credulity of the populace."⁵⁵ I did not detect evidence of cynicism on the part of the Signoria either in the correspondence planning the theft of the habit or the festivities held in its honour. In the public edict announcing the festivities the Signoria declared its motives:

53. 1C, XXII, 63.

54. Fra Mariano, op. cit., p. 108. "ed era cosa di tanta tenerezza lo scorgere un numero così copioso di frati intimamente uniti col vincolo della carità fraterna che molti cittadini non rifinivano di magnificare la scena, rapita dalla meraviglia."

55. See Richard Trexler, "Florentine Religious Experience: The Sacred Image," *Studies in the Renaissance*, Vol. XIX, 1972. p. 16.

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"On the 30th of January, their Eccelencies announced with great ceremony and with trumpets blowing that on February 3rd, on the feast of St. Biagio, the habit of St. Francis, which he wore when he received the signs of the Crucified on his body, would ceremoniously enter the city. The edict proclaimed that due honour must be accorded to the sacred habit of St. Francis. Furthermore the holy relic would always remain a powerful mediator for the City of Florence. ... This is what was announced to the sound of trumpets on that day in Florence. I heard it with my own ears since I myself was there."⁵⁶

"A powerful mediator for the City of Florence"⁵⁷ - this was why the Signoria had gone to such extraordinary lengths to procure the relic; on February 3rd it would welcome a new patron to the city, one with sufficient power and prestige to protect the great Republic. All the ceremony around the habit Francis wore "when he received the signs of the Crucified on his body"⁵⁸ shows it was not perceived to be an ordinary contact relic, even of a great saint like Francis; the great miracle of the Stigmatization imbued the relic with extraordinary power. While other of Francis's habits may have been stained with blood from the stigmata, this habit alone was, as Dionisio Pulinari described it in his chronicles of ca.1580, the one "which had been between the Seraph and him in that sacred impression."⁵⁹ Pulinari's description of the habit, as well as di Miglio's quoted earlier, suggests it had made contact with both Christ and Francis.

Describing the habit Francis was wearing on Mount La Verna as having been between Francis and Christ, suggests the Stigmatization was more than the result of

56.Fra Mariano, op. cit.,p. 106. "... il 30 di Gennaio, li Eccellentissimi Signori fecero divulgare a suon di tromba che, nella festa prossima di S. Biagio corrente il 3 Febbraio, l'abito di S. Francesco divinizzato in certa guisa dalle sante Stimante sarebbe entrato solennemente in città. Diceva il bando che si dovevano porgere i meritati onori al sacro abito di S. Francesco, soggiungeva che la insigne reliquia sarebbe sempre una mediatrice potente dinanzi a Dio per la città di Firenze, ed avvisava finalmente il popolo che, terminata la processione, il santo abito si sarebbe riportato al Convento di S.Salvatore abitato dai frati Minori dell'Osservanza." "Divinizzato in certa guisa" is a very loose translation of the Latin which reads (*habitus Seraphici Francisci quo indutus erat quando recepit signacula illa crucifixi in corpore suo*).

57.*Ibid.*

58.*Ibid.*

59.Dionisio Pulinari, *Cronache*, op. cit. p.81. "che era stato in mezzo fra il Serafino e lui, in quella sacra impressione."

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Francis's meditation; it was a divine act that penetrated Francis from outside. When Pulinari and di Miglio described the habit as *between* Francis and Christ, did they imagine it had been penetrated by the ray that pierced Francis's side, the rays they may have seen in Giotto's painting in Santa Croce in Florence? (fig. 2) Or had they imagined an even more



Figure 2

direct contact with Christ? Perhaps they were thinking of Bartholomew of Pisa version of the miracle in which Francis's body was opened in five places by contact with Christ, (*"per contactum Christi, corpus est apertum in quinque locis con maximo dolore beati Francisci."*)⁶⁰ This version of the Stigmatization, generally unfamiliar to us today, must have had wide circulation; even the popular 15th -century *Franceschina* refers to Christ stigmatizing Francis through direct bodily contact.⁶¹

As discussed in chapter one, Giotto's version of the Stigmatization with five rays darting from the Seraph/Christ figure in the heavens to pierce Francis's hands, feet and side would prove both compelling and enduring. But it would not convince everyone. The friar Salvatore Vitale in his treatise on the stigmata written in 1629, made his objections clear:

"Artists paint the glorious saint receiving the stigmata in a fashion contrary to the truth. They paint the Seraph in the air, and the saint kneeling on the ground ... those red lines that jet out from the hands, feet and

60. See Bartholomaeo da Pisa, *De Conformitate Vitae Beati Francisci ad Vitam Domini Iesu*, AF, Tome V. p. 393.

61. See P. Giacomo Oddi di Perugia, *La Franceschina*, N. Cavanna ed., 1931, p. 178.

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side of the Seraph ... fly in the face of truth ... Christ did not imprint the wounds from the air, but from the ground, *joining hand with hand, foot with foot and side wound with side wound.*"⁶² (italics mine)

For Vitale, Francis was stigmatized from the ground, "by contact, and not otherwise."⁶³

Here is what he believed happened on Mount La Verna :

"The Lord asked him (Francis) to extend his right hand; the servant of God obeyed immediately, offered his hand and Christ, extending his right hand, placed it on Francis's and impressed the wound, in that instant creating, with the same power that created the universe from nothing, a nail of flesh in that wound, puncturing the hand through. The saint felt such pain that he let out a cry and fell to the earth saying: "O my Lord Jesus ..." Christ said "Rise Francis and give me the other hand." He got up and extended his left hand, Christ stretched out his hand and placing it on the saint's did the same as with the other ... again Francis fell and again Christ bid him to stand saying ... "be still Francis": Then he placed both feet on Francis's feet, and stamped and wounded them in a way that caused unbelievable pain being in sensitive places with many nerve endings. As in the hands, there too he left behind nails ... Once again Francis cried out and fell to the ground ... and again Christ bid him to rise..."⁶⁴

In this graphic account of the miracle, Christ descended to earth to bestow his wounds on

Francis. He touched Francis directly, pressing his hands and feet against Francis's. To

"imprint" the final wound, "the Seraph opened and spread His wings in which He enfolded

Francis, and holding him close, imprinted the wound on his side. ... Again

62. Salvatore Vitale, *Teatro Serafico delle Stimate*, (1629), op. cit., p. 198. "Dipingesi da Pittori il Santo glorioso quando ricevette le sacre Stimate, in contraria posizione, sito, modo, e forma di quella, che lui havea. Dipingono il Serafino in aria, ed il Santo inginocchiato in terra ... quei fili rossi, che scendono dalle mani, piedi, e costato del Serafino, denotando le piaghe, che gl'impresse, ripugnano alla verità ... poichè non gl'impresse Cristo le piaghe stando in aria, ma in terra, congiungendo man con mano, piè con piede, e costato con costato."

63. *Ibid.*, See pp. 199-204 for the many sources of this version referred to by Vitale, including Bartholomaeo da Pisa and Antonio Daza.

64. *Ibid.*, p.199-200. "Allora il Signore dissegli, che parese la mano destra; obbedì subito il Servo di Dio, parò la mano, e stendendo Cristo la man destra sua, e ponendola sopra la di Francesco, gl'impresse la piaga, fabricando in quell'istante con la potenza, che di niente creò l'Universo, un chiodo di nervo mirabile dentro à detta piaga, trapassando dall'una all'altra parte della mano, con tanto gran dolore del Santo, che dette un grido, e cadde in terra dicendo, *O Signor Giesù mio*. E stando così disteso in terra, ... Cristo ... gli disse *Rizzati Francesco, dà quà l'altra mano*. Levatosi porse la man sinistra, e parata, allargò la sua Cristo, e ponendola sopra la del Santo, fece l'istesso, che nell'altra; ed il Servo di Dio gridando, e dicendo, *O Giesù*; cascò la seconda volta nel suolo; ... e dissegli il Signore. *Parati, stà fermo Francesco*: E risposto, c'hebbe, *Eccomi Signore, stò*; pose ambedue i piedi sopra i piedi di Francesco, e gli stampò, e piagò in maniera, che per esser in parti nervosa, senti dolor'incredibile; lasciandovi anco i chiodi, come nelle mani. Dette allora il buon Padre un maggior grido al Cielo, dicendo *Giesù mio*; e cascò la terza volta in terra. Il Signore gli disse, che si rizzasse in piedi ..."

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Francis fell to the ground ... and then the Seraph vanished."⁶⁵ The engraving illustrating the infliction of the final wound shows Christ surrounded by the climbing vines of nature, with the cliffs of La Verna in the background.(fig. 3) Christ appears incarnate, just as he had after the Resurrection, with a body which Aquinas says, "... was composed of all the elements and properties necessary for the nature of a human body. Therefore it could be touched ..."⁶⁶ Vitale's description of Christ's touch, hands against hands, feet against feet and side against side, echoes Aelred de Rielvaux's evocation of mystical union written centuries earlier: " Il est descendu aujourd'hui, cet homme si grand ... Il a posé sa face sur ma face, sa bouche sur ma bouche, ses mains sur mes mains, et il s'est fait Emmanuel, dieu avec nous!"⁶⁷ But the touch that was a metaphor for mystical union with Christ in Aelred de Rielvaux, actually occurred in the Stigmatization described by Vitale; Christ pressed his wounds directly against Francis's flesh in a painful contact and union that was as physical in essence as it was mystical.

Only the contact with Francis's side had not been direct. It had been softened by the habit *between* them, its fabric absorbing the blood from Christ's wound before it touched Francis's side. Was this the touch imagined by the Florentines Dionisio Pulinari and Augustino di Miglio when, in the 16th. c., they described Francis's habit as having been *between* himself and Christ? In the illustration of the Stigmatization in Vitale's treatise the cloth of the habit presses against Christ's wound in the mysterious embrace. It too is "stigmatized" as it absorbs Christ's blood, just like the Veil of Veronica and the

65. *Ibid.*, p.200. "Allora il Serafino aprì l'ale e spiegate, ch'egli l'hebbe, abbracciò con esse Francesco, e mettendolo dentro l'ale, e stringendosi con esso, gl'impresse la piaga del costato ... e cascò quasi morto la quarta volta in terra ... sparve il Serafino Cristo."

66. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, vol. 55, "The Resurrection of the Lord", 54.3.

67. From *Sermo in Annunt.*: ed. Talbot, Rome, 1952. Taken from *Lectionnaire monastique Avent-Noël*, Solesmes/Cerf, 1993, p.395-6. See Lecture III.

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Figure 3

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Shroud of Turin. In fact, Salvatore Vitale conflates Christ's contact with Francis in the Stigmatization with his contact with the famous relics. For instance, he says of the Veronica, "There within this image ... the Lord has left you a reminder of the travails he suffered for you, *by stigmatizing that cloth*."⁶⁸ (italics mine) Conversely, he says that Christ transformed Francis into "a Living Shroud,"⁶⁹ suggesting he too was a perfect image of Christ, since a similar contact was made with the "tissue" of Francis's flesh as with the linen of the Shroud.

In his treatise, Vitale devotes lengthy passages to convincing the reader of the perfect conformity between the traces of Christ's wounds left on the Shroud of Turin and on Francis's body. As evidence he presents a series of engravings:

"... refer to the following images ... faithfully reproduced from the Shroud of Turin which I have had most faithfully engraved just as I found them in the description of Mallonio in order to indicate what the most Holy Wounds of Christ our Lord looked like."⁷⁰

The work Vitale refers to is *Esplicazione del Lenzuolo ove fu involto il Signore*, written in 1598 by Alfonso Paleotti.⁷¹ Originally written in Italian and intended for a wide audience, it was translated into Latin by Danielle Mallonio in 1606 so that it would appeal to a more educated reader.⁷² The engravings show reconstructions of Christ's wounds, revealing their shapes and sizes, based on Paleotti's observations of the traces on the Shroud of Turin. Vitale includes them in a treatise on the stigmata of Francis as

68. Vitale, op. cit., p.352. "Ecco che in questa imagine...t'ha lasciato il Sig. una memoria delli travagli, che lui patì."

69. *Ibid.*, p. 366, "Sindone viva".

70. *Ibid.*, p. 264-267, " ... vedansi le figure seguenti ... fedelissimamente cavata dalla Sindone di Turino, e come l'ho trovate stampate nella descrizione del Mallonio, così io l'ho fatte intagliare per dare ad intendere quali fussero quelle santissime Piaghe di Cristo Signor nostro..."

71. This work was published in 1975 by the Bottega d'Erasmus, Torino.

72. See *Ibid.*, Introduction by Luigi Fossati, p.ix.

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authoritative evidence of the shape, size and position of *Francis's* wounds. With regards the wound in the left hand, the second hand to be nailed to the Cross; the hand that felt more pain because it had to be stretched and pulled with a rope to reach the cross, Vitale says:

"...the reason that the wound of the left hand pulls toward the fleshy part of the hand and not the centre is that the force of the rope which pulled the arm caused the flesh to pull back towards the fingers. And, in this position, the nail was driven in. But, after the nail was removed, the flesh and skin returned to their original state."⁷³

In such descriptions, Vitale attempts the kind of detailed reconstruction of the process of crucifixion found in studies of the Shroud of Turin to the present day. Images from a study of the Shroud published in 2000, show a reenactment of the pulling of the left hand with a cord as well as the corresponding stain on the Shroud left by the wound.⁷⁴ (figs. 4,5) Vitale tries to convince us that, like the Shroud, Francis's wounds also registered the process of Crucifixion. Of the wound in Francis's left hand he writes:

"... and this wound conformed to its Prototype ... because it was the same in every aspect to that one, there are those who say that he had the said wound in the left hand, in the fleshy part, like in the left hand of Christ"⁷⁵

For Vitale, the authenticity of Francis's wounds, the proof they resulted from contact with Christ, rests in the fact that the wounds bore the precise signs of the drama of Calvary, down to the last detail; like Christ's wound, the wound in Francis's hand too must show signs of the pull of the cord.

73. Vitale, op. cit., p.250, "che la Piaga della sinistra mano ritira assai inverso il pieno della mano, e nò pare che sia in mezzo della mano, ma vicino alla polpa di quella; la causa di questo è, che la forza della corda, che tirava il braccio, fece ritirare la pelle, e la carne verso le dita della mano; e stando così ritirata fu conficcata la mano. Ma doppo che fu sconficcata, e cavaton' il chiodo, la carne co la pelle ritorno al suo primiero stato."

74. See P. Baima Bollone, *Il Grande Libro della Sindone*, (Milano 2000), p. 163.

75. Vitale, op. cit., p.251. "e fu conforme questa Piaga ancora al suo Prototipo ... perche fusse in tutto simil' e conforme à quella, non manca chi dice, ch'egli havea la detta Piaga nella man sinistra inverso alla polpa della mano, come quella della man sinistra di Cristo."

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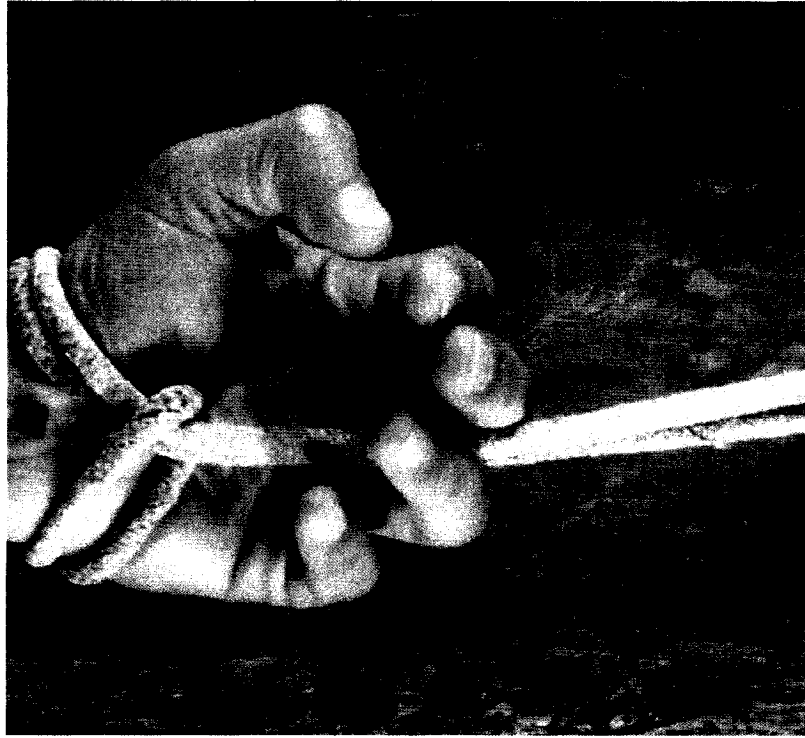


Figure 4



Figure 5

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The same was true for the wounds on the feet. The following is Vitale's description of the image of the right foot, "*il piede destro del Signore*":

"This is the picture of the actual right foot of the Lord with the very Wound. Both this and the following one have been faithfully rendered from the Shroud of Turin, just as I found them printed in Mallonio's description, so have I had them engraved in order to illustrate the Holy Wounds of Christ our Lord, Prototype and Original of those of the Glorious Father San Francesco, whose wounds were similar in both position and shape, just like a footprint is to a foot, to those of the Lord."⁷⁶

According to Vitale, the wounds Christ pressed onto Francis's feet resemble his wounds like a footprint resembles a foot; they are the same shape, the same size, and in the same position. And just as the wound on Francis's left hand had registered the pulling of Christ's arm with a cord, so too his feet registered the differences produced by the angles in which the nails had pierced Christ's feet. The images of the right and left feet illustrate how the two nails protruded from different points of the base of the feet. (figs.6,7,8,9) As with the hands, proof of the authenticity of the wounds on Francis's feet was found in their bearing the symptoms of violence he had not experienced. Vitale says,

"Since there are a great multitude of nerve endings in the feet, there can be no doubt that Christ felt incredible pain there. Consider the structure of the foot, the nerve endings and nervous muscle tissue that joins the bone to the foot. As the large nail violently penetrated it, it broke open and crushed the mass of bone, ligaments and joints, cutting nerve endings, dislocating bones and tearing apart the whole surface...."⁷⁷

Later he adds:

76.*Ibid.*, p. 267. "Questa è la figura propria del piede destro del Signore, con la medesima Piaga, e tanto questa come quella, che seguita, ... è stata fedelissimamente cavata dalla Sindone di Turino, e come l'hò trovate stampate nella descrizione del Mallonio, così io l'hò qui fatte intagliare; per dare ad intendere quali fossero quelle santissime Piaghe di Cristo Signor nostro, Prototipo, ed Originale di quelle del glorioso Padre San Francesco; le quali e nel sito, e nella forma furon simili, come l'orma al piede, a quelle del Signore."

77.*Ibid.*, p.255. "E come ne' piedi si trova grandissima quantità, e moltitudine di nervi, non e dubbio che sentisse Christo incredibili dolori. Consideri si la fabbrica del piede, quelli nervi, e muscoli nervosi, co'quali si giungono e collegano insieme l'ossa del piede. Che come il grosso chiodo entrava violento, apriva, squarciava, ropeva, e dissipava tutta quella gran macchina d'ossa, legami, e giunture, troncando nervi, e disgiungendo ossa, e slegando quell'artificio grande..."

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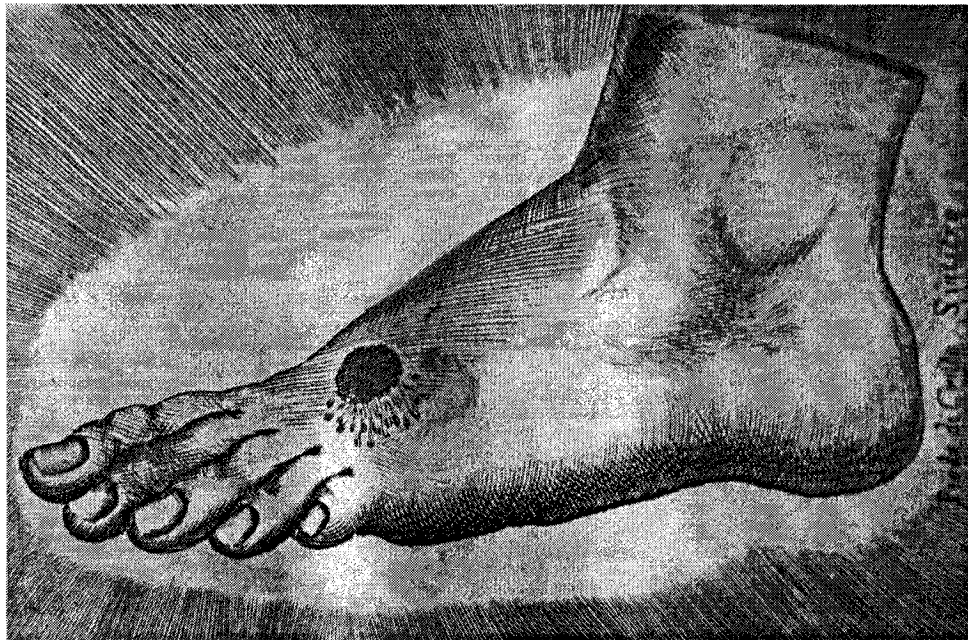


Figure 6

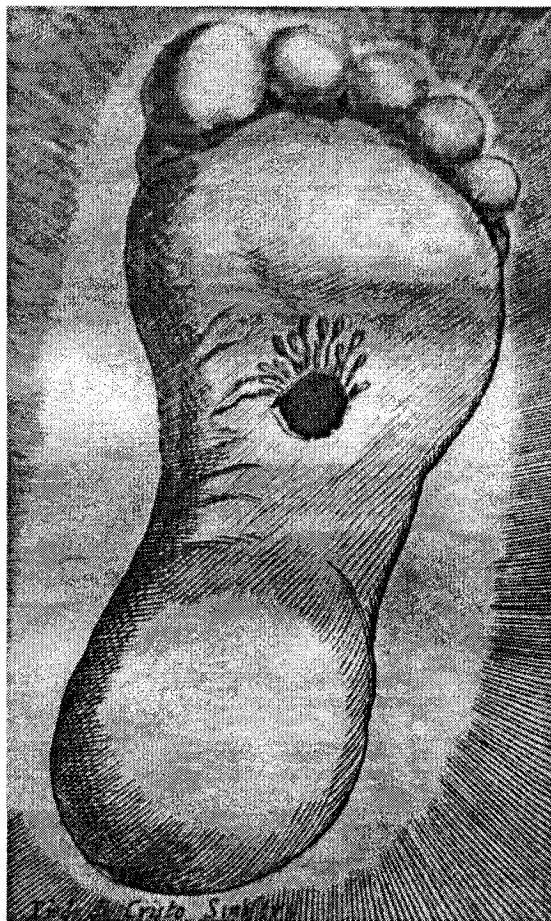


Figure 7

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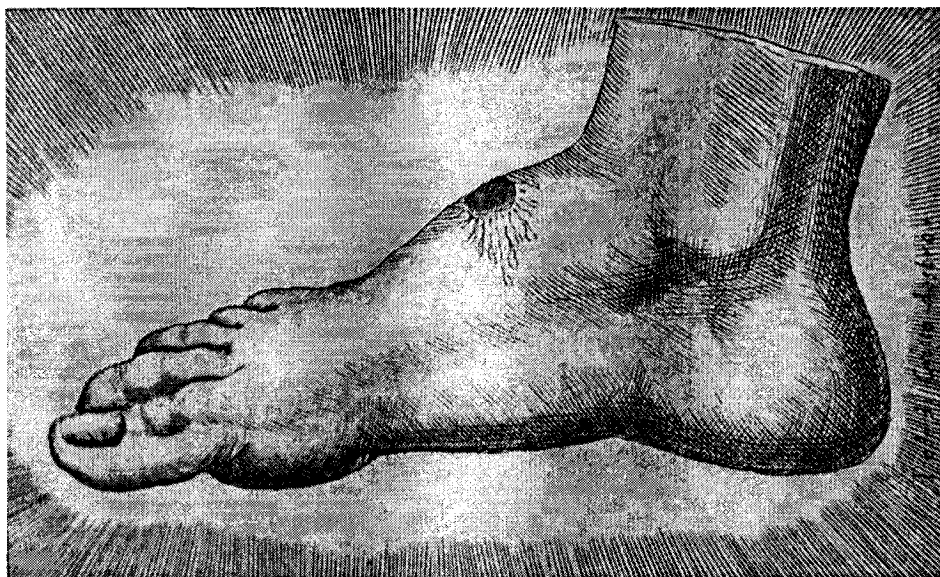


Figure 8

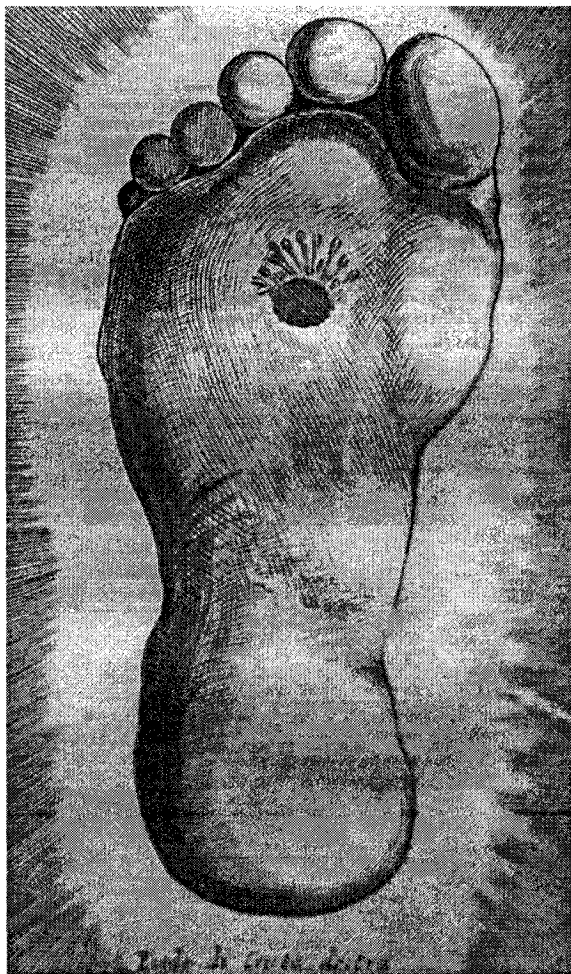


Figure 9

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"The pain of the Servant of God San Francesco must have been intense and acute, his wounds being (so it is written) round like those adored, great and wondrous wounds of Jesus, my most gentle and kind and forgiving Saviour"⁷⁸

Through this kind of repetitive cross-referencing of the wounds of Christ, its traces on the Shroud and the stigmata of Francis, Vitale blurs the distinction between them so that the engravings from the Shroud serve as images of Francis's wounds.

Pascal wrote that Christ was "hidden in the sepulcher ... shrouded only by saints."⁷⁹ For Vitale, Christ was shrouded only by Francis - his



Figure 10

"Living Shroud," a metaphor suggesting Francis in the tomb with Christ, *between* him and the cold stone, absorbing the redemptive blood, like the Shroud in many 16th and 17th-century paintings of the dead Christ in his tomb, such as Philippe de Champaigne's *Le Christ mort couché sur son linceul*, ca. 1654. (fig.10) "Living Shroud" also suggests Francis with the signs of the Risen Christ on his body. For many of his followers, Francis restored what Adam had destroyed - humanity as *imago dei*. Vitale says, "first he (man) reflected the Creator and now the Redeemer of the Universe..."⁸⁰ Just as Adam had reflected God in his soul, Francis's stigmatized flesh reflected the Incarnate God in his

78. *Ibid.*, p.259. "Intensi dunque, acerbi, e grandi dovean'essere li dolori del Servo di Dio Francesco, essendo com'erano, le sue Piaghe (che cosi si legge) rotonde, e circolari, a guisa de quelle adorande, colende, tremende, e stupende Piaghe del mio dolcissimo, soavissimo, benignissimo, e clementissimo Salvator Giesù."

79. Blaise Pascal's "Le Sepulcre de Jesus-Christ," is quoted by Julia Kristeva in "Holbein's Dead Christ", *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, (New York, 1989), p. 264. Kristeva writes, "Before Hegel and Freud, Pascal confirmed the sepulcher's invisibility. For him, the tomb is Christ's hidden abode. Everyone looks at Him on the Cross, but in the tomb He hides from His enemies eyes, and the saints alone see Him, in order to keep Him company in an agony that is peace."

80. Vitale, op. cit., p. 365. "... prima lo rappresentava Creatore, adesso Redentore dell'Universo."

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body, becoming an image of redeemed humanity. In Vitale's descriptions, Francis's body became sacred terrain, receiving the imprints of Christ just like the earth on Mount La Verna; the earth where, Vitale reminds visitors, "how much reverence is due when they walk on that place tread by the feet of the one who created and redeemed you."⁸¹ "Living Shroud" suggests Francis's was a layered body, in which the tissue of human flesh had absorbed divine wounds in five places where it was no longer possible to discern the human from the divine. Salvatore Vitale would have been fascinated by contemporary photos magnifying the Shroud of Turin as though



Figure 11

probing the spaces between the human and divine, seeking out the borders between the man-made fabric of the Shroud and the divine traces of Christ's touch. (fig 11)

Like the Shroud, Francis's habit had also been in the space *between* the human and the divine, becoming a relic of a divine contact, of divine mediation itself. It was towards this sacred space between heaven and earth that the townspeople of Tuscany in Fra Mariano's account ran in order to touch Francis's habit. They were like the multitudes who had pressed in around Christ in order to touch him " or touch even the fringe of his cloak."⁸² They were like the woman with the hemorrhages, the one fabled to be the Veronica, who was healed with the touch of Christ's cloak, at the moment when he felt that "power had gone forth from him ..."⁸³ Like a theory of contact relics, this story illustrates how they work. Saturated with presence, they become conduits of divine

81.*Ibid.*, p. 199. " ... con quanta riverenza, e timore si deve entrare, e calpestare quel santo, e sacro terreno calpestato da' piedi di quello, che ci ha creati, e redenti."

82.Mt 14.36.

83.Mk 5.30.

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power; Christ's cloak healed the woman even before he was aware of it.⁸⁴ When Pulinari and di Miglio in the 1500's described the habit Francis was wearing on Mount La Verna as the habit that had been between Francis and Christ, they implied it was a contact relic of both Francis and Christ. It was a contact relic of the violence that had ripped open Francis's side, tearing open the barrier between heaven and earth. It was towards this "sacred opening," this "space between" occupied by Francis's habit at the moment of Stigmatization, that the townspeople of Tuscany ran addressing their petitions and crying, "San Francesco help us."

84. I am indebted to Professor Sofia Boesch Gajano for pointing out the significance of this miracle.

Chapter 3

Ampollae of Blood from the Stigmata, -Francis of Assisi, "Living Image of Christ"

"I will take away your hearts of stone and give you hearts of flesh"

Ezekiel. 36:26

Pope Gregory IX harboured certain doubts about the stigmata of St. Francis of Assisi. Specifically, "He carried a certain scruple of doubt in his heart about whether he had really received a wound in his side."¹ To allay this doubt Francis appeared to Gregory in a dream in which, Bonaventure recounts, "... he raised up his right arm, uncovered the wound on his side, and asked him for a vial in which to gather the spurting blood that flowed from it."² In a 15th-century illumination of Bonaventure's dream narrative, Gregory is shown holding a large ampoule as it "filled to the brim with the blood which flowed abundantly out of the side."³(fig.1) In the image Francis appears to be leaving the pontiff a blood relic of his wound, tangible proof in the event Gregory's doubts should return.⁴

Ampoules filled with Francis's blood do not exist only in dream narratives; tiny ampoules of blood from the stigmata are preserved to this day in Franciscan Churches in Castelvechio Subequo, Rome and Ascoli Piceno.⁵ This chapter will tell the story of these three relics. I will examine their historical records as well as the hermeneutics

1. LMj (The Miracles) 1,6.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*, The illumination is from the illuminated manuscript (1475), of the *Legenda maior* in the Museo Francescano, Rome, (Codice Inv. Nr. 1266). It is published in *Francesco d'Assisi attraverso l'immagine*, S. Gieben, V. Criscuolo, eds., (Rome: Istituto Storico dei Cappuccini, 1992).

4. On Pope Gregory IX's doubts concerning the stigmata and the papal bulls he issued against detractors in the early 13th century see, A. Vauchez, (1968), op. cit.

5. For the ampoules of blood in Kriens and Lucerne in Switzerland see, Mayer, "Die Blutreliquie des hl. Franziskus in Kriens und Luzern, *Helvetia Franciscana*, 7, pp. 65-104.



