

Observant Reforms and Cultural Production in Europe: Introductory Remarks

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The current volume is the outcome of a virtual workshop held in the midst of one of the COVID-19 waves of 2021, and hosted by Radboud University Nijmegen on 10 and 11 June of that year. This workshop was part of a series of meetings by scholars from several different countries involved with the international project network “Observer l’Observance: Diffusion, réseaux et influences des réformes régulières en Europe (fin XIVE – première moitié du XVIe siècle)”.¹ This project network has provided a platform to study the so-called Observant period (ca. 1380-ca. 1520), when many religious orders in Europe went through (at times heavily contested) processes of reform, and a range of new religious orders and religious movements such as the *Devotio moderna* made their presence felt.²

Prior to the Nijmegen meeting, this research network organized three other international workshops, namely “Les observances régulières: Historiographies” (Clermont-Ferrand, 9-10 June 2017), “The Observance

1 The real drivers of this network are dr. Cristina Andenna, dr. Marina Benedetti, dr. Sylvie Duval, dr. Haude Morvan, and dr. Ludovic Viallet. See on the network’s activities the website <https://observance.hypotheses.org/>.

2 James Mixson, ‘Introduction’, in: *A Companion to Observant Reform in the Late Middle Ages and Beyond*, ed. James D. Mixson and Bert Roest, Brill’s Companions to the Christian Tradition, 59 (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2015), 1-20; Bert Roest, ‘A Crisis of Late Medieval Monasticism?’, in: *Cambridge History of Medieval Monasticism in the Latin West*, ed. A. Beach and I. Cochelin, 2 Vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020) II, 1171-1189.

Movement: Legal Structures and Political Support in Europe, late 14th – early 16th Centuries” (Weingarten, 29 November – 1 December 2018), and “L’Observance: Entre normalisation et répression” (Rome, École française, 7-8 November 2019).³ Each of these gatherings zoomed in on a specific angle, namely historiographical traditions and their problems and perspectives; the legal and institutional contexts in which Observant reforms and religious transformation took place; and the way in which Observant reforms encountered resistance but also became itself a normalizing and normative force in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century religious life and society.

This volume focuses on the relationship between Observant reforms and the cultural production in and beyond Observant communities, and on the interconnection of this production with the changing European cultural landscape at the end of the Middle Ages. Its *raison d’être* is the observation, vocalized by Werner Williams-Krapp, Regina Schiewer, Felix Heinzer, and other scholars working on the late medieval world, that many male and female religious communities during the Observant period were remarkably active in scribal activities and other forms of cultural production, and that a huge percentage of the surviving late medieval manuscripts and works of religious instruction can be linked to religious houses involved with the spread of Observant reforms, or with the world of the *Devotio moderna* in the Low Countries that emerged alongside and in interaction with it, so much so that (despite its peculiarities) it can be seen as yet another twig of the reform branch of late medieval Catholicism.⁴

Although this perceived intensification in cultural production has since been qualified for certain regions and congregations, by and large, there seems to have been a differentiated augmentation in a number of literary

3 The contributions of the first encounter in the meantime have been published in *Mélanges de l’École française de Rome – Moyen-Âge* 130:2 (2018). The contributions of the second encounter will appear in the near future as *L’Observance entre normalisation et répression (XVe-XVIe sec.)*, ed. S. Duval et al. (Rome: École française de Rome, forthcoming).

4 See for instance Werner Williams-Krapp, ‘Observanzbewegungen, monastische Spiritualität und geistliche Literatur im 15. Jahrhundert’, *Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur* 20:1 (1995), 1-15; Regina D. Schiewer, ‘Sermons for Nuns of the Dominican Observance Movement’, in: *Medieval Monastic Preaching*, ed. Carolyn A. Muessig, Brill’s Studies in Intellectual History, 90 (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 1998), 73-92; Felix Heinzer, ‘*Exercitium scribendi* – Überlegungen zur Frage einer Korrelation zwischen geistlicher Reform und Schriftlichkeit im Mittelalter’, in: *Die Präsenz des Mittelalters in seinen Handschriften*, ed. Hans-Jochen Schiewer et al. (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2002), 107-130.

genres and in certain types of artistic, musical, and liturgical output in religious communities and congregations connected with the wider Observant world. Much of this output had a 'pragmatic' or instrumental nature: hence, it did not so much concern a pursuit of literature, art and learning for its own sake, but a literary engagement in service of distinctive religious reform objectives.⁵

The Nijmegen workshop brought together scholars from different countries working in this multidisciplinary field of expertise, to provide a platform where new research on the cultural production of late medieval religious communities could be presented, and to facilitate exchanges about the repercussions of the findings and the questions resulting from them. At a second stage, these scholars were invited to flesh out their presentations, with recourse to the discussions held during the workshop, and to transform them into publishable contributions. The result is this volume, which presents a gamut of new forays into the phenomenon of Observant cultural production, many of which focus on aspects or themes that until very recently have not been central in the scholarly discussion. To provide a background to these new forays into the phenomenon of Observant cultural production, this introduction sketches a concise overview of the predominantly literary aspects of the phenomenon as it has come to the fore thanks to scholarly investigations since the 1980s, prior to introducing the chapters of the contributors. In this way, it hopefully becomes clear to the reader what is the innovative character of the volume, and what remain pressing issues to consider in the future.

The cultural output of the wider Observant world

Scholars working on the Observant world, on late medieval religious life and learning, and on late medieval manuscripts, have pointed to a number of literary genres that during this very period gained in importance, and that more often than not can be directly linked to issues of Observant reform within late medieval religious orders. This is first of all the case with literary genres that are the direct outcome of Observant reform initiatives

5 This has been studied with regard to the literary output under the label 'pragmatic literacy' (pragmatische Schriftlichkeit). See: Nikolaus Staubach, 'Pragmatische Schriftlichkeit im Bereich der Devotio Moderna', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 25:1 (1991), 418-461.

and Observant identity politics. These genres expound on the necessity of reform and the way in which it should be unfolded, defend the chosen Observant lifestyle against non-Observant opponents in the same order, shield Observant initiatives against outside criticism, or proclaim its many benefits to the world at large.

In this context, we can point, for instance, at a veritable avalanche of Observant reform treatises appearing in this period. These include, to name but a few, *De reformatione religiosorum* issued by the Dominican Johann Nider,⁶ the appeal to reform written by the Augustinian Hermit Conrad von Zenn, known as *Liber de vita monastica*,⁷ Denis the Carthusian's quite famous *De reformatione claustralium*,⁸ the 'sermon' *Collatio de perfecta religionis plantatione* of the Cluniac Jean Raulin,⁹ and ultimately the booklet *Libellus ad Leonem X* written by the Camaldolese monks Paolo (Tommaso) Giustiniani and Pietro (Vincenzo) Quirini.¹⁰ These and many other comparable treatises fleshed out detailed reform programs for specific religious orders, or for the world of organized religious life as a whole, and can be traced in many different manuscript configurations and early imprints that emerged in the context of Observant reform projects, but also in the context of attempts by late medieval reform councils (from the Council of Constance to the Fifth Lateran Council) to stimulate or support the reform of religious orders, and therewith bolster the doctrinal and pastoral health of the Church as a whole in the face of multifaceted internal and external threats (decadence, heresy, Ottoman incursions, etc.).

