Introduction

The Other Voice

The “other” voices in early modern European history[1]—so often unnoticed, many now amplified in the Other Voice series—were numerous, original, and even unique. Camilla Battista da Varano (1458–1524) delivered one such voice.[2] At first glance, the circumstances of her life, and the content and context of her religious devotions, seem perfectly conventional, even commonplace. But while her voice echoed some of the commonplaces associated with the writing of contemporary religious women,[3] at the same time she uttered statements and expressed attitudes that undermined the validity of those very commonplaces.

The illegitimate daughter of the prominent noble Varano family of east-central Italy, spurred by the conviction that God had called her by the words of contemporary Franciscan preachers, Camilla da Varano entered a convent to take up a life of interior devotion. So many young women of similar status took this path—or were encouraged, or even forced to take it—that early modern convents

1. The terms early modern, Renaissance, and late medieval, all included roughly in the 1350–1750 under discussion in this volume, can all apply to Camilla Battista da Varano. As a Franciscan nun, abbess, and spiritual author belongs to the history of early modern Catholicism. Culturally, socially, and intellectually—as a participant in both humanist and courtly culture—she belongs to the Italian Renaissance. In that she had roots in the Franciscan Observant movement, she was shaped by fourteenth- and fifteenth-century religious thinking, and hence can be identified as a late-medieval figure as well. Indeed, Varano is a prime example of why these chronological categories are inadequate to explain the complexity of lives led in the era. Accordingly, the use of these chronological labels will be limited. I am committed in print to the idea that these and other categories applied to the era obscure rather than illuminate the history of the period. See, for two examples, William V. Hudon, “Religion and Society in Early Modern Italy—Old Questions, New Insights,” *American Historical Review* 101, no. 3 (1996): 783–804; and “Black and White and Re-read All Over: Conceptualizing Reform across the Long Sixteenth Century, 1414–1633,” in *Reassessing Reform: A Historical Investigation into Church Reform*, ed. Christopher M. Bellitto and David Zachariah Flanagan (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 254–77.

2. Unlike many women writers in this period, Camilla Battista da Varano had both a surname and a personal name in religion. While she is often referred to by her birthname, Camilla, or by her name in religion, Battista, she will be referred to in this volume by her surname, Varano, as has become regular practice in scholarly literature when referring to women writers, and as she appears in the LOC catalog. An exception is made in discussions of Varano family relationships, when she is called Camilla.

3. For women’s religious writing, see especially Gabriella Zarri, “Women and Religious Writing in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries,” in Letizia Panizza and Sharon Wood, eds., *A History of Women’s Writing in Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 79–91. See also the discussions of women’s religious writing in Virginia Cox’s two important studies: *Women’s Writing in Italy, 1400–1650* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 1–79; and *The Prodigious Muse: Women’s Writing in Counter-Reformation Italy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 129–63.

have been portrayed as a dumping ground for the "excess" female population unable to secure suitable marital alliances in the highly-competitive contemporary marriage market.[4] There in the convent Varano wrote, or said she wrote, at the insistence of female superiors and of male spiritual directors, espousing traditional Franciscan piety and devotional practices. She wrote in the manner of devotional texts popular in the later fifteenth century, like the Franciscan *Meditations on the Life of Christ* and the *Legenda aurea (Golden Legend*) by the Dominican Jacobus de Voragine, a collection of saints' lives.[5]

Varano described in her works her own practices of self-denial through extraordinary fasting and other ascetical practices that have attracted reconsideration via psychological analysis when found in predecessors like Clare of Assisi (1194–1253), Angela of Foligno (1248–1309), and Catherine of Siena (1347–1380), and successors like Teresa of Avila (1515–1582), Caterina Vannini (1562–1606), and Maria Maddalena de' Pazzi (1566–1607). She likened herself to Mary Magdalene, depicted in the Gospels as a disciple of Jesus, and later revered for her sanctity.[6] She often focused on the humanity of Jesus and his mother, depicting the excruciating pain that each suffered, and spoke of the spiritual torments that Christian heroism required, such as immersion in the ocean of sufferings that Christ experienced in his Passion. She repeatedly expressed commitment to the ideals of humility, silence, prayerfulness, and obedience.

Yet at the same time, Varano acted in ways that depart from the conventional model of an early modern religious woman, even staking out bold claims of personal, spiritual, and devotional independence. She faulted current religious practice in convents, criticized contemporary males (including her own father), and boldly excoriated inattentive spiritual directors, while she provided spiritual direction of her own to both women and men. She made it known that she engaged

4. See for example Enrico Cattaneo, "Le monacazioni forzate fra Cinque e Seicento," in *Vita e processo di Suor Virginia Maria de Leyva, monaca di Monza*, ed. Umberto Colombo (Milan: Garzanti, 1985), 145–95. In *By Force and Fear: Taking and Breaking Monastic Vows in Early Modern Europe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), especially the second chapter at 23–51, Anne Jacobson Schutte deftly challenges the standard narrative by demonstrating that forced monachization was also a problem for young men.

5. Johannes Bonaventure, *Le devote meditatione sopra la passione del nostro signore* (Venice: Hieronymous de Sanctis et Cornelio, 1487), perhaps the first printed edition of the *Meditationes vitae Christi*, which probably dates to c. 1300. For a modern English edition, see Sarah McNamer, ed., *Meditations on the Life of Christ: The Short Italian Text* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2018). The *Legenda aurea* collection of saints' lives was probably compiled c. 1260 and subsequently circulated widely, especially after the expansion of printing. For a modern English edition, see Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, trans. William Granger Ryan, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

6. For the elaboration of the legend of Mary Magdalene in late medieval and early modern religious thought, see especially Susan Haskins, *Mary Magdalen: Myth and Metaphor* (New York: Harcourt Brace; London: Harper Collins, 1993); and Katherine Ludwig Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen: Preaching and Popular Devotion in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

in mystical conversations with Jesus, yet while she listened with attention, she also challenged the logic of statements attributed to him in the Gospels, as she did in her *Spiritual Life*, reacting to Jesus's words before Herod.[7] Comparing herself to Mary Magdalene, Varano reminded readers that this woman beloved of Christ, although presumed to be a prostitute, was also the first evangelist—as she was portrayed in the medieval and early modern cult that centered upon her. Varano described not just her own devotional prowess but also that of others, including a series of mentors and spiritual guides; notable among them was fra Pietro da Mogliano (1435–1490), whose exemplary death she later chronicled, attributing to him many of the same devotional practices—such as survival on the Eucharist alone—encountered in this era almost exclusively in descriptions of women.[8]

Varano expressed haunting self-doubt, but at the same time, contradictorily, assertions of self-confidence about her own access to God. Indeed, in the opening section of one of her autobiographical works, the *Instructions to a Disciple* (*Istruzioni al discepolo*), she made the bold claim that the priest who requested her writing considered her "a god on earth" who had led him to gain salvation.[9] She was comfortable diving into controversial waters, such as the issue of who exhibited genuine sanctity and who was capable of properly identifying it, which were hotly contested matters in the early modern era.[10]

In sum, Varano fits, in many ways, the image of the *santa viva*, a "living saint," a figure revered as a paragon of holiness in the tight-knit community in which she lived.[11] Her devotional message, accordingly, has a multi-level social

7. See Varano, *Spiritual Life*, in this volume at 64.

8. For contrasting interpretations of this ascetic practice, see Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); and Rudolph M. Bell, *Holy Anorexia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985). For the series of Varano's mentors, see 15 note 37.