Figure 1

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around the miracle of liquefaction. Once a year on the Feast of the Stigmata, the blood relics were believed to liquefy in commemoration of the first flow of blood from Francis's wounds. The meaning of the liquefaction, its significance for devotion, will be examined in devotional literature from the 1600's and early 1700's. We will consider how the perception of Francis as a "Living Image of Christ" in these sources affected the cult of the relics. Perceptions ranged from seeing Francis's wounds as mirroring Christ's wounds to being the actual wounds of Christ. I will argue that the cults of the blood relics of the stigmata reveal modalities of persuasion used by Franciscans to establish not just a similarity-relation between the blood of Francis and the blood of Christ, but an identity-relation, thereby distinguishing blood relics of the stigmata from other blood relics.⁶

In the dream of Gregory IX, Francis himself filled the ampoule with his blood. But how would the Franciscan Tradition account for the existence of blood relics from the stigmata?⁷ According to the 17th-century Franciscan historian Luke Wadding, the blood was preserved by the friars who had tended Francis's wounds.

"The wound on Francis's side oozed blood, not continuously or in drops, but frequently, so that the habit and shirt coloured with blood. The companions kept as much of it as they could, preserving it with great care and reverence in ampoules."⁸

Others believed that Brother Leo had sponged the blood from the stone on which Francis

6. It is not within the scope of this dissertation to deal with the controversy that existed around whether Francis's body was embalmed and whether his blood relics were from the stigmata or from the blood preserved during the embalming. See, G. Santarelli, *La Tradizione Francescana ed i due luoghi ove furono nascosti il corpo ed il cuore del Serafico Padre S. Francesco di Assisi*, (Rome, 1901), pp. 58-59, and A. Tini, *Sulla integrità del corpo di S. Francesco Patriarca nella Basilica di Assisi*, (Assisi, 1900).

7. See Schmucki, op.cit., p.239, note 52. "The narratives which speak of the flow of blood show the possibility that relics either of the blood itself or of the cloth sprinkled with blood were preserved by the friars, although it would be difficult to prove conclusively the genuineness of each relic which was exposed for veneration as such in various places."

8. L. Wadding, "*E lateris vulnere stillabat sanguis, non adeo minutim semper, nec per gutta, sed in tantum saepe, ut beati Viri tunica et subligaculum cuore infecta ruberent. Collegerunt socii ex hoc sanguine quod poterant, mango studio et reverential in ampullis eum servants.*" *Annales Minorum*, Tomus II, 1224, XII, (Quaracchi) 1931, p.102.

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collapsed after receiving the stigmata. The following is Salvatore Vitale's version of this story:

"The rock on which the glorious Saint was wounded was covered with blood, particularly in the spot where he lay half dead ... Fra Leone lifted him from that place where he lay and took him to his cell ... he washed the stone and collected the blood which was easy to do with a sponge, so that the blood was not lost or absorbed by the earth. This blood remains preserved to this day in various places, as I saw with my own eyes."⁹

One of the places mentioned by Vitale is Castelveccchio Subequo where, he says, there was a tiny ampoule of blood which "boils on the day of the Stigmata."¹⁰ This blood relic remains preserved to this day in Castelveccchio Subequo, a small village perched high in the mountains of Abruzzi in central Italy. The relic is kept in the sacristy of the Church of St. Francis, in an octagonal glass tube reliquary supported by silver pedestals with enameled plaques believed to date from ca. 1420.¹¹ (fig. 2) The decorative plaques are unfortunately in very poor condition and difficult to decipher. (figs. 3, 4) According to art historian Serena Romano, one of the octagonal enamel plaques represents the Annunciation, with the crest of the Celano family between an angel and the Virgin. The other plaque also has the Celano crest between two angels with a third figure, presumably Christ in the act of blessing.¹² The reliquary holds a piece of Francis's cord, his hair and the blood from the stigmata.

Local tradition has it that Francis himself founded the monastery in Castelveccchio

9. Vitale, op.cit., p. 331, "Era tutta aspersa di sangue la Pietra, nella quale il Santo glorioso fù ferito, e piagato; e particolarmente in quel luogo dove giaceva disteso mezzo morto ... Il Beato Fra Leone, ... doppo che lo sollevò da terra dove giaceva, e lo portò in cella, doppo che'l Santo si rihebbe, attese a lavare la pietra, e raccogliere quel sangue, che con facilità lo raccolse per essere fresco, con una spugna, e così il ditto sangue non fù perso, ne fù dalla terra absorto, e consumato; talmente ch'l detto sangue s'è conservato e si conserva hoggi, come l'ho visto io in alcune parti."

10. See *ibid.*, "qual bolle nel giorno delle Stimate."

11. Regarding the dating see Serena Romano, "La Scuola di Sulmona fra tre e quattrocento e gli inizi di Nicola da Guardiagrele" *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa*, Serie III, Vol. XIV, 1 Pisa, 1984. According to Romano the enamels display no particular originality and are of fair quality. The stamp with the date of production is on the inside of one of the pedestals no longer visible since the pedestals are now fixed onto a new wooden platform.

12. See *ibid.*, pp. 727-728.

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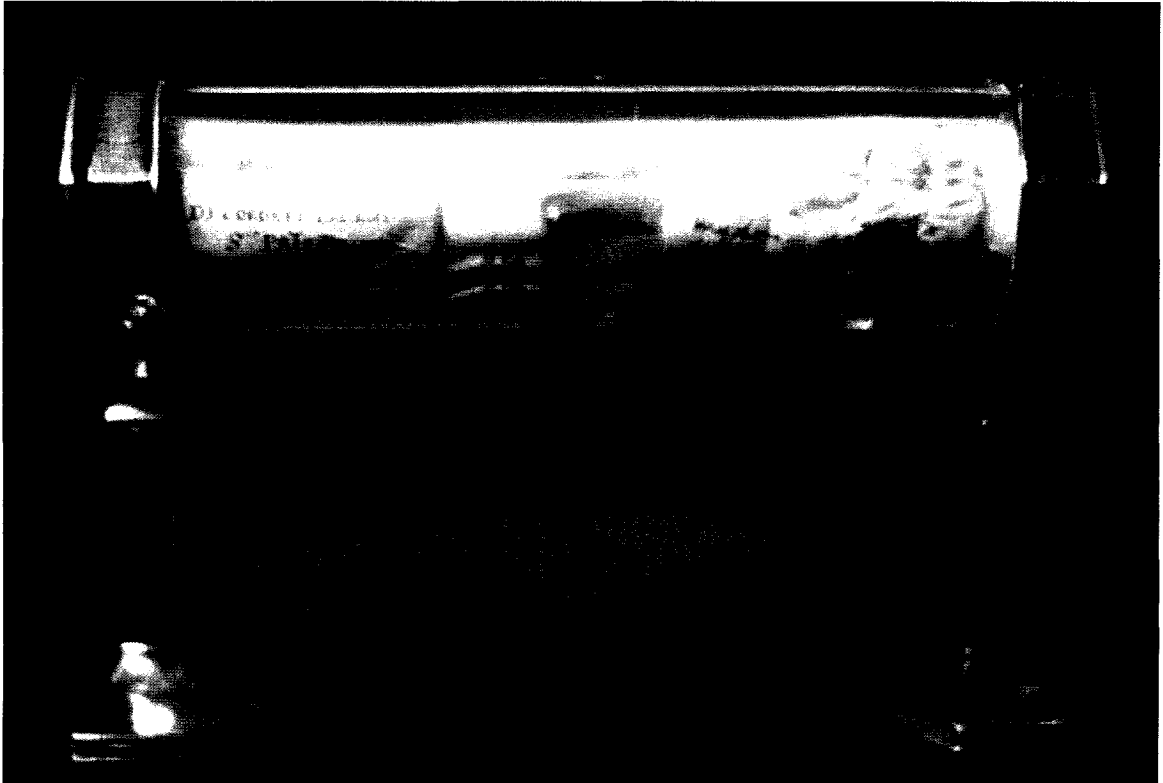


Figure 2



Figure 3

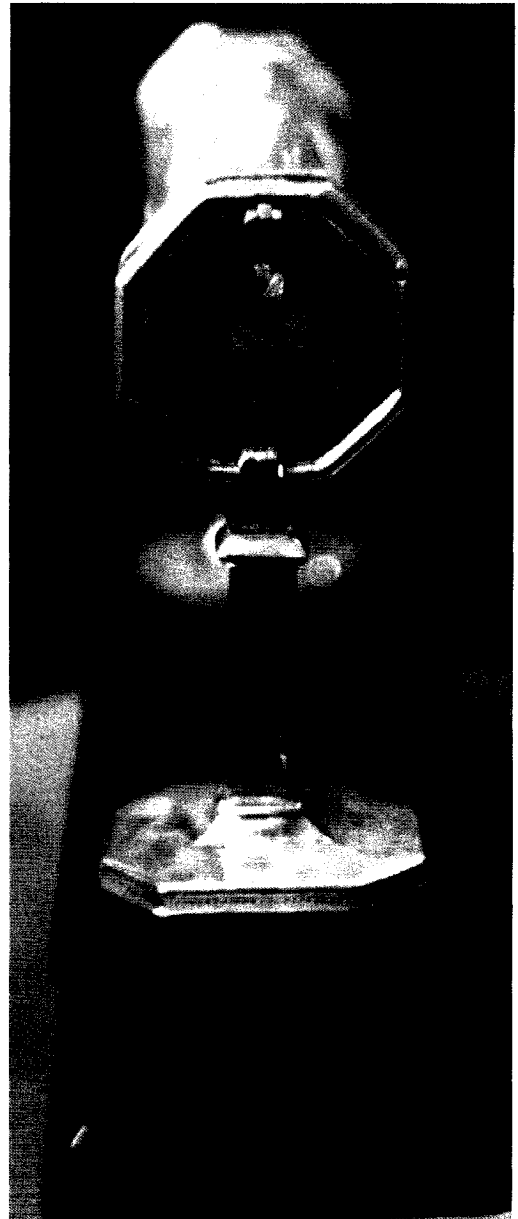


Figure 4

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Subequo. Francis visited Abruzzi on several occasions, having close ties with the Counts of Celano, a powerful family in the region.¹³ There is a long-standing tradition that while Francis was visiting one of the Counts of Celano in Gagliano, he was offered a church and adjoining land in Castelvechio Subequo for the founding of a new monastery.¹⁴ Completed in 1267, the monastery became an important Franciscan centre in the region, renowned as a school of philosophy and theology and the site of nine Provincial Chapters.¹⁵ When and under what circumstances the relic of the blood of the stigmata was donated to the monastery is not known; it is generally presumed to have been a gift from the Counts of Celano, though no record of the donation has survived.¹⁶

The relic was originally kept in the Chapel of St. Francis, decorated with a beautiful, now badly damaged fresco cycle of the saint's life commissioned in the second half of the 14th century by Count Ruggero of Celano, who eventually joined the Order and was buried in this chapel.¹⁷ (fig. 5) Beneath the frescoes runs a band of inscriptions identifying the scenes and, etched into the Gothic lettering is more writing - the graffiti of pilgrims who visited the church and scratched their names, dates, places of origin and other draw-

13. On the historical records of Francis's visits to Abruzzi see E. Ricotti (1961), op. cit., p. 40. For the early history of the Franciscan Order in Abbruzzi see E. Ricotti, *La Provincia Francescana Abruzzese di S. Bernardino dei Frati Minori Conventuali*, (Rome, 1938); L. Pellegrini, "Il Francescanesimo nella società Abruzzese dal secolo XIII all'Osservanza Bernardiniana," *Civiltà Medioevale negli Abruzzi* Vol 1, Boesch Gajano, ed. 1992; A. Chiappini, *L'Abruzzo Francescano nel sec XIII*, (Rome 1926).

14. See Ricotti, (1961), op. cit., p. 41.

15. See *ibid.*, p. 43.

16. Unfortunately the records of the monastery's archives were either destroyed or dispersed at the time of its closure in 1809. An inventory compiled at that time shows that the monastery's archives included 52 administrative registers and 207 parchments from 1277 to 1763. See N. Petrone, (1976), op. cit., p.44.

17. On the frescoes see M. Andaloro, "Conessioni artistiche fra Umbria Meridionale e Abruzzo nel Trecento," pp. 312 ff. The chapel was evidently renowned from early in its history; Bartholomew of Pisa tells the story of a man from Castelvechio who was bed-ridden with a grave illness and prayed to St. Francis, promising he would visit his church if he was healed. See *de Conformitate*, V, 495.

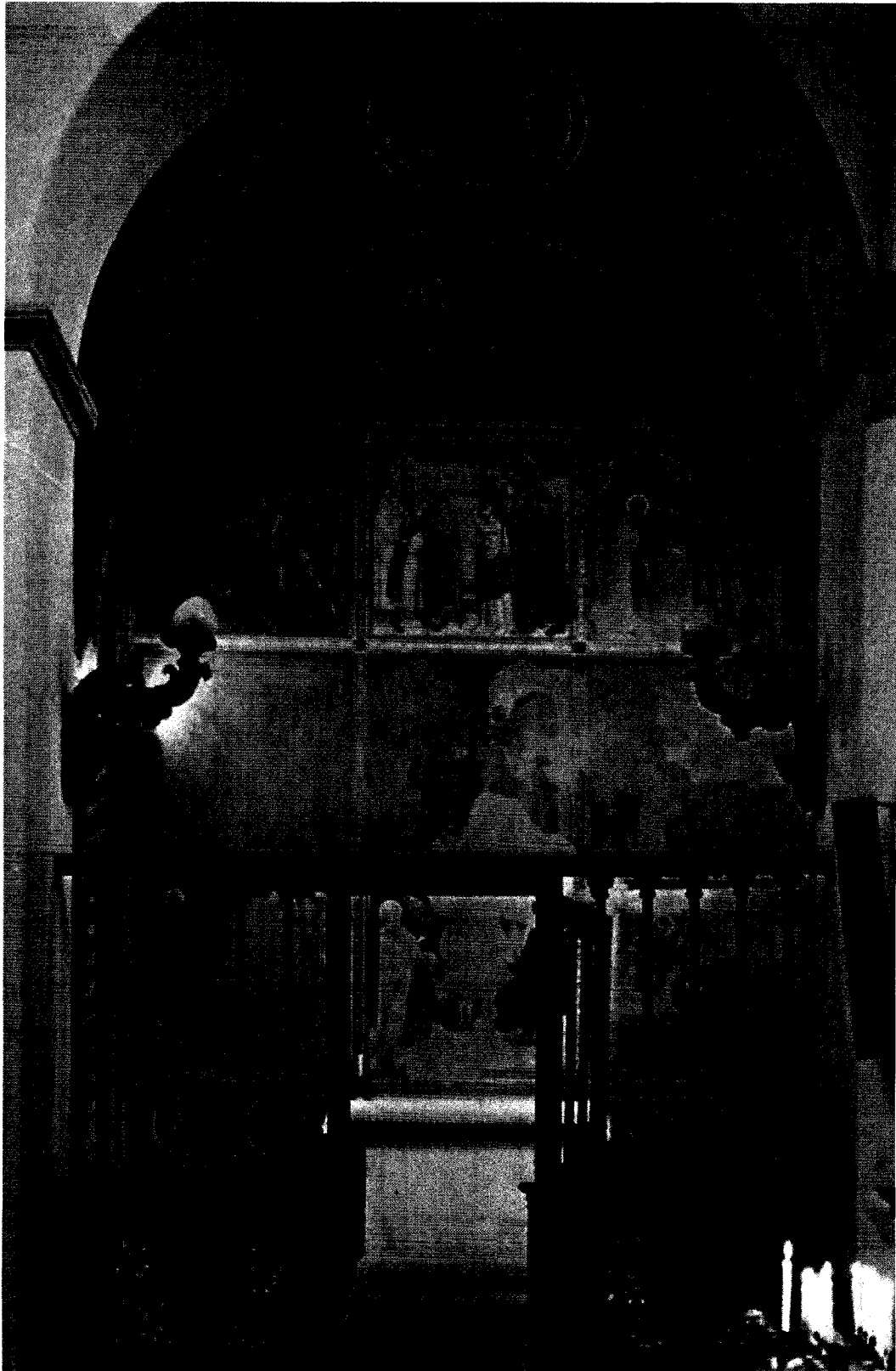


Figure 5

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ings onto the walls.¹⁸ Some remain decipherable; we read the dates 1400 AD, MCCCCXII-1441-1447-1491-M553 as well as places from outside the region, evidence the chapel was a popular pilgrimage site.¹⁹ (fig. 6,7) These *sgraffiati* from the 1400's remain as testaments, lingering traces of devotion to St. Francis and to the relic of the blood of the stigmata.²⁰ Egidio Ricotti refers to a document from the 1600's which reads:

"In this chapel a great number of possessed were exorcized and an infinite number of those who suffer from seizures were healed. For these and many other graces received, there was and there is a great devotion and a great flow of people from far and wide."²¹

The walls of the chapel were once filled with *ex-voti*.²² Many of them must have been for graces received from the relic of the blood of St. Francis, the most beloved of the town's relics. According to Ricotti, at the time of the temporary closure of the monastery in 1809, when all the relics were stored in a municipal safe, only the blood of St. Francis was kept in the church because of the townspeople's frequent requests to appeal to it for favours and protection.²³ Ricotti tells of the great devotion to the prodigious relic at the time he wrote in the 1930's, when people still traveled from far and wide to Castelvechio Subequo on

18. On the inscriptions see: F. De Rubeis, "Scritture Affrescate nella cappella di S. Francesco della Chiesa di Castelvechio Subequo," *Bullettino Deputazione Abruzzese di Storia Patria*, 1991.

19. For mention of the graffiti see Ricotti (1961), op. cit., p. 53, and Andaloro, op. cit., p.346, note 38.

20. See J. Flemming, *Graffiti and the Writing Arts of Early Modern England*, (Philadelphia, 2001), p.34, "graffiti writing was once sanctioned in ways now foreign to ourselves." See p. 40, "And ancient graffiti (which historians distinguish from formal inscriptions on the uncertain grounds that the former are done in a free hand) are still sometimes read as if they constituted a special form of the minor code: one in which voices of the past, unmodified by dictates of genius, official form, or imperial ideology, registered themselves and were miraculously preserved."

21. E. Ricotti (1961), op. cit., p. 55, "In questa Cappella si sono liberati gran numero d'indemoniati e un numero quasi infinito di quelli che patiscono di mal caduco e per tante grazie ricevute vi è stata e vi è grandissima devozione e concorso di popolo, anche da parti assai lontane." This document no longer exists in the Church's archives.

22. See *ibid.*, p.55, note 71.

23. See *ibid.*, p.69.

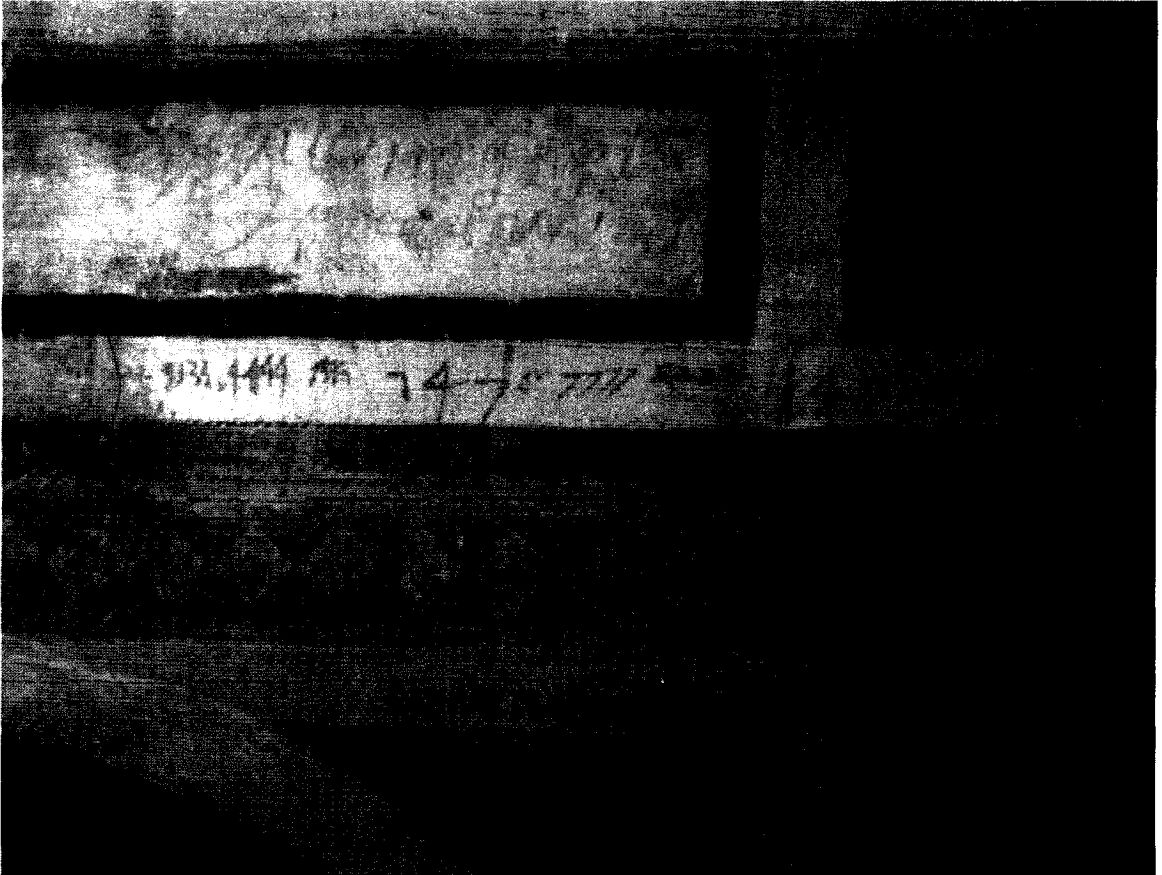


Figure 6

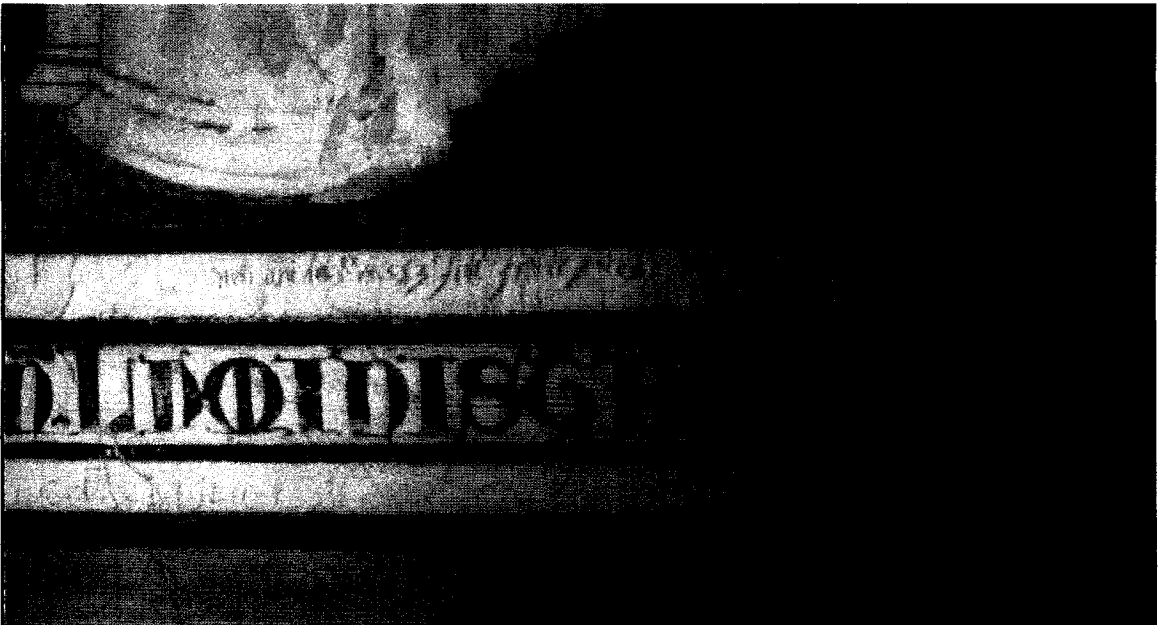


Figure 7

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the feastdays of the Stigmata and of St. Francis in order to venerate it.²⁴ I visited Castelveccchio Subequo on the feastday of St. Francis, October 4th 2001, to observe how the relic was used in the celebrations. It was placed prominently on the altar, used to bless the congregation and carried in procession through the town's narrow streets, brightly decorated for the occasion and lined with vendors selling local delicacies. (figs. 8,9) Unlike other relics of the stigmata that are all but forgotten in sacristy cupboards or have been relegated to museum pieces, the blood relic in Castelveccchio Subequo has enjoyed uninterrupted popular devotion from the late Middle Ages to the present.

The relic of the blood of St. Francis venerated in Castelveccchio Subequo is not just the relic of an extraordinary miracle, but of a continuous miracle; according to several sources, every year on the Feast of the Stigmata, the blood liquefied. Naturally this brought the relic considerable renown. The miracle was noted by historians Rodolpho Tossiniani in the 16th century and Luke Wadding in the 17th century; it was also described by several writers on the stigmata including Salvatore Vitale quoted above.²⁵ When Antonio Daza wrote of the miracle of the liquefaction of the blood in Castelveccchio Subequo in 1619, he characterized it as unique among Christ's miracles. While healing the blind and resurrecting Lazarus from the dead were great miracles, their effect, Daza reasons, was to return the body to a completely *natural* state of health.

"But this was not the case when the Lord bestowed the sacred stigmata on our Father San Francesco. This miracle was permanent and continuous because He bestowed them miraculously and our Father Francesco lived two years with them miraculously and miraculously God conserves them in his sacred dead body ... The same is said of a tiny ampoule of blood from the wounds of our Father San Francesco which is in a place

24. See E. Ricotti, "Una Reliquia del Sangue di S. Francesco a Castelveccchio Subequo (Abruzzi)," *MF*, 1934, p.357-8.

25. See Petro Rodolpho Tossiniani, *Historium Seraphicae Religionis Veneriis*, 1586, p. 277, "*Locus Castriveteris, ibi reperitur de sanguine Sancti Francisci qui in die Sanctorum Stigmatum fervere dicitur.*" See Wadding, op. cit., year 1399 Tomus IX "*... Castri veteris, ubi conservatur ampulla sanguinis sancti Francisci, qui in die sacrorum Stigmatum effervet.*" (See also tomus II, 1224 quoted above).

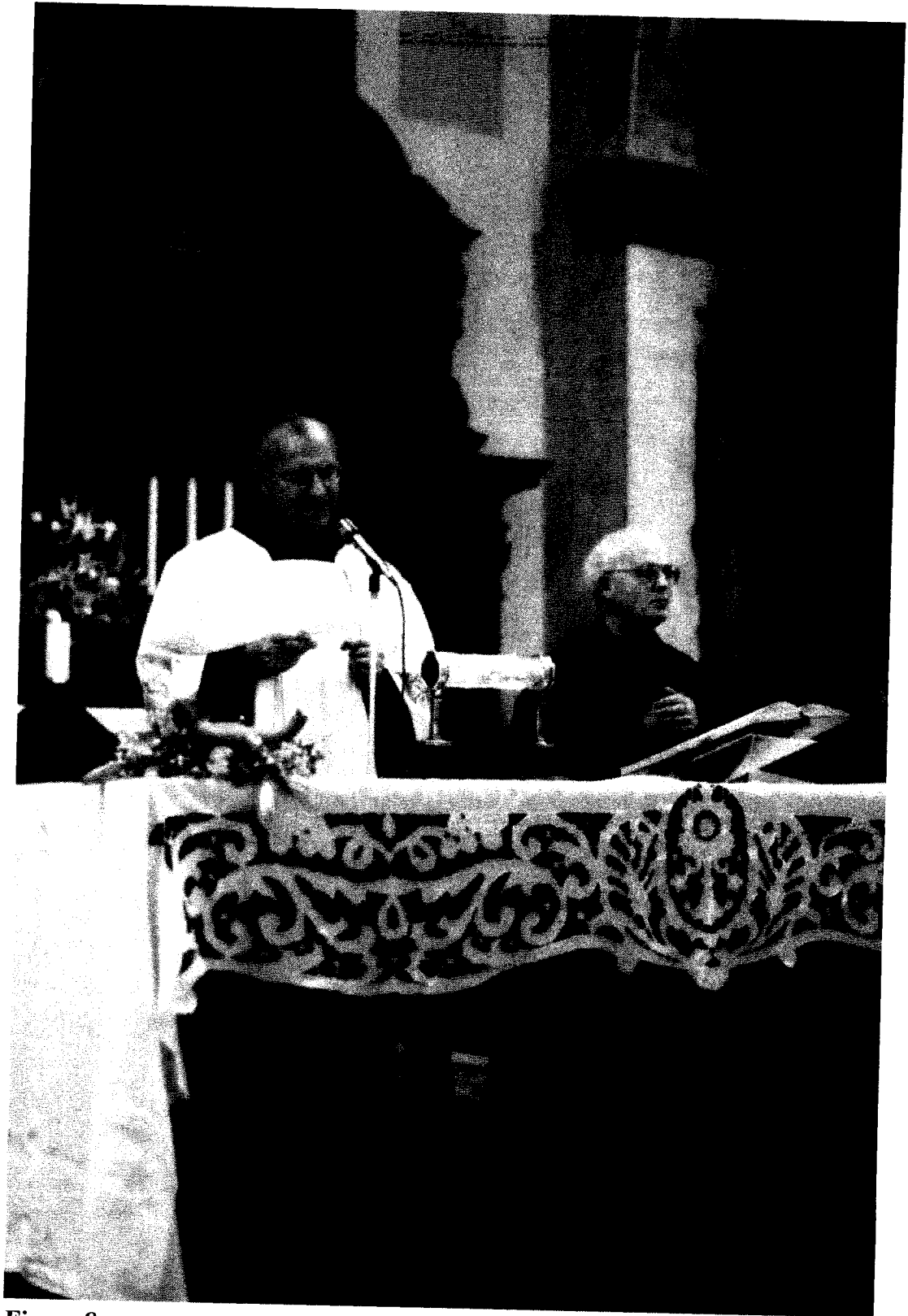


Figure 8



Figure 9

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called Castelvechio in the Reign of Naples, which boils on the day of the Stigmata.”²⁶

For Daza, the boiling of the relic of the stigmata on its feast day was further proof that the Stigmatization was a continuous miracle. By comparing the stigmata to Christ’s other miracles Daza seems to suggest that when Christ healed the sick, his “contact” with them ceased with their cure; in the case of the stigmata, however, the “contact” that had produced the wounds also maintained them miraculously open during Francis’s life, after his death, and in the yearly liquefaction of their relics. For Daza therefore, the liquefaction of the blood was a sign of Christ’s continuous presence in the relic.

The connection between Christ and the blood of the stigmata alluded to by Daza was given ritual expression in the 15th century. According to Aniceto Chiappini:

“The relic is listed in a parchment of the convent from the XVth century. Inside the reliquary with the blood of St. Francis is also included the relic of the blood of Christ spilt during the Flagellation with the parchment of authentication from the XIIIth century.”²⁷

While no historical records of the relic exist today, in this brief footnote Chiappini preserved a very precious detail from its cult, the fact that the blood of Christ was

26. *Ibid.*, p. 102-103, “...non fù cosi, ma miracolo permanente, e continuo: perche se miracolosamente gliele dette, miracolosamente gliele conserve, e miracolosamente visse due anni con esse, e miracolosamente le conserva hoggi Iddio nel suo sagratissimo corpo defonto; perche è un miracolo permanente, e continuo... come è quello medesimamente, che si dice d’un ampolletta di sangue delle Piaghe del nostro P.S. Francesco, che è in un luogo detto Castelvechio nel Regno di Napoli, qual bolle nel giorno delle Stimmate.”

27. See A. Chiappini, *Abruzzo Francese nel secolo XIII*, (Roma, 1926), p. 25, note 1. “La reliquia trovasi inventariata in una pergamena del convento del sec.XV. Dentro il reliquario del sangue di S. Francesco è pure acclusa la reliquia del Sangue di Cristo versato nella flagellazione, con relativa autentica in pergamena del secolo XIII.” This must be the same parchment which Ricotti refers to in “Reliquiarii ed oggetti preziosi della Chiesa di S. Francesco in Castelvechio Subequo (Aquila)” *MF*, 35, 1935; see p. 273. N. Petrone, (1976) *op.cit.* p. 45, mentions this same parchment as missing. E. Ricotti (1961) p. 45 note 56 says that the Archive of the church presently conserves only a few documents from recent centuries.