6 It circulated in manuscript format throughout the fifteenth century and was printed as *De reformatione religiosorum libri tres* (Paris: Ambroise Girault, 1512).

7 See on this work Hellmuth Zschoch, *Klosterreform und monastische Spiritualität im 15. Jahrhundert. Conrad von Zenn (d. 1460) und sein Liber de vita monastica*, BHTh, 75 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1988).

8 On this text and other works of monastic reform by the same author, see Denys the Carthusian, *Opera Minora*, 9 Vols. (Cologne: San. Mariae de Pratis, 1907-1909), Vol. VI, as well as their analysis in Dennis D. Martin, *Fifteenth-Century Carthusian Reform: The World of Nicholas Kempf* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), *passim*.

9 The work was edited and brought to press for a different audience by Sebastian Brant: *Collatio habita in publico conventu Cluniacensium ordinis sancti Benedicti: ... de perfecta religionis plantatione, incremento & instauratione* (Basel: Johann Bergmann, 1498).

10 Eugenio Massa, *Una cristianità nell'alba del Rinascimento. Paolo Giustiniani e il 'Libellus ad Leonem X' (1513)* (Genoa-Milan: Marietti, 2005). See also Ludovic Viallet, 'Social Control, Regular Observance and Identity of a Religious Order: A Franciscan Interpretation of the *Libellus ad Leonem*', *Franciscan Studies* 71 (2013), 33-52.

Other literary genres that flourished in this period, and that scholars have linked to Observant reform initiatives and Observant identity politics, are order historiography and hagiographical writings. The competition with non-Observant groups within the same order to claim the legacy of the original intentions of order founders, and the urge to present their reform initiative as a necessary and authentic return to the pristine lifestyle of their order's first beginnings, caused many monks, canons and friars championing Observant reforms to engage in a massive scale in institutional history writing.¹¹ In this programmatical historical commitment, the envisaged goal, namely to demonstrate that the Observants were the true representatives and inheritors of the original ideals of the order in question, could have peculiar colonializing repercussions. That is to say that, with recourse to fictive creation histories, Observants invented institutional foundations for aligned congregations (enclosed 'second orders' of religious women and various groups of Tertiaries), and therewith could present themselves as the sole legitimate candidates for their spiritual and juridical oversight.¹²

It is likewise among authors connected with Observant or related reformist branches that many new hagiographic ventures were engaged in, to enlist or claim existing *beati* and saints from older periods for their Observant cause (and for their order),¹³ to promote the beatification and canonization of new saints from their own circles, and then to use the recent canonization or beatification of their own saints to further propagate the truth of the Observant lifestyle. This expedited a significant wave of new hagiographies of saints and *beati/beatae* associated with or claimed for the

11 Bert Roest, 'Later Medieval Institutional History', in: *Historiography in the Middle Ages*, ed. Deborah Mauskopf Deliyannis (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2003), 277-315; Anne Huijbers, 'Observance' as Paradigm in Mendicant and Monastic Order Chronicles', in: *A Companion to Observant Reform in the Late Middle Ages and Beyond*, ed. James D. Mixson and Bert Roest, Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition, 59 (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2015), 111-143; Eadem, *Zealots for Souls. Dominican Narratives of Self-Understanding during Observant Reforms, c. 1388-1517*, Quellen und Forschungen zur Geschichte des Dominikanerordens – Neue Folge, 22 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018); Letizia Pellegrini, *Bernardino Aquilano e la sua Cronaca dell'Osservanza con nuova edizione e traduzione a fronte* (Milan: Edizioni Biblioteca Francescana, 2021).

12 See on these phenomena for instance Alison More, *Fictive Orders and Feminine Religious Identity, 1250-1550* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

13 Chiara Mercuri, *Santità e propaganda: Il terz'ordine francescano nell'agiografia osservante* (Rome: Istituto Storico dei Cappuccini, 1999).

Observant cause, most notably Bernardino of Siena among the Franciscans and Caterina of Siena, who was ‘appropriated’ by the Dominicans and whose actions and later hagiographical representation played a paramount role in the propagation of Dominican Observant ideals.¹⁴ Moreover, these same saints and *beati/beatae* became visually and materially prominent in the iconographical programs in books, murals and altar pieces in Observant churches, and in the reliquaries related to their veneration.¹⁵

As in many religious orders Observant factions eventually won out, the Observant historiographical and hagiographical representation of the history of orders and saints influenced religious institutional historiography for centuries to come, with lasting repercussions for the manner in which the history of religious orders was written, all the way up to the twentieth century. In that sense, the Observant take-over of order historiography and hagiography created a very enduring master narrative of saintly origins, backlash and decadence, followed by heroic Observant reforms.¹⁶ This take-over also had lasting repercussions for the formats of history

14 Within the Franciscan order, the Observant hagiographic production surrounding Bernardino of Siena is a case in point. See on this Daniele Solvi, ‘Modelli minoritici della agiografia bernardiniana’, *Franciscana* 13 (2011), 255-289; *Le vite quattrocentesche di S. Bernardino da Siena*, ed. Daniele Solvi, 3 Vols. (Florence: SISMEL-Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2014-2018). More in general on Observant hagiographical models, Idem, *Il mondo nuovo. L’agiografia dei Minori Osservanti* (Spoleto: CISAM, 2019). On the Dominican appropriation of, and hagiographical production on Caterina of Siena, and on the role of Dominican friars such as Raimondo of Capua and Giovanni Dominici in this, see *A Companion to Catherine of Siena*, ed. Carolyn Muessig, George Ferzoco and Beverly Kienle, Brill’s Companions to the Christian Tradition, 32 (Leiden: Brill, 2012); *Virgo digna coelo: Caterina e la sua eredità: Raccolta di studi in occasione del 550° anniversario della canonizzazione di santa Caterina da Siena (1461-2011)*, ed. Alessandra Bartolomei Romagnoli, Luciano Cinelli & Pierantonio Piatti (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2014).

15 Several studies on the representation of Giovanni of Capestrano were included in a theme issue of *Franciscan Studies*: Pavla Langer, ‘Giovanni of Capestrano as novus Bernardinus. An Attempt in Iconography and Relics’, *Franciscan Studies* 75 (2017), 175-208; Luca Pezzuto, ‘Prints for Canonization (and ‘Verae Effigies’): The History and Meanings of Printed Images Depicting Giovanni of Capestrano’, *Franciscan Studies* 75 (2017), 209-232; Giuseppe Cassio, ‘Saint Giovanni of Capestrano in the Artistic Representations of the Franciscan Family Tree’, *Franciscan Studies* 75 (2017), 233-273. See also Machtelt Israëls, ‘Absence and Resemblance: Early Images of Bernardino da Siena and the Issue of Portraiture (With a New Proposal for Sassetta)’, *I Tatti Studies* 11 (2008), 77-114; Roberto Cobiانchi, ‘Fashioning the Imagery of a Franciscan Observant Preacher: Early Renaissance Portraiture of Bernardino da Siena in Northern Italy’, *I Tatti Studies* 12 (2009), 55-83; *Storia, conservazione e tecniche nella Libreria Sagramoso in San Bernardino a Verona*, ed. Monica Molteni (Treviso: ZeL, 2010); Roberto Rusconi, *Immagini dei predicatori e della predicazione in Italia alla fine del Medioevo* (Spoleto: CISAM, 2016).