9. See Varano, *Instructions to a Disciple*, in this volume at 105.

10. For the issue of pretense of sanctity, see especially Janine Larmon Peterson, *Suspect Saints and Holy Heretics: Disputed Sanctity and Communal Identity in Late Medieval Italy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019).

11. For "living saints" (*sante vive*), see especially Gabriella Zarri, "Living Saints: A Typology of Female Sanctity in the Early Sixteenth Century," in *Women and Religion in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, ed. Daniel Bornstein and Roberto Rusconi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 219–303; Zarri, "Female Sanctity, 1500–1660," in *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, Vol. 6: *Reform and Expansion*, ed. Ronnie Po-chia Hsia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 180–200; and Zarri, *Le sante vive: Cultura e religiosità nella prima età moderna* (Turin: Rosenberg & Sellier, 1990). See also Aviad M. Kleinberg, *Prophets in Their Own Country: Living Saints and the Making of Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Anne Jacobson Schutte, *Aspiring Saints: Pretense of Holiness, Inquisition, and Gender in the Republic of Venice, 1618–1750* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); and Schutte, "I processi dell'Inquisizione veneziana nel Seicento: La femminilizzazione dell'eresia," in *L'Inquisizione romana in Italia nell'età moderna: Archivi, problemi di metodo, e nuove ricerche: Atti del seminario internazionale: Trieste, 18–20 maggio*

significance. The ways in which Varano related her devotions, her image of herself, and her image of others—not to mention the ways in which her ideas were received by others—help us to recognize another facet of the extraordinary complexity of early modern women. All their voices, including Varano's, need consideration if we are to fully comprehend the richness of European culture in the early modern era.

Religious Women and the Italian Renaissance

Camilla Battista da Varano lived and wrote at the height of the Italian Renaissance, an era in Western history studied with particular intensity over the last 250 years. Understood traditionally through the nineteenth-century depiction crafted by the Swiss cultural historian Jacob Burckhardt (1818–1897),[12] the Renaissance has often been viewed as an Italian, fourteenth- through sixteenth-century phenomenon motivated by veneration of classical antiquity; by a love for learning dedicated to civic and secular purposes; by a skepticism toward traditional Christian religious thinking and practice; and by extreme individualism. Over the last century, Burckhardt's depiction of the Renaissance has been assailed as a misleading oversimplification. Medievalists,[13] social and economic historians,[14]

1988, ed. Andrea Del Col and Giovanna Paolin (Rome: Ministero per i beni culturali e ambientali, 1991), 159–73.

12. Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. S. G. C. Middlemore, annot. Peter Murray, with introduction by Peter Burke (London: Penguin, 1990); German orig. Basel 1860.

13. See especially Charles Homer Haskins, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927); Erwin Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1960); and Robert Bartlett, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization, and Cultural Change, 950–1350* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

14. For social history, see especially Gene A. Brucker, *The Civic World of Renaissance Florence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977); Edward Muir, *Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981); and Guido Ruggiero, *The Renaissance in Italy: A Social and Cultural History of the Rinascimento* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015). For economic history, see especially Robert S. Lopez, *The Commercial Revolution of the Middle Ages, 950–1350* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1971); and among the voluminous works of Raymond de Roover those anthologized in Julius Kirshner, ed., *Business, Banking, and Economic Thought in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974); also Norman J. G. Pounds, *An Economic History of Medieval Europe*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1994), 463–72, 482–87; Sheilagh Ogilvie, *Institutions and European Trade: Merchant Guilds, 1000–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); and Francesco Guidi Bruscoli, "Banking and Money," *Oxford Bibliographies Online* (2021), <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195399301/obo-9780195399301-0120.xml>.

historians of Christian thought and practice,[15] historians of women's roles,[16] and postmodern literary theorists,[17] among others, have contributed to a broader and more complex view of the Renaissance.

Thus Varano lived inside a Renaissance context that historians have struggled mightily to comprehend, and lived specifically in a subsection of that world as a female member of a religious order. From the enormous literature examining the religious life of women in the Renaissance, some principal points of discussion are presented in the following paragraphs. In their 1994 volume *Donne e fede: Santità e vita religiosa in Italia*, Lucetta Scaraffia and Gabriella Zarri provide a critical contribution to this literature when they reflected on a central issue in feminist thought: whether Christianity was principally an institution responsible for the repression of women in Western society, or a sphere in which women could participate in culture and thus gain power.[18] No simple answer to that question was possible, they suggested, advocating instead a source-based approach to the lives of religious women, an approach that has both explored the clerical repression of women and assessed the degree of female participation in church organizations and activities.

In the nearly three decades since the appearance of *Donne e fede*, studies of Italian religious women in this era have highlighted the centrality of these women's stories—in all their variation and complexity—for a fuller understanding of the

15. See especially Hudon, "Religion and Society in Early Modern Italy"; David S. Peterson, "Out of the Margins: Religion and the Church in Renaissance Italy," *Renaissance Quarterly* 53 (2000): 835–79; Francesco C. Cesareo, "The Complex Nature of Catholicism in Renaissance Italy," *Renaissance Quarterly* 54 (2001): 1561–73; and Thomas Worcester, "Early Modern Catholicism," *Oxford Bibliographies Online* (2021), <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195399301/obo-9780195399301-0173.xml>.

16. The classic essay challenging Burckhardt's assertions about the equality of women and men is Joan Kelly-Gadol, "Did Women Have a Renaissance?" in *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, ed. Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), 137–63. This classic has since inspired a whole new literature, often qualifying or rejecting Kelly's insights; see especially Constance Jordan, *Renaissance Feminism: Literary Texts and Political Models* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 1–9; and John Coakley, "Introduction: Women's Creativity in Religious Context," in *Creative Women in Medieval and Early Modern Italy: A Religious and Artistic Renaissance*, ed. E. Ann Matter and John Coakley (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 1–16.