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once placed in the same reliquary as the blood of the stigmata.²⁸ Presenting them simultaneously before the gaze of devotees suggested a unique relationship between them, they would have appeared elevated to the same level, as though the same reverence was due both relics. Placed on the altar together for the Feast of the Stigmata, the relics would likely have inspired sermons on the conformity between the blood of the stigmata and the blood of the Passion. Salvatore Vitale wrote of three such conformities. First, Vitale says, in both cases the blood was not absorbed by the earth; second, just as Longinus preserved Christ's blood so Brother Leo preserved Francis's blood. Finally Vitale writes,

"The third conformity, experience shows, is that in certain places the blood of Christ boils on Good Friday at the hour that the Lord spilt it ... The same is written of the blood of San Francesco conserved in a tiny ampoule in a place called Castelveccchio under the Reign of Naples, which boils on the day of the Stigmata."²⁹

Vitale connects the liquefaction of the blood of Francis with the liquefaction of the blood of Christ, suggesting that even a tiny dismembered fragment of Francis's body practiced *imitatio Christi*.

It was perhaps because of the renowned miracle of liquefaction that in the 16th century Duke Federico Cesi of Acquasparta wanted to possess a portion of the blood of the stigmata for his private devotion. In 1591, through the influence of his brother Cardi-

28. It is not within the scope of this chapter to comment on the 15th-century disputes between Franciscans and Dominicans on whether Christ was resurrected with all of his blood. For a brief summary of the debate see, G. Mori, "<Quarta fuit sanguinis a deitate> La disputa di S. Giacomo della Marca nel politico di Massa Fermana di Carlo Crivelli," *Storia dell'Arte*, 47, 1983, pp. 23-25. According to Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, *Quaestio 54, de qualitate Christi resurgantis*, "Since it pertains to the truth of his human nature, all of the blood which poured forth from Christ's body also rose with it. ... As far as the blood which is preserved as relics in certain churches is concerned, this did not flow from Christ's side, but is said to have poured from images of Christ when they were struck."

29. See Vitale, op. cit., p. 333-334. "La terza conformità è, che si trova per esperienza, che in certe parti il Sangue di Cristo bolle nel giorno del Venerdì Santo all'ora che'l Signore lo sparse; ... Il medesimo si scrive del sangue di S. Francesco conservato in un'ampolletta in un luogo chiamato Castelveccchio nel Regno di Napoli, qual bolle nel giorno delle Stimate."

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nal Bartolomeo Cesi, a portion of the blood was extracted from the ampoule in Castelvechio and given to the Duke in whose private possession it remained for over three decades. From the year 1599, Duke Federico, who was a founding member of the Confraternity of the Stigmata in Rome, began taking the relic to the Church of the Confraternity for the Feast of the Stigmata.³⁰ In 1625 he donated the relic to the Confraternity permanently. The notarial document of the donation has been preserved and its preamble summarizes the period from the Duke's acquisition of the relic to its donation to the Confraternity.³¹

Thanks to the donation of the relic to the Confraternity of the Stigmata in Rome, sources of its cult have been preserved in their archives. For example, in the Confraternity's Rule Book of Rituals, (*Rituale della Venerabile Arciconfraternita delle Sacre Stimate del P. S. Francesco di Roma*, 1669) we read, "The precious Blood of our Father San Francesco will be exposed from the vespers of the Eve of the Feast of the Stigmata for the whole octave of the feast, as well as on his feast day on the 4th of October and on the morning of San Silvestro."³² The relic was exposed on the feast of St. Silvester on December 31st in recognition of the Duke's donation:

"On the morning of the Feast of Pope San Silvestro, the blood of our Father San Francesco will be exposed ... to thank the Lord for having inspired the Duke of Acquasparta to donate the precious treasure of the Blood which flowed from the Sacred Stigmata of our Seraphic Father ..."³³

30. On the history of the Confraternity of the Stigmata in Rome see Matteucci, op. cit., pp. 138 ff.

31. "Instrumento di donazione della Reliquia da parte da Federico Ceso all' Archiconfraternita delle Stimate": Roma, Arch. Vicariato, Arciconfr. SS. Stimate, Registro protocollare 1597-1654, (62-64). On this document see: E. Parsi, "Storia di una insigne Reliquia" *L'Osservatore Romano*, 30 Dicembre, 1943. For a brief summary of the history of the relic see: E. Ricotti, "Il tesoro delle "Stimate": Il Sangue di S. Francesco," in *Pax et Bonum*, 1944, a special publication in honour of the 350th anniversary of the foundation of the Confraternity of the Stigmata in Rome.

32. See *Rituale della Venerabile Archiconfraternita delle Sacre Stimate del P. San Francesco*, per Fabio di Falco, 1669, Chapt. IX pp. 90-91. "Il prezioso Sangue del nostro padre San Francesco s' esporrà nelli primi Vespri della Vigilia delle Sacre Stimate per tutta l'ottava; nel primo Vespro, e nel giorno della sua festa alli Quattro di Ottobre, e nella mattina di S. Silvestro."

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The *Rituale* also includes specifications on the handling and placement of relics for the Feast of the Stigmata:

“The brothers will make sure to allow enough time on the eve of the first vesper and every morning of the octave especially, to arrange for the exposition of the holy relics for public veneration. ... To this end a cloth or silk covering should be draped on the table in front of the armoire in the sacristy where the relics are kept, so that our confessor, or another priest wearing his vestment and stole, may place the relics there.”³⁴

The relics could not be handled by a lay member of the Confraternity; they could only be handled by a priest in his vestment and stole as though they were consecrated objects. As for the blood of St. Francis,

“The precious relic of the blood of San Francesco will be placed in the middle of the main altar ... the precious Wood of the Holy Cross, kept in the altar of the *Santi Quaranta*, will also be placed on the main altar every evening of the octave, and the Office of the Cross will be recited in front of it.”³⁵

As with placing the blood of Francis beside the blood of the Passion in Castelvechio Subequo, the ritual of placing Francis’s blood next to the Wood of the True Cross created a link between the Stigmatization and the Crucifixion. It was as though the Office of the Cross was to be recited before two relics of the Passion, the Wood of the Cross and the blood spilt from it.

From the *Rituale* we also learn of the preparations for the solemn procession of the Miraculous Blood of our Seraphic Father San Francesco. For the Sunday of the octave of

33. See *ibid.*, p. 111, “La mattina di S. Silvestro Papa s’essorrà il Sangue del nostro Padre S. Francesco ... per ringraziare il Signore Iddio, che si degnò d’inspirare il Duca d’Acquasparta a donare alla nostra Archiconfraternita l’inestimabil Tesoro del Sangue che uscì dalle Sacre Stimate del nostro Serafico Padre.”

34. See *ibid.*, p. 106, “... gli altri Fratelli si sforzeranno di ritrovarsi di buon’hora nella vigilia avanti il primo Vespero, & in tutte le mattine dell’ottava ... per esporle (le reliquie) alla publica veneratione. A quest’effetto si preparerà una tovaglia, ò sia panno di seta sopra la tavola avanti l’Armario dove si conservano nella sacrestia, acciòche sopra di essa decentemente possa il nostro Confessore, ò altro Sacerdote colla Cotta, e la Stola posare le dette Reliquie.”

35. See *ibid.*, “Si collocherà nel mezzo dell’Altar maggiore la preziosa Reliquia del sangue del nostro Padre San Francesco...il preziosissimo legno della Santissima Croce, il quale ogni sera dell’Ottava si riporterà all’Altar Maggiore avanti il quale si recitarà l’Officio della Croce ...”

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the Feast of the Stigmata, the brothers must be reminded ahead of time to free themselves for that day. Each year a bulletin must be posted which reads, "Dear brothers you are invited on Sunday at 21:00 to our procession of the Holy Relic of the Blood of San Francesco."³⁶ Pamphlets were distributed reminding the residents who lived along the route of the procession to clean their streets and decorate their windows in honour of the relic. Finally, after describing the lengthy route of the procession through Rome, the *Rituale* specifies, "Having completed the usual route and reaching our piazza ... when the celebrant has climbed the stairs of our church he will turn to the populace and bless it with the holy relic."³⁷

The Confraternity of the Stigmata no longer exists and while the relic is still exposed for the Feast of the Stigmata and the Feast of St. Francis, there is no longer a popular devotion to the relic of the stigmata in Rome. The relic is kept in a 17th-century armoire in the sacristy of the Church of the Stigmata.³⁸ The reliquary, made of silver, gilded silver and crystal, has an angel on a pedestal holding a garland of flowers which frames a small glass container for the relic. (fig. 10) The reliquary underwent various modifications between the 17th and 19th centuries and its present form dates from between 1815 and 1838 and is attributed to Antonio Cappelletti.³⁹ Of earlier reliquaries we know that in 1633, Cardinal Francesco Barberini commissioned a new reliquary on the occasion of his

36. See *ibid.*, p. 152, "Carissimi Fratelli siate invitati Domenica a hore vent'una alla nostra Processione della Santa, e celebre Reliquia del Sangue del Padre S. Francesco."

37. See *ibid.*, p.155, "Finito che farà il solito giro arrivando li PP. nella nostra Piazza ...Quando il Celebrante sarà salito i scalini della nostra Chiesa rivoltandosi al Popolo colla Santa Reliquia gli darà la benedittione."

38. The armoire was commissioned by Cardinal Barberini in 1633. Its doors are painted with images of St. Francis and St. Clare. See Angeloni, Baldini, Pedrocchi and Strinati, *Chiesa delle SS. Stimmate di Francesco d'Assisi in Roma*, (Rome,1989), p. 77.

39. See *ibid.*, p. 80.



Figure 10

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investiture as protector of the Confraternity. According to Gualberto Matteucci, the reliquary commissioned by the Cardinal was the one described in the Confraternity's Inventories for 1639 and 1648 as, "a silver receptacle valued at fifty *scudi* in which is the little ampoule with the Blood of our Father San Francesco."⁴⁰ We know too that this reliquary was modified in 1675 when another portion of blood from the stigmata extracted from a blood relic from a monastery known as SS. Annunziata della Romita in the region of Spoleto was added to it.⁴¹

The blood of the stigmata in Rome also appears in the *Account of the Welcome and Hospitality Offered to Visiting Confraternities by the Archiconfraternity of the Stigmata of St. Francis in their Hospice in Rome in the Year of the Holy Jubilee of 1725, as described by Brother Filippo Coppetelli on order of the Father Superior.*⁴² The *Relazione*'s entry for the 17th of September gives an account of the celebrations held for the Feast of the Stigmata. The church was decorated more richly than other years; altars were draped with velvet and brocade, crystal candelabras were hung and the church was almost entirely paved in velvet, damask and tapestries. Cardinal Barberini celebrated the mass before a very large gathering and the blood relic of the stigmata was exposed for the veneration of all. At vespers the brothers sang the Office of the Holy Cross and the congregation was blessed with the wood of the Cross and the blood of the stigmata. The relic is also mentioned in the entry for the 6th of May where we find, "Following the ringing of the *Te*

40. See Matteucci, op. cit., p. 160, note 3, "Una custodia tutta d'Argento fino di valuta di scudi cinquanta, dentro al quale c'è un ampolla con dell Sangue del Nostro Padre Santo Francesco."

41. See *ibid.*, p. 140.

42. *Relazione e di quanto si è operato dalla V. Archiconfraternita delle S. Stimate di S. Francesco di Roma nel ricevimento & alloggio dato alle Compagnie forastiere nell'Ospizio della medesima l'Anno del SS Giubileo MDCCXXV* Descritta dal Fr. Filippo Coppetelli per ordine de I P. Guardiani. I owe a debt of gratitude to Raymondo Michetti who allowed me to consult the manuscript belonging to his family.

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Deum, the Father Superior deemed it just to show the miraculous blood of San Francesco to the devout Lady, the Princess Beatrice of Baviera, as well as to the visiting brothers so that all would be consoled.”⁴³

The most intriguing historical record of the blood relic in Rome is an account of its miraculous liquefaction I discovered in the notarial document of its donation to the Confraternity referred to above. It reads:

“The Duke took relish in recounting what happened on one occasion in the year 1593 or 1594 or later, he could not remember precisely when. On the Eve of the Feast of the Stigmata, while staying in his estate in Acquasparta in the diocese of Todi, hearing the ringing of the Vespers he took the precious relic of the blood ... which he kept in his bedroom, in his hands. The precious relic had not started to liquefy as in previous years, so he called Don Bernardino Bavatio, priest of Amelia and his chaplain at the time, who is still alive today, and told him to uncork the little ampoule with the precious blood by pulling out the wax cork. When Don Bernardino had almost pulled it out of the little ampoule... they saw on the tip of the cork two congealed drops of the precious blood; the drops stirred of their own accord and turned into froth. Then they dropped to the bottom of the tiny ampoule and liquefied and de-congealed all the rest of the blood, which then became liquefied and remained so for the rest of the Octave of the Feast of the Stigmata, as in previous years. After the Octave, it re-congealed as above. All this was well witnessed by the Duke and Don Bernardino from whom this truth can be verified.”⁴⁴

This account is extraordinary for many reasons, not least of which is the intimacy of the context. In contrast to the formality found in the Book of Rituals of the Confraternity there is no *mise en scène* for the relic here, let alone for the miracle of liquefaction. In

43. See *ibid.*

44. See *L'istrumento di donazione* op. cit., “una volta come il Duca similmente con il suo gueamento asserisce, dell’anno 1593 o 1594, ò altro più (uno) tempo, che peradesso del tempo preciso non si ricorda, stando nella sua terra di Acquasparta Diocesi di Todi, e venuta la vigilia festività di Sacre Stigmata et sentendo sonare il Vespero, prese nelle sue mani la preziosa reliquia di sangue, che ... la teneva nella sua camera, dove dormiva, ... il prezioso sangue non fosse incominciato a liquefarsi secondo il solito dell’altri anni passati, chiamò Don Bernardino Bavatio Sacerdote di Amelia in quell tempo, suo Cappellano, quale ancora oggi e vivo, e dissegli, che sturasse l’Ampollina, ove stava il detto prezioso sangue, con tirar fuori il turaccio quale era di cera, et mentre il Don Bernardino l’haveva quasi cavato fuori dalla bocca della Ampollina, come anco il Don Bernardino videro il turaccio bagnato, et nella punta di quello esserci due gocce del prezioso sangue congelato, quali gocce si maneggiavano da loro con fare un pocho di schiumetta, et poi caderno nel fondo della Ampollina, et liquefacero, et scongelavano tutto l’altro sangue, che divenne tutto liquefatto, e così liquefatto durò per tutta l’ottava della festa conforme a gli’altri anni, et passata l’ ottava, si re congelò come sopra, sicome il tutto videro benissimo il Duca , et il Don Bernardino, dal quale anco si puo sapere questa verità.”

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anticipation of the yearly miracle, one would have expected to find the Duke in his chapel with a priest presiding over prayer services. Instead he is alone in his bedroom, his gaze fixed on the relic as though he were relishing in the private viewing of a priceless work of art. The Duke did not want to miss the first moment of the liquefaction, but this time, “The relic had not started to liquefy as in previous years ...”⁴⁵ It was only at this point that the chaplain was called, not to pray, but to investigate the “malfunction.” Don Bernardino was asked to uncork the ampoule. Whatever the problem, it was judged to be in the relic itself, not in any lack of reverence on their part. What clue did Duke Federico and Don Bernardino hope to find in the ampoule? Or did they hope uncorking it might stir the relic awake? Once uncorked, “of their own accord,” two drops of blood on the tip of the cork did stir and froth before dropping into the ampoule and melting the rest of the congealed blood, as if on contact.⁴⁶

Duke Federico and Don Bernardino’s instinct to uncork the ampoule and investigate its contents reveals they believed the relic was intrinsically miraculous. Their first recourse was not prayer; they did not turn to Christ or St. Francis, but investigated the blood as though it were *spiritual matter*. No rite, no prayer was required, only the right time, the ringing of vespers on the eve of the Feast of the Stigmata was what prompted the liquefaction. In the Duke’s account, the melting of the blood itself appears to be the rite, “performed” by the relic as a kind of self-commemorating ritual or prayer offered in memory of the first flow of blood from Francis’s side. We could well understand why the Duke relished in repeating this story of the temporary malfunction of the liquefaction. “In 1593

45. *Ibid.*

46. *Ibid.*

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or 1594, he could not remember when,⁴⁷ he could claim to have observed the hidden processes of a miracle. The description of two drops stirring, bubbling and then melting the rest of the blood, as if by their extreme heat, has the clinical ring of a process observed under a microscope; it is as though the Duke had witnessed the very stirring, the inner workings of spiritual matter.

In this rare account of private relic devotion, Duke Federico's captivated gaze on Francis's blood appears indiscreet: wonder mixed with voyeuristic curiosity. From the time it was marked with stigmata, Francis's body would remain forever the object of intense scrutiny and devotion. In the dream of Pope Gregory IX referred to above, Francis appears forced to submit his wounds to the verifying gaze of the Church, sole arbiter of the miraculous. Ordinary devotees could only gaze upon relics of the wounds through the controlling filter of ritual, Francis's blood presented beside the blood of Christ in Castelvechio Subequo, or near the Wood of the Cross in Rome. In devotional literature on the stigmata we find reflection on yet another gaze cast on Francis's body and blood, the gaze of Francis himself. Consider the following from a devotional guide for the Confraternity of the Stigmata written by Giacomo Dragonelli in 1661.⁴⁸

"... the body of our Saint gave wings to the interior man in order to raise himself higher in the meditation of heavenly things. Where could the soul of Francis gain better motive to become enflamed by divine charity than from the visible signs tangibly impressed into his flesh by heavenly love? There was no need for the Seraphic soul of this great saint to go beyond his wounded body for a higher motive to raise him up to God. *It sufficed for him to look at the nails of flesh and blood which flowed from his side*, and soon he became enflamed with love for the Crucified. One would say that while the body of Francis burdened his soul ... at

47. *Ibid.*

48. G. Dragonelli, *Il Divoto delle Sacre Stimmate di S. Francesco*, (Roma, 1664). On p. 70 Dragonelli indicates he is a member of the Confraternity.

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the same time it aided him to raise himself to the highest contemplation.”⁴⁹ (italics mine)

Francis’s stigmatized body offered writers and orators alike occasion to captivate audiences with images that reversed the traditional roles of body and soul, as when Dragon-delli says, “the body of our Saint gave wings to the interior man in order to raise himself higher in the meditation of heavenly things.”⁵⁰ The body, ever an obstacle in the Christian Tradition to the soul’s ascent to God, in Francis’s case transported him to “the highest contemplation;” gazing upon the blood from his wounds Francis “became enflamed with love for the Crucified.”⁵¹ Francis’s self-directed gaze bears no trace of narcissism because the flesh and blood he contemplated was the handiwork of Christ, flesh moulded by Christ himself.

In a re-working of the comparison often made between Stigmatization and the imprinting of a seal on molten wax, Dragon-delli creates the following image for the process by which Christ moulded Francis into his likeness:

49. *Ibid.*, p. 43-44, “Ma l’istesso corpo del nostro Santo somministrava l’ali all’uomo interiore à più altamente sollevarsi alla meditatione delle cose celesti; imperoche d’onde poteva l’anima di Francesco trarre motivi più efficaci à infiammarsi nella divina carità, che da’ segni visibili impressi così vivamente nella propria carne dall’amor celeste? Non occorre, che lo spirito Serafico di questo gran Santo si partisse dalla consideratione del suo corpo così impiagato per trovare motivi più alti à sollevarlo in Dio: bastava che rimirasse i suoi chiodi formati di carne e’l sangue che versava dal suo costato, e tosto si accendeva all’amore del Crocifisso, e dirassi, che il corpo di Francesco aggravasse l’anima di lui, mentre così fedelmente servendola, l’aiutava à elevarsi con altissime contemplationi ...”

50. *Ibid.*

51. *Ibid.*

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“What happened to the Seraphic Father is the same as what takes place when an artisan wants to cast a figure in wax or some other firmer material in order to make a copy of the original. To do this he makes a mould of the figure into which will be poured the material for the cast. He also uses fire, by virtue of which the material will liquefy and flow to fill the entire mould. ... Here is the mould of the Crucified Lord into which Francis flows, so that what results is *a living and perfect image of the Saviour*.”⁵² (italics mine)

Once again Dragondelli inverts the familiar image of the body as a vessel for the soul, and presents instead Christ as the vessel, the empty space, the mould, *into* which Francis’s body flowed, liquefied by the fire of love. The contact with Christ suggested here is different from that of an imprint; in this image Francis conforms to the contours of Christ’s body from within the emptiness, from within the divine soul. When the mould is cracked open what emerges is spiritual flesh, a re-formed body, redeemed, re-shaped into a perfect *imago dei*.

The valorization of Francis’s stigmatized body found in Dragondelli⁵³ is pushed even further by Tomaso Mancini Romano in a sermon delivered in the Church of the Confraternity of the Stigmata in 1721.⁵⁴ Mancini Romano says,

“Now what would you say gentlemen if today I pointed out to you a virtuous man who, without leaving the world had escaped from his prison, who rather than remain in the prison was no longer a prisoner? Yours and my Glorious Patriarch, the Seraph of Assisi, the stigmatized Francis is that virtuous man, the one who enjoyed a fate not experienced by other virtuous men. If like other just men Francis’s soul was a mystic Heaven, and if this Heaven was for a time enclosed in the clay of the body, when Christ on the summit of La Verna imprinted his holy wounds in the body of Francis, *his body was no longer a prison, no longer made of clay but became a Heaven. And the soul of Francis became a Heaven en-robed in another Heaven – Heaven within a Heaven*. And while other virtuous men are made of Heaven and earth, Francis became a

52. *Ibid.*, p. 64, “Accadde al Serafico Patriarca quello appunto, che vuol fare un’artefice, quando vuol’gettare qualche figura ò di cera; ò di altra piu soda materia, che riesca in tutto somigliante al primo originale. A ciò che, si provvede del cavo, come dicono, della stessa figura della materia atta ad esser gettata, e del fuoco, che con la sua virtù vada liquefacendo la materia, e la facci scorrere per tutte le parti. ... Ecco la scolatura, ò cavo del crocifisso Signore, dentro à cui Francesco v’è tutto scorrendo, per modo che n’ esce un vivo e perfetto ritratto dello stesso Salvatore.”

53. The valorization of Francis’s flesh did not inspire a more positive view of the body. Dragondelli remains conventional in his views and urges the devotee to render the body “spiritual”; the devotee must “render blood for blood” (“render sangue per sangue”) in the practice of flagellation. See pp. 99-100.

54. In the *Rituale*, op. cit. p. 104, it states that 14 preachers, more or less, should be invited to preach during the octave of the feast.

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combination of Heaven and Heaven, so that looking at the stigmatized Francis I see a Heaven, a Heaven which has not appeared, was not seen, not possessed, by anyone other than Francis.”⁵⁵ (italics mine)

If for Dragondelli Francis’s flesh was moulded by the divine, for Mancini Romano it *was* divine. He sees the body/soul equation altered in Francis; the saint ceased to be a combination of heaven and earth and became “a combination of Heaven and Heaven.” Mancini Romano invites us to gaze upon Francis and see what he sees, “looking at the stigmatized Francis I see a Heaven ...” In Francis, the divine spark was not hidden beneath the opaque “clay of the body,” it was visible to the naked eye, embedded on his flesh, transforming him into a “Heaven en-robed in another Heaven.”⁵⁶

In Dragondelli and Mancini Romano we find expression of the perpetual tension in Franciscan devotional literature between viewing Francis’s wounds as artifacts of Christ and the actual wounds of Christ. The second belief divinizes Francis’s flesh and results in statements as extreme as the following, made by Mancini Romano in his sermon on the Feast of the Stigmata:

55. Tomaso Mancini Romano, *Il cielo nuovo, ragionamento in onore delle stimmate di S. Francesco*, op. cit., pp.3-4, “Or che direte, ò Signori, se in questo giorno vi addito un Giusto, che senza partire dal mondo fù esente da questo carcere, anzi che rimanendo nella prigione, più non fù prigioniere. Il vostro, il mio gloriosissimo Patriarca, il Serafino d’Assisi, lo Stigmatizzato Francesco è quel’ fortunatissimo Giusto, che godette questa ventura non goduta dagli altri Giusti; Sì l’anima di Francesco come quella degli altri Giusti, era un mistico Cielo, ed anche questo Cielo stette per qualche tempo racchiuso nella creta del corpo, ma quando Cristo sù la sommità dell’Alvernia stampò nel corpo di Francesco le sue sacratissime piaghe, il corpo non fù più carcere, non fù più terra, divenne un Cielo; e l’anima di Francesco fù Cielo vestito d’un altro Cielo, fù Cielo dentro del Cielo; e la dove gl’altri Giusti sono un composto di Cielo, e Terra, Francesco si rese un composto di Cielo, e Cielo, di maniera che fissando le pupille nello Stigmatizzato Francesco, veggio un cielo non più comparso, un cielo non più veduto, un cielo non posseduto da altri, che da Francesco...”

56. *Ibid.*

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“Everyone knows one wound of Christ would suffice to reclaim an infinite number of souls ... now if Francis received embedded in his flesh not one but five of Christ’s wounds, if in his members is found all the currency needed for our redemption, how can anyone grasp how infinitely precious is the stigmatized body of Francis.”⁵⁷

Perhaps Mancini Romano was permitted to make pronouncements as extreme as saying Francis bore “all the currency needed for our Redemption” because a Church fighting back against Protestantism needed to enlist Francis’s stigmata as evidence of Christ’s sanction of the cult of saints and images. Mancini Romano says, “...let them burn the religious paintings, reduce to dust the sculptures and statues of the Crucified. Unless they remove Francis from this world, the image of Christ not only remains, but breathes and lives.”⁵⁸ For Mancini Romano, Christ created an image of himself in Francis so that it could be accessible to all, recognizable by all:

“Who does not yet recognize that he (Francis) is a likeness of the Creator, which is much more evident, more manifest, than the soul? Since the Creator’s image in our soul can only be detected by the enlightened intellect, yet the image of the Creator in Francis’s stigmatized limbs is perfectly recognizable to the weakest eye ... The evident likeness of the Creator in Francis’s stigmatized body raised him above all other beings, even raised him above the soul itself.”⁵⁹

The divine was visible on Francis’s flesh, raising it above the invisible soul. When Mancini Romano delivered his sermon in Rome during the octave of the Feast of the Stigmata, the relic of Francis’s blood was on the altar. All of his statements would have informed

57.*Ibid.*, p. 25, “per ricomprare anime infinite, non v’è chi nol sappia, è prezzo sovr’abbondantissimo una sola piaga del mio Signore, ... or se ottenne Francesco non una sola piaga di Cristo, ma cinque; se inviscerò nelle sue membra tutte le principali monete della nostra Redenzione, chi può concepire la preziosità dello stimmatizzato suo corpo?”

58.*Ibid.*, p. 9, “abbrugino à loro posta le Religiose pitture, disfaccino in polvere i rilievi, e le statue del Crocefisso, se non levano dal mondo Francesco, l’Imagine di Cristo non solamente resta, ma spira, e vive.” See Dragondelli, op. cit., pp. 4-5 for similar references to Francis being an image more powerful than those made of wood, stucco or bronze.

59.*Ibid.*, p. 11-12, “Chi non conosce, che ancor esso è un ritratto dell’Onnipotente? Chi non vede, che ancor esso è un effigie del Creatore, ed un effigie molto più chiara, molto più manifesta, che non è l’anima ragionevole? Perche il ritratto del Creatore nella nostra Anima sol bene lo discerne un’ illuminato intelletto, ma il ritratto del Creatore nell’impiagate membra di Francesco perfettamente lo riconosce ogni debil pupilla; ... l’immagine apertissima del Creatore nel corpo stimmatizzato di Francesco, lo sollevò sovra tutte le creature, e forse, forse lo sollevò sovra l’anima istessa ...”

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what people saw when they beheld the relic, when they addressed their prayers to it.

When Mancini tells the congregation “the wounds of all the Martyrs taken together would not produce so perfect a resemblance to God as the Stigmata of Francesco,” and that naked, it would be impossible to distinguish Francis from Christ, he is telling them that the blood relic on the altar was unique among blood relics, that it had extraordinary power.⁶⁰

Having described Francis’s body as divine, as a “Heaven,” Mancini Romano calls Francis’s blood “manna” from heaven. Bemoaning that it was no longer possible to see Francis’s body, he says,

“Let us rejoice that even now we may look lovingly upon Manna from our Heaven, which is to say the blood of Francis’s stigmata, not only do we contemplate it with our eyes, but also hear it with our spirit ... Francis’s blood is ceaselessly crying out ... Have Mercy.”⁶¹

Francis’s blood was ceaselessly interceding on behalf of the faithful, with the power of Christ’s own wounds. For Mancini Romano, Francis’s body was a Heaven and its blood relic was “manna,” sustenance for our senses deprived of the *exemplum* of Francis’s sanctity. He suggests there is no hierarchy, no real dichotomy between the sensual and the spiritual response of devotees to the saint, or to the relic “we contemplate with (it) our eyes” and “hear (it) with our spirit.”⁶² In defence of the cult of relics he seems to suggest that the relic and its liquefaction “spoke” directly to the devotee in a way that was immediately intelligible to the senses and the spirit.

Dragondelli also makes reference to the eloquence of Francis’s presence; he defends the eloquence of his silent *exemplum*. While Francis was alive, he says, it was enough for the faithful to see the pallor of his face, his modesty, the extreme poverty of the

60.*Ibid.*, p. 15, “perche tutte insieme le piaghe di tutti i Martiri non produrrebbero una somiglianza così esatta del Creatore, come han prodotta le Stimmate di Francesco ...”

61.*Ibid.*, p. 33, “Ralleghiamoci però, che anche al presente sù quell’Altare vagheggiamo del nostro Cielo la Manna, che è quanto dire il sangue delle Stimmate di Francesco, anzi non solo lo contempliamo colle pupille del corpo, ma di più l’ascoltiamo coll’orecchie dell’intelletto ... Grida incessantemente il sangue di Francesco ... grida Misericordia.”

62.*Ibid.*

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habit barely covering his ailing body, and even the most hardened heart would dissolve in tears. He adds that in the last two years of his life, Francis had himself carried through villages to incite people to embrace the Cross of Christ more by the sight of his wounds than with words. Like Mancini Romano, Dragondelli refers to the direct impact of Francis's stigmata, "while still living among us mortals, Francesco, with these prodigious furnaces open in his flesh was able to kindle all hearts ..." ⁶³ After his death, devotees could still be moved by Francis's *exemplum* ever present in his relic, evident in the liquefaction of his blood:

"Although the copious flow of blood from the wounds was interrupted upon his death, the blessed flame is not at all extinguished. It goes on to burn even more brightly in the continuous remembrance of it and more recently in the increase of a special devotion of the pious Confraternity to his stigmata and to the blood of the Blessed Father in their safekeeping. This blood, which hitherto is sometimes seen to boil whenever it liquefies, suffices to rekindle the coldest of hearts to divine love." ⁶⁴

For Dragondelli the liquefaction of the blood of the stigmata touches devotees in a way mere words could not; it sets their own blood on fire and re-ignites their love of Christ.

"When the blood of the Saviour had been recently spilt, faith was deeper, hope stronger, charity more ardent, the hearts of men were still "a boil." But with the passing of time, hearts become frozen, faith deadens, hope weakens, charity cools. ... In order to remedy the disproportionate growth of these ills in recent centuries, the Lord needed to refresh in the minds of the faithful the memory of the spilling of Precious Blood, and revive the ancient fervour of the Original Spirit of the Church. To this end Divine Providence called upon the incomparable man, new Seraph in the flesh, San Francesco of Assisi ... because the memory of Christ's Passion appeared extinct in human memory, the Lord was pleased to awaken and enflame the world with the tangible impression of the sacred wounds in the body of Francesco, and in this manner the blood of the Redeemer which seemed almost frozen in our hearts began to warm and boil over in a certain

63. Dragondelli, op. cit., p. 10, "Se dimorando Francesco ancora trà noi mortali, con queste prodigiose fornaci aperte nella sua carne accendeva ogni cuore ..."

64. *Ibid.* p. 11, "E quantunque il sangue, che prima scatoriva in abbondanza dalle piaghe, sia dopo la sua morte mancato, non è per tanto affatto estinto così beato incendio; Imperoche si conserva tuttavia più vivo dalla continua ricordanza, e dalla speciale divotione accresciuta in questi ultimi tempi da' divoti Confrati delle sue Stimate; oltre che l'istesso sangue del Santo Padre da medesimi Confrati custodito, che fin' hora liquefatto, e come bollente tal volta si vede, e bastevole ad accender ogni più gelato cuore alla divina carità."