16 One could argue that, at least within Franciscan scholarship, this Observant way of presenting the history of the order lasted up till the late 1960s, and still informed the narrative decisions

writing, including that of subgenres that coupled Observant programs of self-representation with humanist *de viribus illustribus* productions and related classicizing genres, leading for instance to stylized collective biographies of order leaders, order scholars and order saints.¹⁷

Beyond scholarly attention to the production of texts linked with Observant identity politics mentioned above, there have been investigations of works written by Observant spokesmen for fellow Observants that reflect specifically on the legitimacy or illegitimacy of pursuing forms of cultural production, whether or not in rule commentaries and order statutes. After all, in many orders, the Observance meant (at least in theory) a return to a more humble and ‘poor’ religious lifestyle, and many types of cultural production – book possession and library formation, the pursuit of academic titles and forms of education connected with books and libraries, the embrace of academic genres linked to the push towards academic titles (such as *Sentences* commentaries), investments in manuscript illumination, elaborated liturgical chant, lavish religious illustration cycles in churches and monasteries, expensive liturgical vestments and chalices, etc. – could be seen as counter to the sought-for transformation and ‘purification’ of the religious life.¹⁸ Hence, scholars have encountered texts that detailed the types of education that should be pursued without betraying the Observant cause, and the way in which an Observant life could cohere with acceptable types of learning, liturgical display and the production of books and art works.¹⁹

of John R.H. Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order from Its Origins to the Year 1517* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968).

17 Anne Huijbers, ‘De viris illustribus ordinis praedicatorum: A “classical” genre in Dominican hands’, *Franciscan Studies* 71 (2013), 297-324; Eadem, ‘Dominikus zitiert Ovid. Die humanistische Darstellung berühmter Dominikaner’, *Hagiographica* 25 (2018), 221-250; Claire Taylor Jones, *Women’s History in the Age of Reformation: Johannes Meyer’s Chronicle of the Dominican Observance* (Toronto: PIMS Publications, 2019).

18 Roberto Cobianchi, *Lo temperato uso dele cose: la committenza dell’osservanza francescana nell’Italia del Rinascimento* (Spoleto: CISAM, 2013); Denise Zaru, *Art and Observance in Renaissance Venice: The Dominicans and their Artists (1391- ca. 1545)* (Rome: Viella, 2014); Mercedes Pérez Vidal, *Arte y liturgia en los monasterios de dominicas en Castilla: desde los orígenes hasta la reforma observante (1218-1506)* (Gijón: Trea, 2021).

19 With regard to education, the pursuit of academic titles, the creation of libraries, etc., see for instance Petr Hlaváček, ‘Die böhmischen Franziskaner-Observanten im ausgehenden Mittelalter und ihr Verhältnis zu Bildung und Bücher’, in: *Identités franciscaines à l’âge des réformes*, ed. F. Meyer and L. Viallet, *Histoires croisées* (Clermont-Ferrand: Presses universitaires Blaise Pascal, 2005), 335-362; Idem, ‘Zum (Anti)intellektualismus in Ostmitteleuropa im 15. und

Scholars have noticed that the witnessed intensification of cultural production was by no means limited to the legitimization, defense, characterization or championing of Observant causes. The new religious enthusiasm of religious order branches and congregations involved with Observant reforms led to a huge investment in pastoral activities and forms of activism to help transform Christian society as a whole. For many Observants and propagators of the *Devotio moderna*, the reform of their own order or congregation was part and parcel of a necessary reform of church and society at large.²⁰

It is, therefore, no accident, that for many Observants and adherents of the *Devotio moderna*, the sought for transformation of their own religious life went hand in hand with a wider pastoral and social commitment. This could have many different faces, yet it meant in any case a strong increase in the production of vernacular (and Latin) religious texts for the edification of wider groups. First and foremost, Observant movements in mendicant religious orders in particular, which of old had been actively involved in preaching and in the production of a wide range of pastoralia, were at the forefront of what has been called the late medieval preaching revolution: many of the most influential fifteenth-century preachers and many of the most celebrated sermon collections produced in manuscript format and from the 1470s onwards also in print, were the product of Observant hom-

16. Jahrhundert. Die böhmischen Franziskaner-Observanten und ihr Verhältnis zu Bildung und Büchern', in: *Kirchen- und Kulturgeschichtsschreibung in Nordost- und Ostmitteleuropa. Initiativen, Methoden, Theorien*, ed. Rainer Bendel (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2006), 31-58; Johannes Karl Schlageter, 'Die Distanz der Franziskaner zur Leipziger Universität gegen Ende des Mittelalters', *Wissenschaft und Weisheit* 74 (2011), 252-267; Bert Roest, 'Conventual and Observant Positions on Education and the Pursuit of Degrees', in: Idem, *Franciscan Learning, Preaching and Mission, c. 1220-1650: Cum scientia sit donum Dei, armatura ad defendendam sanctam fidem catholicam...*, The Medieval Franciscans, 10 (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2015), 146-150. For a more general evaluation of Observant educational pragmatics, see Pietro Delcorno, 'Quomodo discet sine docente? Observant Efforts towards Education and Pastoral Care', in: *A Companion to Observant Reform*, 147-184. The question of access to music and musical instruments is broached in the article by Perina in the present volume, whereas liturgical issues are central in the contribution by Hoefener. For issues of liturgical and iconographical modesty, see alongside of the studies mentioned in footnote 18 also Claire Taylor Jones, *Ruling the Spirit: Women, Liturgy and Dominican Reform in Late Medieval Germany* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018); Jeffrey Hamburger, 'The Reformation of Vision: Art and the Dominican Observance in Late Medieval Germany', in: Idem, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (New York: Zone Book, 1998), 427-467.

20 James Mixson, 'Observant Reform's Conceptual Frameworks between Principle and Practice', in: *A Companion to Observant Reform*, 60-84.

iletic practitioners. These include *reportationes* of preaching encounters, carefully composed model sermon collections for fellow preachers, as well as ‘reading sermons’ meant for devotional and doctrinal self-instruction of religious and lay people.²¹ Beyond sermons and sermon-like texts, scholars have pointed at and studied a wide variety of additional instruction texts for religious and lay audiences issued by Observant and *Devotio moderna* authors. These range from mass instruction booklets and confession guides, to prayer manuals, texts of spiritual direction, meditative texts and Passion devotion treatises,²² including authentic late medieval bestsellers such as those of Thomas a Kempis,²³ Denis the Carthusian,²⁴ Hendrik Herp,²⁵ Antonino Pierozzi,²⁶ and Dietrich Colde.²⁷