17. Challenges by literary analysists and others include Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), reflecting the influence of theorists Clifford Geertz and Michel Foucault; also John J. Martin, "Inventing Sincerity, Refashioning Prudence: The Discovery of the Individual in Renaissance Europe," *American Historical Review* 102, no. 5 (1977): 1309–42; and Martin, *Myths of Renaissance Individualism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

18. Lucetta Scaraffia and Gabriella Zarri, eds., *Donne e fede: Santità e vita religiosa in Italia* (Rome: Giuseppe Laterza, 1994), v–xvi. See also the English translation by Keith Botsford: *Women and Faith: Catholic Religious Life in Italy from Late Antiquity to the Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

Renaissance and of early modern religious culture. Such studies typically begin with consideration of Catherine of Siena, the first Italian woman to leave spiritual writings in the vernacular, but now considered most noteworthy by some, like Thomas Luongo and Gerald Parsons, for her political role.[19] Others, like K. J. P. Lowe, Alison Knowles Frazier, Diana Robin, Virginia Cox, and Sarah Gwyneth Ross, emphasize the literary creativity of women in the period—including religious women—highlighting their humanist utilization of classical texts.[20] Still others reflect on the spirituality of such women within increasingly cloistered contexts, among them Francesca Medioli, Anne Jacobson Schutte, Querciolo Mazzonis, Dyan Elliott, and Bernard McGinn.[21] These scholars and others find devotional and mystical creativity across the century and a half between Catherine of Siena and Camilla Battista da Varano. They also identify the social and ecclesiastical anxiety over the connection between women's spirituality and sexuality—along with the church legislation and social conventions designed to control it—in addition to the resistance of many women against those strictures, and the negotiating tactics they and their families sometimes employed to subvert the rules.[22]

19. See F. Thomas Luongo, *The Saintly Politics of Catherine of Siena* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006); and Gerald Parsons, *The Cult of Saint Catherine of Siena: A Study in Civil Religion* (Aldershot, UK-Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008). See also 16 note 42 for additional titles for Catherine of Siena.

20. K. J. P. Lowe, *Nuns' Chronicles and Convent Culture: Women and History Writing in Renaissance and Counter-Reformation Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Alison Knowles Frazier, *Possible Lives: Authors and Saints in Renaissance Italy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); Diana Robin, *Publishing Women: Salons, the Presses, and the Counter-Reformation in Sixteenth-Century Italy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Cox, *Women's Writing in Italy*; Sarah Gwyneth Ross, *The Birth of Feminism: Woman as Intellect in Renaissance Italy and England* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009); and Margaret L. King, "Women and Learning," *Oxford Bibliographies Online* (2010), <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195399301/obo-9780195399301-0032.xml>.

21. Francesca Medioli, "The Dimensions of the Cloister: Enclosure, Constraint and Protection in Seventeenth-Century Italy," in *Time, Space, and Women's Lives in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Anne Jacobson Schutte, Thomas Kuehn, and Silvana Seidel Menchi (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2001), 165–80; Schutte, "'Saints' and 'Witches' in Early Modern Italy: Stepsisters or Strangers?" in *Time, Space, and Women's Lives*, 153–64; Querciolo Mazzonis, *Spirituality, Gender, and the Self in Renaissance Italy: Angela Merici and the Company of St. Ursula (1474–1540)* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2007); Schutte, *By Force and Fear*; Dyan Elliott, *The Bride of Christ Goes to Hell: Metaphor and Embodiment in the Lives of Pious Women, 200–1500* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012); and Bernard McGinn, *The Varieties of Vernacular Mysticism, 1350–1550* (New York: Crossroad, 2012), 292–329.

22. See in addition to studies already named, Coakley and Matter, *Creative Women in Medieval and Early Modern Italy*; Jo Ann McNamara, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns through Two Millennia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996); Patricia Ranft, *Women and the Religious Life in Pre-Modern Europe* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996); Silvia Evangelisti, *Nuns: A History of Convent Life, 1450–1700* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); and Merry Wiesner-Hanks, *The*

Recapping and extending her earlier work in her 2017 monograph *Figure di donne in età moderna*, Zarri takes up the entire saga of early modern Italian religious women, depicting Catherine of Siena as emblematic not just of a shift in their role in Italian society, but also of political and ecclesiastical shifts during the period, due to social conventions as much as to the pressures of church and state, that profoundly affected women in monasteries.[23] After reviewing the debate of Jacob Burckhardt, Joan Kelly-Gadol, and others over the meaning of the term "Renaissance" for early modern women, she examines the common understandings of the effects of legislation from the Council of Trent (1545–1563) upon sixteenth- and seventeenth-century women—especially those concerning the imposition of claustration, an attempt she regards as having failed, as it was undermined both by negotiation and the plain infraction of the rules. Zarri further shows how the exempla of "illustrious women" (*clare donne*) from the classical tradition encouraged the acquisition of humanist learning by elite fifteenth- and early-sixteenth-century women. At the same time, many of these women were exploited by powerful males for dynastic purposes—some of whom escaped male designs, while some did not. Zarri sees Catherine of Siena, accordingly, as a woman who exploited contemporary culture—and her popular reputation among the people—to carve out a career as a reformer, at the same time that she was herself exploited and manipulated by others.

Some early modern religious women who were not so famous as Catherine, Zarri points out, even if well-educated, were assigned subordinate roles of prayer-giving and teaching with the stricter rules of claustration imposed by Trent. They were also controlled by their families whose main goal, to advance the interests of princely dynasties, remained the preservation of their daughters' virginity. Even so, those seemingly rigid rules were inconsistently applied, and the cloister walls themselves became what Zarri calls "the symbol of a new religious identity."[24] She argues that a thorough reconsideration of the condition of early modern religious women and their positioning "between Renaissance and Counter-Reform," would result in a better understanding of each of those terms.[25] In pursuing these enduring debates, Zarri is hardly alone. Three editors and fifteen other contributors in their 2021 volume *Renaissance Religions: Modes and Meaning in History* explore the complexity of Italian religious expression from the beginning of the fifteenth through the late seventeenth centuries, challenging many of the

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Marvelous Hairy Girls: The Gonzales Sisters and Their Worlds (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 149–81.

23. Gabriella Zarri, *Figure di donne in età moderna: Modelli e storie* (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2017), 3–41.