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sense in our memories. This is thanks to the blood of the Seraphic Father, which for this reason is preserved liquefied and at times appears as though boiling, thereby confirming what Ubertino said ... "The blood spilt by the Saviour will not perish from memory while it reheats in the Stigmata of Francesco."⁶⁵

For Dragondelli Christ presented the world with a new image of his Passion, in order to touch and move the faithful so the "blood of the Redeemer ... (would) boil over" in their memories. He creates an intimate link between the warmth the devotee feels, the melting of his heart, and the melting and boiling of Francis's blood. It is as though momentarily, the hearts and blood of Christ, Francis and his devotees were ritually united through the liquefaction of the relic. Just as the Duke of Acquasparta had observed two drops liquefying and melting the rest of the blood on contact, Francis's liquefied blood "melts" the blood of the devotees who see it. And like Pope Gregory IX when he awoke from his dream in which Francis filled an ampoule with his blood, the devotee who sees the relic burns with zeal.⁶⁶ Dragondelli ends the passage by quoting Ubertino da Casale who conflates the blood of Francis and Christ, "The blood spilt by the Saviour ... reheats in the Stigmata of Francesco."⁶⁷

65. *Ibid.*, pp. 2-4, "Quando il sangue del Salvatore poco prima sparso ancor'bolliva ne' cuori humani, la fede era più viva, la speranza più vigorosa, la carità più ardente: ma hora che nel progresso del tempo si è quasi gelato nelle nostre menti, la fede è come morta, la speranza quasi estinta, e la carità assai raffreddata : ... A porger adunque opportune rimedio à si gran male in questi ultimi secoli à dismisura cresciuto; conveniva, che il Signore rinnovasse nelle menti de'suoi fedeli lo spargimento del suo pretioso sangue dalla loro memoria quasi affatto cancelato; accioche con tal ricordanza i Cristiani ritornassero all'antico fervore, e si conformassero allo spirito primiero della Chiesa. A tal'effetto fù destinato dalla divina provvidenza l'incomparabil'huomo, nuovo Serafino in carne San Francesco d'Assisi ... Perche pareva già estinta nelle menti humane la memoria della Passione di Christo, si compiacque il Signore d'eccitare, e di riscaldare tal ricordanza nel Mondo con l'impressione manifesta delle sacre cicatrici nel corpo di Francesco: e in tal guisa il sangue del Redentore, che pareva quasi gelato ne' nostri cuori cominciò a riscaldarsi, e à subbollire in un certo modo nelle nostre menti, merce il sangue del Serafico Padre, che perciò si conserva tuttavia liquefatto e tal' hora apparisce come bollente, avverandosi con ciò il detto del divoto Ubertino ... "Non perira colla scordanza de gli huomini il sangue sparso dal Salvatore, mentre che nelle Stimmate di Francesco par che di nuovo s'incalorisca."

66. LMj (The Miracles) 1,6. Bonaventure writes that after the Pontiff's dream, "From that day he began to feel such devotion towards this sacred miracle, and to burn with such a zeal for it, that he would not allow anyone to obscure these signs with arrogant presumption without striking him with a severe rebuke."

67. Dragondelli, op. cit., p. 4.

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Thus far we have examined evidence from the cult of the blood relics of the stigmata in Castelveccchio Subequo and Rome, which reveals the meaning the relics had for their custodians and their devotees. In Castelveccchio Subequo we saw how a powerful link was created between the blood of Francis and the blood of the Passion when they were placed side by side in the same reliquary. We saw how the miracle of the liquefaction of the relic was connected with the liquefaction of the blood relic of Christ on Good Friday, as though it was the same blood, worthy of the same veneration. In a sermon delivered during the Feast of the Stigmata, with the relic visible on the altar, Francis's wounds were described as the actual wounds of Christ, rendering his body a "Heaven" and the blood relic, manna from that "Heaven." Francis's stigmatized body was described as a spiritualized body which surpassed even the soul, creating the impression in the devotee that the relic before them was "spiritual matter." The distinction made between the blood of the martyrs and the blood of Francis and the suggestion that Francis's blood flowed from wounds which contained all the currency for Redemption, divinized Francis's blood. The cults of the blood relics of the stigmata in Castelveccchio Subequo and Rome suggest attempts on the part of Franciscans to establish not just a similarity-relation between the blood of Francis and the blood of Christ, but an identity-relation, distinguishing their cults from that of other blood relics.

In both Dragondelli and Mancini Romano we found a defence of a devotional path that engaged the senses; both spoke of the "eloquence" of Francis's stigmatized body, the "Living Image of Christ." I have left the most visually eloquent of the blood relics of the stigmata for last, the relic in the magnificent 13th-14th-century Church of St. Francis in Ascoli Piceno. The relic is in a silver reliquary decorated with cherubs created by Pietro Gaia (1570-1621).⁶⁸ (fig. 11) If in most cases it is the reliquary which lends drama to otherwise ordinary-looking fragments of bone or drops of blood, in this case the contrary

68. The historical information in this and the following paragraphs are from G. Parisciani, "Il sangue di San Francesco come quello di San Gennaro?", *op. cit.*

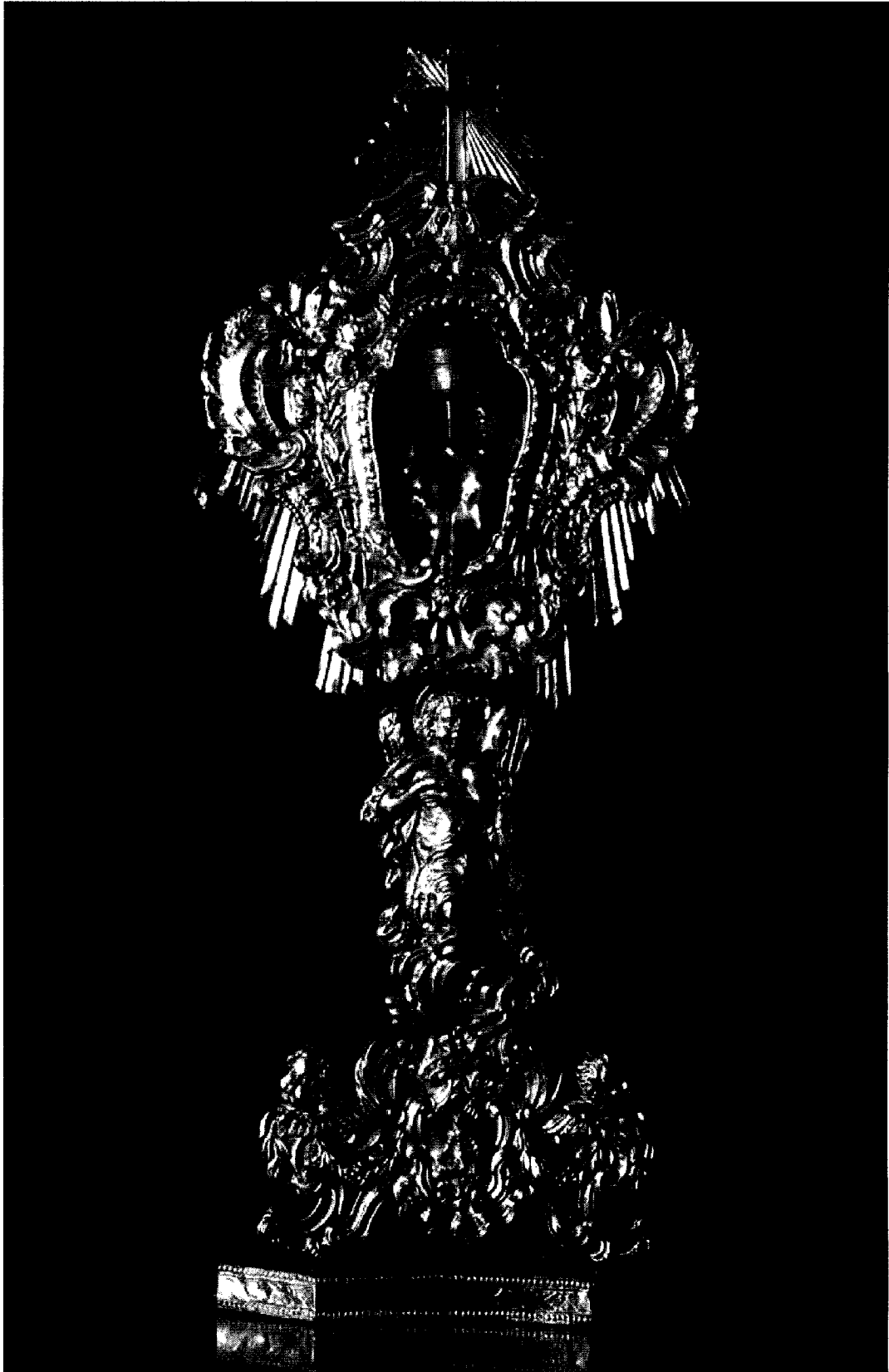


Figure 11

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is true. At the centre of this very standard reliquary is a glass compartment with two cherubs holding a very extraordinary-looking relic. (fig. 12) The blood in the ampoule appears perfectly liquid.

The blood relic in Ascoli Piceno is believed to be a gift made to the Church by the Franciscan Pope Nicholas IV (1288-1292). The only remaining record of the relic is a parchment believed to be from the 13th century which mentions the blood, (*de sanguine stigmatum Sti. Francisci*). It seems incomprehensible that this extraordinary relic which still appears “liquid and not coagulated,” as Ilario Altobelli, mathematician and friend of Galileo described it in 1620, should have been all but forgotten for centuries.⁶⁹ According to Gustavo Parisciani, the relic had been stored in the Church’s archives during the Napoleonic suppression of Religious Orders (1797-1810). Afterwards its “miraculous qualities” were forgotten and today it is kept in the Church’s sacristy, taken out only for the Feast of St. Francis and the Feast of the Stigmata.⁷⁰

The blood relic in Ascoli Piceno recapitulates visually many of the observations made of Francis’s wounds and their relics in the sources we have examined. The inexplicably liquid blood looks like spiritual matter, the relic of a spiritualized body. Held between two angels whose hands present the relic, without touching it, it appears to inhabit eternity. (fig. 13) When I visited Ascoli Piceno to examine the relic, I was allowed to hold it. I could not resist the impulse to tilt the reliquary to see if the blood would move. It did not; it looked perfectly liquid yet it did not move. The experience was awkward; there was an incongruity between the miraculous appearance of the relic and my easy access to it, the casualness of the context. The experience underscored the crucial role of cult and ritual in providing the lens through which we experience religious objects.

69. See *ibid.*

70. See *ibid.*

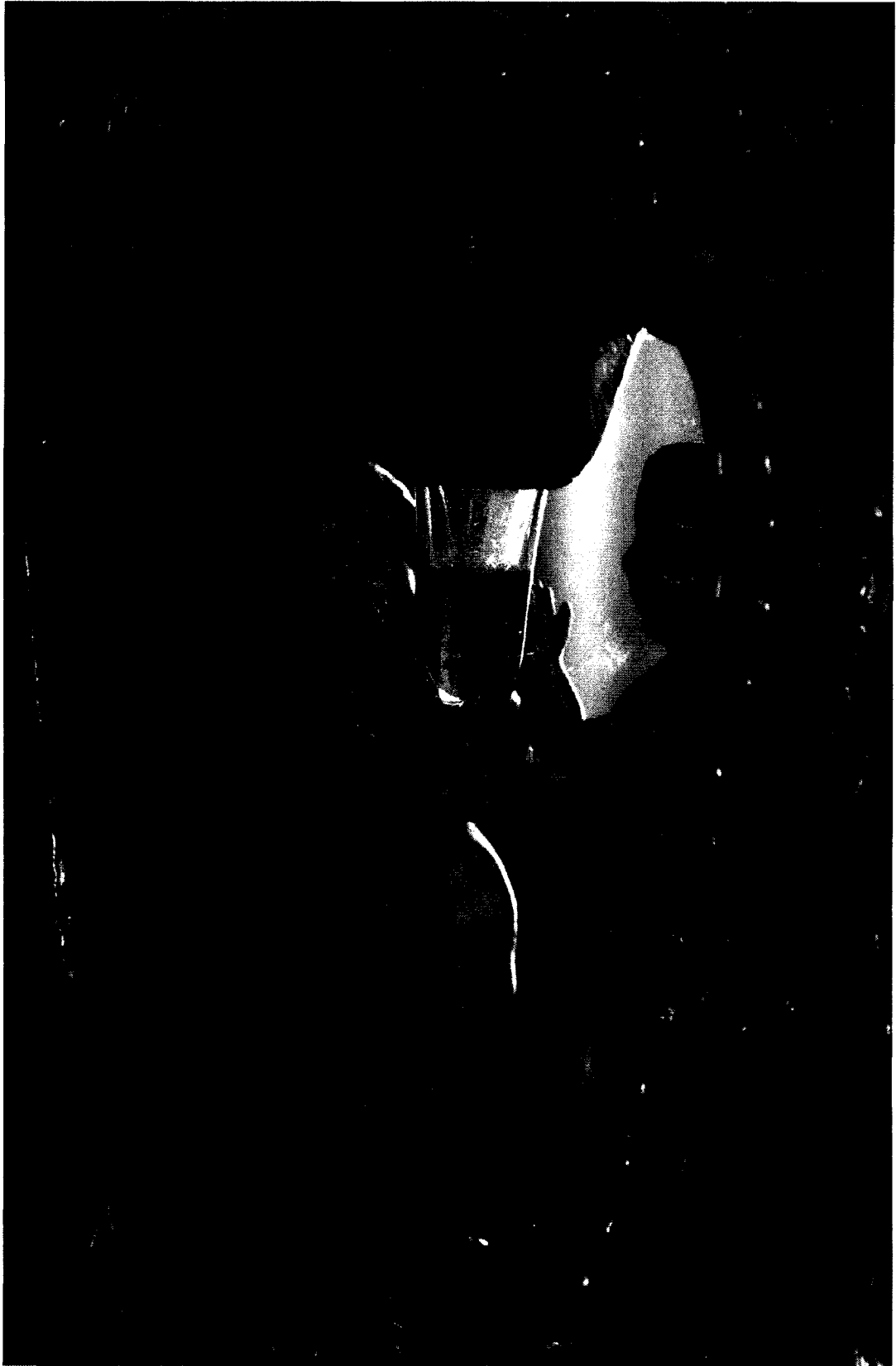


Figure 12



Figure 13

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Unlike the relic in Castelvechio Subequo which is still carried in procession as it was in the Middle Ages, and the relic in Rome whose celebrations and stories remain preserved in the Confraternity's dusty archives, the relic in Ascoli Piceno appeared orphaned. Separated from its narratives, from any trace of its history, from the sermons on its miraculous appearance, or traces of the devotion it once inspired, its identity was lost and the meaning of its extraordinary appearance remained unintelligible. The relic of St. Francis's blood which appears most alive, most visually eloquent, remains today the most silent.

Chapter 4

The Contact Relics of the Side Wound - Francis of Assisi, "Living Eucharist"

"Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe"

John 20:27

The most visually dramatic and symbolically rich of all the relics of the stigmata of St. Francis of Assisi is the relic known as the *camoscio*, the leather bandage that Francis wore to protect his side wound from the coarseness of his habit.¹ The relic, part of the collection of the Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi, is in a solar-shaped monstrance.² (figs. 1, 2) At first sight the *camoscio* appears damaged, the centre is torn. The piece that would have made contact with the side wound, the most sacred part of the relic, is missing. But the longer one observes it the more the tear at the centre of the relic emerges as the "content" framed by the reliquary. This chapter will propose that the Eucharistic monstrance presents the *camoscio* not merely as a contact relic of the side wound of Francis, but as the size and shape of the side wound itself. The significance of the Eucharistic framing of the relic will be explored in light of: a) the medieval devotion to the measurement of the side wound of Christ (the *mensura vulneris*) and b) the Eucharistic symbolism of the side wound. Finally I will examine a sermon delivered in Rome in 1672 by the Jesuit Antonio Vieira, who compares Stigmatization with Transubstantiation. This chapter will argue that the *camoscio*, framed by a Eucharistic monstrance, presents Francis's side wound as consecrated, as though it were a miraculous host. It presents Francis's stigmatized body as a

1. See Schmucki, (1991) op. cit., p. 239, note 52. "The chamois is a soft, pliable skin made from the antelope of the same name to cover the wound in the side."

2. The *camoscio* relic is on display at the Relic Museum of the Lower Church of the Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi.

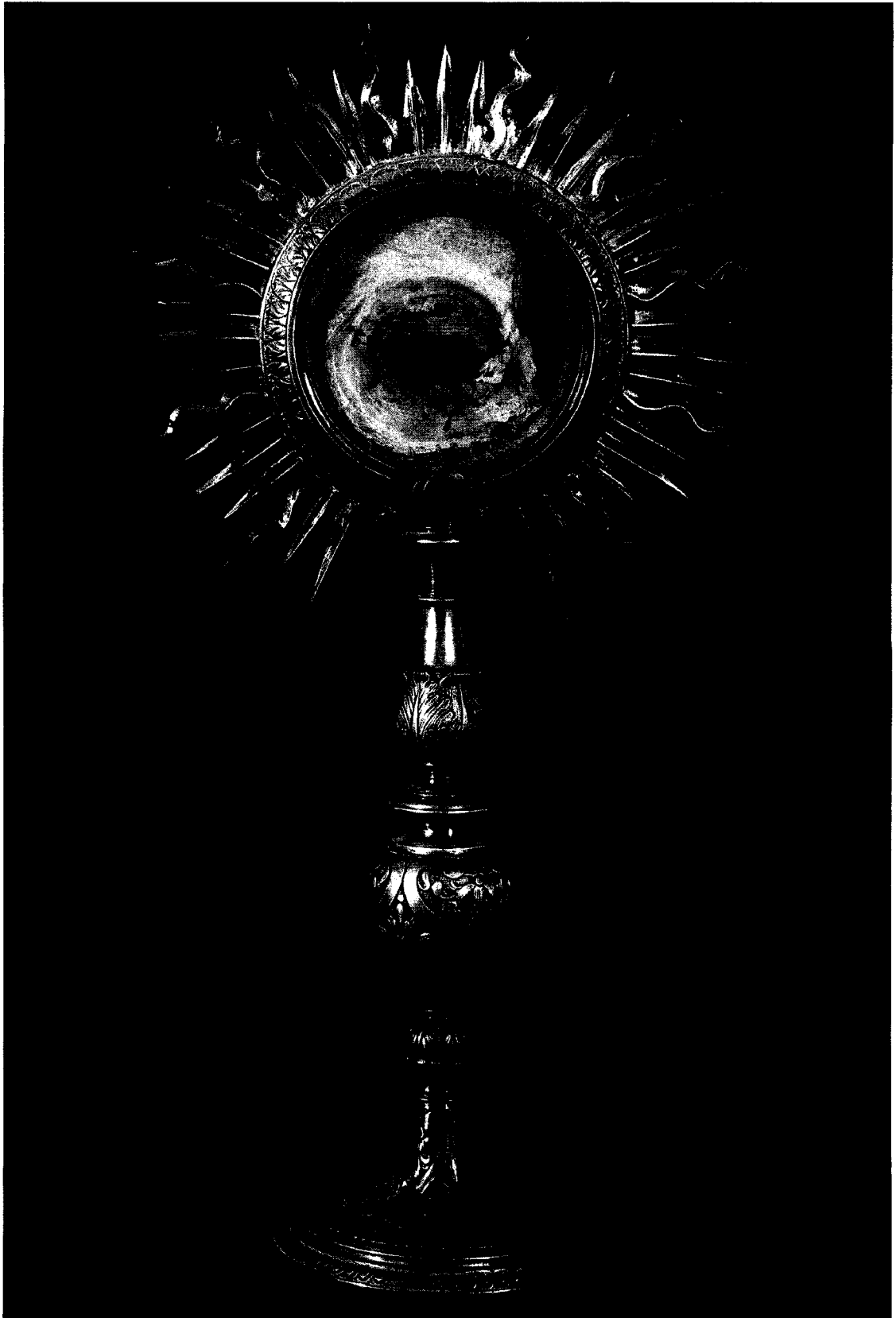


Figure 1

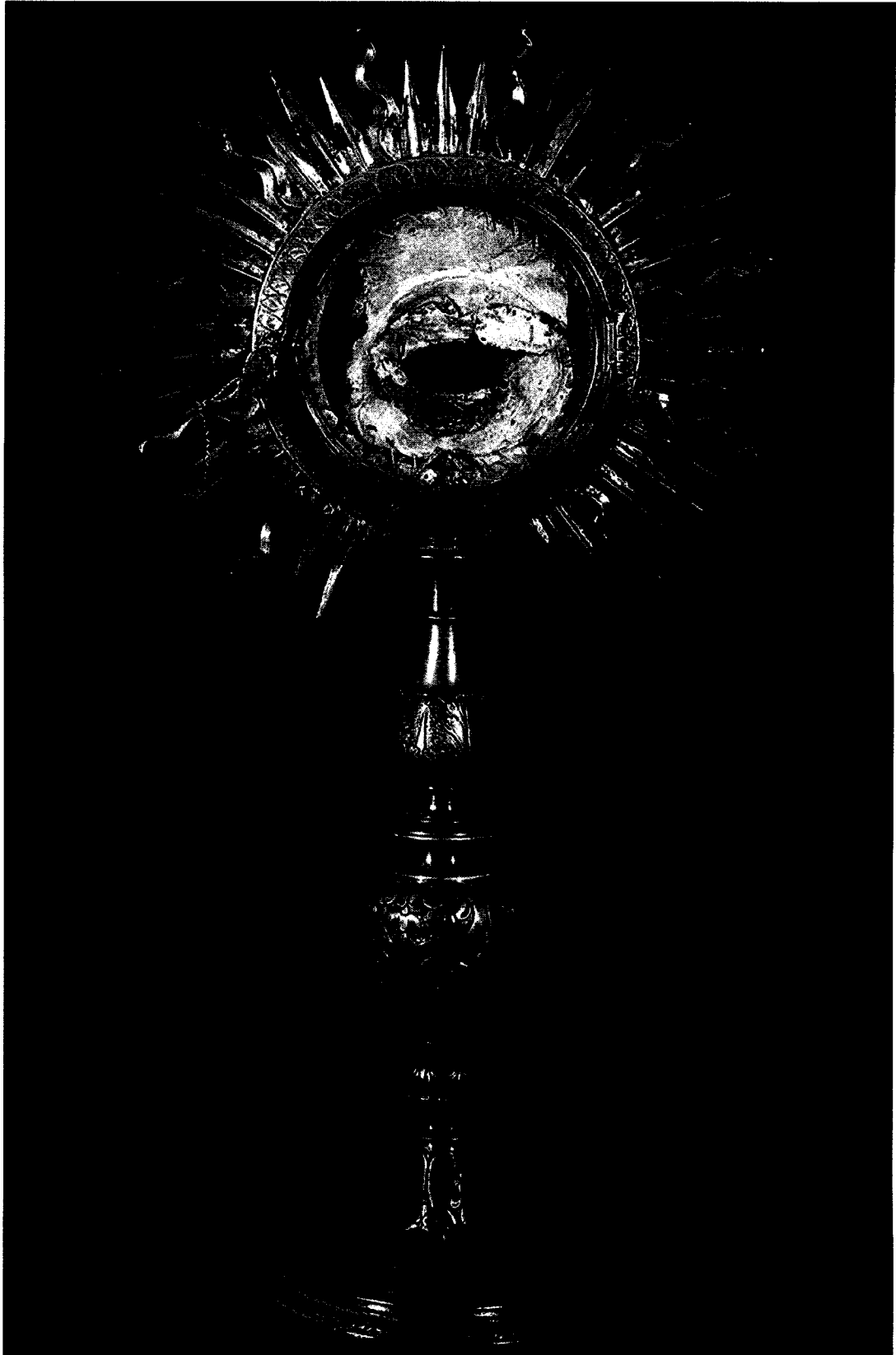


Figure 2

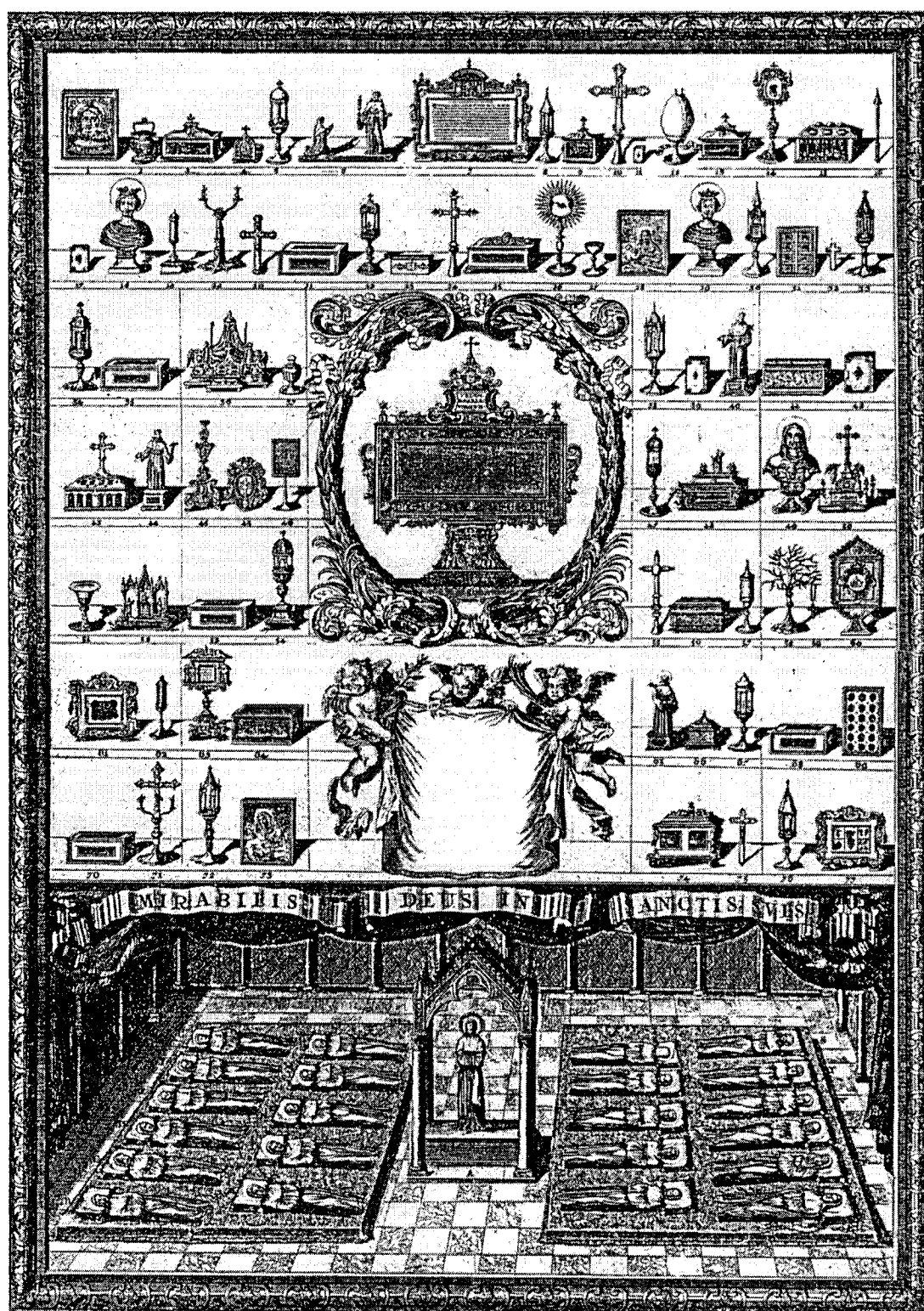


Figure 3

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living Eucharist.

The silver solar-shaped monstrance which frames the *camoscio* dates from 1602 and was commissioned by Father Cornelio Rosa, whose emblem is engraved on the pedestal.³ We find the monstrance depicted in a poster of The Treasure of the Basilica from 1700.⁴ (fig. 3) First introduced in the 1400's, the solar-shaped ostensory represented a trend away from monstrances in the form of a cross or statue of Christ, with the host sometimes exposed behind glass, over the side wound.⁵ According to Timothy Verdon, by the mid-15th century most Eucharistic monstrances were shaped like the sun, symbol of Christ, "The true light, which enlightens everyone," (John 1:9). Timothy Verdon suggests they may have been modeled on the rays that surround the holy name of Jesus - *IHS*, on the tablet of St. Bernardino of Siena.⁶ (fig. 4) The Eucharistic monstrance that frames the *camoscio* has the same straight and undulating rays of St. Ber-



Figure 4

3. See Mariangeli, op.cit., p.92.

4. I owe a debt of gratitude to Father Pasquale Magro, Director of the Library of the Sacro Convento in Assisi, for pointing this out to me and showing me an original poster preserved in the Library. See P. Magro, *Basilica of Saint Francis in Assisi, Treasure Museum F.M. Perkins Collection, Origins and Evolution, Artistic Itinerary, Assisi*, p. 21.

5. See T. Verdon, "Il "pane vivo": la teologia, le immagini, il percorso", *Panis Vivus*, (Siena, 1994), p. 45. See also E. Rupin, *L'oeuvre de Limoges*, (Paris, 1890), p. 504, "Celle de soleil, indiquant une forme spéciale, date de l'époque à laquelle les orfèvres donnèrent au contour de l'hostie l'apparence de cet aster projetant des rayons alternativement droits et flamboyants; on la trouve employée pour la première fois dans l'Inventaire du Trésor de la Sainte-Chapelle de Bourges dressé en 1405." See M. Andrieu "Aux origines du culte du Saint-Sacrement, reliquaires et monstrances eucharistiques," *Analecta Bollandiana*, 68, 1950.

6. See Verdon, op. cit., p. 45. For a brief summary of the cult of the tablet of St. Bernardino see "Le trigramme *IHS* et le culte du Nom de Jésus," A. Vauchez, *Histoire des saints et de la sainteté chrétienne*, (Paris 1986), Tome VII, p.80.

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nardino's tablet. It presents the *camoscio* ablaze with Seraphic fire.

The earliest description of the *camoscio* to my knowledge dates from ca.1338, in the Liturgical Catalogue of Relics of the Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi.⁷ The Liturgical Catalogue was used for the yearly blessing with the relics; the description of each relic was read aloud as the priest held it up to perform the blessing. The *camoscio* was described in the following way, *Item est unum corium perfusum sanguine, cum quo cooperiebat vulnus lateralis, et viditur esse lanceatum*, (Here is a piece of leather, soaked with blood, which covered the side wound and it appears as if pierced with a lance.)⁸ We know therefore that the *camoscio* had its lance-shaped tear as early as the 14th century. Perhaps, as Bonaventura Mariangeli suggests, the missing piece was cut out because it was soaked with blood, and constitutes the blood relics of Francis listed in the Inventories of the Basilica in Assisi.⁹ It is unlikely however that the shape of the tear was accidental since its description, "as if pierced with a lance," corresponds exactly to the description of Francis's side wound found in 13th-century sources. In the Encyclical Letter which first announced the stigmata to the world, Brother Elias wrote, "His side appeared pierced with a lance (*lanceatum apparuit*) and it often oozed blood."¹⁰ Thomas of Celano echoed Elias when he wrote, "His right side, was marked with an oblong red scar as if pierced by a lance ..."¹¹ It is clear that the *camoscio* described "as if pierced with a lance" was meant

7. This inventory was published by Michele Faloci Pulignani, in "Le Sacre Reliquie della Basilica di San Francesco in Assisi nel secolo XIV," *MF*, I, 1901, pp. 145-150.

8. See *ibid.*, p. 148. The entry preceding the reliquary with the *camoscio* includes, *pelle que fuit super vulnus lateralis* (the skin which was on the side wound), referring perhaps to the scab which formed over the side wound.

9. See Mariangeli, (1916), *op. cit.*, p. 95.

10. Quoted from Schmucki, *op. cit.*, p. 264.

11. 3C, 4. See Also Bonaventure, *LMj* Chapter 13, "Also his right side, as if pierced with a lance, was marked with a red wound from which his sacred blood often flowed, moistening his tunic and underwear."

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to reveal the shape of Francis's wound, as though the contact relic had somehow become marked with the outline of the wound it had pressed against.