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- 21 The literature on this is massive. See for instance Larissa Taylor, *Soldiers of Christ. Preaching in Late Medieval and Reformation France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); Anne Thayer, *Penitence, Preaching, and the Coming of the Reformation* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002); Bert Roest, *Franciscan Literature of Religious Instruction before the Council of Trent*, Studies in the History of Christian Traditions, 117 (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2004), 52-101; Ian Siggins, *A Harvest of Medieval Preaching: The Sermon Books of Johann Herolt, OP (Discipulus)* (Blumington: Xlibris, 2009); Carlo Delcorno, ‘L'Osservanza francescana e il rinnovamento della predicazione’, in: *I frati osservanti e la società in Italia nel secolo XV. Atti del XL Convegno internazionale* (Assisi - Perugia, 11-13 ottobre 2012) (Spoleto: CISAM, 2013), 3-53. See also the contributions of Cécile Caby and Pietro Delcorno in the present volume.
 - 22 For the Franciscan production of such materials, see Roest, *Franciscan Literature of Religious Instruction*, ad indicem. For especially Dominican ‘direzione spirituale’, see Gabriella Zarri, *Uomini e donne nella direzione spirituale: (secc. XIII-XVI)* (Spoleto: CISAM, 2016).
 - 23 Uwe Neddermeyer, ‘Verfasser, Verbreitung und Wirkung der “Imitatio Christi” in Handschriften und Drucken vom 15. bis zum Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts’, in: *Kempener Thomas-Vorträge*, ed. Ulrike Bodeman (Kempfen, 2002), 55-83; Nikolaus Staubach, ‘Von der Nachfolge Christi und ihren Folgen: Oder warum wurde Thomas von Kempfen so berühmt?’, in: *Ibidem*, 85-104; Ad Poirter, Rijcklof Hofman & Kees Schepers, ‘Thomas a Kempis. 550 Years of Impact’, *Ons Geestelijk Erf* 91 (2021), 289-292.
 - 24 Kent Emery Jr., ‘Denys the Carthusian and the invention of preaching materials’ *Viator* 25 (1994), 377-409; *The Spiritual Writings of Denis the Carthusian: contemplation, meditation, prayer, the fountain of light and the paths of life, monastic profession, exhortation to novices*, trans. & introd. Íde Ní Riain and Terence O'Reilly (Dublin-Portland, OR: Four Courts Press, 2005).
 - 25 Anna Dlabacová, *Literatuur en observantie. De Spieghel der volcomenheit van Hendrik Herp en de dynamiek van laatmiddeleeuwse tekstverspreiding* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2014); Eadem, ‘Transcending the Order: The Pursuit of Observance and Religious Identity Formation in the Low Countries, c. 1450-1500’, in: *Religious Orders and Religion Identity Formation, ca. 1420-1620: Discourses and Strategies of Observance and Pastoral Engagement*, ed. Bert Roest and Johanneke Uphoff, *The Medieval Franciscans*, 13 (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2016), 86-109.
 - 26 Antonino Pierozzi, *la figura e l'opera di un santo arcivescovo nell'Europa del Quattrocento*, ed. L. Cinelli & M.P. Paoli, *Memorie Domenicane*, 43 (Florence: Nerbini, 2012).
 - 27 Dieter Berg, ‘Dietrich Kolde. Volksprediger und Literat’, in: *Idem, Armut und Geschichte. Studien zur Geschichte der Bettelorden im Hohen und Späten Mittelalter*, Saxonia Franciscana, 11 (Kevelaer: Coelde, Butzon & Bercker, 2001), 335-344.

The quite ambitious program of societal reform exhibited by Observant sermon collections, to bring about an equitable and fully Christian commonwealth, free from un-Christian types of behavior (and also ‘cleansed’ from non-Christian groups such as Jews and heretics),²⁸ found a corollary in the production of concomitant texts to help married couples and Christian households, and even merchants, city governments and rulers to live and act responsibly in the world, in accordance with Christian guidelines.²⁹

The new emphasis on modesty and poverty notwithstanding, the recognition of the role of religious learning in a fully Christian society, for which quite a few Observant propagandists reached back to the model of Jerome, who had been both an ascetical eremitical church father, and at the same time an important educator, church historian, exegete and Bible translator, meant that many Observant and *Devotio moderna* houses (re-)embraced forms of Christian scholarship quite quickly, even though the pursuit of academic degrees was often frowned upon, at least until the early sixteenth century. In fact, scholars have discerned a convergence between certain conceptions of humanist scholarship and conceptions of Observant religious life, and it became apparent that religious houses within the Benedict congregations of Melk and Bursfeld, but also Observant houses of other orders (including Cistercian and Camaldolese communities, houses of Augustinian hermits and to some extent also Observant Dominican and Franciscan friaries) over time became linked to more humanist-type

28 See on this for instance Franco Mormando, *The Preacher's Demons. Bernardino of Siena and the Social Underworld of Early Renaissance Italy* (Chicago-London: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Cynthia L. Polecristi, *Preaching Peace in Renaissance Italy. Bernardino of Siena and his Audience* (Washington, D.C., The Catholic University of America Press, 2000); Maria Giuseppina Muzzarelli, *Pescatori di uomini: Predicatori e piazze alla fine del Medioevo* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2005); Bert Roest, ‘Giovanni of Capestrano's Anti-Judaism Within a Franciscan Context: An Evaluation Based On Recent Scholarship’, *Franciscan Studies* 75 (2017), 117-143.

29 See for instance Bernadette Paton, *Preaching Friars and the Civic Ethos: Siena, 1380-1480* (London: Westfield Publications, 1992); Letizia Pellegrini, ‘Predicazione osservante e propaganda politica: a partire da un caso di Todi’, in: *La propaganda politica nel basso medioevo. Atti del XXXVIII Convegno storico internazionale. Todi, 14-17 ottobre 2001* (Spoleto: CISAM, 2002), 511-531; Giacomo Todeschini, *Ricchezza francescana. Dalla povertà volontaria alla società di mercato* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2004); Letizia Pellegrini, ‘Tra la piazza e il Palazzo. Predicazione e pratiche di governo nell'Italia del Quattrocento’, in: *I frati osservanti e la società in Italia nel secolo XV. Atti del XL Convegno internazionale* (Assisi - Perugia, 11-13 ottobre 2012) (Spoleto: CISAM, 2013), 109-133; Maria Giuseppina Muzzarelli, ‘Pawn Broking between Theory and Practice in Observant Socio-Economic Thought’, in: *A Companion to Observant Reform*, 204-229; Pietro Delcorno, ‘Predicare (contro) la sessualità: Frammenti di un discorso pubblico’, in: *La sessualità nel basso medioevo* (Spoleto: CISAM, 2021), 91-146.

pursuits of arts, theology, natural science, medicine and, as said before, the study of history. This was no doubt partly the result of the fact that these orders attracted talented literate offspring of the new urban elites, for whom a life of literacy and learning went hand in hand with deeply felt religious convictions. All this left traces in late medieval Observant monastic and mendicant book collections, and ensured that reformist spokesmen of different orders, many of whom became efficacious users of the emerging printing press for their pastoral efforts and their propagandist works, became a significant presence in the later fifteenth-century *respublica litterarum*.³⁰

When the Observance and related forms of religious reform known for their pragmatic and spiritual literacy, gained a foothold in organized religious life, it drew the attention of potential lay patrons, and of secular authorities on different levels. This aspect, which still needs additional study, means that we cannot see the cultural production of such religious groups independent from the expectations and ambitions of influential outsiders. This could be local authorities keen to have properly Observant religious houses in their jurisdiction, to show urban prestige through their patronage of reformed communities, and eager to engage well-known Observant preachers for Advent and Lenten sermon performances, or lay