24. Zarri, *Figure di donne*, 30.

25. Zarri, *Figure di donne*, 34–41.

oversimplifications implicit in the traditional periodization of Renaissance and Counter-Reformation.[26]

A study of Varano's life and works can contribute significantly to that ongoing debate, and help confirm, undermine, or promote the revision of ideas about Renaissance religious women during the early modern period. All the earlier commentators—Burckhardt and his followers, medievalists finding the beginnings of rebirth in movements long before the Renaissance, historians of women insisting that Renaissance women had no genuine access to the culture of their male contemporaries, economic historians who locate the beginning of "modernity" in the Middle Ages, not the Renaissance, historians of religion finding devotional sophistication rather than stagnation in the latter era, and New Historicists contending that politics and power defined Renaissance individuals—have discovered part of what is true about early modern religious women. Further exploration of Varano's fascinating life and literary production will advance the reassessment that they have launched.

The Life and Works of Camilla Battista da Varano

Camilla Battista da Varano was born on April 9, 1458, an illegitimate daughter in a noble family: that of the marquis Giulio Cesare da Varano (c. 1433–October 9, 1502).[27] By a complex process of consolidation beginning in the thirteenth century, the Varano family acquired considerable wealth and gained dominance over other noble families in the Italian province of Le Marche (the Marches). As Guelf partisan supporters of the papacy, they eventually controlled a territory stretching from their capital town of Camerino at the eastern edge of the Apennines across the Marches some forty-five miles to the Adriatic. They built, or converted for their own use, an extensive network of towers, forts, and castles that provided both a permanent military presence and sites for courtier hunting parties.[28] From this

26. Peter Howard, Nicholas Terpstra, and Riccardo Saccenti, eds., *Renaissance Religions: Modes and Meaning in History* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021).

27. See for Giulio Cesare, Anna Gabriella Chisena, "Varano, Giulio Cesare da," *DBI* 98 (2020), <https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giulio-cesare-da-varano_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/>.

28. There were likely sixty to one hundred edifices in this network, including substantial castles like Beldiletto, la Rancia, plus others at Visso on the river Nera and at Collepietra on the hill known as Fiastrone. See Pietro Luzi, *Camilla Battista da Varano: Una spiritualità fra papa Borgia e Lutero* (Turin: Gribaudi, 1989), 45–53. Luzi considered himself a beneficiary of grace received through Varano's intercession before she was canonized, and vowed to spread devotion to the Passion of Christ in return. His declaration, made on October 6, 1987, is included in the "Raccolta documenti Varani" that is part of the *Positio Beata Camilla Battista Varano*, a summary of the evidence prepared by the Franciscan procurator general for Varano's canonization trial. Such documents are not published, but reproduced, generally in runs of 150 copies or less, for use by members of the commission considering the case for sainthood; see Congregatio de causis sanctorum, Camerinen – S. Severini in Picino, *Canonizationis B. Baptistae Varano monialis professae Ordinis Clarissarum, Positio super virtutibus*, III, Raccolta

Fathers, and from the Old and New Testaments to vernacular classics like Dante's *Inferno*. She wrote in the vernacular more than in Latin, however; while one of her earliest works was a set of Latin couplets inspired by her contemplation of the crucified Christ, most were composed in Italian, albeit with a generous use of Latin words and phrases.

Varano's devotional outlook was formed by the Franciscan spirituality that had prevailed in central Italy for generations, communicated by followers of Saint Francis of Assisi (1181/1182–1226), the founder of the Franciscan Orders of Friars Minor and St. Clare. A feature of that culture was the gifting to young girls of wooden dolls in the likeness of a baby Jesus (*bambino*) both as a reminder of the humanity of Jesus and to promote emulation of the Virgin Mary, his mother: Varano had one.[35] The lords of Camerino had promoted Franciscan spirituality through the establishment of convents and patronage of their charitable and evangelical activities. Varano's early devotion included attendance at public sermons delivered by Franciscans, events that were a significant and highly popular feature of contemporary culture. The preachers she heard, such as Pietro da Mogliano (1435–1490), Francesco da Urbino, Marco da Montegallo (1425–1496), Francesco da Caldarola (c. 1424–1507), and Domenico da Leonessa (d. 1497) followed in the tradition of earlier Franciscan sermonizers and social critics including Bernardino da Siena (1380–1444) and Giacomo della Marca (1393–1476).[36]

35. Corry, Howard, and Laven, *Madonnas and Miracles*, 67–93.

36. For the Franciscan preaching tradition, see especially Franco Mormando, *The Preacher's Demons: Bernardino da Siena and the Social Underworld of Early Renaissance Italy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999). For Varano's developing spirituality under its influence, see Simoncini, *Studio critico*, 4. Among studies of individual preachers, see for Pietro da Mogliano, Ippolito Brandozzi, *Il beato Pietro da Mogliano, Minore Osservante (c. 1435–1490), con due sermoni inedita e tredici tavole fuori testo* (Rome: Edizioni francescane, 1967); Letizia Pellegrini, "Pietro da Mogliano, beato," *DBI* 83 (2015), <https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/pietro-da-mogliano-beato_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/>; for Marco da Montegallo, Silvano Bracci, ed., *Marco da Montegallo (1425–1496): Il tempo, la vita, le opere: Atti del convegno di studio, Ascoli Piceno, 12 ottobre 1996 e Montegallo, 23 agosto 1997* (Padua: Centro studi antoniani, 1998); and Hélène Angelini, "Marco da Montegallo," *DBI* 69 (2007), <https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/marco-da-montegallo_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/>; for Francesco da Caldarola, Angelo Antonio Bittarelli, ed., *Lo scrigno di Caldarola: La Madonna del Monte, il beato Francesco, la confraternità, 1491–1991* (Tolentino: La Linotype, 1992); and for Domenico da Leonessa, Camilla Battista da Varano, *Le opere spirituali*, ed. Giacomo Boccanera (Jesi: Scuola tipografia francescana, 1958), 5 (cited henceforth as Boccanera, *Opere spirituali*); and Carla Casagrande, "Domenico da Leonessa," *DBI*, 40 (1991), <https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/domenico-da-leonessa_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/>. For the Poor Clares, the female branch of the Franciscans that Varano later entered, see especially Alessandra Bartolomei Romagnoli, "Il francescanesimo femminile dalle origini al Concilio di Trento," in *All'ombra della chiara luce*, ed. Aleksander Horowski (Rome: Istituto storico dei cappuccini, 2005), 11–85. Angela Emmanuela Scandella considered Varano a "creature" of the Observant Franciscan movement, not unlike many other noblewomen of her time; see her "Camilla Battista e l'Osservanza femminile," in Bartoli, *Dal timore all'amore*, 33–61.

In 1466 or 1468, Varano heard the Good Friday sermon preached by fra Domenico da Leonessa in the church of S. Pietro in Muralto in Camerino. The convent and hermitage there housed all of the preachers and spiritual advisers Varano trusted. During his sermon, Domenico urged the audience on that day to shed one tear out of compassion for the sufferings of Jesus. Varano adopted the focus on the humanity of Christ—especially the suffering Christ—characteristic of Franciscan Good Friday messaging. She not only took the advice of Domenico about a tear on that day, but vowed to shed tears of compassion on every Friday.