In an Inventory from 1473, the *camoscio* was in a casket of gilt bronze, *Item unum tabernaculum de ramine inauratum in quo est camussium quod sanctus Franciscus portavit super vulnus laterale*, (Here is a tabernacle (shrine) of gilt bronze in which is the chamois that St. Francis wore on the side wound).¹² A new reliquary was commissioned for the *camoscio* in 1479. The original contract still exists and begins, "Wishing for the honour and glory of our Patriarch St. Francis, to make a shrine that is fitting and worthy for the *camoscio* that St. Francis placed on the side wound ..." ¹³ We do not know whether this reliquary was ever made, but records exist of the silver objects collected to be melted down to provide the silver for it.¹⁴

The *camoscio* is among the relics of the stigmata associated with the care of Francis's wounds. Thomas of Celano tells us that Francis wore woolen socks to protect the wounds on his feet, "... placing a piece of leather over the wounds to soften the wool's roughness." ¹⁵ Though the early sources do not mention the *camoscio* specifically, they do make reference to pieces of cloth (*pezze*) placed over the side wound by Brother Leo to stop the bleeding. The following is from the *Actus*, Consideration 3:

12. See Mariangeli, op. cit., p. 93.

13. "Volendo per honore et gloria del patriarca San Francesco fare uno tabernacolo condecante e degno dove se allochi el camoscio quale san Francesco portava alla piaga del costato ..." The contract is reprinted in G. Fratini, *Storia della Basilica e del Convento di S. Francesco in Assisi*, (Prato, 1882), p. 279-81.

14. The donations of silver objects to be melted down for the silver to make the reliquary are listed in the Inventory of the Basilica of the Sacro Convento in Assisi from 1473, published in F. Pennacchi, "I Più Antichi Inventari della Sacristia del sacro convento di Assisi - Bibli Com. Di Assisi, cod. 337" AFH, 1914.

15. 2C, XCVIII.

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“And although those very holy wounds, inasmuch as they were imprinted on him by Christ, gave him very great joy in his heart, nevertheless they gave unbearable pain to his flesh and physical senses. Consequently, being forced by necessity, he chose Br. Leo, who was simpler and purer than the others. And he revealed everything to him, and he let him see and touch those holy wounds. And St. Francis entrusted his wounds only to him to be touched and rebound with new bandages ... Sometimes it happened that when Br. Leo was changing the bandage of the wound in the side, St. Francis, because of the pain which he felt from the loosening of the bloody bandage, would put his hand on Br. Leo’s chest over his heart. And from the contact of those holy hands on which were imprinted the venerable Stigmata, Br. Leo would feel such sweetness of devotion in his heart that he nearly fainted and fell to the ground.”¹⁶

Francis’s wounds are often depicted as iconic, Christ-like and miraculous. This passage however reveals his everyday experience of the wounds, the “unbearable pain” Francis felt, his vulnerability and need of Brother Leo’s help to bandage the wounds and stop the bleeding. It reveals that Francis’s stigmata were real wounds, requiring the same care and causing the same pain as any ordinary wound. Bandages would stick to the dried blood causing him “pain ... from the loosening of the bloody bandages.”¹⁷ The bandages were not discarded like ordinary bandages however; they were preserved by the friars and are found listed in Inventory Catalogues as the (*pezze*) “the pieces of cloth with which he (Brother Leo) dried his wounds.”¹⁸ Like these pieces of cloth, the *camoscio* directs our attention to the fact that Francis’s wounds were open, bleeding and required daily care.

Another relic of the care of the side wound is the *impiastro*, the Italian word for

16. Quoted in Schmucki, op. cit., p. 223, note 14, Schmucki gives other sources on the care of the wounds, “see the anonymous *Vita Fratris Leonis AF* 3: 65-74: “How only he touched the wounds of Blessed Francis” (68); Bartholomew of Pisa, *De Conformitate* 4: 189-190; 5: 371-72, 394-95: “Br. Leo very frequently saw these Stigmata, because he placed dressings between the nails and the flesh every day except Friday, and changed the wound in the side. In fact, Blessed Francis many times exposed his hands to Br. Leo’s gaze and when Br. Leo looked at them, he experienced the greatest consolation.” ”

17. See *ibid.* According to Schmucki, “How far the later writers report the truth when they discuss the particular care which Br. Leo gave to the wounds of St. Francis is hard to determine, especially since it is difficult to separate the chaff of fable from the grain of historical truth.”

18. The entry is found in Inventory #41 of the - *Inventari alfabetici della basilica e sacristia di S. Francesco, ordinati dal P. Filippo Gesualdo, generale O.F.M. nell 1600*, p. 101 and it reads: “Un tabernacolo d’argento nel quale vi è una scritta fatta per mano di S. Francesco qual mando a fra Leone: in cima ci sono delle pezze con le quale egli asciuttava le sue piaghe.” (A silver tabernacle in which was the (note) hand-written by Saint Francis which he sent to Brother Leo: on top of which are pieces of cloth with which he dried his wounds).

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poultice or herbal dressing made by spreading a paste of medicinal herbs on a linen cloth. According to Franciscan tradition, Clare prepared such herbal dressings and sent them to Francis to place on the *camoscio* before applying it on the side wound.¹⁹ The *impiastro* has been carefully preserved to this day by Clare's Sisters in the Monastery of St. Clare in Assisi.²⁰ It is in a silver casket with the stigmata in silver relief on the cover, donated to the Bishop of Assisi in 1596 by Cardinal Carlo Borromeo.²¹(fig 5) The earliest known mention of the *impiastro* is in the 14th-century *De Conformitate* of Bartholomew of Pisa, "Blessed Clare saw the stigmata of St. Francis while he was still alive and (she) made an *impiastro* for the side wound which today can be seen in the Monastery of St. Clare in Assisi."²² In the *Annales Minorum*, Wadding reports that he saw the *impiastro* in Assisi, but in his description he uses *impiastro* and *camoscio* interchangeably:

19. According to Bonaventure, while a number of brothers saw Francis's wounds while he was still alive, Clare saw them after his death. See LMj. Chapter 13.

20. I am very grateful to Sister Chiara Anastasia Hill of the Monastery of St. Clare in Assisi for allowing me to see and photograph the relic of the *impiastro* and sharing her knowledge of its historical sources.

21. The original note with the reliquary is preserved in Archivio vescovile di Assisi, Scans. IV, vol. 34, c. 118. I am indebted to Sister Anastasia for this information.

22. Fra Bartolomaeo da Pisa, *De Conformitate vitae beati Francisci ad vitam Domini Jesu*, (1385-1390) Fructus XXXI (Lib III Fruct III) *Beata Clara vidit stigmata beati Francisci dum viveret et vulneri laterali emplastrum quoddam ipsa fecit, ut hodie ostenditur in monasterio Sanctae Clarae de Assisio*

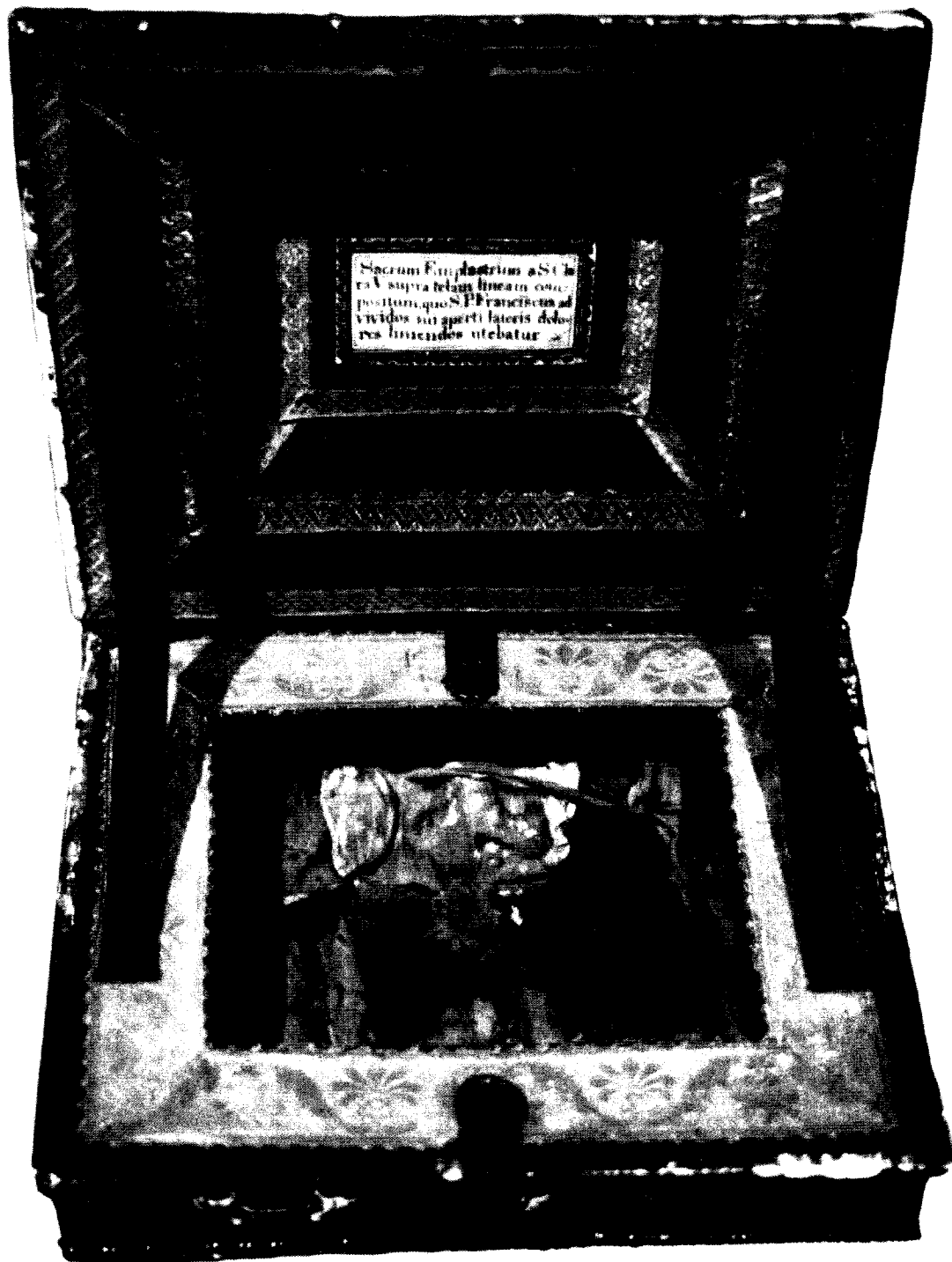


Figure 5

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In the Church of St. George of the Poor Clares of Assisi, I saw preserved a kind of cataplasm or poultice (*impiastro*) // in old vernacular Italian *camocium*, which the most Holy Virgin Clare made for the holy man to soothe the pain of the wound and to stop the bleeding.”²³

The *impiastro* is the most ephemeral of the relics of the stigmata, all that remains are shreds of stained linen. The herbal balm prepared by Clare “to soothe the pain of the wound” tells the story not only of the daily pain Francis endured but of Clare’s pain in seeing him suffer. In an age associated with harsh asceticism inspired by Christ’s wounds, the *impiastro* tells the story of Clare’s attempts to soothe the pain and heal a wound inflicted on Francis by Christ himself. A 17th-century guide to Assisi includes a description of the *camoscio* which also mentions the *impiastro*. It reads:

“A silver star with a piece of chamois medicated by St. Clare, which Francis wore on the sacred side wound, with the blood, the herbal dressing and the *imprint of the wound*, is carried in solemn procession through the streets of the city on the Feast of the Stigmata on the 17th of the month of September.”²⁴ (italics mine)

The author of the guide, G. Ciofi, suggests that traces of blood and the poultice made by Clare were visible on the *camoscio*. More importantly he draws the pilgrims’ attention to

23. Luca Wadding, *Annales Minorum* 1224 n.XVIII, vol.II *In ecclesia sancti Georgii clarissarum Assisii vidi adhuc servari quoddam genus cataplasmatum, seu emplastrum // vulgo italico antiquo “camocium” dictum, quod ad leniendum laterali plagae dolorem, et sanguinem retinendum viro sancto fecit virgo sanctissima Clara*. The relic is also mentioned in the 15th-century *La Franceschina*, op. cit., chapter 8. “... alla piaga del lato fece un certo impiastro, el quale anche se mostra nel monasterio de Santa Chiara d’Assesi.” (“she made for the side wound a kind of poultice which is also exposed in the monastery of St. Clare in Assisi.”) Antonio Daza in *Descrizione delle stimmate* (1619) op. cit., p. 120 seems to be describing either the *impiastro* or the *camoscio* when he writes: “La Benedetta S. Chiara vivendo il nostro Padre San Francesco meritò vedere le piaghe de’ piedi, e delle mani, e per quella del costato fece di sua propria mano uno incerato, ò socrocio, per conservarla più guardata, e più difesa dall’asprezza dell’habito: il quale si conserva, e si mostra, come pietosa reliquia nel Convento di S. Chiara d’Ascesi.” (“While our Father Francis was still alive, the Blessed St. Clare deserved to see the wounds in his feet and in his hands. For the side wound she herself made an oilcloth or (socrocio?) to hide it and protect it against the coarseness of the habit. This is preserved and shown as a holy relic in the Convent of St. Clare in Assisi.”)

24. See G. Ciofi, *Santuari della Serafica città d’Assisi, con la Notizia de Corpi Santi, Reliquie insigni & memorie, ch’ivi si conservano*, (Assisi, 1664), pp 23-24. “Una Stella d’Argento con una Pezza di camoscio quale S. Francesco portava alla Sacra Piaga del Costato, che S. Chiara gli la medicava, con il Sangue, con l’impiastro, & impressione della Piaga, la quale con solenne Processione si porta per la Città la festa delle Sacre Stimati alli 17 del mese di Settembre. “

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the tear and informs them it is an imprint of the side wound.

While the *camoscio*, like the *impiastro*, is associated with the care of the side wound, in its Eucharistic frame its meaning becomes interwoven with the complex theology and symbolism of the side wound of Christ, source of the Eucharist. The *camoscio* should be considered in light of the devotion to the side wound of Christ. The Stigmatization of St. Francis would act as a powerful catalyst for the medieval devotion to the wounds of Christ. According to Louis Gougaud, “C’est de la stigmatization de l’Alverne, “le grand miracle” ... que date véritablement l’avènement triomphal des cinq plaies dans la vénération du moyen age.”²⁵ For the first ten centuries of its history, Christian piety had not been especially focused on the Five Wounds. The Gospels speak of Christ’s wounds in two instances, the piercing of Christ’s side with a lance and the Resurrected Christ presenting the Apostle Thomas the wounds as proof of his identity, “Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” (John 20:25-27) It was as proof of the Resurrection that the Church Fathers focused on the wounds of Christ. They would refer to the permanence of the wounds on Christ’s Glorified Body in polemics around Christ’s human/divine nature. But a real devotion to the Five Wounds would have to wait for the medieval period and its intense focus on Christ’s humanity and the Passion. If St. Bernard made Passion Devotion part of the life of a monk, it was the preaching of the Franciscans, charged with enthusiasm for the stigmata, which spread the devotion for the Passion and the Five Wounds beyond the cloister. The devotion to “woundedness” resonated with the difficult lives of medieval believers, and from the 13th century onwards, devotion to the

25. Dom Louis Gougaud, *Dévotions et Pratiques Ascétiques du Moyen Age*, (Paris, 1925), pp. 79-80.

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Five Wounds found expression in devotional practices accessible to all.²⁶ The devout could attend the Mass of the Five Wounds and Celebrate the Feast of the Five Wounds.²⁷ Devotion could be expressed by simple gestures like genuflecting five times or fasting for five days.²⁸ Books of Hours were full of prayers to the Five Wounds. A simple gauge of the extent of the diffusion of the devotion into every day life is that it entered colloquial speech as a curse (Zounds!).²⁹

A devotion widespread in the 14th and 15th centuries was the devotion to the *mensura vulneris*, the measurement of the side wound of Christ. Life-sized images of the side wound appeared on woodcut prints and in Books of Hours and images of the wounds, particularly the side wound, were carried for protection as amulets. The devotion was part of a medieval fascination with the precise length and breadth of *praesentia*. The measurements of Christ and the Virgin, the Holy Sepulcher and the Cross, were all preserved as treasures in relic collections and listed in relic Inventories. Holy pictures and prayer scrolls with the measurements of Christ were carried by the devout for protection.³⁰ Especially popular was the measurement of the side wound, usually estimated as 7 cm.³¹ One

26. On the pessimism that pervaded Europe after the Black Death, see M. Meiss, *Painting in Florence and Siena after the Black Death, The Arts, Religion and Society in the Mid-Fourteenth Century*, (1951).

27. See M. Rubin, *Corpus Christi* op. cit., p. 394 "Masses dedicated to the wounds first appear from the early fourteenth century in sections of votive masses in missals, and in private books of prayer, often accompanied by appropriate pictures of open gashes. Interest in the wounds developed into a special devotion; and further into a feast with its mass *Humiliavit* and indulgences in the fourteenth century."

28. See Gougaud, op. cit., pp. 87 ff, for more examples.

29. See *Ibid.*, p. 88, "Zounds" is the contraction of "Christ's Wounds" and is often used by Shakespeare.

30. See L. Gougaud, "La Prière dite de Charlemagne", *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique*, vol. XX, 1924.

31. *Ibid.* p. 223 "Le rouleau Harl T ii, qui mesure 1m22 de long sur 9cm de large, contient, outre la mesure du corps du Christ représentée par une croix en forme de Tau ... la mesure de la plaie du côté droit du Sauveur, laquelle est représentée par un losange peint en rouge, long de 7 cm."

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example is from a 15th-century Book of Hours in which the wound is presented diagonally framed by a lozenge-shaped enclosure.³²(fig. 6) The images of this measurement



Figure 6

were not seen as symbols of the side wound, but as relics, remnants of the wound, the exact outline of its *praesentia*. This is clearly illustrated in a Parisian Book of Hours, ca. 1485-1500 in which an image of the side wound of Christ is in a reliquary, carried by two angels.³³ (fig.7)

According to Louis Gougaud, “Il arrive aussi que cette forme soit indiquée, sur les estampes du XVe siècle, par une simple découpure pratiquée dans le papier.”³⁴ This is what the devotee was meant to see in the *camoscio* relic, a cut out of the wound, an outline of the “tear” in Francis’s flesh.³⁵ The piece of chamois looks as though it were Francis’s own skin stretched onto

32. See W. Sparrow Simpson, “On the Measure of the Wound in the Side of the Redeemer,” *The Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, December, 1874.

33. See Delaisée, Marrow, de Wit, *Illuminated Manuscripts*, (Fribourg, 1977), p. 469. For an in-depth analysis of devotion to the measurements of the side wound of Christ, see David S. Arford., “The Passion Measured: A Late-Medieval Diagram of the Body of Christ,” *The Broken Body, Passion Devotion in Late-Medieval Culture*, (Groningen, 1998). See p. 213, “... the woodcut employs these measurements in order to establish both a spatial and a devotional precision, exemplifying a late-medieval tension between the rendering of symbolic space and ‘real’ space.” On the side wound of Christ and gender see C. Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, (1982) pp. 120-123. See also F. Lewis, “The Wound in Christ’s side and the Instruments of the Passion: Gendered Experience and Response,” *Women and the Book*, (Toronto, 1996). pp. 204-223. On the evolution of the devotion to the Sacred Heart from the devotion to the side wound see, M.V. Bernadot, “Le développement historique de la dévotion au Sacré-Cœur », *La vie spirituelle*, Vol II, 1920, pp. 193-215.

34. See Gougaud, op. cit., pp. 99-100.

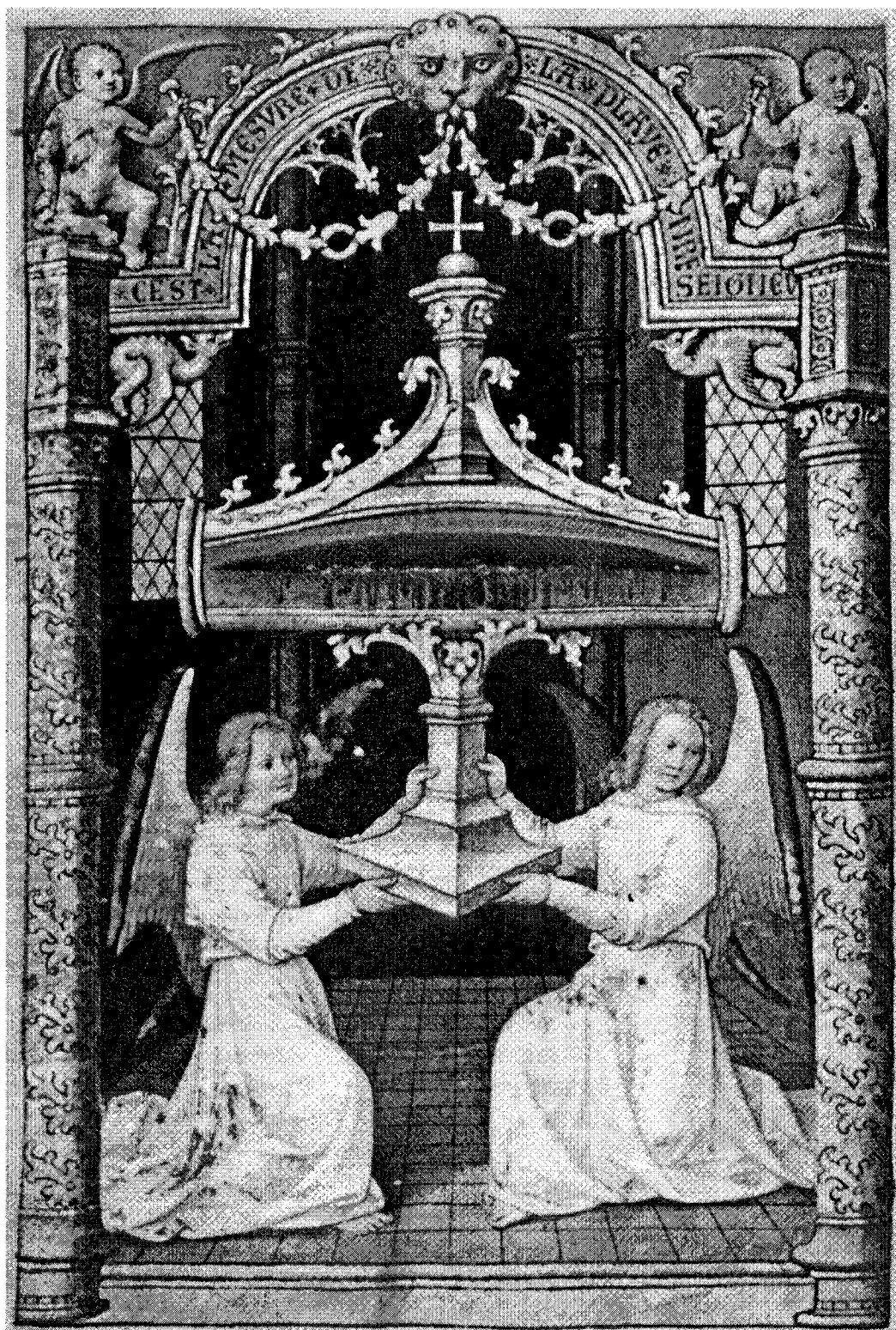


Figure 7

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the round frame, pulled tight to expose the “tear” in the centre, the opening of the wound. (fig. 8) It exposes the most venerable of the wounds inflicted on Mount La Verna, when Christ “tore the sack of flesh in that five-fold way.”³⁶ Bonaventure tells us that during his lifetime though Francis tried to hide the side wound, some friars devised ways to catch a glimpse of it.



Figure 8

“But the wound in his side he so cautiously concealed that as long as he was alive no one could see it except by stealth. One brother who used to zealously take care of him induced him with a pious care to take off his tunic to shake it out. Watching closely, he saw the wound, and he even quickly touched it with three of his fingers determining the size of the wound by both sight and touch.”³⁷

The *camoscio* exposes what the friar went to lengths to discover, the exact shape and size of the wound.

On 13th and 14th-century crucifixes, Francis often drew the devotee’s gaze to Christ’s wounds. He appeared on large medieval crucifixes, with the historical eyewitnesses of the Passion, the Virgin, Mary Magdalene and St. John. But Francis is most often found next to the wounds, touching them, kissing them or gazing at them. On the *Crucifix of the Maestro della Santa Chiara* for instance, Francis is shown gazing into Christ’s wound as though trying to penetrate its mystery. (fig.9) On a similar Crucifix by Marga-

35.The tear in the *camoscio* is approximately 4 cm. wide.

36.From “The Divine Office of the Feast of the Stigmata” from Franciscan manuscript breviary (15th-16th centuries). See *Francis of Assisi The Prophet*, pp. 668-669. ... “Jesus, You changed the weeping of Francis sweetly, when You tore the sack of flesh in that five-fold way. The heart of Francis is pierced with loving arrows, the piercing showing forth in his flesh with beautiful wounds.”

37.LMj. Chapter XIII.

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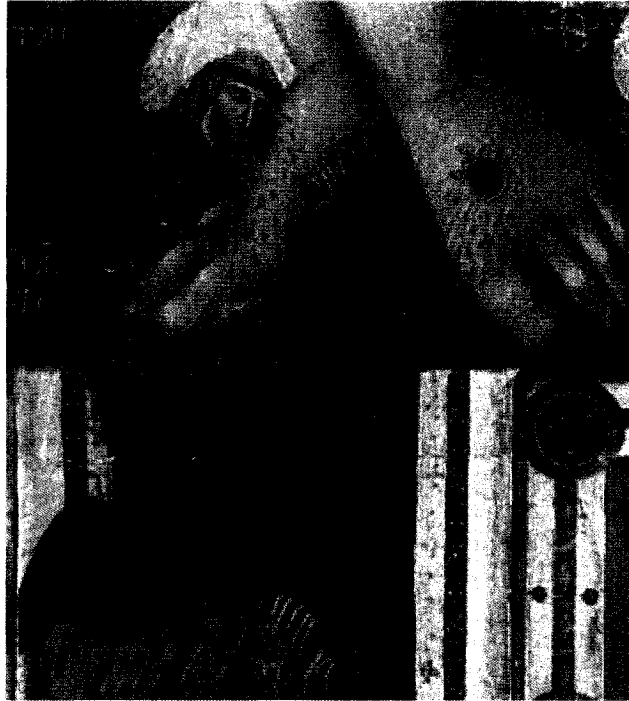


Figure 9

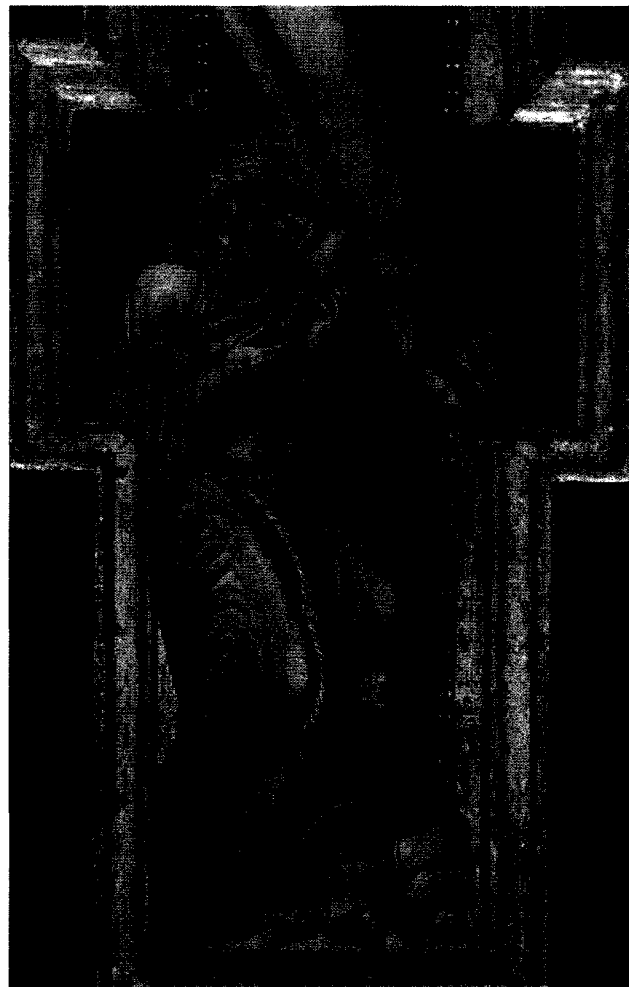


Figure 10

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rito d'Arezzo (fig 10), Francis is connected with Christ's wounds so that the blood flowing from the wound in his right hand appears indistinguishable from the blood of Christ. As Georges Didi-Huberman remarks of Margarito's Crucifix:

"... les filets de sang christique traversent le corps du saint aux lieux mêmes de sa stigmatisation; ils coulent par-delà, c'est-à-dire "de" sa main gauche (vue de profil), tandis que a droite, vue de face, exhibe déjà un trou noir, en plus petit, que celui où il dépose son regard, son baiser (son onction); le sang coule aussi de part et d'autre de son pied, comme s'il transperçait, comme si François lui même saignait du sang du Christ; quant à l'immense pied du crucifié, tout enlacé entre bouche, mains et poitrine, il vient jusqu'au coeur de François, pourrait-on dire, il bouleverse les pans de sa robe - et semble ouvrir, sur l'ouverture même de la plaie du côté."³⁸

Didi-Huberman evokes an image of the Stigmatization as a kind of reciprocal anointing between Christ and Francis. Francis touches Christ with a kiss that is *unction* and Christ opens and "anoints," "consecrates" Francis with his blood, his "priestly robe of red."³⁹ Perhaps the most explicit portrayal of Christ anointing Francis with his blood is found on the *Crucifix with St Francis* by the Master of the San Quirico Cross, ca. 1315, where Francis is splattered with the flow of blood from the side wound of Christ.⁴⁰ (figs.11,12)

We could imagine Francis' tears of compassion mixing with Christ's blood on these Crucifixes. Francis had been given the "grace of tears" of which Bonaventure says, "... if the grace of tears, the tears of thanksgiving, the tears of fervent piety are sought, such tears must be drawn from the Saviour's Fountains, i.e. from the five wounds of Jesus Christ."⁴¹ Just as Francis on the *Crucifix of the Maestro Della Santa Chiara* gazes into

38.Georges Didi-Huberman, "Un Sang d'Images," op. cit., pp. 137-138.

39.See Bonaventure, *The Tree of Life*, Eighth Fruit for Bonaventure's evocation of Christ anointing his body with his own blood: "Christ the Lord was stained with his own blood, which flowed profusely: first from the bloody sweat, then from the lashes and the thorns, then from the nails and finally from the lance. So that with God there might be plenteous redemption, he wore a priestly robe of red; his apparel was truly red and his garments like those of the wine presser."

40.See W. R. Cook, *Images of St. Francis of Assisi*, op. cit., p. 145. Cook comments that the painting "downplays the stigmata" but I think on the contrary that the blood flowing directly on Francis from the side wound symbolizes the Stigmatization.

41.Bonaventure, *Holiness of Life (De Perfectione Vitae ad Sorores)*, Chapter VI.

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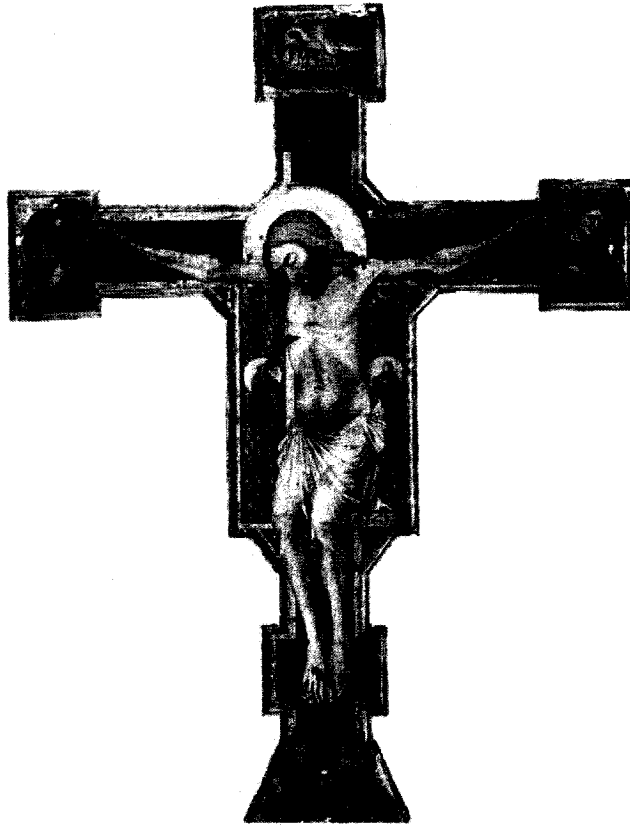


Figure 11



Figure 12

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Christ's wound, Bonaventure urges his followers to:

"Gaze with the Blessed Apostle St. Thomas, not merely on the print of the nails in Christ's hands; be not satisfied with putting your finger into the holes made by the nails in His hands; neither let it be sufficient to put your hand into the wound in His side; but enter bodily by the door in His side and go straight up to the very Heart of Jesus. There, burning with love for Christ Crucified be transformed into Christ."⁴²

Bonaventure exhorts Franciscans to follow Francis into the side wound to discover the depth of Christ's love. Francis's penetration of the mystery of the Passion, his assimilation into Christ through the side wound, is prefigured in a story of his first visit to Mount La Verna. The following is a version of the story told by the Spanish friar Antonio Daza in his treatise on the stigmata written in 1619.