30 Paul O. Kristeller, 'The Contribution of Religious Orders to Renaissance Thought and Learning', in: *Medieval Aspects of Renaissance Learning* (Durham, N.C.: Duke UP, 1974), 95-158; Noel Brann, *The Abbot Trithemius (1462-1516): The Renaissance of Monastic Humanism*, Studies in the History of Christian Thought, 24 (Leiden: Brill, 1981); Denis D. Martin, 'The *Via Moderna*, Humanism, and the Hermeneutics of Late Medieval Monastic Life', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 51:2 (1990), 179-197; Petrus Becker, 'Benediktinische Reformbewegungen und klösterliches Bildungsstreben. Die rheinischen Abteien der Bursfelder Kongregation', *Rottenburger Jahrbuch fuer Kirchengeschichte* 11 (1992), 161-174; Franz Posset, *Renaissance Monks: Monastic Humanism in six Biographical Sketches* (Leiden: Brill, 2005); Harald Müller, 'Nutzen und Nachteil humanistischer Bildung im Kloster', in: *Funktionen des Humanismus. Studien zum Nutzen des Neuen in der humanistischen Kultur*, ed. Thomas Maissen and Gerrit Walther (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2006), 191-213; Cécile Caby, 'Al di là dell' 'Umanesimo religioso': Umanisti e Chiesa nel Quattrocento', in: *Cultura e desiderio di Dio. L'Umanesimo e le Clarisse dell'Osservanza*, ed. Pietro Messa et al. (Assisi: Porziuncola, 2009), 15-33; Eadem, *Autoportrait d'un moine en humaniste: Girolamo Aliotti (1412-1480)* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2018); Eadem, 'Pratiques humanistes et ordres religieux dans l'Italie du Quattrocento: quelques jalons', in: *L'humanisme à l'épreuve de l'Europe (XVe-XVIIe siècle): Histoire d'une transmutation culturelle*, ed. Denis Crouzet et al. (Ceyzérieu: Champ Vallon, 2019), 197-217. For the somewhat peculiar situation in England, where Observant reforms formally never took hold, see J.G. Clark, 'Humanism and Reform in Pre-Reformation English Monasteries', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th ser. 19 (2009), 57-93.

aristocratic and royal patrons transferring (a part of) their patronage to reformed houses, and bestowing on them religious art, and also claiming space in these houses for private chapels, burials, and forms of commemoration that were not automatically commensurate with the envisaged simplicity of a properly Observant lifestyle. This led to discussions and regulations.³¹

It has been noted that normative works on cultural production written by Observant spokesmen could betray a strong gender bias, in that preachers and spiritual guides could approach women in ways that downplayed intellectual ambitions. This is visible in some Observant sermons to female religious, and in several Observant rule commentaries and statutes written by male clerics and designated for newly reformed female communities.³² Possibly facilitated by such teachings, we do come across female communities and congregations connected with late medieval Observant reform

31 Some of which will also be touched upon in the articles of this volume. A famous case in point concerns the murals of fra Angelico in the Observant Dominican friary of San Marco in Florence, under the patronage of the Medici. See on that for instance Magnolia Scudieri, *The Frescoes by Angelico at San Marco* (Florence-Milan: Giunti Editore, 1996). On late medieval monastic patronage and its repercussions more in general, see Jonathan R. Lyon, 'Nobility and Monastic Patronage: The View from Outside the Monastery', in: *The Cambridge History of Medieval Monasticism in the Latin West, 2: The High and Late Middle Ages*, ed. Alison Isdale Beach and Isabelle Cochelin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 848-864. More specific with regard to Observant houses, see for example Ana Maria S. de Almeida Rodrigues, 'The Crown, the Court and Monastic Reform in Medieval Portugal. A Gendered Approach', in: *Queens, Princesses and Mendicants. Close Relations in a European Perspective*, ed. Nikolas Jaspert and Imke Just, *Vita regularis - Ordnungen und Deutungen religiösen Lebens im Mittelalter* (Leipzig: LIT Verlag, 2019), 1-11; Monique Sommé, 'The Dukes and Duchesses of Burgundy as Benefactors of Colette de Corbie and the Colettine Poor Clares', in: *A Companion to Colette of Corbie*, ed. Joan Mueller and Nancy Bradley (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2016), 32-55. In this introduction, I do not touch on issues of Colettine literacy and learning in the context of Observant reforms. See on that Bert Roest, 'A Textual Community in the Making: Colettine Authorship in the Fifteenth Century', in: *Seeing and Knowing: Women and Learning in Medieval Europe, 1200-1550*, ed. Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker, *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts*, 11 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 163-180, and Anna Campbell, 'Creating a Colettine Identity in an Observant and Post-Observant World: Narratives of the Colettine Reforms after 1447', in: *Religious Orders and Religion Identity Formation, ca. 1420-1620: Discourses and Strategies of Observance and Pastoral Engagement*, ed. Bert Roest and Johanneke Uphoff, *The Medieval Franciscans*, 13 (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2016), 32-47.

32 Aspects of this come to the fore in several sermons for nuns by Stephan Fridolin; see Petra Seegets, 'Lehre für angefochtene und kleinmütige Menschen', in: *Spätmittelalterliche Frömmigkeit zwischen Ideal und Praxis*, ed. Berndt Hamm and Thomas Lentjes (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 190-195.

movements that lived on a meager diet of liturgical prayers and devotional exercises.³³

At the same time, scholars have noted that, throughout Europe, Observant preachers often collaborated with religious women, and many sermons of preachers have in fact survived thanks to the scriptorial and editorial activities of the women they preached to.³⁴ In between lengthy diatribes against female sins, Observant orators also hailed pious lay women as domestic teachers, and just as the church father Jerome had presented his female aristocratic Roman disciples with a demanding program of religious education, these preachers likewise could depict their female religious charges in the monastery as learned virgins, therewith catering to the literary and cultural ambitions of the often aristocratic nuns in newly Observant Dominican, Clarissan and Augustinian monasteries, particularly in Italy, Spain and Southern Germany. In these female houses, filled with literate daughters and widows of prominent urban families, several of whom had received a humanist upbringing and were used to function in family networks maintained by letter writing and the exchange of books, many of the mechanisms at play in the identity formation of Observant groups that facilitated the efflorescence of the genres mentioned previously, likewise fueled the production of a diversified body of texts, in environments where religious education and book learning were embraced as a matter of course.³⁵

33 See also the contribution of Koen Goudriaan to this volume.

34 See for instance Thom Mertens, 'Ghostwriting Sisters: The Preservation of Dutch Sermons of Father Confessors in the Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Century', in: *Seeing and Knowing*, 121-141; Cynthia Cyrus, *The Scribes for Women's Convents in Late Medieval Germany* (Toronto-Buffalo-London: University of Toronto Press, 2009), as well as the contribution of Patricia Stoop to this volume.