According to Pietro Luzi and Silvano Simoncini, Varano asked her father and stepmother to make preachers like Domenico da Leonessa and Pietro da Mogliano frequent visitors at court and to take them as their own advisers.[37] The same writers speculate about Varano's personality (speculations that are unverifiable), depicting her not as downcast or dour but rather exuberant and outgoing—excelling in studies, in dance, in singing, in artistic expression, and in her interactions with others. As loyal biographers, they view her in terms resembling the perfect female courtier later sketched in Baldassare Castiglione's famous *Book of the Courtier*, but one possessing serious religious goals.[38] Surely part of their reason for hinting at this connection was the Varanos' close association with the Della Rovere family through marital alliance—the family installed as the ruling dynasty of Urbino, whose court society it was that Castiglione portrayed.[39]

Despite her devotional practices, which extended beyond the Friday tears into intense fasting, self-discipline by scourging, and continual prayers, Varano remained dissatisfied, in a state she described as "imprisoned," until the intervention of fra Francesco da Urbino, another preacher. She lived as a tertiary (a member of the Third Order of Saint Francis) while still residing at the court, continuing her

37. Over the years, Giulio Cesare must have come to trust Domenico a great deal. In 1484, when Giulio Cesare completed the refurbishing of the convent he had acquired from the Olivetans, he turned it over to Domenico, then local provincial of the Observant Franciscans. On January 4, 1484, Varano went to live there with eight companions. Both Domenico and Pietro were her spiritual directors and advisers; see Simoncini, *Studio critico*, 3–4; Luzi, *Camilla Battista da Varano*, 18–21, 61–75; Bracci, *Autobiografia*, 14–17; and Thoman, *Worldly Princess*, 8. For the relationship between nuns like Varano and their spiritual advisers, see especially Jodi Bilinkoff, *Related Lives: Confessors and Their Female Penitents, 1450–1750* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005); and also Patricia Ranft, "A Key to Counter-Reformation Women's Activism: The Confessor-Spiritual Director," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 10, no. 2 (1994): 7–26.

38. The description of the ideal female courtier is found in Castiglione's *Courtier*, book 3. Among many available versions, the widely-read Charles S. Singleton translation may be cited, available in the critical edition by Daniel Javitch: *The Book of the Courtier* (New York: Norton, 2002).

39. For the Varano-Della Rovere connection see Gaia Remiddi, "Il palazzo da Varano di Giulio Cesare," in De Marchi and Falaschi, *I Da Varano e le arti*, 1:93–104; John E. Law, "The Da Varano Lords of Camerino as *condottiere* Princes," in *Mercenaries and Paid Men: The Mercenary Identity in the Middle Ages: Proceedings of a Conference Held at University of Wales, Swansea, 7th–9th July 2005*, ed. John France (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 89–103; and Nico Ottaviani, "Le donne dei Varano," 28–30.

devotions and committed to her vow to weep on Fridays. After hearing a number of the sermons Francesco da Urbino delivered in 1479, Varano eventually decided upon a life of virginity within a cloister. His Lenten preaching, as she explained, shook her from what she considered her complacency. She described Francesco as sent by God, a "true trumpet of the Holy Spirit," one who revealed God's plan, bringing her out of "the world of darkness into the true light" with the "thunder and lightning" of his messages to her soul about the gravity of sin and about the special hatefulness of despair.[40] Varano said that she began to hear voices calling her to "flee" rather than "to stew in the muddy swill of this world."[41] She should escape, she understood, by becoming a nun. Under Francesco's influence, she also reported eating either nothing at all on Fridays, or only a few mouthfuls of bread, while sleeping little out of respect for the agony of Christ in the garden and other occasions of mental anguish during the Passion. Francesco's intervention, Varano later explained, led her to reconsider the relationship with another powerful male in her life, her father, as will be seen.

In making this choice for the convent life, and seeking extreme expressions of devotional piety, Varano entered another context, that of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Italian female mysticism. The prime exemplar of this tradition is Catherine of Siena, committed not just to contemplation and extreme asceticism, but also to active apostolic work and promotion of church reform. Literary techniques that Catherine used, such as writing of herself in the third person, and mystical theological concepts, such as the unsatiated satiation of intense love of God, are echoed in Varano's writings.[42]

A series of Italian women mystics writing in the vernacular followed Catherine of Siena in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries—a series Bernard McGinn called, alluding to scripture (Hebrews 12:1), "a great cloud of witnesses."[43] Among them was Caterina Vigri (Catherine of Bologna, 1413–1463), who led the sisters of Corpus Domini in Ferrara and its sister house in Bologna. Originally a lay community, the Ferrara house at first sought to be governed, as a patroness urged, by an adaptation of a Franciscan rule, but Caterina preferred

40. Varano, *The Spiritual Life*, in this volume at 68.

41. Varano, *The Spiritual Life*, in this volume at 68–69.

42. For Catherine of Siena, in addition to titles cited in this introduction at 6 note 19, see Eugenio Dupré Theseider, "Caterina da Siena, santa," *DBI* 22 (1979), <https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/caterina-da-siena-santa_(Dizionario-Biografico)>; Jane Tylus, *Reclaiming Catherine of Siena: Literacy, Literature, and the Signs of Others* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); and Carolyn Muessig, George Ferzoco, and Beverly Mayne Kienzle, eds., *A Companion to Catherine of Siena* (Leiden: Brill, 2012). See also Catherine of Siena, *The Dialogue*, ed. and trans. by Suzanne Noffke (New York: Paulist Press, 1980).

43. McGinn, *The Varieties of Vernacular Mysticism*, 292; see McGinn's overview of Italian female mystic writings in *The Varieties of Vernacular Mysticism*, 197–249, 292–329.

the stricter Rule of St. Clare.[44] She related her experience of diabolical temptations—especially over obedience, perhaps linked to the struggle with the patroness—in *The Seven Spiritual Weapons* (*Le sette armi spirituali*).[45] She encouraged the patient sufferance of evil (*mal patire*) in imitation of Christ, and wrote of the painful withdrawal of satisfaction in prayer, two other themes Varano also explored. Caterina had many disciples, including Illuminata Bembo (c. 1420–1493) who wrote about Caterina's life in her *Mirror of Illumination* (*Specchio di illuminazione*).[46]

To these voices may be added the Dominican tertiary Osanna of Mantua (Osanna Andreasi; 1449–1505), whose noble pedigree, devotion to the Passion of Christ, and criticism of decadence and immorality are all reminiscent of Varano's.[47] There follow the imposing figures of Angela Merici (c. 1470–1540), founder of the Ursuline order specifically committed to female education,[48] and Catherine of Genoa (Caterina Fieschi Adorno, 1447–1510), who tended the sick and poor of Genoa, and whose mystical theology inspired the reforming Oratory of Divine Love.[49] Adding to these Tommasina Fieschi (c. 1448–1534)[50] and Battista Vernazza (1497–1587),[51] devoted disciples of Catherine of Genoa, the "cloud" McGinn identified looks rather thick indeed.