"The first time that our Father San Francesco arrived on this mountain, he was searching in the rugged spots for the most secluded place where he could pray. He saw some broken rocks with wide split fissures in them, and one among them which was particularly large, which appeared hewn apart from the others, almost suspended and supported only on one side by a small stone. This gave the saint much food for thought. He did not think it could possibly have been made by human endeavour, partly because the spot was so solitary and remote from any human habitation. In the end the Saint entered into the cavity in the rock ... begging the Lord to show him the reason for this great marvel. ... When the Saint had finished praying, there appeared before him an Angel who said to him, "Francesco, this stone, just as many others which you see on this mountain split asunder on the death of the Lord Jesus Christ." From then on he began to hold this sacred place in greater veneration and went there for his prayers and penance."⁴³

His desire to commune with Christ led Francis to Mount La Verna, the "Mystic

42. *Ibid.*

43. A. Daza, *Descrizione delle stimmate*, (1619), op. cit., pp. 53-54. "La prima volta, che'l nostro Padre S. Francesco arrivò à questo Monte, andando dentro à più scoscesi luoghi, per trovarvi un luogo più solitario per darsi all'orazione, vedde alcune pietre rotte con assai grandi aperture, e fra l'altre una d'assai notabile grandezza, ch'era come tagliata, e divisa dall'altre, e quasi in aria, sustentata per una parte sola, sopra una picciola pietra, cosa, che dette molto da pensare al Santo, parendogli cosa impossibile da farsi per industria humana; per esser in parte tanto remota, & appartata, dove à pena già mai arrivò persona, ne v'habito fino all'hora. Al fine entro il Santo nella Concavità & apertura di questa pietra, ... supplicando nostro Signore, che gli desse ad intendere la causa di sì gran maraviglia ... Finì il Santo la sua oratione, e gl'apparve un'Angiolo, e gli disse. *Francesco, questa Pietra che vedi, come molte altre, che sono in questo Monte, s'apersero, e si spezzarono nella morte del nostro Signore Gesu Cristo*, e da all'hora in poi cominciò à tenere in più veneratione questo santo luogo, e andarvi molte volte per gl'esercitij dell'oratione, e della penitenza ..."

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Calvary,”⁴⁴ a natural shrine of the Passion which caused the earth to shake and rocks to split; as Bonaventure put it, “heaven and earth mourn and hard rocks crack as if out of natural compassion.”⁴⁵ In this story, on Mount La Verna Francis penetrated the “wounds” of the earth that had “mourned” the death of Christ, venturing further than anyone before him in penetrating the mystery of Calvary. In Lino Moroni’s Guide to LaVerna from 1612, pilgrims are directed to the fissures whose miraculous origins were revealed to St. Francis.⁴⁶ (fig.13) In this as in all of Moroni’s engravings, the natural surroundings of La Verna are untamed and forbidding, dominating the tiny human figures in their midst. The craggy fissure indicated by the letter G seems unapproachable, reinforcing the notion that Francis could only have ventured there by divine inspiration.

Just as mountains split open when Christ died, “the divine plan permitted that one of the soldiers should pierce open his sacred side with a lance.”⁴⁷ Bonaventure compares the opening of Christ’s side with the splitting of mountains. “Behold how the spear thrown through the divine mercy ... made a cleft in the rock and a hollow place in the cliff as an abode for doves ... Rise, therefore, beloved of Christ, be like the dove that makes its nest in the heights in the mouth of a cleft.”⁴⁸ Francis’s union with Christ, his assimilation into Christ’s body after the Stigmatization was expressed in stories in which he “inhabits” the side wound. A story from the 13th-century *Chronicles of Brother Thomas of Eccleston and Brother Jordan of Giano* tells of heretics who were scandalized to hear that

44. *Ibid.*, p.52, “Mistico Calvario.”

45. Bonaventure, *The Tree of Life*, Eighth Fruit.

46. See L. Moroni, *Opera della Descrizione del Sacro Monte della Vernia*, 1612. Beside the letter G reads: “Spaccature & aperture alla vista artifiziose, ma furno fatte miracolosamente, come fu revelato al Padre San Francesco” (“Clefts and openings that appear artificial, but were caused miraculously, as was revealed to our Father Saint Francis.”)

47. Bonaventure, *The Tree of Life*, Eighth Fruit.

48. *Ibid.*



Figure 13

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the stigmata had exalted Francis above John the Evangelist. They had the following vision:

“... they beheld the Lord Jesus Himself reclining in the bosom of John and John in His. And when they assuredly believed that this was shown them in confirmation of their opinion - for they thought the legate had blasphemed, and had cried shame on the preaching - lo, sweet Jesus with His own hands opened the wound in His side and there was seen most clearly Saint Francis within His breast, and sweet Jesus closed the wound, and shut him up entirely therein.”⁴⁹

By virtue of the stigmata, Francis's relation with Christ surpassed that of anyone who had preceded him; only Francis became “indistinguishable” from Christ; only his body was forever assimilated into Christ's, “shut up entirely” in his side wound.

The *Franceschina* recounts a similar story of a friar who had a vision of Francis emerging from the side wound of Christ:

“For a long time this friar persevered in his prayer, pleading for Jesus to show him St. Francis. One evening as he was rapt in prayer in a deserted place, he saw a chorus of saints passing through the nearby forest. On asking who they were, he was told they were a company of confessors who were guiding St. Augustine and Saint Gregory. The friar inquired whether St. Francis was among them. They told him he was not, so he bid them “Go in the name of God.” Then there appeared a second chorus, even more beautiful than the first. Again the friar asked them who they were and they answered they were the martyr saints, led by Saints Stephen and Laurence. Again he inquired whether St. Francis was among them and again the answer was no. So he bid them, “Go in the name of God.” Then a third more splendid chorus with the Saint Apostles passed by and once again the friar asked whether St. Francis was with them and once again the answer was no. And then too he bid, “Go in the name of God.” And another gorgeous chorus passed by. It was the glorious Virgin Mother of God surrounded by holy virgins. Again the friar asked whether St. Francis was with them and once again the answer was no. And the friar said, “Go in the name of God.” Finally a chorus more splendid than the others came by with Christ and the Angels and again the friar asked if St. Francis was there. St. Michael the Archangel smiled, and gaily addressed the Lord who was ahead of him: “Lord, this friar wishes to see St. Francis; if it pleases your kindness, I pray you let him see him.” And the Lord answered: “It pleases me, let the friar see him.” And the Lord lifted his right arm and as he lifted it St. Francis emerged from the side wound of Our Lord Jesus Christ. On seeing St. Francis the friar's heart was filled with joy and consolation and he ran to him, at which point St. Francis cried out, “O you little wicked one,

49. *The Coming of the Friars Minor to England & Germany Being the Chronicles of Brother Thomas of Eccleston and Brother Jordan of Giano*, pp. 109-110. See Daniel Russo op. cit., p.660 for his comments on this story.

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what are you doing? This is the Lord Jesus Christ before you. And the friar ... threw himself at the Lord's feet, recognizing his error."⁵⁰

An illustration of this tale is found in the *Alcoran* which mockingly shows Francis, often called Christ's Standard-bearer, waving his flag as he pokes out of the side wound.⁵¹

(fig.14) In his great enthusiasm to see Francis, the friar overlooks Christ and though he recognizes his error by the end of the story, it is too late, the damage is done. The narrative has reversed the usual relationship between Christ and his saint, placing Christ in the role of mediator, revealing Francis hidden away in his side wound. Though Francis is outraged by the zealous friar's great oversight, Christ is complicit with the story's surprise ending, being the one who granted Francis this most privileged place in the Procession of Saints, a place even more privileged than the Virgin's. The story expresses the belief that after the Stigmatization, to indicate Francis his followers could point to Christ, in particu-

50. *La Franceschina*, op. cit. pp., 443-444, "...Quisto frate perserverò longo tempo in oratione, pregando sempre Yhesu Christo che li piacesse mostrargli santo Francesco. Et stando una sera in uno certo loco deserto in oratione, vidde uno choro de santi passare per la selva a lato ad esso, et domandò lui chi fosse. Li fo dicto che era lo choro de li confessori, lo quale guidavano santo Augustino et santo Gregorio dottori santi. Et domandando quisto frate si c'era intra loro santo Francesco, li fo risposto de no. Et quillo dixè : « Andate nel nome di Dio. » Anche venne el secondo choro piu splendido ; et domandando chi era, respuse che era lo choro de li santi martiri, et guidavano santo Stephano et santo Lorenzo. Et domandando si c'era santo Francesco intra loro, li fo risposto de no. Dixè : « Andate nel nome de Dio ». Venne el terzo choro che era più splendente che li primi, che era de li santi Apostoli ; et domandando si c'era intra loro santo Francesco, li fo detto de no. Dixè : « Andate nel nome de Dio ». Venne un altro choro bellissimo che era de le sante Vergene, nel quale era la gloriosa Vergene Maria matre del Salvatore. Et similemente domandando si c'era santo Francesco intra loro, li fo ditto de no. Dixè el frate : « Andate nel nome de Dio ». Ultimamente venne el choro de l'altri santi molto più splendente, nel quale era Christo co li santi Angeli, et lo frate domandò si li era santo Francesco. Et allora santo Michele Arcangelo sorrise, et co la faccia alegra dixè al Signore che andava innante : « O, Signore, questo frate desidera de vedere santo Francesco : si piace a la vostra benignità, prego gli li mostriate. » Dixè lo Signore : « Me piace ; lo vega ». Et alzò lo Signore lo braccio deritto ; et levandolo sù, santo Francesco uscì fore de la piaga laterale del nostro Signore Yhesu Christo. Et vedendo quello frate santo Francesco, subito el suo core fo repieno de gaudio et consolatione, et curre ad esso. Al quale dixè santo Francesco : « O cativello, que fai tu ? Tu ài qui el tuo Signore Yhesu Christo. ... et gettossi a li piedi de Yhesu Christo, recognoscendo la sua colpa. » This story was first recounted in *De Conformitate*, Bartholomaeo da Pisa.

51. "St. François apparait à un des frères sortant du côté de notre Seigneur, tenant à la main l'Eten-dart de la Croix," engraving, *L'Alcoran des Cordeliers tant en Latin qu'en François*, Albère Erasmus, 1734.



Figure 14

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lar to the wound in his side.

In these narratives Francis emerges from the most venerated of Christ's wounds, the wound which was described as the source of the sacraments. The water and blood that issued from Christ's side symbolized the water of Baptism and the blood of the Eucharist.⁵² The Eucharistic symbolism of the side wound is key for understanding the significance of the framing of the *camoscio* relic. One expression of the Eucharistic symbolism of Christ's side wound was the theme of *effusius sanguis*, common in 15th and 16th-century iconography, in which blood pouring from Christ's side wound was caught in chalices held by angels. It sometimes served to promote the Doctrine of Transubstantiation of both species, bread and wine. A clear example is

found in a painting by Benvenuto di Giovanni (ca. 1518) in which the Resurrected Christ fills the chalice at his feet with blood issuing from the side wound. (fig. 15) The effusion of blood pierces through the host which also appears to bleed into the chalice. Carlo Crivelli painted a version of the *effusius sanguis* in the 15th century in which the blood from Christ's side is caught in a chalice held by Francis. (fig 16) Francis is shown kneeling before the Resurrected Christ, who stands before him, the same height as the

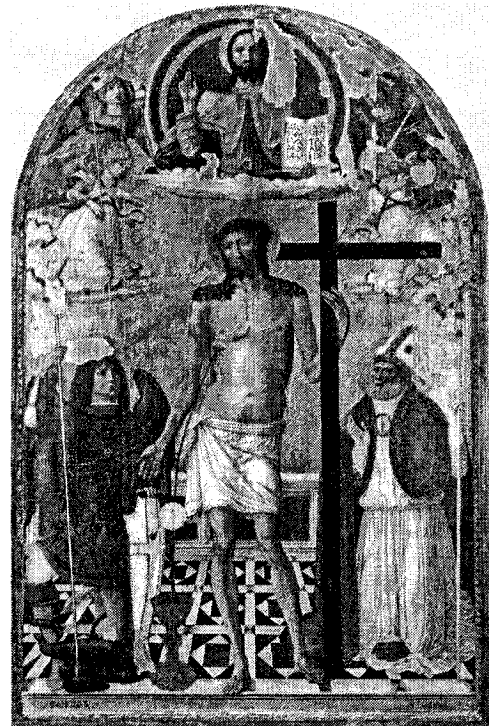


Figure 15

52. See St. Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, Tractate 120, "the Evangelist used a wide awake word so that he did not say, "pierced his side" or "wounded" or anything else, but "opened", so that there, in a manner of speaking, the door of life was thrown open from which the mystical rites (*sacramenta*) of the Church flowed."

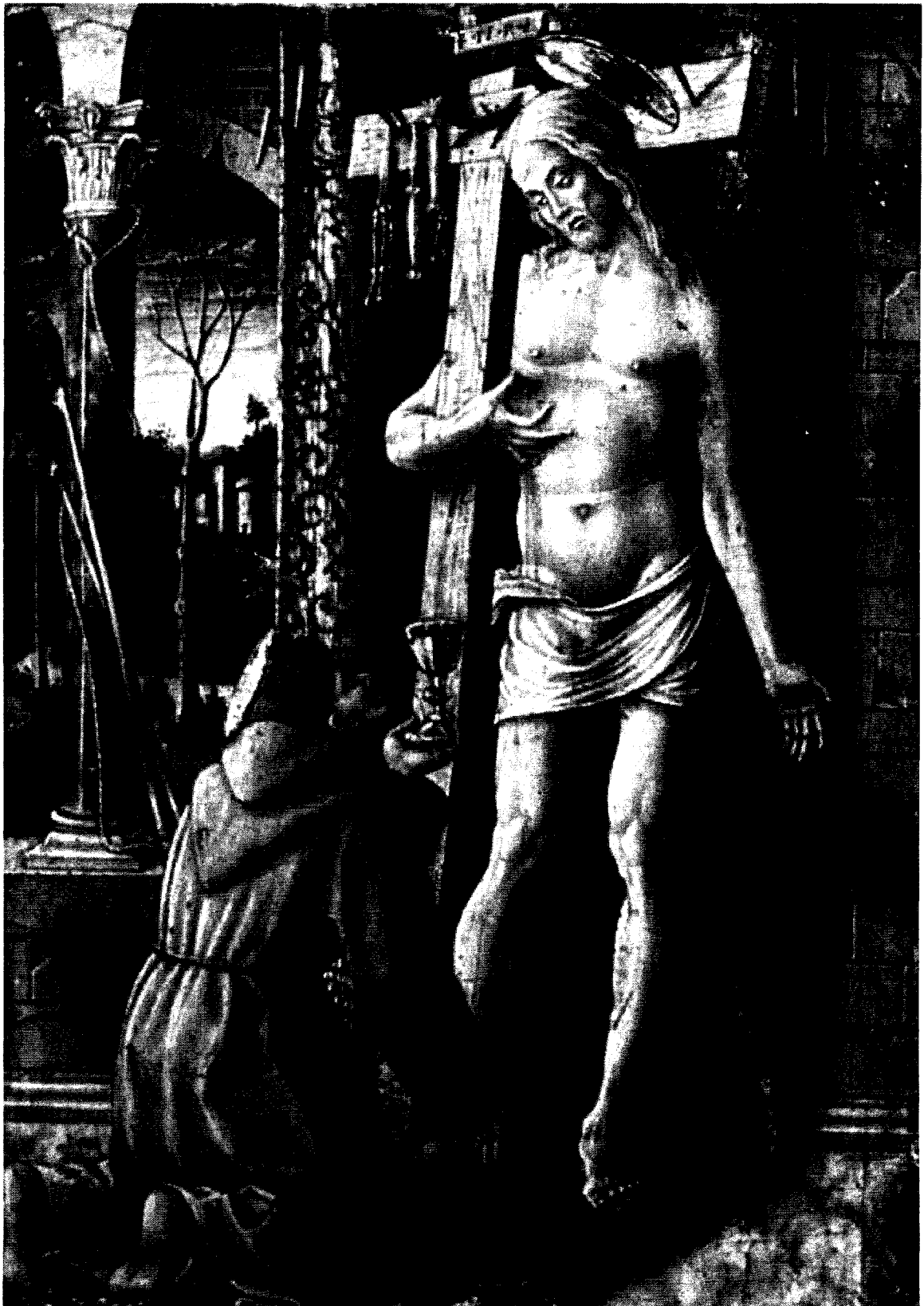


Figure 16

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Tau-shaped cross he is holding, with all the instruments of the Passion on it. On Christ's right is the Column of the Flagellation, with the spear that pierced his side leaning against it, the tip of the spear at the same height as the side wound. Francis is directly facing Christ and his right hand is positioned to mirror Christ's, as though it revealed the other side of Christ's wound. The chalice Francis holds which fills with Christ's blood seems to symbolize the wounds of his stigmata, which Fausto Zerboni would refer to as "... the bitter chalice of wounds in the remains of the body of San Francesco."⁵³

The Transubstantiated host which "bleeds" into the chalice in Benvenuto da Giovanni's painting suggests every consecrated host is a miraculous host. Every host can erupt and bleed or turn to flesh like the miraculous hosts in tales of priests with insufficient faith. The fleshy, bleeding hosts of the Eucharistic miracles made the invisible reality of Transubstantiation visible, transforming doubt into faith. The notion of Francis's wounds making the mystery of the Eucharist visible is expounded in a sermon delivered in 1672 in the Church of the Confraternity of the Stigmata in Rome. In *Sermone delle stimate di S. Francesco*, the Spanish Jesuit Antonio Vieira tries to explain Christ's purpose, the divine plan, behind the "re-imprinting" of his Passion, first in the Eucharist and then in Francis in the form of stigmata. In both cases, Vieira says, Christ sought to distill the Original Wounds of their flaws. He is emphatic that on Calvary and in the Eucharist, the mystery is the same, the Passion is the same, the death is the same, only the ministers are different. The flaws of the Sacrifice on Calvary Vieira insists, were not in the Original Wounds, but in their imprinters. On Calvary, ministers of hatred had imprinted on Love; Love stretched out its arms, hatred lifted up the hammers, Love opened its hands, hatred

53. See Fausto Zerboni, *Ragionamento delle Sacre Stimate di S. Francesco*, (1641), p. 7, "si vegga l'amaro calice delle piaghe nel sacco del corpo di Francesco."

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drove in the nails. As a result, according to Vieira, in the Original Wounds, Divine Charity became mingled with hatred, injustice with mercy, and sacrilege with sacrifice. This flaw, Vieira says, was eliminated in the Eucharist in which the priest acts with reverence. Therefore, Vieira concludes that Christ purified in the Sacrament, the villainy of Calvary, correcting in this Second Passion all the flaws of the first.

As he leads up to the reason the Sacrifice on Calvary was “re-imprinted” in Francis, Vieira explains that though the consecration of the host during the Mass was done with reverence, it was not necessarily pure. The priest, like the Apostle Thomas who needed to touch Christ’s wounds before believing it was Christ, could be plagued with doubt. It was to eliminate this final flaw, Vieira concludes, that Christ robed himself as a Seraph and “re-imprinted” his wounds on Francis:

“This was the manner adopted by Christ when He himself imprinted His wounds in Francis for the second time. In the Sacrament He re-imprinted His Passion, in Francis He consecrated (made a sacrament of) His wounds; in the Sacrament He hid the mystery of Faith; in Francis He made visible the mystery of Charity. As Christ with His Love is the ministrant in the consecration of the Sacrament, Christ and His Love was likewise the craftsman in imprinting His wounds, so that having purified in Francis the villainy of Calvary His wounds endured, entirely sacred, wholly beautiful and wholly lovable.”⁵⁴

Vieira equates the act of Stigmatization with Transubstantiation in which Christ unveiled the mystery hidden in the Eucharist. The Stigmatization was an act in which Christ, without the intermediary of the priest, consecrated the wounds on Francis’s body, making “visible the mystery of Charity.” Vieira then asks forgiveness of the Sacrament, because he

54. Antonio Vieira, *Sermone delle Stimate di S. Francesco*, (1672), p. 10, “Tal fù lo stile che osservò Cristo nella seconda stampa delle sue piaghe imprimendole per se stesso in Francesco. Nel sacramento ristampò la sua passione, in Francesco sacramentò le sue piaghe: nel Sacramento pose la passione invisibile; in Francesco fece il Sacramento visibile: nel Sacramento occultò il misterio della fede; in Francesco manifestò il misterio della Carità: E come nella consecrazione del Sacramento Cristo, è 'l suo Amore e'l ministro; così nella impressione delle piaghe Cristo altresì, e'l suo Amore fù l'artefice: accioche, purificata in Francesco la malvagità del Calvario, rimanessero le sue piaghe e di ogni parte sante, e di ogni parte belle, e di ogni parte amabili.”

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cannot help but notice an advantage in the impression of the wounds in Francis. What was the advantage? In the Stigmata, Christ Himself was the sole minister, who made the invisible Sacrament of the Eucharist visible. Vieira likens Francis's stigmatized body to a visible sacrament, as though he was transformed into a living Eucharist.⁵⁵

In a statement that is astoundingly bold, Vieira suggests that the stigmatized Francis not only surpasses the Eucharist, but his side wound surpasses the side wound of Christ. This is because unlike Christ, Francis felt the pain of the side wound.

"Here is the spear, the wound and the transferred pain of Francis ... And this living man ... will endure the pain of the spear ... Christ's was one, but three were the blows: one in Christ, one in Mary and the third in Francis. That of Christ wounded the body but not the spirit; that of Mary wounded the spirit but not the body; that of Francis wounded the body and spirit together. Christ received the blow but did not feel the pain. Mary felt the pain but did not receive the blow. Francis received and felt the blow and he felt the pain. That is why Francis's side oozed blood every Friday. Only blood, not blood and water as in Christ's side, because blood drawn with pain is pure blood, it is not watered down."⁵⁶

For Vieira, Francis felt pain in his side wound as if he had been pierced by a lance. He goes so far as to suggest that the pain of Stigmatization surpassed that of the Passion, since the pain that Christ was spared in the side wound was transferred to Francis who "received and (he) felt the blow and he felt the pain."⁵⁷

In the Greek liturgy of the Mass the host was at one time distributed with a spear-shaped paten, while the priest repeated the words from John's Gospel, "... one of the sol-

55.Dragonelli refers to Francis as a "living host." See *Il Divoto*, op. cit., p 42, "(Francesco) meglio di qualunque altro potè offerire all signore il suo corpo stimmatizzato come hostia viva santa ...", ("better than anyone Francis could offer the Lord his stigmatized body as a sacred living host ...")

56.Vieira, op. cit., pp. 20-22, "Ecco la lancia, la piaga, e'l dolore trasferito in Francesco ... E quest' uomo ... patirà vivo quel dolore medesimo della lancia ... la lancia di Cristo fù una, le lanciate furon trè: una in Cristo, l'altra in Maria, la terza in Francesco. Quella di Cristo ferì il corpo, ma non già l'anima: quella di Maria ferì l'anima, ma non già il corpo: quella di Francesco ferì il corpo, e l'anima insieme. Cristo riceve il colpo ma non sentì il dolore. Maria sentì il dolore, ma non ricevè il colpo. Francesco ricevè, e sentì e'l colpo, e'l dolore. Per questo ogni venerdì usciva sangue dal costato di Francesco; ma sangue solamente, e non sangue con acqua come quello del costato di Cristo; perche sangue cavato con dolore, non è sangue adacquato, è puro."

57.Ibid.

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diers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out.”⁵⁸ The Eucharistic monstrance offers the *camoscio*, the relic described “as if pierced with a lance” to the gaze of the devotee as though it were a host that turned to flesh, like the miraculous host in Lanciano.⁵⁹ (fig. 17) It presents Francis’s body for veneration in a kind of “static ‘eleva-



Figure 17

tio’.”⁶⁰ In a letter to the clergy, Francis wrote that the Eucharist “cannot be His Body without first being consecrated by word. For we have and see nothing bodily of the Most High in this world except His Body and Blood.”⁶¹ Francis would undoubtedly have been shocked to see his own body presented as consecrated, framed as a miraculous host, a relic of the Body of Christ. With imagery that unwittingly evokes the *camoscio* in its solar monstrance, Antonio Vieira captures the devotional power of the stigmata:

“Therefore in order to thaw a world grown cold and to rekindle human hearts, it is not that the wounds of Christ in Francis are more propitious than His own Wounds; but rays emanating from the body of the Sun do not burn, while reflected in a mirror they ignite. Thus it was. Christ is the sun, Francis the mirror, the

58. See *Spiegazione dell’Apertura del costato di Nostro Signor Gesù Cristo*, (1781), p.47. This work by an anonymous author was translated from the French translation of Duguet into Italian by Antonio Pezzano.

59. See David Sox, *Relics and Shrines*, (London, 1985), chapter nine on the Eucharistic miracle of Lanciano. The miracle of Lanciano is the earliest of the Eucharistic miracles. Legend dates the miracle to the 8th century when the doubts of a priest resulted in the host turning to flesh and the wine to blood. Both relics continue to be shown in an 18th-century monstrance in the Franciscan Church in Lanciano in the Abruzzi region of Italy. See M. Rubin, *Gentile Tales*, (London, 1999), a study of host desecration narratives that targeted Jews in the centuries following 1100.

60. See G.J.C. Snoek, op. cit., p. 62. “The introduction of the procession on the feast of *Corpus Christi* led to ‘exposition’, a kind of static ‘elevatio’, consisting of placing the Eucharistic bread on or above the altar ...”

61. See “Exhortations to the Clergy,” *The Saint*, p. 52.

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wounds the rays, His love the fire and our hearts the inflammable matter.”⁶²

This seems to recapitulate the devotional impact of the *camoscio* relic. In the Eucharistic monstration, the side wound of Francis is at once conflated with the side wound of Christ and elevated to the status of a consecrated host. At the same time, it remains distinct from Christ’s wound, more propitious for being miraculous, more touching for being human, more exemplary for being within our reach.

Though the relic of the *camoscio* has few textual sources (brief descriptions in inventory catalogues and a guide book to Assisi), its evocative form and the symbolic richness of its framing make it visually eloquent, like Francis’s wounds themselves of which Thomas of Celano writes:

“... words would be unable to express such marvels,
soiled as they are by cheap and everyday things.
For this reason perhaps
it had to appear in the flesh,
since it could not be explained in words.
Therefore, let silence speak, where word falls short,
for symbol cries out as well, where sign falls short.
This alone intimates to human ears
what is not entirely clear:
why that sacrament appeared in the saint.”⁶³

Celano writes, “let silence speak;” mystical union has always defied verbal expression. In the case of Francis, his mystical union with Christ on Mount La Verna occurred in the body and was compared to the mystical transformation of the host into the Body of Christ. The *camoscio* relic in its monstration appears to capture the paradox of the mystical experience

62. Vieira, op. cit., p. 25. “Dunque per riscaldar la freddezza del mondo e per infiammar & accender i cuori umani, non è molto che siano più efficaci, o veramnete più proportionate, le piaghe di Cristo in Francesco, che nell’istesso Cristo. I raggi che vibrati dal corpo del Sole non accendono, passati per uno specchio sveglian fuoco. Così fù. Cristo e il Sole, Francesco lo specchio, le piaghe i raggi, il suo amore il fuoco, e la materia i cuori nostri.”

63.2C, Second Book, Chapter CLIV.

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it embodies by having as its focus an *emptiness*. It offers the devotee a silent invitation to penetrate its opening to the mystery Francis of Assisi encountered on Mount La Verna.

Chapter 5

The Contact Relics of the Wounds in the Hands and Feet - Francis of Assisi, "Living Cross"

"With Christ I am nailed to the Cross"

Gal. 2:19

The stigmatized body of Francis of Assisi challenged both reason and faith. In Franciscan sources from the 13th through 17th centuries we find evidence of the persistence of debates over the nature, shape, origin and theological significance of the wounds. The early biographies tell stories of the doubts of Francis's earliest followers, stories of Francis appearing in dreams and visions in order to ease his friars' doubts in the same way Jesus reassured his disciples after his Resurrection, by allowing them to see and touch his wounds. Bonaventure tells the story of a certain friar "of outstanding virtue and reputation" who was "firmly convinced of the holy stigmata" but, the more he considered it with "the light of human understanding" the more his doubts grew.¹ Francis confronts the doubting friar in a dream saying: "Why all these conflicting struggles in you ... See my hands and my feet!"² While the wounds on the hands were clearly visible, the wounds on the feet were covered with mud so Francis urges the friar, "Remove the mud from my feet ... and examine the place of the nails."³ As the brother reaches down to touch the feet, "it seemed to him the mud washed away, and he touched with his hands the places of the nails."⁴ The touch of "the nails" in Francis's feet washed away the murky doubts clouding

1. LMj *The Miracles*, 3

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*



Figure 1

the friar's faith.

On a 14th-century Umbrian crucifix in Montefalco, it is Francis who reaches to touch the nail piercing Christ's feet. (fig. 1) Francis draws the devotee not to Christ's wound but to one of the Instruments of the Passion. His gestures invite the devotee to venerate the nail as he does: kneeling, his gaze fixed on the nail which he leans over to kiss with reverence. Francis's gestures seem to act out the words of the Holy Week hymn *Pange lingua...*, "... *dulci clavo dulce pondus sustinens!*" ("gentleness of the nail that sustained so gentle a burden!").⁵ With his right hand Francis touches the nail piercing Christ's foot as if to re-enact the "touch," the contact that had pierced his own hands and

5. From *Antiphonaire Romain, Préparé & publié par les moines de Solesmes conformément à la Liturgia Horarum & à l'Ordo Cantus Officii, Tome Second. Hymnaire Latin-Français, Solesmes, 1988*. The hymn is believed to have been composed by Thomas Aquinas.

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feet with nails.⁶

This chapter will examine the relics of the mysterious “nails of flesh” in Francis’s stigmatized hands and feet. Like the relics of the side wound, they are vestiges of the care given to the unusual wounds. They include the linen bindings used to dress the wounds, as well as a sock and a shoe Francis wore after receiving the stigmata, both preserved in the Monastery of St. Clare in Assisi. These relics are mentioned in inventories and guide books to Assisi. Reference to the relics is also made in devotional literature on the stigmata where they serve both to articulate the shape of the nails of flesh and as evidence that the wounds bled. I will consider sermons delivered in the Church of the Confraternity of the Stigmata in Rome by Fausto Zerboni (1641) and Antonio Vieira (1672) with their reflections on how the nails of flesh in Francis’s hands and feet, their points bent back into his flesh, made Francis a “Living Crucifix,” a “Living Cross” sculpted by Christ himself on Mount La Verna. Finally, I will examine devotional literature which includes the relics of the nails of flesh as part the defense that the stigmata were not the result of meditation. The “nails” are presented as having been forged by Christ himself, making Francis’s bandages, socks and shoes contact relics of the only things Christ made with his own hands.

The descriptions of the “nails” in Francis’s hands and feet in the early sources contain several variations.⁷ In his Encyclical letter Brother Elias writes: “His hands and feet had as it were the punctures of nails, pierced on both sides, retaining scars and showing the black color of nails.”⁸ While Elias refers to punctures with the dark colour of nails,

6. For an analysis of the detail of Francis touching the nail in the Montefalco Crucifix, see Jill Bennett, “Stigmata and sense memory: St. Francis and the affective image,” *Art History*, Vol. 24, No. 1, Feb. 2001, pp. 1-16.

7. For a thorough analysis of the varying descriptions of the wounds in the hands and feet in the early sources see, O. Schmucki, (1991), *op. cit.*, Chapter Five.