35 For context, see Eva Schlotheuber, 'Bücher und Bildung in den Frauengemeinschaften der Bettelorden', in: Eadem, *'Gelehrte Bräute Christi': Geistliche Frauen in der mittelalterlichen Gesellschaft, Spätmittelalter, Humanismus, Reformation*, 104 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 159-178. On the cultural life of Dominican nuns, see Mercedes Pérez Vidal, 'The Corpus Christi Devotion: Gender, Liturgy, and Authority among Dominican Nuns in Castile in the Middle Ages', in: *Medieval Intersections: Gender and Status in Europe in the Middle Ages*, ed. Katherine Weikert and Elena Crislyn Woodacre (New York: Berghahn Books, 2021), 35-47; Eadem, 'The Art, Visual Culture and Liturgy of Dominican Nuns in Late Medieval and Early Modern Castile', *Memorie domenicane* n.s. 46 (2015), 225-242; Farkas Gábor Kiss, 'Reading Nuns at the *Insula Leporum* (Hungary): Traces of Bilingualism in a Late Medieval Dominican Nunnery', in: *Pursuing a New Order, 1: Religious Education in Late Medieval Central and Eastern Central Europe*, ed. Julian Ecker and Pavlína Rychterová (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018), 169-192, as well as the studies of Claire Taylor Jones and Paula Cardoso mentioned in footnote 47

Just looking at Observant Clarissan houses in the Italian peninsula during the fifteenth century, something connected with my own field of expertise, it is clear that the process of Observance, the collaboration with male spiritual guides, and the involvement of these houses with Observant reforms in other communities, could cause a dramatic increase in copying and translation activities, as well as a noted increase in epistolography, many different types of (at times autobiographical) texts of religious instruction, translations of and commentaries on the rule, convent historiography and hagiographies,³⁶ prayer texts and devotional poetry, Passion meditation treatises, in-house sermons by abbesses, novice training manuals, and different types of religious art and music.³⁷

Scholars recognize that the most 'literate' of these Observant communities, such as Corpus Christi in Bologna, Monteluca in Perugia, Santa Lucia in Foligno, San Lino in Volterra, became places that maintained

of this introduction. For literacy and the cultural life in other female communities, see also Anna Dlabacová & Patricia Stoop, 'Incunabula in Communities of Canonesses Regular and Tertiaries Related to the *Devotio moderna*', *Quaerendo* 51 (2021), 219-248, and Eva Schlottheuber, *Klostereintritt und Bildung. Die Lebenswelt der Nonnen im späten Mittelalter. Mit einer Edition des 'Konventstagebuchs' einer Zisterzienserin von Heilig-Kreuz bei Braunschweig (1484-1507)*, Spätmittelalter und Reformation. Neue Reihe, 24 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004).

36 See on these writings within and beyond the Italian peninsula Lucia Sebastiani, 'Cronaca e agiografia nei monasteri femminili', in: *Raccolte di vite di santi dal XIII al XVIII secolo: strutture, messaggi, fruizioni*, ed. Franco Bolgiani and Sofia Boesch Gajano (Fasano di Brindisi, 1990), 159-168; Charlotte Woodford, *Nuns as Historians in Early Modern Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Kate Lowe, *Nuns' Chronicles and Convent Culture in Renaissance and Counter-Reformation Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Anne Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles: Women Writing About Women and Reform in the Late Middle Ages* (University Park, Pa.: Penn State University Press, 2004).

37 For concise and avowedly incomplete overviews of the Clarissan production in all of these and related genres, see Chiara Augusta Lainati, *Temi spirituali dagli scritti del Secondo Ordine Francescano* (Assisi: S. Maria degli Angeli-Assisi: Porziuncola, 1970), ad indicem; Bert Roest, *Order and Disorder: The Poor Clares between Foundation and Reform*, The Medieval Franciscans, 8 (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2013), 283-345 [=Chapter 6: 'Forms of Literary and Artistic Expression']; Carmela Comparà, 'I libri delle Clarisse osservanti nella 'Provincia seraphica S. Francis' di fine '500'', *Franciscana* 4 (2002), 169-372. For more general introductions to female involvement with textual production and underlying pedagogical ideals fuelling the production of these texts, see in particular Katherine Gill, 'Women and the Production of Religious Literature in the Vernacular 1300-1500', in: *Creative Women in Medieval and Early Modern Italy: A Religious and Artistic Renaissance*, ed. E. Ann Matter (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 64-85; Carolyn A. Muessig, 'The Pedagogical Ideals of Late Medieval Observant Dominican and Franciscan Nuns', in: *Theologie und Bildung im Mittelalter*, ed. Peter Gemeinhardt and Tobias Georges, *Archa Verbi*, Subsidia, 13 (Münster i.W.: Aschendorff, 2015), 129-150.

scriptoria and nurtured female religious authors and artists of renown.³⁸ These included Clarissan authors who all have received or are currently receiving new scholarly editions of their works, such the versatile Caterina Vigri (d. 1463),³⁹ her life-long friend Illuminata Bembo (d. 1496),⁴⁰ Girolama of Montefeltro,⁴¹ Smeralda (Eustochia) Calafato,⁴² and Camilla

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- 38 Ugolino Nicolini, 'I Minori Osservanti di Monteripido e lo 'Scriptorium' delle Clarisse di Monteluze in Perugia', *Picenum Seraphicum* 8 (1971), 100-130; Ilaria Bianchi, 'La gloria della serafica Chiara e del suo ordine: suor Dorotea Broccardi, copista e miniatrice nel convento di San Lino a Volterra', in: *Vita artistica nel monastero femminile. Exempla*, ed. Vera Fortunati, Biblioteca di storia dell'arte (Bologna: Editrice Compositori, 2002), 107-113; Jacques Dalarun and Fabio Zinelli, 'Poésie et théologie à Santa Lucia de Foligno. Sur une laude de Battista de Montefeltro', in: *Caterina Virgi. La santa e la città. Atti del Convegno Bologna, 13-15 novembre 2002*, ed. Claudio Leonardi, Caterina Virgi, la santa e la città, 5 (Tavernuzze (Florence): SISMELE-Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2004), 19-43; Ugo Vignuzzi & Patrizia Bertini Malgarini, 'Le capacità linguistiche delle Clarisse dell'Osservanza: qualche anticipazione', in: *Cultura e desiderio di Dio: L'Umanesimo e le Clarisse dell'Osservanza*, ed. Pietro Messa et al. Viator, 8 (S. Maria degli Angeli-Assisi: Edizioni Porziuncola, 2009), 35-44; Monika Benedetta Umiker, 'Codici di S. Maria di Monteluze e l'attività scrittoriale delle monache', in: *Cultura e desiderio di Dio*, 73-80; Attilio Bartoli Langeli, 'Scrittura di donna. Le capacità scritte delle Clarisse dell'Osservanza', in: Ibidem, 81-96.
- 39 For some editions, see: Caterina Vigri, *I dodici giardini. L'esodo al femminile. Con testo originale a fronte*, ed. Gilberto Aquini and Mariafiama Maddalena Faberi, Mistica. Testi e Studi, 2 (Bologna: Gli Inchiostri associati, 1999); Caterina Vigri, *Laudi, Trattati e Lettere*, ed. Silvia Serventi, (Tavernuzze-Florence: SISMELE, Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2000); Caterina Vigri, *Le sette armi spirituali*, ed. Antonella degli'Innocenti, (Tavernuzze-Florence: SISMELE-Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2000). See also Jerydene M. Wood, 'Breaking the Silence: the Poor Clares and the Visual Arts in Fifteenth-Century Italy', *Renaissance Quarterly* 48:2 (1995), 262-286; Alessandra Bartolomei Romagnoli, 'Santa Caterina da Bologna e la rivoluzione culturale delle Clarisse nel Quattrocento', *Frate Francesco* 79:1 (2013), 225-235; Serena Spanò Martinelli, 'Caterina de' Vigri between Manuscript and Print: Text, Image, and Gender', in: *The Saint Between Manuscript and Print: Italy, 1400-1600*, ed. Alison Knowles Frazier, CRRS Essays and Studies, 37 (Toronto: CRRS, 2015), 351-378.
- 40 Illuminata Bembo, *Specchio di illuminazione*, ed. Silvia Mostaccio, Caterina Vigri. La Santa e la Città, 3 (Tavernuzze-Florence: SISMELE-Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2001).
- 41 Dalarun & Zinelli, 'Poésie et théologie à Santa Lucia', 21-44; F. Regina Psaki, 'Battista da Montefeltro Malatesta', in: *Women in the Middle Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Katharina Margit Wilson and Nadia Margolis (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 2004), 63-64.
- 42 Lucrezia Lorenzini, 'Il monachesimo di Eustochia Calafato nella crisi spirituale del Quattrocento', in: *Atti del XXI Congresso Internazionale di Linguistica e Filologia Romanza: Centro di studi filologici e linguistici siciliani, Università di Palermo, 18-24 settembre 1995*, ed. Giovanni Ruffino, 6 Vols. (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1998) VI, 659-666; *Heilige Eustochia Calafato 1434-1485: Quellen zum Leben einer Reformerin im Orden der heiligen Klara von Assis*, ed. Susanne Ernst (Heiligenkreuz: Stift Heiligenkreuz, 2015).