44. For Catherine of Bologna, see Mary Martin McLaughlin, "Creating and Recreating Communities of Women: The Case of Corpus Domini, Ferrara, 1406–1452," in *Sisters and Workers in the Middle Ages*, ed. Judith M. Bennett (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 261–88.

45. *The Seven Spiritual Weapons*, orig. composed c. 1450, first printed 1475. Modern Italian editions include *Le sette armi spirituali*, ed. Cecilia Foletti (Padua: Antenore, 1985); and *Le sette armi spirituali*, ed. Maria Degl'Innocenti (Florence: SISMEL, edizioni del Galluzzo, 2000). See also the English translation *The Seven Spiritual Weapons*, ed. and trans. Hugh Feiss and Daniela Re (Toronto: Peregrina, 1998, reprinted Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011).

46. Illuminata Bembo, *Specchio di illuminazione*, ed. Silvia Mostaccio (Florence: SISMEL, edizioni del Galluzzo, 2001).

47. For Osanna Andreasi, see Abele L. Redigonda, "Andreasi, Osanna," *DBI* 3 (1961), <https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/osanna-andreasi_(Dizionario-Biografico)>.

48. For Angela Merici, see Querciolo Mazzonis, "A Female Idea of Religious Perfection: Angela Merici and the Company of St. Ursula, 1535–1540," *Renaissance Studies* 18, no. 3 (2004): 391–411; and Mazzonis, *Spirituality, Gender, and the Self.*

49. For Catherine of Genoa (Caterina Fieschi Adorno), see Umile Bonzi, *S. Caterina Fieschi Adorno*, 2 vols. (Genoa: Marietti, 1961–1962).

50. For Tommasina Fieschi, see Umile Bonzi, "Le traité des sept degrès de l'amour de Dieu de Tommasina Fieschi," *Revue d'ascétique et de mystique* 16 (1935): 29–86.

51. For Tommasa Vernazza, see Daniela Solfaroli Camillocci, "La monaca esemplare: Lettere spirituali di madre Battistina Vernazza (born Tommasa Vernazza, 1497–1587), in *Per lettera: La scrittura epistolare femminile tra archivio e tipografia: Secoli XV–XVII*, ed. Gabriella Zarri (Rome: Viella, 1999), 235–61; and Andrea Vanni, "Vernazza, Tommasa," *DBI* 98 (2020), <https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/tommasa-vernazza_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/>.

When Varano chose to enter the Franciscan convent of Poor Clares in Urbino, and so to enter into this world of early modern Italian mysticism, she did so over the distinct objection of her father, Giulio Cesare. And there is a logical reason why: he had witnessed firsthand the benefits that could accrue to a family from a highly-educated, polished woman participating in its public life. Whether his cousin Costanza impressed Bianca Maria Visconti and Francesco Sforza by her 1442 speech pleading for the return of Camerino to Varano control, or that return was accomplished rather by her marriage to Francesco's brother Alessandro, Costanza's role was central. In 1479, Giulio Cesare had every reason to expect that his erudite daughter could similarly benefit the long-term prospects of the Varano family. He opposed Camilla's intention for approximately two and one half years, first with enticements to remain at home, and later with threats and virtual imprisonment. Yet Varano persevered and achieved her goal, entering the convent on November 14, 1481.

In her spiritual autobiography, *The Spiritual Life* (*La vita spirituale*), Varano described the choice to do so as having been prompted by fra Francesco da Urbino's 1479 Annunciation sermon. In relating the story, she compared herself to the Israelites suffering in bondage to the Egyptians and their Pharaoh. After he freed the Israelites from Pharaoh, Varano explained, God led them through the desert even though they were rebellious and inconsistently faithful. She described herself as similarly inconsistent and rebellious after being freed from a "Pharaoh" who could perhaps have been understood as Satan—or as her disapproving father. But when led toward the religious life by God, she said, her "malicious nature," one rooted in a "false and whorish soul," refused God's plan and made up excuses. "Who could release me from my father and his powerful hands?" she asked. It was impossible for her to imagine, she explained, that she could leave the hands that "held me so dearly . . . even if I truly wanted to do so."[52] In a tantalizing but undeveloped point, she mentioned that she would withhold information about the kind and quality of promises she made in order to escape from him. She explained that her father was fearful of "the scourge of God," or "he would never have permitted me to enter religious life."[53]

Whatever his reasons might have been, Varano was clear about hers: she had been moved to independent action and rejection of her father's expressed wishes in part by that sermon on the Annunciation: for she longed to feel the same spark of love that Mary felt when she learned of God's plan. Varano took matters into her own hands, making another vow, this time to the Virgin Mary, to

52. Varano, *The Spiritual Life*, in this volume at 70 and 80–81.

53. Varano, *The Spiritual Life*, in this volume at 80. For the difficulty suffered by girls objecting to family plans for their futures, see Anne Jacobson Schutte, "The Permeable Cloister?" in *Arcangela Tarabotti: A Literary Nun in Baroque Venice*, ed. Elissa B. Weaver (Ravenna: Longo, 2006), 19–36. For Varano's resistance to her father's wishes, see also Bracci, *Autobiografia*, 18.

remain immaculate until God "disposed of me otherwise."[54] About two years after her entry into the convent she professed perpetual vows, an event she described only as "bitter" with little further explanation. This could easily be a reference to the austerity of contemporary Franciscan convent life, as one of her biographers suggested. And it may be that Varano considered life at the court as the equivalent, for her, of Egyptian servitude. She sought, it seems, to escape this servitude through virginity in the cloister, away from the allurements of court and from, in all probability, any plans her father may have had for her in a marital alliance. But even while choosing the convent, she still expressed her appreciation of what she had gained from life at court: for she took Battista as her religious name in honor of her female relatives, Battista da Montefeltro and Battista Sforza, her predecessors both in humanistic learning and in Franciscan-inspired devotion.[55] Surely Varano, like many of her peers and contemporaries who chose the cloister—rather than having it chosen for them—found the environment favorable because of the opportunities it held for autonomy and self-expression.[56]