8. Quoted from *ibid.*, p. 264.

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Thomas of Celano refers explicitly to nails:

“Francis seemed as if he was recently taken down from a cross, with his hands and feet pierced with nails ... it was wonderful to see in the middle of his hands and feet not the punctures of nails but the nails themselves, fashioned from the flesh and retaining the blackness of iron ...”⁹

Celano adds a further element in a later description in the *Treatise on the Miracles*:

“They saw not the punctures of nails in his hands and feet but the very nails themselves marvelously fashioned from his flesh by the power of God, and originating in his own flesh. When they were pressed down on one side, they immediately responded like continuous sinews on the opposite side.”¹⁰

Octavian Schmucki remarks that Celano’s accounts evolve, introducing new elements:

“Celano ... affirms the almost organic character of the nails ... originating in the flesh, so connected internally to muscles or sinews that ... as often as the viewers pressed down on a fleshy particle of the Stigmata, the opposite immediately bulged.”¹¹ A very significant dimension is added to the description of the nails by Pope Alexander IV in 1255:

“We wish at least to set before your eyes those gratifying insignia of the Lord’s Passion which should be frequently recalled and greatly admired, and which the hand of divine operation impressed on the body of this Saint while he was still alive. Eyes looking closely saw, and touching fingers became most sure, that in his hands and feet a truly formed likeness of nails grew out of the substance of his own flesh or was added from some newly created material.”¹²

Schmucki points out, “It is the beginning of theological reflection when the Pontiff explains the origin of these marks in two ways: small molded pieces of flesh either grew out of Francis’s own flesh by means of divine operation, or they were added to it by divine creation.”¹³ I will examine the extent to which the second of the two theories becomes a central focus of devotion, as well as its significance for the cult of the relics of the wounds.

9. Quoted from *ibid.*, (1C, 112-113).

10. Quoted from *ibid.*, (3C, 4-5).

11. *Ibid.*, p. 272.

12. Alexander IV, *Benigna operatio*, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 176.

13. O. Schmucki, (1991), p. 277.

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Bonaventure's descriptions of the wounds borrow from earlier sources; Schmucki notes, "a new element appears: it completes the description of the Stigmata's organic character found in 3Cel 4-5 and attributes the moveable character of the wounds to hard and connecting sinews."¹⁴

"In his holy hands and feet could be seen the nails which had been miraculously formed out of his flesh by God; they were so much part of his flesh that, when they were pressed on one side, they immediately jutted out further on the other side, as if they were made of solid material which reached right through."¹⁵

The perception that the nails moved of one piece would lead to legends of attempts to remove them from Francis's flesh and preserve them as relics, just like the nails that pierced Christ were preserved as relics with the other Instruments of the Passion.

When the linen bandages are included in the descriptions of the wounds, the focus is on their positioning, drawing attention to the shape of the nails, in particular the area between Francis's flesh and the nail-like protrusions. For instance, Bartholomew of Pisa, in *De Conformitate* writes:

"Br. Leo very frequently saw these Stigmata, because *he placed dressings between the nails and the flesh* every day except Friday, and changed the wound in the side. In fact, Blessed Francis many times exposed his hands to Br. Leo's gaze and when Br. Leo looked at them, he experienced the greatest consolation." (*italics mine*)¹⁶

Specifying the dressings were placed between the nails and the flesh, suggests a clear demarcation, as though there were a groove between the nails and Francis's flesh. The *Actus* also recounts how Brother Leo would dress the wounds on his hands and feet with pieces of linen cloth:

"St. Francis allowed only Br. Leo to touch the Stigmata and to dress them with fresh pieces of linen which Leo would apply each day of the week between those marvelous nails and the rest of the flesh, to absorb the

14. *Ibid.*, p. 282.

15. Quoted from *ibid.*, (LMj 15,2-3).

16. Quoted from *ibid.*, p. 223, note 14.

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blood and lessen the pain. On Thursday and throughout Friday Francis wanted no remedy be applied, in order that truly crucified with Christ on the day of Christ's Crucifixion he might meditate on the sorrows of the Cross out of love for Christ."¹⁷

In this description the bandages absorb blood from the wounds, evidence that the wounds in Francis's hands and feet not only had fleshy protrusions, but were also open, bleeding cuts. In the 15th-century *La Franceschina* both these characteristics are underscored:

"These nails were so separate from the other flesh and distinct from the feet and from the hands that they could be easily moved. Moreover, the linen bandages could easily be placed between the nails and the flesh so as to stem the blood which flowed copiously from them. And although those holy nails were separate from the flesh they could not be removed from their place in the hands and the feet by the many who tried. ... They could be moved but not removed from their place ... And everyday bandages were placed on the hands and on the feet to lighten some of the pain and to stem the flow of blood."¹⁸

This description focuses on the fact that the nails looked so real, so distinct from Francis's flesh that attempts were made to pull them out. The legend of Clare's attempts to remove the nails in Francis's wounds will be examined further along.

The relics of the pieces of linen that dressed the wounds of the hands and feet are mentioned in one of the oldest Inventories of the *Sacro Convento* in Assisi. An Inventory from 1473 includes, *Item unum tabernaculum de argento, in quo est scriptura de manu sancti Francisci ed de panno lineo cum quo tergebat lacrimas et de panno lineo cum quo cooperiebat stigmata pedum*. ("A Silver tabernacle which contains a note written by St. Francis which he sent to Brother Leo. Over it are pieces of the bandages with which he

17. Quoted from *ibid.*, p. 223.

18. See *La Franceschina*, op. cit., p. 180. "... li ditti chiovi erano sì separati da l'altra carne et remoti nelli piedi et nelle mane, che molto agevemente se manegiavano. Et anche più, che le pezze de lino se podevano ponere abelemente intra essi chiovi et la carne, per reprimere el sangue che d'essi usciva et abundava. Et niente de meno quilli santi chiovi, advenga che fossero spicciati da la carne, non foro mai poduti però rimuovere dalli loro lochi, da quanti che ce provaro, che foro più, ne da li piedi nè da le mane. ... Muovere se podevano, ma non rimuovere dal loro loco. ... Et ogne dì ponevano le pezze nelle mane et nelli piedi ad frenare alquanto lo dolore grande et reprimere lo sangue."

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dried his wounds.”)¹⁹ Giuseppe Ciofi’s guide to Assisi (1664) includes, “*Un Tabernacolo d’Argento con alcune pezze bagnate co il Sangue delli Sacri Stimmati di S. Francesco*,” (A silver tabernacle with some bandages soaked in the blood of the Sacred Stigmata of St. Francis).²⁰ An earlier guide by Iacomo Salvi (1618) specifies pieces of woolen bandages for the wounds of the feet, (“*due Pezzette di Lana, co le quali copriva le Piaghe de’Piedi.*”)²¹

There is a legend that on Mount La Verna Francis would rinse the linen bandages and refresh his wounds in water that filled the hollow in the trunk of a beech tree. In the guide book to La Verna by Lino Moroni, *Opera della Descrizione del Sacro Monte della Vernia* (1612), pilgrims are directed to, “The Little Chapel built on the very site of the tree called the Beech Tree of the Water, which healed many illnesses, in particular illnesses of the eyes.”²² On the engraving of the beech tree the Letter D indicates the grate behind which is part of the trunk of the beech tree while the letters E and F indicate the drawing of the tree and “The person of our Father St. Francis who washed the bandages soaked in the blood of his sacred stigmata in this Beech Tree.”²³ (fig. 2) Augustino Di Miglio refers to the legend in his *Nuovo Dialogo delle Devozioni del Sacro Monte della Verna* (1568):

“I still do not dare negate that St. Francis did occasionally wash his hands in that water. So that from then on that water had the power of healing sickness of the eyes ... The brothers have always had a devotion to it; but in the last thirty years men and women, through some instinct or instigation or divine enlightenment have begun to treat it with great reverence and place great faith in it. Noble women and gentlemen frequently

19. Bibl.Di Assisi Cod. 337

20. See G. Ciofi, *Santuarii della Serafica Città d’Assisi, con la Notizia de Corpi Santi, Reliquie insigni, & memorie, ch’ivi si conservano*, (1664), p. 24.

21. See: I. Salvi, *Guida de Pellegrini che Bramano Visitare i Santi luoghi della Serafica Città d’Assisi*, (1618), p. 12.

22. See Moroni, op. cit. “Cappelletta fatta nel sito proprio dove era il Faggio chiamato dell’Acqua quale sanava molti mali, ma in particolare de gl’occhi.”

23. See *ibid.*, Engraving Q, “Persona del Padre San Francesco, quale lavò le pezze tinte del sangue delle sue sacrate Stimate con l’acqua di tal Faggio.”



Figure 2

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send for it to be fetched, as can be witnessed daily.”²⁴

Di Miglio refers to the pieces of cloth that dressed the wounds in Francis’s hands and feet in the context of confirming that the wounds bled:

“In great quantities they flowed with blood. So that Brother Leo his confessor and secretary would encircle those nails with linen bandages everyday except between Thursday evening and Friday evening to stem the flow of blood. These bandages, soaked with the blood, are preserved as relics in various places, most in San Damiano in Assisi.”²⁵

Unfortunately no such relics remain in San Damiano today.

In the Monastery of St. Clare in Assisi, a sock and a shoe made by Clare to protect the nail-shaped wounds on Francis’s feet are still carefully preserved. After receiving the stigmata Francis had difficulty walking; unable to leave Mount La Verna on foot he was compelled to ride on the back of a donkey. According to the *Fioretti*, “the angelic man Francis went down the mountain with Brother Leo and a devout peasant on whose donkey he rode, for owing to the nails in his feet he could not well go on foot.”²⁶ The wounds on the feet required particular care in order to permit Francis some mobility. Thomas of Celano tells us that after the stigmata Francis wore woolen socks, “He began to wear woolen socks so his feet could not be seen, placing a piece of leather over the wounds to soften the

24. D Miglio, A., op. cit., pp. 133-134, “Et anchora non ho ardire di negare che San Francesco no si lavassi qualche volta le mani in quella acqua. Et per tale cotatto, detta acqua habbi di poi conseguita tal virtù di sanare le infirmità de gl’occhi ... Sempre i frati ci hano havuta devozione, ma da 30 anni in quà, gl’huomini, & le donne per uno certo istinto, o instigazione, o illuminazione divina, gl’hanno cominciato à fare grande reverenzia, & havergli gran fede. Di maniera che le nobili Signore, & gentildonne spesso mandano per essa, si come ogni giorno si può manifestamente vedere. ”

25. *Ibid.*, pp. 95-96, “Anchora quelle in gran copia, versavano el sangue. Onde Fra Leone suo confessore, & Sacretario ogni giorno (eccetto dal giovedi sera, infino al venerdi sera) circondava quelli chiodi, con certe pezzuole line, che ristagnassino el sangue, delle quali pezzuole, col sangue cosi bagnate, si conserva per reliquie, in piu luoghi. Et massime in San Damiano presso a Ascesi, in una Croce d’argento.”

26. *The Little Flowers of St. Francis*, Raphael Brown translation, 1958 ed., p. 195.

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wool's roughness.”²⁷ In the Monastery of St. Clare in Assisi, a white linen sock that Francis wore to cover the stigmata is kept in a simple glass reliquary. (fig. 3) The following is its description:

“Aside from the central seam which runs from top to bottom, another seam joins the piece covering the front of the foot to the rest of the stocking and others still, made with various remnants, which join up where the stocking widens.”²⁸

A description of the sock in the catalogue of relics in the Basilica of St. Clare, published in 1741 by the bishop of Assisi, Mons. Ottavio Ringhieri, includes a blood stain: “a sock of linen, stained with blood in the place of the wound of the stigmatized foot of the Saintly Patriarch.”²⁹ The sock is also listed in the oldest catalogue of relics of the Basilica of St. Clare in Assisi, “*Iste est unus calceus sancti Francisci quod portavit postquam habuit stigmata sancta*,” (“This is a sock that St. Francis wore after he received the stigmata”).³⁰

Francis had allowed in his Rule that “those who are compelled by necessity may wear shoes.”³¹ He was forced to avail of this leniency after the Stigmatization. To help ease his pain and facilitate his walking, legend has it that Clare made special shoes for him to wear.

27.2C Book 2, chapt. XCVIII.

28. Bigaroni, Meier, Lunghi, op. cit., p. 286. “Oltre alla cucitura centrale che la percorre da cima a fondo, ne troviamo una che unisce il pezzo che ricopre la parte anteriore del piede al resto della calza ed altre, eseguite con vari ritagli, che si riscontrano sull’allargarsi della calza.”

29. O. Ringhieri, *Tesoro sagro delle reliquie che si conservano nel Santuario di S. Chiara d'Assisi*, Bologna, (1741), p. 10. “un calcetto di panno lino, macchiato di sangue nel sito della piaga del piede stimmatizzato del S. Patriarca.”

30. The catalogue dating from the late 14th century was published by L. Bracaloni, in “Le Sacre Reliquie della Basilica di S. Chiara in Assisi,” *AFH*, 12, 1919, pp. 402-417.

31. The Later Rule, Chapt. II.

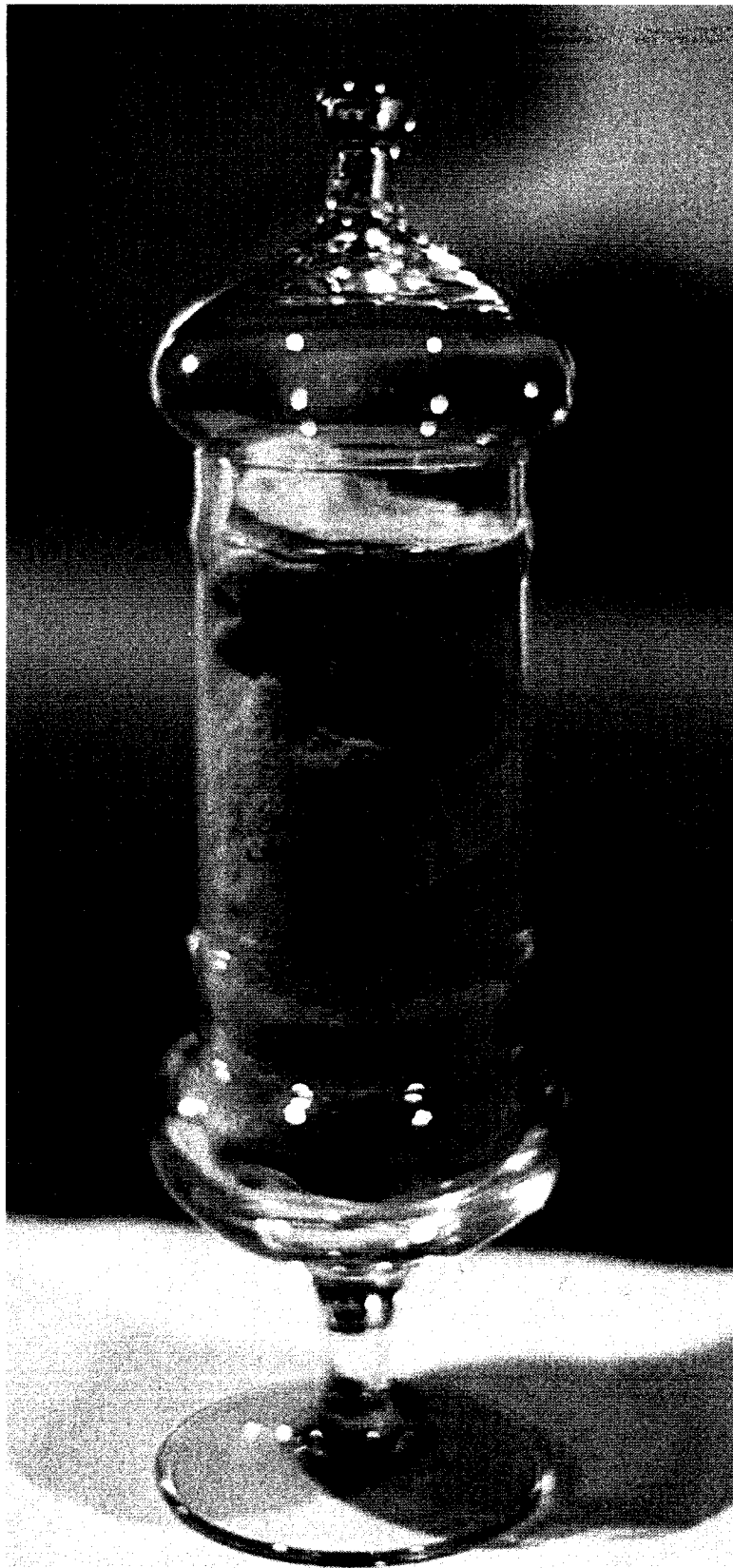


Figure 3



Figure 4

One of these remains carefully preserved in the Monastery of St. Clare in Assisi. (fig. 4)

The following is a description of the shoe in its present condition:

“The shoe is made of two parts joined by a seam. The upper is made of natural-coloured, soft kid leather; while the sole is of thicker and harder leather. A small flap is attached to the front. A thin leather thong joins the two parts of the shoe near the ankle.”³²

In a 14th-century Inventory of Relics the shoe is listed as, “*Ista est una scarpa quam beatus Franciscus portabat*,” (“This is a shoe that the Blessed Francis wore”).³³ The first guide book to Assisi describes it with greater detail, “*una delle scarpe, che porto dopo che ricevette le stimmate, fatta da S. Chiara*” (“one of the shoes which he wore after receiving

32. Bigaroni, Meier, Lunghi, op. cit., p. 286. “La scarpa e formata da due parti unite con una cucitura: la parte superiore e di pelle leggera e morbida di capretto color naturale, mentre la suola e di cuoio piu duro e spesso. Sul davanti e attaccata una piccola linguetta. Verso il collo del piede una striscia di pelle sottile unisce i due lati della scarpa.”

33. Bracaloni, op.cit., p. 409.

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the stigmata, made for him by St. Clare”).³⁴ The shoe also appears mentioned in Giuseppe Ciofi’s *Tesoro Sacro Delle Reliquie, che si conservano nella Sacra Chiesa, e Monastero di S. Chiara d’Assisi*: “un scarpino fatto da S. Chiara a S. Francesco, e portato da lui doppo ricevuto le Stimmate con il sangue della piaga” (“a shoe made by St. Clare for St. Francis and worn by him after he had received the stigmata, with blood from the wound.”)³⁵

Augustino Di Miglio in his *Nuovo Dialogo* suggests that the shoes Clare made for Francis had special soles to accommodate the nails of flesh. Referring to Francis’s infirmity after the stigmata Di Miglio writes,

“He could walk only for short distances and on the tips of his toes. After the stigmata he rode on the back of a donkey. Also after receiving this imprint he wore soles on his feet made by St. Clare, in the center of which she wrought a depression for the points of the nails. The soles are kept in the Monastery of St. Clare in Assisi. I seem to remember having touched them with my own hands”³⁶

This is the only instance I came across of the detail of the concave depression, carved out by Clare to accommodate the protruding fleshy nail. This detail suggests a story of a careful process requiring Clare taking an imprint of Francis’s feet to ensure the precision of the “depression for the points of the nails.” Like the other relics of the wounds, the special insole described by Di Miglio draws attention to the challenges the stigmata posed to Francis’s daily life as well as to the efforts of those closest to him to alleviate his discomfort. If the early sources identify Brother Leo as the one who nursed Francis’s stigmata,

34. Salvi, *Guida de’ pellegrini op. cit.*, p. 27. I owe a debt of gratitude to Sister Chiara Anastasia Hill, osc. for information on the relics in the Monastery of St. Clare in Assisi and for permission to photograph them.

35. G. Ciofi, *Tesoro Sacro*, (1664), p. 5.

36. Di Miglio, op. cit., p. 95, “Poco spazio poteva andare, & questo in punta di piedi. Ma andava di poi a questa impressione, cavalcando sopra uno asinello. Et anchora doppo a tale impressione portò le suola in piede che le fece Santa Chiara. Nelle quali artificialmente fu fatto nel mezzo uno concavo, dove entravano le punte di quelli chiodi ... Le quali suola si riservano, nel monasterio di Santa Chiara dentro a la Città d’Ascesi. Et io anchora mi pare ricordare haverle tocche con le proprie mani.”

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later tales identify Clare as the one who searched for remedies, such as the herbal dressings for the side wound or in this case, an insole custom-made for the nails of flesh. Di Miglio's detail of the depressions in the soles of Francis's shoes conjures very concretely the protrusions that Pope Alexander IV had described as newly created material, added to Francis's flesh by Christ.

The specifics around nursing the wounds, the bandages that soaked up the blood, the socks and special shoes Francis had to wear, are often mentioned as part of the Franciscans' defense of the nature of the wounds. They reinforce the fact that Francis's were not mere marks, mere signs or symbols of Christ's wounds; they were real, open, bleeding, painful wounds which stained clothing, required bandages, made walking painful, required protection with shoes and socks. The relics are mentioned as part of the proof of the unique shape and divine origin of the nails of flesh. Though a knife can wound any part of the body, there are no human means of producing black, nail-like protrusions large enough that bandages can be wedged in grooves separating them from the hands and feet. By the 17th century the Protestants joined the ranks of detractors of the stigmata and the Franciscans remained on the defensive regarding the divine origin of Francis's wounds. In 1619 Antonio Daza writes the following in defense of the fact that only Christ himself could have imprinted the wounds on Francis's hands, feet and side.

"... because they were made in the same form as those of Our Lord Jesus Christ and because they were not only bleeding wounds but wounds with nails and nail heads crafted from the flesh itself, with the points bent back and all equal and all four identical without any distinction between them. Being made of flesh, the nails were harder than sinews, and they were so detached from the flesh of the hand that several pieces of linen were wedged in the space by the brothers in order to soak up the blood. Moreover, being wounds they emitted free flowing blood, without solid matter and without unpleasant odours. ... Neither could his sacred wounds be the result solely of meditation of Christ because if the ardent meditations and imagination of His Passion had produced wounds, the Blessed Virgin would also have received them, being the one who most meditated upon and felt the Passion and wounds of her Holy Son. And though it is true that often the flesh is in some, the subject of imagination – not the hard, sinewy flesh (as the glorious St. Augustine called it) which is that of the soles of the feet and palms of the hands. So it is clear that these holy wounds could not

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have been made either by artifice or nature, or by meditation or any other human ingenuity, but only by divine power, transferred from the Flesh of Our Redeemer onto that of his servant Francis. ... which San Bernardino of Siena asserts ... that he doesn't recall having read that Our Lord Jesus Christ made anything by His own hand (that is approved by the Church) except for the nails and wounds of Our Father St. Francis."³⁷

In this passage Daza recapitulates and addresses the persisting points of contention regarding the form, nature, origin and theological significance of the marks on Francis's body.

The bandages serve to emphasize how separate the nails were from the rest of the flesh,

"so detached from the flesh of the hand that several pieces of linen were wedged in the space."³⁸ Daza stresses, as others before him, that the wounds bled, "they emitted free

flowing blood."³⁹ These characteristics support the fact that the stigmata could not have

been produced by meditating on Christ's suffering, by the intensity of Francis's imagination.

If this were possible Daza argues, surely the Virgin would have been the first to

receive them. Daza insists, in other words, that the stigmata were not psychosomatic. He

recognizes the power of the imagination over the flesh, but the body's responsiveness, its

malleability, had limits, "though it is true that often the flesh is in some the subject of

37.Daza, op. cit., pp. 100-101, "... perche erono del proprio modo, e fattura di quelle, che hebbe N.S. Giesù Christo, e perche furono non solamente Piaghe co'l sangue; ma con chiodi fatti della medesima carne col'capo, con le punte radoppiate, eguali, e simili tutti quattro, senza veruna differenza fra l'uno, e l'altro, e con l'essere chiodi di Carne, erono piu duri, che nervi, e stavono appartati dall'altra Carne tanto, che fra detta Carne, e chiodi capivono alcune pezzette di panno lino, che vi ponevono li Compagni del Santo per asciugargli il sangue. Ancora perche essendo piaghe manavano sangue puro, e non fecero mai materia, ne ebbero mal'odore, ... Ne meno le sue sagratissime Piaghe potevono essere effetti solamente della meditatione di Cristo, perche se la vehemente meditatione, e imaginatione della sua Passione avesse fatto piaghe, la Vergine sagratissima l'haverebbe havute; per esser lei quella, che più meditò, e senti la Passione, e piaghe del suo santissimo Figliuolo. E a ben che sia vero, che la Carne stia molte volte in alcuni soggetta all'imaginatione, non la Carne dura, e nervosa (come dice il glorioso P. S. Agostino) qual'è quella delle piante de'piedi, e delle palme delle mani: e così consta chiaramente, che non potevono esser fatte queste sagratissime piaghe ne per arte, ne per natura, ne per meditatione, ne per alcun'altra industria humana; ma solo per virtù Divina, translate dalla Carne del Nostro Redentore in quella del suo servo Francesco ... il che dice San Bernardino da Siena, ... che non si ricorda, haver letto che'l nostro Signore Giesù Cristo, habbia fatto, nessuna cosa imediatamente di sua propria mano (che sia approvata da S. Chiesa) se non li chiodi, e le piaghe del nostro Padre S. Francesco."

38.*Ibid.*

39.*Ibid.*

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imagination – not the hard, sinewy flesh ... which is that of the soles of the feet and palms of the hands.”⁴⁰ The imagination cannot pierce through sinewy flesh, nor can it create new flesh. Daza re-asserts the words of Alexander IV, that the wounds and the nails in Francis’s flesh are the only thing that Christ made “by His own hand.”⁴¹

The notion of the nails as separate entities, created and embedded in Francis’s hands and feet by Christ, is reinforced by the legend of Clare’s attempt to pull a nail out of Francis’s wound. Daza writes,

“Being of flesh, these nails had the firmness and colour of iron and they pierced the hands and feet from one side to the other and though they were totally separate from the flesh they could not be pulled out. This was attempted by St. Clare when she tried to take one of the nails from the hand; which she could not do despite her efforts.”⁴²

This legend, which likely originated with Bartholomew of Pisa,⁴³ was included in one of Jacopone da Todi’s *laude*: “St. Clare, coveting the sacred treasure, tried in vain to loosen it with her teeth. But the fleshy nails were as hard as iron and sinewy.”⁴⁴ Daza writes that Clare tried to extract the nail from the wound, “in order always to have with her a relic of this great Father.”⁴⁵ And, “despite forceful efforts”⁴⁶ she was unsuccessful because, “God

40.*Ibid.*

41.*Ibid.*

42. Daza, op. cit., p. 102, “... essendo di Carne questi chiodi havevono la durezza, e colore di ferro, e trapassavono le mani, e’ piedi da una parte all’altra; e ben che stessero appartati dalla Carne per tutte le parti, non si potevono perciò cavar di quivi, come lo sperimentò la gloriosa Vergine Santa Chiara, quando tentò di cavare uno de’ chiodi delle mani: che dopoi aver fatto ogni diligenza non potè.”

43. See *de Conformitate*, op. cit., p. 372, *quod clavi movebantur et tamen a minibus nec a pedibus removeri potuerunt, cum beata Clara et alii hoc facere attentarunt.*

44. See G. Ferri, *Laude di frate Jacopone da Todi secondo la stampa fiorentina del 1490 con prospetto grammaticale e lessico*. p. 91, “Fra l’altri sancta Chiara si l’apicciò co i denti, de tal thesaro avara essa con la sua gente; ma non gli valse niente, cha gli chiovi eran de carne, si como ferro stane duro & ennervato...”

45.*Ibid.*, p.201. “... per haver sempre seco reliquia di tanto gran Padre...”

46.*Ibid.*, “... benche lo procurasse con ogni forza , e con ogni industria ...”

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in His Majesty did not wish that the nails or stigmata should find themselves in other hands than his and in those of his subject Francis.”⁴⁷ Daza suggests God did not wish the nail loosened because no other hands were worthy of “holding” it; it was not his will that the nails be removed from Francis’s flesh and preserved as relics of the Stigmatization the way the original nails were preserved as relics of the Crucifixion.

Salvatore Vitale in *Teatro Serafico delle Stimmate* (1629), reflects on the conformity between the nails in Francis’s flesh and the nails that pierced Christ. Vitale says they were the same number, four; they had the same round shape, the same black colour. They were even, proportionately speaking, the same size. He writes, “The holy nails of Christ were long, as can be seen in the nail that one can visit in Rome ...”⁴⁸ In the case of Francis’s nails, “Their size and length were in proportion to the hands and feet of St. Francis; in other words they did not pierce through the wood as those of Christ.”⁴⁹ For Vitale, the nails in Francis’s flesh, “the image representing the originals”⁵⁰ possessed similar virtues as the Instruments of the Passion:

47.*Ibid.*, “...non volendo la Maestà di Dio (ch’opro quel singulare miracolo) che ne li chiodi, ne le stimmate si trovasse in altra mano, che nelle sue, & in quelle del suo regalato Francesco ...”

48.Vitale. op. cit., p. 281, “Erono i sacratissimi chiodi di Cristo lunghi, si come lo dimostra il chiodo, che si visita in Roma.”

49.*Ibid.*, p. 283, “lunghezza, e grandezza proporzionata allo stato, che haveano le mani, e piedi di San Francesco; cioè non confitti in legno come quelli del Signore.”

50.*Ibid.*, p. 285.

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“One may see a great analogy between the virtue of Christ’s nails and the nails of his servant Francis, and small wonder that the image representing the originals also represents their virtues. Francis’s nails are the living image of those of Christ, by whose power they appear wondrous.”⁵¹

In his treatise Vitale includes an engraving of Francis framed by the Instruments of the Passion; its inscription reads, “*Signasti Domine Servuum tuum Franciscus Signis Redemptionis nostre.*” (fig. 5) For Vitale Francis’s body was embedded with the Instruments of the Passion and by great stretches of the imagination, he compares the miracles of the nails of Christ and Francis. Just as a nail of Christ calmed the waters of the ocean during a storm, the water that washed Francis’s wounds cured sick cattle, “Thus, the nails of St. Francis in the guise of their Prototype the nails of Christ, are wondrous in the waters of the sea and the earth.”⁵² Just as the Emperor Constantine wore the nails on the harness of his horse to shield him in battle, the nails of St. Francis touched the harness of his donkey which then healed a woman who could not conceive. As Christ’s nail was placed in the Diadem of the Emperor Constantine, so too many princes and monarchs carried the insignia of Francis’s wounds and nails on their weapons. Vitale compares Francis’s nails of flesh not to Christ’s wounds but to the relics of the nails, to Instruments of the Passion. Along with the legends of Clare’s trying to pull a nail from Francis’s wound, Vitale illustrates the extent to which devotion to the nails as separate entities had grown.

The presence of nails made Francis’s wounds Christ-like only while Christ was on the Cross. They did not resemble the wounds of Christ in the tomb or after his Resurrec-

51. *Ibid.*, “Grandissima analogia si scorge trà la virtù delli chiodi di Cristo, e li chiodi del suo servo Francesco nella virtù; e non e maraviglia, che la figura, come rappresentativa del figurato, rappresenti ancora gl’effetti di quello. Li chiodi di Francesco viva imagine sono di quelli di Cristo, per la cui virtù si mostron mirabili.”

52. *Ibid.*, p. 286, “Ecco, che li chiodi di San Francesco a guisa del suo Prototipo li chiodi di Cristo hanno virtù nell’acqua marina, e terrestre.”