Battista of Varano (1458–1524),⁴³ to name but a few and limiting myself to Italy.⁴⁴

By and large, scholars agree that the impetus of reform – of individual religious, of individual communities, of congregations and orders as a whole, but also of society at large, as emphasized in the countless Observant sermon marathons in town and countryside –, as well as a strengthened sense of vocation, and the sense of urgency connected with it, were strong driving force for different types of cultural production. At the same time, this same impetus of reform, and the wish to return to a more genuine and more modest religious lifestyle in accordance with the rule, and ultimately with the commands of Christ in the Gospel, made it difficult to wholeheartedly embrace the material consequences of learning, literary and artistic prowess, unless it could be properly instrumentalized for (an aspect of) the Observant cause. Such qualms became especially cumbersome when these material consequences were substantial, as was the case with library formation, the creation of extensive murals, the commission of expensive altarpieces, liturgical vestments and musical instruments. All that could easily be seen to be in overt discrepancy with the commands of poverty and simplicity that formed the core of the Observant message.

The content of this volume

Such conflicting elements and related problematical issues connected with the Observant cultural output, but also the genres and types of cultural

43 For editions of her *Vita Spirituale*, the *Avvertimenti spirituali*, the *Istruzioni al discepolo*, and her *Dolori mentali di Gesù nella sua Passione*, see Beata Camilla Battista da Varano, *Le opere spirituali*, ed. G. Boccanera (Iesi: Scuola Tipografica Francescana, 1958); Beata Camilla Battista da Varano, *Autobiografia e le opere complete*, ed. S. Bracci (Vicenza: Hamsa, 2009). In addition, see S. Battista da Varano, *Trattato della purità del cuore. De puritatis cordis. De perfectione religiosorum*, ed. Silvia Serventi, Fondazione Ezio Franceschini, La Mistica Cristiana tra Oriente e Occidente, 30 (Florence: Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2019).

44 Observant Clarissan authors of a comparable renown also hailed from other European regions, witness the printing successes of the massive *Vita Christi* written by Isabel/Elionor Manuel of Villena, and the admiration with which a Humanist Observant Clarissan abbess and author such as the Nuremberg Poor Clare Caritas Pirckheimer was addressed in the writings of Erasmus and other humanists. On the latter, see also Eva Schlotheuber, 'Humanistisches Wissen und geistliches Leben. Caritas Pirckheimer und die Geschichtsschreibung im Nürnberger Klarissenkonvent', in: Eadem, *'Gelehrte Bräute Christi': Geistliche Frauen in der mittelalterlichen Gesellschaft*, Spätmittelalter, Humanismus, Reformation, 104 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 179–204.

production in need of further exploration, were central in many of the presentations during the virtual Nijmegen meeting. Due to the specific expertise of the participants, these coalesced around three larger thematic complexes, namely (1) concrete Observant cultural practices surrounding books and libraries, learning and preaching; (2) Observant liturgical developments and transformations in religious music; (3) aspects of Observant spiritualities and their practical and material consequences.

With some adjustments, the current volume follows the workshop set-up. This means that, under the respective subheading Observant cultural practices: books and libraries, learning and preaching are positioned the panoramic survey 'Which Rhetoric for Which Observance? Provisional Investigations in Fifteenth-Century Italy' by Cécile Caby (Sorbonne Université); the case study 'An Amphibious Identity: Apollonio Bianchi between Observance and Humanism' by Pietro Delcorno (Università di Bologna); the analysis 'Caterina of Siena in the Writings of Observant Poor Clares: Caterina Vigri and Camilla Battista of Varano' by Silvia Serventi (independent scholar); and the essay 'Religious Life and Visual Authority: Library Decoration among Mendicant Observant Orders' by Roberto Cobianchi (Università degli Studi di Messina).

This is followed by four articles focused on aspects of Observant liturgy and the transformations in religious music. This includes an essay on liturgical space by Haude Morvan (Université Bordeaux-Montaigne), entitled 'Observant Reform and Dominican Church Interiors in Italy (15th-16th Centuries)'; an assessment by Hugo Perina (Centre de Recherches Historiques, Paris) on music, namely 'The Organ and the Italian Observance: Discourses Tested by Practices'; a case study by Kristin Hoefener (Universidade Nova in Lisbon), titled 'Female Chant Repertoire in Aveiro's Dominican Convent of Jesus during the Observant Reform (15th Century)'; and the philological investigation 'Towards a Critical Edition of the *Libro del Conorte* of the Abbess Juana de la Cruz (1481-1534)', by Pablo Acosta-Garcia (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona).

Yet another group of articles are arranged around the subheading aspects of Observant spiritualities. This section includes a contribution by Koen Goudriaan (emeritus Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam), entitled 'Third Order Convents in Western Flanders: Varieties in Tertiary Observance'; the exploratory paper 'Preaching the Observant Reform in Female Communities Related to the *Devotio moderna*' by Patricia Stoop (Universiteit

Antwerpen); and the essay 'Observant Reform and the Cult of New Dominican Saints in the Southeastern Adriatic' by Valentina Živković (Institute for Balkan Studies, SASA, Belgrade) and Ana Marinković (Art History Department of Sveučilište u Zagrebu/University of Zagreb).