In the end, and for reasons unknown, Giulio Cesare acquiesced to his daughter's desires, supporting her with substantial financial resources. But his acquiescence was apparently conditioned upon her taking up residence, early in January 1484, along with eight companions, in a convent that he had newly rebuilt on the site of a monastery that had been abandoned located close to the family castle in Camerino. The convent—which came to be named Santa Maria Nova—was, and still is, a modest building of stone and brick, located on the perimeter of that hilltop town in the Marches.[57] In founding this convent, Giulio Cesare could have been seen as imitating—on a smaller scale—the actions of the greater Montefeltro lords who had established and patronized the Clarist convent in Urbino that Varano had first entered in 1481. It had been built by Federico da Montefeltro (1422–1482), and among its patrons was Elisabetta Malatesta, Varano's great-aunt.[58] Now Varano's entry into a convent that her father had rebuilt and endowed, one not far from his palace, could be viewed as not so much an expression of approval of her vocation, but as an attempt to retain control over his daughter despite her entry into religious life.[59]

54. Varano, *The Spiritual Life*, in this volume at 69–70.

55. For other examples, see Camaioni, "Battista da Varano, santa," and Bracci, *Autobiografia*, 19.

56. The argument offered by Margaret L. King, *Women of the Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 81–97. See also Lowe, *Nuns' Chronicles and Convent Culture*, 395–97.

57. Jeryldene Wood, *Women, Art, and Spirituality: The Poor Clares of Early Modern Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 112–14.

58. For other versions of these stories, see Luzi, *Camilla Battista da Varano*, 77–88; Bracci, *Autobiografia*, 17–18; Thoman, *Worldly Princess*, 8–9; and Simoncini, *Studio critico*, 6–8.

59. For this view see Paul Lachance, "Battista da Varano (1458–1524): A Survey of Her Life and Her Writing as a Poor Clare Visionary," *Mystics Quarterly* 20, no. 1 (1994): 19–25.

chants, prayers, and meditations containing fairly continuous reminders of the omnipotent lordship of God, and of the limited, fallen nature of worldly authority. Beyond the Psalms, the divine office employed readings and prayers developed from ancient Hebrew and early Christian culture, from scriptural sources and from theological and devotional writings by the Fathers of the Church.

In convent life, with its ritualized prayer program, Varano experienced both the heights of mystical devotion and the depths of spiritual despair. The recitations that make up the divine office promoted the primary importance of faith in God over all others, and encouraged the individual devotee to take up the voice of participants in salvation history, such as Zechariah and the Virgin Mary, through the recitation of scriptural canticles. Such continuous recitation, moreover, prompted individual devotees like Varano to think of themselves as serving God—even standing alongside God, battling evil—and as the recipients of God's promises, protections, and benefits.

This steady liturgical practice informed, but was also separate from Varano's mystical experience, in which she conversed, as she reported, with saints, with the Virgin Mary, and with Jesus himself. She described her own mystical marriage to Jesus, using language charged with erotic meanings. But to focus only upon that mystical experience would be misleading, for Varano also described episodes of spiritual desolation when the revelations, and even the desire to pray in choir, dried up. One major episode of such desolation persisted for more than two years, between August 1488 and the early months of 1491—a desolation made all the worse, she explains, by the memory of the mystical rapture and love of Christ she had earlier enjoyed. What her texts—and Varano's constant use of scripture, particularly the Psalms that were central to convent prayer—may reveal about her, and about her hopes for others who might follow her guidance, must be considered in light of the times of desolation, as well as the experiences of revelation, that she reported. Dedicated to a communal life embracing poverty, chastity, and obedience as defined in the Rule of St. Clare, Varano enjoyed mystical experiences that she described as a foretaste of heaven, but also intense spiritual suffering; and she believed that others who took up the same course of life might experience the same mixture of delight and dejection.

Varano gained a considerable reputation as a spiritual guide, as evidenced in forewords to her texts and in letters by which she addressed them to others, often based on spiritual conversations with convent colleagues. An abbess, Sister Pacifica, urged Varano to write down her ideas about the Passion, and those ideas informed her treatise on *The Mental Sufferings of Jesus during His Passion*.

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the Eighteenth Century: A Historical Introduction and Guide for Students and Musicians (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991); Robert Taft, *The Liturgy of the Hours in East and West: The Origins of the Divine Office and Its Meaning for Today*, 2nd rev. ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993); and Margot E. Fassler and Rebecca A. Baltzer, eds., *The Divine Office in the Latin Middle Ages: Methodology and Source Studies, Regional Developments, Hagiography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

She explained to Pietro da Mogliano, to whom she addressed the work, that she had already shared the ideas with fellow sisters in conversation. She directed two writings to another spiritual mentor who was looking for guidance—who may be identified as either Giovanni da Fano, a Franciscan priest and superior, or Antonio da Segovia, an Olivetan monk.[63] These works were her *Instructions to a Disciple*, essentially a letter to that mentor remarking on the quality of his leadership, and her *Treatise on Purity of Heart (Trattato della purità del cuore)* in its second, Italian, version. These writings addressed to Pietro da Mogliano and to Giovanni da Fano or Antonio da Segovia are examples—quite surprising ones—of a cloistered sister giving spiritual advice to a priest. Nor did she restrict her spiritual guidance to priests and convent sisters: she addressed *The Happy Passing of the Blessed Pietro da Mogliano* to Elisabetta Gonzaga, the duchess of Urbino, hoping to inspire her devotion, and she wrote a substantial letter to the physician Battista Pucci to assist him in a crisis of faith.

While Varano largely escaped the world of the court as she pursued her religious profession, she certainly did not enjoy immunity from the effects of contemporary political crisis. As a part of his efforts to utilize Italian lands for enrichment of his family, the Spanish Borgia pope Alexander VI (1492–1503) excommunicated Giulio Cesare, Camilla's father, on March 1, 1501, on the basis of trumped-up charges that he had aided papal enemies and failed to pay required tribute. On July 21, 1502, the pope's son Cesare Borgia (1475–1507) deposed Giulio Cesare as lord of Camerino. But before that debacle, Giulio sent female and minor members of the family to safety in the Republic of Venice, while Varano took refuge in Atri, in the Abruzzo, likely at a Clarist convent.[64] On October 9, 1502, Giulio Cesare was strangled on Borgia's order in a castle in Pergola. Pirro, Annibale and Venanzio, his three sons who had been taken prisoner with their father when he was deposed, were hanged a few days later near Rimini. As part of the Borgia consolidation of power in the region, part of the Franciscan cloister of S. Pietro in Muralto, site of the death of Pietro da Mogliano, was demolished to make room for the construction of fortifications. It was only after the death of Alexander VI that the Varani were returned to power, in the person of Giulio Cesare's one surviving son, Giovanni Maria (1481–1527). He ruled the territory as a vassal of Pope Julius II (1503–1513), who facilitated Giovanni's assumption

63. For Giovanni da Fano (1469–1539), Franciscan preacher, reformer, and early critic of Luther, see Dagmar von Wille, "Giovanni da Fano," *DBI* 56 (2001), <https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giovanni-da-fano_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/>. For Antonio da Segovia (d. 1533), who was Varano's spiritual director and the copyist of her works, see *Istruzioni al discepolo*, ed. Massimo Reschiglian (Florence: Edizioni del Galluzzo per la Fondazione Ezio Franceschini, 2017), 42–45 and 155–57, cited henceforth as Reschiglian, *Istruzioni*; and Silvia Serventi, *Trattato della purità del cuore: De puritate cordis, De perfectione religiosorum* (Florence: Edizioni del Galluzzo per la Fondazione Ezio Franceschini, 2019), xiv, cited henceforth as Serventi, *Trattato*.