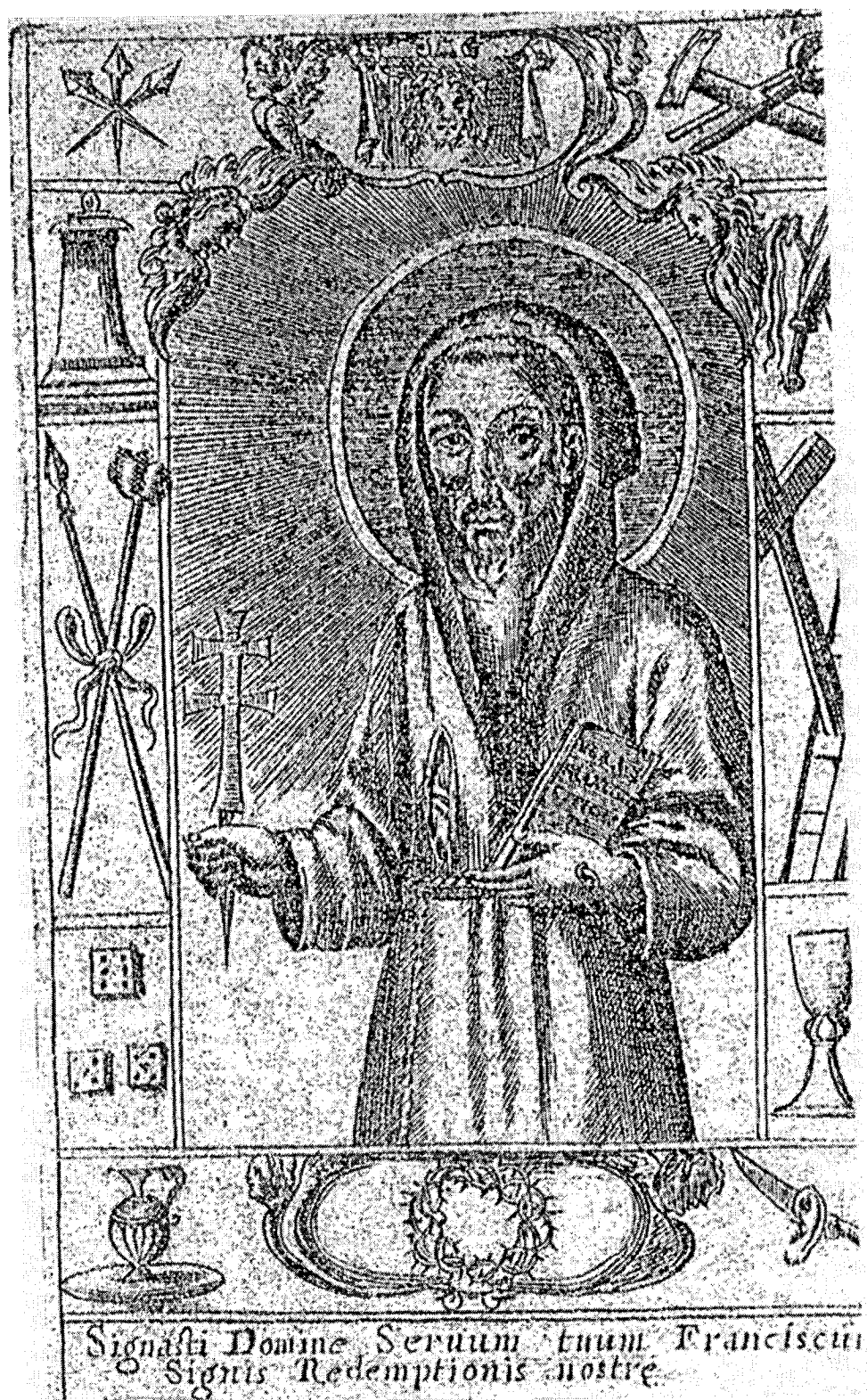


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tion. After the Stigmatization, the nails in Francis's wounds suspended him on the Cross with Christ for two years, making him a living Crucifix. The idea of Christ as the artisan who crafted a new kind of Crucifix in Stigmatizing Francis is explored in two sermons delivered in the Church of the Confraternity of the Stigmata in Rome during the octave of the Feast of the Stigmata. The first I will examine is by Fausto Zerboni: *Discussion of the Sacred Stigmata of St. Francis, (Ragionamento delle Sacre Stimate di S. Francesco)* (1641). Zerboni likens the Stigmatization of Francis to a divine act of creation comparable to the creation of the universe:

"... this creation is nothing compared to a greater marvel ... Christ is a more excellent artisan for having made of Himself a Cross ... than for having created heaven and earth ... with five lances of light with enormous force he pierced him, fills his heart with joy and at the same time his body with wounds. With no court condemning, He himself is the arbiter. With no other executioner He himself carries out the wounding. On the anvil of Francis's flesh He creates the nails and without any other wood, making of Himself a Cross, He crucifies him, so Bonaventure says, *Franciscus nova Creatura, novus homo, noviter Crucifixus*.... Here is the artisan, there is his work, the stigmatized Francis, who surpasses any great creation ... If Christ is a Cross and Francis the Crucified ... I say it would follow that Francis can be measured against God ... Forgive my devotion if speaking of a saint so extraordinary I overstep a little the accepted rhetoric. Take it as it is meant..."⁵³

As with other sermons on the stigmata examined in previous chapters, Zerboni makes statements about the Stigmatized Francis that are so bold that he feels compelled to apologize for them. He implies the creation of the Stigmatized, "Crucified" Francis was more wondrous than the creation of the universe because it involved God transforming himself,

53. F. Zerboni, *Ragionamento delle Sacre Stimate di S. Francesco*, (1641), p.13, "questa fabbrica è nulla, rispetto à una di maggior maraviglia...Cristo è fabbro più eccellente per haver formata di se stesso una Croce, che per haver fatto il Cielo, e la terra... con cinque lancie di luce con gigantesca forza, lo trafigge: gli empie di gioia il cuore, e tutto in un tempo il corpo di ferite. Senza, che altro tribunale lo sententij, arbitre egli medesimo il condanna, senza che altro carnefice si adopri, esso stesso esecutore l'impiega ... su l'incude della carne batte i fulmini e i chiodi; e senza, che altro legno comparisca; in se medesimo, fabricata di se stesso una Croce, lo crocifigge: quindi hebbe a dir S. Bonaventura: *Franciscus nova Creatura novus homo, noviter Crucifixus*. ... sì, sì ecco il fabbro, ecco l'opera, Francesco stimatizzato, che avanza ogni grand'opra. O fabrica più degna della divina destra, che non è quella dell'universo tutto. Che se Cristo è Croce, e Francesco è Crocifisso, lasciatemi tirar una conseguenza. Dunque dico io: par che tanto vaglia Francesco quanto vale Iddio. Piano alle propositioni. Perdonate alla mia divotione, se parlando d'un Santo, ch'esce dall'ordine, trascorro un tantino anch'io il dir regolato: intendetela pero, come va intesa ..."

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“Christ is a more excellent artisan for having made of Himself a cross.”⁵⁴ Zerboni suggests that in creating the world God remained detached from it, manifesting his power, whereas the Stigmatization of Francis implied divine condescension comparable to the Incarnation. The Stigmatization entailed Christ’s willingness to merge with matter again, to relive the drama of Calvary. In the Stigmatization, however, Christ was not the victim but the perpetrator of the crime, the one responsible for “crucifying” Francis. “On the anvil of Francis’s flesh He creates the nails and without any other wood, making of Himself a Cross, He crucifies him ...”⁵⁵ Zerboni permits himself to say the Stigmatization of Francis was a greater feat than the creation of the world because what resulted was God-like. Zerboni says, “Here is the artisan, there is his work, the stigmatized Francis, who surpasses any great creation ... If Christ is a Cross and Francis the Crucified ... I say it would follow that Francis can be measured against God ...”⁵⁶

After the death of Christ, men carved crosses and crucifixes to pray to. Zerboni writes,

“I ask an artisan to make me a wooden crucifix. Once it is made I venerate the crucifix ... and God accepts the devotion directed to wood when it is a crucifix. Now Christ a worthier artisan makes of Himself a Cross and makes the Crucified of a nobler material than wood ... You agree that the Cross and Crucified are worthy of the same devotion ... Francis crucified is equal to Christ his Cross.”⁵⁷

For Zerboni, Christ formed nails of flesh “on the anvil of Francis’s body” to join Francis

54. *Ibid.*

55. *Ibid.*

56. *Ibid.*

57. *Ibid.*, p. 13, “Io me’n vado da un fabbro: fatemi da questo legno un Cristo in Croce. Fatto ch’egli è; io adoro così di latria il Crocifisso, ... e si contenta Iddio nella stima presso gli huomini andar di pari con un legno, quando si tratta di Croce e di Crocifisso. Horsù: Cristo fabbro più degno, fa se stesso Croce:...e fa un Crocifisso di materia più nobile, che non è il legno Ma voi havete detto, che la Croce, e’l Crocifisso han la medesima adoratione ... Francesco Crocifisso vada di pari con Cristo sua Croce.”

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to himself, as the crucified is joined to the cross, making one crucifix, so that the prayers directed to this “crucifix” reach both Francis and Christ. Zerboni explains this intertwining of the human and divine with another metaphor:

“You enter a shop and see beautiful fabric of gold lightly interwoven with silver flowers. How much is it? It is worth its weight in gold. But here it is mixed with silver. It is the same when silver is woven into gold; it is worth the weight of gold. How much is Francis worth? If naked, alone, and without stigmata he is worth the weight of an ordinary saint. But Francis embroidered with the gold of Christ’s wounds is worth the weight of the gold of Christ... Francis crucified, united with Christ his Living Cross is equal to Christ his Cross.”⁵⁸

Zerboni suggests Francis’s stigmatized body must be measured by its divine, not human components.

Antonio Vieira in *Sermone delle Stimmate di S. Francesco* (1672) also preaches that Francis was a Crucifix sculpted by Christ. He writes, “Christ divine sculptor and printer, imprinting in Francis the mark of His wounds ... the Crucifix newly remodelled with an additional element.”⁵⁹ Vieira grants Francis a more active role in the Stigmatization than Zerboni. For Vieira, in the new crucifix, the sins of the Instruments of the Crucifixion of Christ, the cross and the nails, are atoned for by Francis’s body. He writes, “The tools with which Christ’s wounds were first inflicted were nails and the Cross. I would have much to say on Christ’s behalf about these two tools ... Why were you not moved,

58. *Ibid.*, p. 14, “Siete in una bottega di variati drappi, scuoprite bellissima tela di fin’oro vagamente intessuta con fiorami d’argento: Quanto vale questa? Vale à peso d’oro; ma qui c’è dell’argento mischiato. Tant’è. quando l’argento è lavorato con oro, vale a peso d’oro. Quanto vale Francesco? S’è nudo, solo, e senza le stimate, vale à peso d’un santo ordinario: ma Francesco ricamato con l’oro delle Piaghe di Cristo, vale à peso d’oro di Cristo. Francesco Crocifisso che fa union con Cristo animata sua Croce, vale quanto val Cristo sua Croce.”

59. Vieira, *op. cit.*, p. 6, “Cristo scultore ed impressor Divino imprimendo in Francesco i caratteri delle sue piaghe ... Il Crocifisso con aggiunta, e con gran novità ristampato. ... Il crocefisso ristampato in Francesco.”

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why did you not come undone in that moment?”⁶⁰ Vieira wonders at the fact that the nails and wood of the cross were not responsive to the horror of Calvary in the same way as the mountains that quaked with the death of Christ. This “insensitivity” was corrected by the “sensitive” nails in Francis’s flesh, the pain of which expiated the sins of the original nails:

“This was the shortcoming in the tools of the first impression of Christ’s wounds. But see how nobly this was corrected in Francis, the second impression. Not only were the wounds in Francis’s feet and hands open but in the centre of each could be seen a nail which pierced them and which was made of the same flesh, black and blue just like the colour of iron. I admire these nails more than the wounds themselves. In Christ Crucified, it was His hands, His feet, His wounds which bore the pain; but the hard insensitive nails did not suffer. In the crucified Francis the feet and hands suffer, the wounds endure in the living flesh, and so too do the nails. On Calvary the very stones broke apart to indicate the pain, but being insensitive they did not feel pain. The nails of the harder stones felt the pain, showed the pain, or rather they caused excruciating pain. Thus because Christ’s nails caused pain, Francis’s nails were able to feel pain. Living nails, sensitive nails, reasoning nails, because knowing the reason for feeling, they felt both the pain and its cause. Oh Holy Spirit. Oh more than miraculous love! Francis’s love felt so ardently, so deeply, so painfully the torment and offence of those nails that he changed and moulded and brought them to life in himself.”⁶¹

If Christ forged the nails in Francis’s body, it was Francis who felt the pain, whose compassion made them “sensitive.” Francis took on the faults not only of the nails but of the Cross as well:

“Thus Francis endured the flaws of the nails. Likewise that of the Cross, the second instrument to contribute

60. *Ibid.*, p.13, “Gl’istrumenti, con cui la prima volta s’impressero in Cristo le piaghe, furono i chiodi, e la Croce. Contro di questi due istrumenti ho io molto di che quarelarmi per parte di Cristo. ... Perche non v’inteneriste, perche non vi spezzaste, perche non vi disfaceste in quell’ora?”

61. *Ibid.*, p. 14, “Questo fù il difetto de gl’istrumenti nella prima impressione delle piaghe di Cristo; ma vedete come nobilmente l’emendò nella seconda stampa Francesco. Ne’ piedi e nelle mani di Francesco non vi eran solo le piaghe aperte; mà nel mezzo di ciascheduna vedeasi rilevato un chiodo, che le trafiggeva, formato della medesima carne, nero, ed azurro giusta il colore dell’istesso ferro. Più ammiro questi chiodi che le piaghe stesse. In Cristo Crocifisso pativan le mani, pativano i piedi, pativan le piaghe; ma i chiodi duri, ed insensibili non pativano: In Francesco crocifisso patiscono i piedi e le mani, patiscono nella carne viva le piaghe, e chiodi stessi patiscono. Nel Calvario spezzavansi mostrando dolore le pietre, ma non havevan dolore, perch’erano insensibili: i chiodi delle pietre piu duri, ne haveano dolore, ne mostravan dolore, anzi che cagionavano dolori acerbissimi: e perche i chiodi in Cristo cagionavan dolori, per questo i chiodi in Francesco son capaci di dolore. Chiodi vivi, chiodi sensitivi, chiodi ragionevoli; perche conoscendo la ragion di sentire, sentissero il dolore, ed anco la causa. O Spirito, o amore più che miracoloso! Apprese l’amor di Francesco si vivamente, si fortemente, si dolorosamente il tormento, e l’offesa di quegli chiodi, che gli trasformò, egl’informò, e li vivificò in se stesso.”

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in the imprinting of the first wounds. St. Bonaventure observed that Francis's nails not only pierced his hands and feet, but that on the outer side they were bent back on themselves, blunted as though re-hammered. ... Yet another mystery, another and more delicate, gentle wonder. The nails pierced the hands and feet of the Crucified, yet they are not bent back on themselves neither are they bent back on the feet but they are hammered into the Cross. Therefore if the nails pierced Francis and were bent back in Francis, he was not only crucified, but was both crucified and crucifix in one. That is the case. Why was Francis a cross or made himself one? To correct in himself the flaw in the Cross of Christ. Because the Cross of Christ was insensitive and did not suffer. He made himself into a sensitive cross, a responsive cross and a patient cross." ⁶²

In Vieira's description, for two years Francis's body bore the Cross and nails, in an act of continuous atonement, expiating the sins of the Instruments of the Passion. For both Zerbini and Vieira Francis's body becomes like the stage of a Passion Play, with Christ and Francis assuming all the roles of the drama; Christ is both executioner and Cross, Francis is both the victim and the instruments of execution. Jean-Claude Schmitt noted of medieval ascetics, "Des femmes comme Dorothée de Montau ou Julienne de Norwich, des hommes comme Henri Suso ou Robert de Salentino, s'infligent la discipline dans une sorte de pantomime de la flagellation du Christ dont ils désirent réaliser dans leur chair la parfaite *Imitatio*."⁶³ But the Stigmatization as interpreted by Franciscans was no pantomime of the Crucifixion because the main actor was Christ; the depth of Francis's devotion only made his flesh malleable to *receive* the actions of Christ, who condescended to re-enact his Passion and carve a crucifix from Francis's flesh to remind humankind of

62. *Ibid.*, pp.15-16, "Così emendo, e supplì Francesco il difetto de' chiodi. E così parimente quello della Croce; che fu il secondo istrumento che concorse duramente all'impressione delle prime piaghe. Osservò S. Bonaventura, che i chiodi delle piaghe di Francesco non solo li trafiggevano le mani e' piedi, mà che ancora dalla parte opposta eran ritorti, raddoppiati, e come ribattuti. ... Nuovo mistero, nuova, e più delicata maraviglia. I chiodi trafiggono le mani, e' piedi del Crocifisso; ma non si raddoppiano, ne si ribattono nelle mani, non si raddoppiano, ne si ribattono ne piedi, ma ben sì nella Croce. Dunque se i chiodi trafiggevano Francesco, e si ribattevano in Francesco, Francesco non solo era crocifisso, ma crocefisso, e croce insieme. Così è. Ma perch' era egli, o si fece egli Croce? Per correggere in se stesso il difetto della croce di Cristo. Perche la Croce di Cristo fu insensibile, e non patì; egli si fece e Croce sensibile, e Croce passibile, e Croce paziente. Nella Croce del Calvario pativa Cristo, perch'era in carne mortale; ma la Croce non pativa, perch'era già immortale, e glorioso; mà la Croce pativa, perch'era Croce animata, Croce viva, Croce passibile, e veramente Francesco trasformato in Croce."

63. Jean-Claude Schmitt, *La Raison des Gestes dans l'Occident médiéval*, (Paris, 1990), p. 319.

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his Original Sacrifice.

While Zerboni and Vieira do not mention the relics of the nails of flesh, their sermons shed light on the development of devotion to the nails in Francis's hands and feet, which in turn offer clues of the cult of their relics. There is one final context I would like to examine in which the relics of the stigmata are mentioned specifically, the dispute between the Franciscans and Dominicans over the differences between the stigmata of Francis and the invisible stigmata of St. Catherine of Siena. The battleground was the field of images, the rights to represent Catherine's wounds in iconography.⁶⁴ In 1599, Clement VIII commissioned a Dominican from Siena, Gregorio Lombardelli, to write a defense of the stigmata of Catherine, *Sommario della Disputa a difesa delle Sacre Stimate di Santa Caterina da Siena*, (*Summary of the Dispute in Defense of the Sacred Stigmata of St. Catherine of Siena*), published in 1601. Lombardelli's most forceful argument for painting Catherine with the wounds is that one of the functions of paintings is to represent invisible reality symbolically. As examples of common iconographic symbols Lombardelli cites the fact that the Trinity does not comprise of an elderly man, a Son on the cross and a dove; the Virgin does not really have swords piercing her heart; angels are not winged men; the Evangelists were not animals and the Apostle Peter did not carry keys. Why therefore are the Franciscans scandalized when they see Catherine painted with visible stigmata representing the invisible? The Dominicans, Lombardelli adds, are not scandalized when they see Francis's wounds, the *signa clavorum*, painted incorrectly,

64. See Vauchez, (1968), op. cit., p. 611, « Pendant tout le XVe siècle, la sainte siennoise fut au centre d'un débat passionné dont l'enjeu était d'importance. Admettre la réalité de ses stigmates, comme le faisaient les Dominicains, c'était nier que ceux-ci fussent un privilège accordé par Dieu au seul S. François. » On the controversies over the representation of Catherine's stigmata see, Bianchi, L, Giunta, D, *Iconografia di S. Caterina da Siena*, (Rome, 1988).

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symbolically:

“... as we are not scandalized on seeing the image of Saint Francis with his feet and hands stained red by the blood issuing from his wounds, although they may not have issued, nor might the wounds be visible; rather he had the nails of his own flesh, with the heads of the nails on the palm side, black as iron and bent back on the upper side. This was asserted by the Seraphic S. Bonaventura in chapter 13 of his “Life of the Saint”; likewise did Pope Alexander IV confirm it in two of his bulls, nor is it disputed ... in the *Fioretti*, though I have never seen these wounds represented in paintings as described by the above. If it is not an error to alter the manner of it in paintings, dear God, why should it be a mistake to paint St. Catherine with visible wounds which represent the invisible?”⁶⁵

While Lombardelli’s logic is sound that visible signs are used to represent invisible realities, it dismisses the enormous significance, the centuries of devotion centered precisely around the physicality of Francis’s wounds, the fact that they made Francis the painting, the portrait, the artifact created by Christ himself.

While it is not within the scope of this study to enter into the dispute between Franciscans and Dominicans, I would like to refer to a Franciscan rebuttal to the Dominican claims that Francis’s hands and feet did not bleed as they were depicted in paintings. *Religiosa Difesa al singular favore delle Sagratiss. Stimmate del raffigurato di Christo S. Francesco*, (*Religious defense of the unique favour of the Sacred Stigmata of the image of Christ, St. Francis*) was written in 1668 by Francesco Ugolini. Ugolini enlists the relics of the stigmata to counter Dominican claims, like Lombardelli’s, that the wounds on Francis’s hands and feet, the *signa clavorum*, did not bleed.⁶⁶ The relics of the stigmata, Fran-

65. G. Lombardelli, *Sommario della Disputa a difesa delle Sacre Stimate di Santa Caterina da Siena*, Siena, 1601, p. 33 “... come non ci scandaliziamo noi, mentre che vediamo l’immagine di S. Francesco con le Piaghe de’ piedi, e mani rubiconde, e versanti sangue, benche esse non versassero sangue, nè si vedesser le Piaghe: ma della propria carne vi havesse i chiodi, che dalla parte della palma havevano il capo nero, come il ferro, e dalla parte di sopra rintuzzati pur neri: così dicendo il Serafico San Bonaventura nel 13 cap. della Vita del Santo; così dicendo Papa Alessandro quarto in due suoi Brevi ... nè da i Fioretti, con tutto ciò, io non ho mai veduto quelle Santissime Piaghe così dipinte, come i sopradetti narrano, e se non è errore il variare il modo con la pittura; o immortale Idio, perche è errore il dipinger S. Caterina con le visibili Piaghe, le quali rappresentino l’invisibili ...”

66. F. Ugolini, *Religiosa Difesa al Singular favour delle Sagratiss. Stimmate del raffigurato di Cristo S. Francesco*, Udine, (1668). Ugolini is not responding to Lombardelli but to a discourse made by the Dominican Alberto Fiorentino in 1667, challenging the uniqueness of Francis’s stigmata.

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cis's blood-stained habit and bandages, the chamois, Ugolini says, are evidence that should suffice for the whole world that Francis's wounds did indeed bleed. As for the wounds on the feet, Ugolini presents the relics of the shoes as evidence:

"These therefore are the scars, in which are visible, the nails forged by the Creator of all things. A piece of congealed blood that oozed from the sacred feet remains attached to the upper part of a pair of shoes which St. Clare herself made, thus the scars flowed with blood and clear liquid, not malodorous, but on the contrary sweet smelling."⁶⁷

Ugolini presents the relics as definitive proof, forensic evidence, that all of Francis's wounds bled. The relics underscore the difference between Francis's and Catherine's wounds; symbolic wounds don't bleed, and should not be confused with real wounds. For Franciscans there was an obligation to paint Francis with his wounds, the same obligation there was to paint Christ with his wounds. Painting Catherine with visible wounds undermined the significance of Francis's incarnate wounds and blurred the distinction, on canvas and in the minds of devotees, between the symbolic and the real.

Lombardelli's claim that the *signa clavorum* were incorrectly painted as wounds instead of nails is true of most early iconography of the stigmata; but there are paintings in which the nails of flesh are represented as vividly as they were described in the early sources and the devotional literature. One such painting is by Guglielmo Caccia ca.1560, entitled *San Francesco sorretto dagli angeli* (*St. Francis Supported by Angels*). (fig.6) In this painting Francis is in ecstasy, his eyes turned heavenwards as his limp body is held by angels who appear to have broken his fall, his swoon. These aspects of the painting rein-

67. *Ibid.*, p. 13, "Queste dunque sono cicatrici, dentro le quali si vedono chiodi dal Facitore di tutto fabricati, delle quali si vede in un paio di scarpe fatteli fare da S. Chiara medesima, un pezzo di quella materia sanguigna congelata, che da sagri piedi usciva attaccata alla parte di sopra; si che mandano fuori sangue, & humori chiarissimi senza alcuna putredine, anzi odoriferi, e fragranti ..."



Figure 6

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force a view of the Stigmatization as a mystical union between Christ and Francis's soul; no external agents are present, no Seraph, no Christ, no piercing rays. In their place however are the nails of flesh, painted with stark realism, the heads of the nails visible in the palms and their points bent back on the upper part of the hands. (figs 7, 8) These nails do not symbolize the stigmata; they are the nails venerated as the ones forged by Christ when he sculpted a new crucifix on Mount LaVerna, where Francis was "... fixed to the cross in both body and spirit."⁶⁸ The *Sacro Convento* in Assisi possessed several relics of the Passion, they possessed relics of the wood of the Cross as well as one of the nails of the Crucifixion. But the Franciscans' most precious relic of the Passion was the body of their Founder, pierced with the nails that had united him with Christ on the Cross, the same nails that had been encircled by the bandages and protected by the sock and shoe still preserved with reverence by Clare's sisters in Assisi.



Figure 7



Figure 8

68. LMj 14,1.

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Conclusion

Much of this dissertation was written in a Benedictine Monastery just outside Montreal. During my stays at *l'Abbaye Ste-Marie des Deux-Montagnes* I became accustomed to the daily rhythm of the monastic life, punctuated by the sound of bells calling the sisters to chapel to sing the offices. The beauty of the Gregorian chants always soothed the soul, but over time I was more deeply moved by the sisters' steadfastness, their dedication to prayer. Observing their daily practice I understood what Thomas of Celano meant when he wrote that Francis did not so much pray as become himself a prayer.¹ Like the sisters in the Abbey, Francis's goal throughout his life had been to achieve a seamlessness between the inner and outer life, a perfect harmony between body and soul. This goal was surpassed on Mount La Verna when on the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, Francis experienced a harmony not only between body and soul but between heaven and earth, as he became transformed into a prayer, a kind of living hymn to the Cross, composed by Christ himself on the instrument of his body.

But who was Christ addressing in this hymn, this prayer? In the devotional literature on the stigmata examined in this study, Christ's prayer was addressed to believers who had grown tepid in their faith. The sight of Francis's stigmata was meant to touch hardened hearts and rekindle devotion to Christ's sacrifice on the Cross. On Mount La Verna Christ transformed Francis's body into a kind of shrine or memorial to the Passion,

1. 2C, Second Book, Chapt. LXI, "He would often ruminate inwardly with unmoving lips, and, drawing outward things inward, he raised his spirit to the heights. Thus he would direct all his attention and affection toward the one thing he asked of the Lord, not so much praying as becoming totally prayer."

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a new devotional site, a new crucifix, to which the devout could direct their prayers. The Creator of the Universe created an artifact on Mount La Verna, made not of iron and wood but of flesh and blood. We have considered how writers and orators used metaphors to describe how Stigmatization transformed Francis; he was called a “Living Shroud,” “Living Eucharist,” “Living Cross,” “Living Crucifix.” These metaphors suggest Francis’s stigmatized body belongs within the category of the relics of Christ: the bodily relics (his blood), the contact relics (the Shroud, wood from the Cross, nails of the Crucifixion) and Christ’s Sacramental body (the Eucharist), all infused with Christ’s *praesentia*. Referring to Francis as “Living Shroud” and “Living Eucharist” suggests an identification between Francis and Christ; they suggest the same theological conclusions about Francis’s wounds as the analyses from Padre Pio’s stigmata which show the blood is the same rare type (AB) found on the Shroud of Turin and the miraculous Eucharist of Lanciano.

In the sources I examined Francis’s wounds were venerable not only because they were Christ-like, but because they had been fashioned by Christ. The effect was that rather than being reminded of the wounds of Christ, peoples’ attention remained arrested on Francis’s wounds, on Christ’s artifacts. The Protestant reformers mocked the Franciscans’ excessive devotion to Francis’s stigmata with statements like, “Those onely were saved by the blood of Christ, who lived before St. Francis, but all that followed, were redeemed by the blood of St. Francis, I think now it is needless to insert any more of this stuffe, ...”² We saw how the stigmata did indeed become objects of a devotion that strained the limits of orthodoxy. Francis’s body was described as possessing all the currency necessary for Redemption; because of the stigmata, Francis was considered

2. This is from the introduction of the English translation of the *Alcoran* by Erasmus, *The Alcoran of the Franciscans, or a Sink of Lyes and Blasphemies. Collected out of a Blasphemous Book belonging to that Order Called the Book of the Conformities*, (London, 1679), p. 16.

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unequalled among saints, surpassing even the Virgin and the apostles; one drop of blood from the stigmata was worth more than the blood of all the martyrs. By virtue of the stigmata Francis was described as surpassing even the Eucharist. While these statements are extreme, what saved them from outright heresy was that they were made with the view of Christ's role in Stigmatization.

In the postscript to the *Alcoran* Erasmus writes, "But, if our Frank had, in truth, that impression of the Wounds, it was done by the Fascination and cheat of the Devil. But I rather think that after his Death the Monks invented that Tale, for the further confirmation of their Order."³ For Franciscans the wounds were not only real but the creation of Christ; from their perspective, no amount of devotion was excessive. In the sources I examined, what emerged was the great emphasis placed on Christ's role in the act of Stigmatization. In part this was in response to the criticism of the Reformers and others who doubted the divine origin of the wounds. But the role of Christ was also at the heart of devotion to the miracle; how that role evolved beyond the early sources, bears further study. The simple mention of the appearance of the Seraph in the early sources gave way to vivid elaborations of the divine condescension at the moment of Stigmatization, the sense of what it cost the divinity to stigmatize Francis. For some Franciscans, the veneration of Francis's wounds was the veneration of the day Christ descended to earth once more on Mount La Verna where he left his footprints in the earth and his imprints on Francis's body.

The sources I examined expressed the belief that Christ had crafted his presence into Francis's body; he imprinted, sculpted, molded, carved, embroidered or consecrated

3. *Ibid.*, p. 151.

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Francis's flesh. These writers expressed a fascination with this new instance of incarnation, this new way of binding the divine and the human. Their explanations made clear that the binding entailed a transformation on the part of both Francis and Christ. For Francis to become a crucifix, Christ must become the artisan who carves and sculpts his body. If Francis is an imprint or statue, Christ makes himself the matrix or mould, the emptiness in which Francis is formed anew. If Francis is crucified, Christ is executioner and cross and the forger of nails of flesh. If Francis is a Eucharist, Christ is the priest at the altar consecrating his body and blood. In each of these images, Christ transforms Francis into a physical image of himself. In the process Christ is also transformed, remaining perpetually bound with mortal flesh in the five wounds left on Francis's body. It is this belief that permitted Franciscans to go so far as to say that Francis's wounds even surpassed Christ's; Christ's wounds were inflicted by human hatred, whereas Francis's were crafted by divine love. It is in this sense that the wounds of Francis were not seen as copies of Christ's but as *original* artifacts of Christ.

I have tried to show how the relics of the stigmata were infused with the meaning of both the wounds and the event of Stigmatization, how they were physical traces of the physiology, the poetics and the theology of the wounds. I have tried to show how the relics of the stigmata were seen as relics of Christ's artifacts. The habit had been "between" Francis and Christ at the moment of the piercing of the side wound. The liquefaction of the blood relics was evidence of the continuity of Christ's "touch," his continuous presence in the blood of the stigmata. The bandages encircled the nails forged by Christ on "the anvil" of Francis's body and the shoe accommodated the new flesh which only the Creator of the physical world could have created. If my greatest challenge was the scarcity of textual

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sources for the relics, this was to some extent compensated for by the variety and significance of the contexts in which the relics were mentioned. The relics of the stigmata contributed to every level of the ongoing debates over the nature of Francis's wounds. They were evidence of Francis's everyday experience of the wounds, evidence of their shape and proof that they bled. They were also used as evidence that the wounds were not the product of meditation, but were divine in origin. The *camoscio* relic of the side wound is evidence of the most radical hermeneutics of the stigmata. The chamois with the spear-shaped tear appears to present Francis's actual side wound conflated with Christ's side wound, rendered indistinguishable from it by a Eucharistic monstrance. The presentation of this contact relic is emblematic of the historic moment when mystical union occurred in the spirit and in the flesh, when the union was not only between the human soul and Divine Soul, but between human and divine bodies.

In the course of this study I examined inventory catalogues and guide books with lists of relics of both human and divine bodies. I came to realize how reading through a list of relics of Christ and the Passion had the effect of conjuring that narrative with all of its milestones captured in its traces. For instance in the Salvi guide to Assisi (1618) I have referred to, there is a long list of relics of Christ which includes the wood of the Cross and a thorn from the crown on thorns, fabric stained with blood at the foot of the Cross; it also includes wood from the table of the Last Supper, stone from the Sepulcher, stone from the place Christ fasted for forty days, relics of the manger where he was born and so on. These are followed by a list of relics of the Virgin, relics of the apostles, then the martyrs and finally relics of St. Francis, beginning with his body "marked with the signs of our

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Redemption”.⁴ The Inventory then lists the *camoscio*, the handkerchiefs with which Francis dried his tears, the woolen fabric that covered the wounds on his feet, the shoes, etc. Read aloud to pilgrims to Assisi, the relics conjure the whole Christian narrative, placing pilgrims in the presence of the most important milestones of their faith. I think an examination of the narrative function of important relic inventories, especially those meant to be read aloud in liturgical settings, bears further study.

Relics conjure a story differently than words and their effect is not always easy to describe. I felt this most in the case of the *impiastro*, the herbal dressing made by Clare for the side wound, discussed in chapter 4. This relic has an air of authenticity, not according to any critical criteria or because it had reliable historical sources; in fact, Clare’s care of the wounds is not mentioned by either Celano or Bonaventure. It seems authentic because it conjurs a story that stirs the imagination deeply; it recounts a new chapter in the story of the stigmata, a story easy to believe, the story of Clare’s response and care for Francis’s wounds; a story that was unbounded by texts. I hope that in this study I have been able to transmit the poetry of the *impiastro*, the theological richness of the *camoscio*, the historical significance of the habit and the uniqueness of all the relics of the stigmata of St. Francis of Assisi, traces of the meeting of heaven and earth.

4. See Salvi, op. cit., p. 10-12.

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