64. Luzi, *Camilla Battista da Varano*, 100–101.

of the ducal office, and of Julius' successor, Pope Leo X (1513–1521). Giovanni Maria solidified the Varano family's ties of clientage with the papacy through his marriage to Caterina Cibo, a niece of Leo X.[65]

This change in papal regime marked a shift in opportunities not just for the Varano family generally, but for Camilla more particularly.[66] In the years immediately preceding and following the catastrophic extinction of her father and brothers, Varano turned from writing to religious administration. In 1500, before her exile to the Abruzzo, she served as abbess in Camerino, then returned to Camerino sometime after the death of Alexander VI in 1503, but did not remain there long. In January, 1505, Julius II asked Varano to create a convent of Poor Clares in Fermo, in the Marches some fifty miles east of Camerino, where a Third Order (regular) Franciscan convent had earlier closed.[67] Varano stayed there for about two years before returning to Camerino, where she served repeated terms as abbess, in 1507, 1513, and 1515. When serving in that capacity, she had a reputation for looking beyond the enclosure of the cloister to tend to the needs of the convent's neighbors. She intervened through a letter to her brother-in-law in 1515 on behalf of the people of Montecchio, for instance, in the hope that mercenary soldiers would spare a town whose citizens had supported her convent. Varano also wrote during this period, but mainly shorter pieces. The longest was her ten-chapter *Instructions to a Disciple*, composed sometime between 1499 and 1501. Her other extant writings in this first decade-and-a-half of the sixteenth century were primarily letters.

According to biographers Luzi and Bracci, Varano also turned in these and later years to prayer, which was, they suggest, her only recourse amid the further disintegration of her family. Her stepmother, Giovanna Malatesta—a woman

65. See Luzi, *Camilla Battista da Varano*, 55–56; Bracci, *Autobiografia*, 25–26; and Thoman, *Worldly Princess*, 9–10.

66. Varano was not unique in having a religious life affected by political crisis and social circumstances. See, for example, Luongo, *The Saintly Politics of Catherine of Siena*, 3–19.

67. The "First" Franciscan order signifies the order of Franciscan Friars Minor founded by St. Francis; the "Second" order that of the Poor Clares, who followed the rule of St. Clare (Santa Chiara) approved in 1253; and the "Third" order that that of "tertiaries." The tertiaries, founded by Francis around 1221, were persons both male and female living in the world but following a modified Franciscan discipline of charitable service and spiritual devotion, were called "third order seculars" to distinguish them from "third order regulars." Third order regulars were of both sexes, but their origins are murky. The female establishments may date to fourteenth-century Italy, or even earlier in central Europe, but were common in Italy in Varano's day. See especially for the development of the Franciscan order Duncan Nimmo, *Reform and Division in the Medieval Franciscan Order: From Saint Francis to the Foundation of the Capuchins* (Rome: Capuchin Historical Institute, 1987); David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans: From Protest to Persecution in the Century after Saint Francis* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2001); and Grado Giovanni Merlo, *In the Name of Saint Francis: History of the Friars Minor and Franciscanism until the Early Sixteenth Century*, ed. Robert J. Karris, trans. Jean François Godet-Calogeras (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 2009).

apparently renowned for her devotional piety, as well as her dedication to all the children of Giulio Cesare—died on November 2, 1511. Varano had to face continued family violence, this time perpetrated by her half-brother, Giovanni Maria, against her nephew Sigismondo, the son of the deceased Venanzio, another half-brother. Sigismondo made a claim to the lordship of the town in 1518, and benefitting from the absence of his uncle, proceeded triumphantly into Camerino. Giovanni Maria provoked a battle between his supporters and those of his nephew, but the matter was resolved when Sigismondo was killed on his way to Rome in an ambush that contemporaries suspected was arranged by his uncle.[68]

After her return from Fermo in 1507, Varano lived at the convent in Camerino until her death. In *The Spiritual Life*, she described the death she anticipated as a release from the prison of her body, a release she longed for as though she was "ablaze and aflame in [a] burning, immaterial fire,"[69] knowing that when death finally arrived, her painful desire would be transformed into a nuptial celebration. Varano died on May 31, 1524, while a recurrence of the plague was punishing the region. As she was in isolation to avoid contagion, there were no witnesses to her last words. Her funeral was held in the courtyard of the Varano palace in Camerino, in the presence of her half-brother, Giovanni Maria, duke of Camerino, with a eulogy delivered by Paolo Corimbo da Fossombrone, a friar from S. Pietro in Muralto. Varano was buried on June 2—the day on which her feast is still celebrated in Camerino—in the common grave for the sisters under the choir in the convent where she had lived a life of prayer and mystical revelations.[70]

The Texts

Varano's works will first be considered in their chronological, developmental order. Having begun writing as soon as her religious vocation became clear to her, she composed some devotional poems, her earliest works, which are traditionally dated around 1479—the same year in which she had heard fra Francesco da Urbino's Lenten preaching on the Annunciation. The next two years, which Varano recalled as a period of torment over her father's opposition to her choice of the religious life, ended on November 14, 1481 when she entered the convent at Urbino to begin her novitiate. Two years later, in the spring of 1483—that is, while still a novice and before her profession of vows—she completed a first draft of her *Memories of Jesus*. She insisted that this text, in which for the first time she describes a spousal relationship between herself and Christ, contained things she had learned prior to entering the convent. She transcribed and likely rewrote it in 1491, addressing it to fra Domenico da Leonessa.

68. Luzi, *Camilla Battista da Varano*, 56–57; Bracci, *Autobiografia*, 26–27.

69. Varano, *The Spiritual Life*, in this volume at 93.

70. For her final years and death, Luzi, *Camilla Battista da Varano*, 57–58, 97–98; and Bracci, *Autobiografia*, 27–28.