Finally, this volume also includes at its very end the article 'Was There an Observant Cistercian Movement? Reform in the Medieval History of the Cistercian Order' by Emilia Jamrozak (University of Leeds). Although this ultimate contribution does not focus on Observant cultural production per se, Jamrozak's enlightening exposition of the historiographical traditions of Cistercian reform, as well as her unprecedented attempt to flesh out a viable approach to the study of Observant reforms in that order, made her contribution too relevant to exclude it from a collection that wants to make available cutting-edge research on the Observant world.

Cécile Caby's opening article focuses on a subgenre of mendicant and monastic preaching not often talked about, namely the speeches or sermons held at (general) chapter meetings in religious orders. These were important moments of self-representation and also occasions to take a stance on issues of order reform, sometimes in an attempt to influence the election of proper reform candidates for leadership positions. Caby shows how such performances at general chapter meetings within the Franciscan, Augustinian and Olivetan orders pushed the message of reform, and also how these ceremonial speech acts were in this very period transformed under the influence of new, humanist rhetorical formats, revealing the intriguing interaction of Observant and contemporaneous humanist discourses of intellectual, religious and cultural reform, and the strategic use of humanist epideictic oratory at (public) occasions that called for emotionally charged persuasion.

Pietro Delcorno follows up on this issue, by discussing the way in which Apollonio Bianchi (d. 1450), a hitherto ignored Franciscan Observant preacher active in Northern Italy, on the one hand developed spectacular and efficacious theatrical homiletic strategies, which we nowadays tend to link to late medieval popular preaching, and at the same time explored new humanist rhetorical formats to address secular and religious authority figures, and to position himself as a militant propagator of the Observant cause. As such, he nearly seamlessly adopted a hybrid cultural *persona*, commensurate with the tasks at hand. For this friar, Observant poverty, humility and pastoral prowess could very well be reconciled with

the elite discourses of high-brow humanism, as came to the fore in a very astute way in his *Libellus de vite pauperis prestantia*.

With the article of Silvia Serventi, we move into the world of female Observant writing. More in particular, she shows the order boundary transgressing nature of the works of one of the most influential ‘mothers of the Dominican Observance’, namely Caterina of Siena. Whereas this female religious reformer was very important for the creation of a Dominican Observant female identity, as has been studied in depth by Anna Scattignato, Sylvie Duval, and others,⁴⁵ she also became an example and lingering presence, not much noticed in earlier scholarship, in the writings of important Observant Poor Clares, in this case Caterina Vigri and Camilla Battista of Varano. Both were very influential shapers of the spiritual and intellectual profile of the Italian Clarissan Observant world. The inheritance of Caterina of Siena’s mystical language, notably her metaphors, and her narrative motives and sources facilitated these Clarissan authors to develop their own spiritual concepts, some of which in turn again found reception in sixteenth-century Dominican circles. It is an example of complex cross-fertilization that became somewhat of a hallmark of Observant disciplinary and spiritual texts, and shows the importance of order-transgressing approaches of the study of late medieval religious literature.

The appropriation of writing and scholarship in Observant circles meant the emergence of libraries in Observant houses, something alluded at earlier in this introduction. The contribution of Roberto Cobiانchi approaches the setup of these libraries from an angle that until now has not been studied in depth, namely the illustrative programs of these locations, to search for the visual traces of an Observant identity. After all, these Observant libraries developed significantly in the period under discussion, and were first and foremost created with Observant clerical users

45 See for instance Anna Scattignato, ‘Suggerimenti cateriniani negli epistolari femminili tra Quattro e Cinquecento’, in: *Virgo digna coelo. Caterina e la sua eredità. Raccolta di studi in occasione del 550° anniversario della canonizzazione di santa Caterina da Siena*, ed. Anna Bartolomei Romagnoli, Luciano Cinelli and Paolo Piatti, Atti e documenti, 35 (Rome: Libreria editrice Vaticana, 2013), 545-582; Rita Librandi, Dal lessico delle “Lettere” di Caterina da Siena: la concretezza della fusione’, in: *Dire l’ineffabile. Caterina da Siena e il linguaggio della mistica*, ed. Lino Leonardi and Pietro Trifone, La mistica cristiana tra Oriente e Occidente, 5 (Florence: Edizioni del Galluzzo per la Fondazione Ezio Franceschini, 2006), 19-40; Sylvie Duval, *Comme des Anges sur terre, les moniales dominicaines et les débuts de la réforme observante* (Rome: École Française de Rome, 2015), passim.

in mind. With the caveat that he can only provide a provisional interpretation, Cobianchi makes a convincing case that the decorative schemes in (Franciscan and Dominican) Observant libraries combine the veneration of the canonized saints of their order with a just as strong or even stronger celebration of the scholarly achievements of previous order members. Therewith, these Observant houses claimed for themselves the religious and intellectual legacy of pre-Observant friars, just as the Observants in general claimed to be the real offspring of the order founders, whose ideals they were supposedly restoring.

In a different manner, the organization of space is also central in the article of Haude Morvan. Her study of Dominican liturgical space tackles a complex question that has been a contested issue in international scholarship at least since the works of Jäggi, Bartolini Salimbeni and colleagues,⁴⁶ namely to what extent Observant reforms and the concomitant transformation in the liturgical life of religious men and women took hold in the physical and spatial organization of convent churches. Morvan approaches this question with several investigations of the positioning of Dominican church choirs, to conclude in the end that in the cases she studied Observant reforms and subsequent renovations of convent churches do not show a single solution, and that reasons for relocating the choir and to change the choir screen were rather case specific, influenced by local trends, and also in part dependent on the input of artists and especially external benefactors who provided much of the funding. Hence, at least with regard to the setup, location and aesthetic development of church choirs, there does not seem to have been a one-on-one relationship with a specific (Dominican) Observant religious identity.

46 Lorenzo Bartolini Salimbeni, *Architettura francescana in Abruzzo dal XIII al XVIII secolo* (Rome: Università 'G. D'Annunzio', 1993); Carola Jäggi, *Frauenkloster im Spätmittelalter. Die Kirchen der Klarissen und Dominikanerinnen im 13. und 14. Jahrhundert* (Petersberg: Imhof Verlag, 2006); Valeria Rubbi, 'L'architettura conventuale femminile: il problema di una definizione tipologica', in: Caterina Vigri, *La Santa e la Città. Atti del Convegno, Bologna 13-15 novembre 2002*, ed. Claudio Leonardi (Florence: SISMEL-Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2004), 259-267; Leonie Silberer, 'Medieval Monastic Architecture of the Franciscan Order. Friaries as Evidence of Written and Unwritten Rules and Ideal Perceptions', in: *Rules and Observance: Devising Forms of Communal Life*, ed. Mirko Breitenstein et al., Vita Regularis, Abhandlungen, 60 (Berlin-Münster: LIT Verlag, 2014), 281-294; Panayota Volti, 'L'architecture mendicante: continuité et innovation', *Memorie Domenicane* 40 (2009), 69-89.

Mendicant churches as liturgical spaces were also venues for the performance of music. And with Hugo Perina, we engage with the complex relationship Observants had with it, particularly when costly instruments were involved. His article points at the role of mendicant orders in the development of the organ, in the context of furious debates about the increasing use of polyphonic music and instrumental accompaniment in the liturgy. He demonstrates that Observant mendicants, as shown in Observant Franciscan and Dominican chapter regulations, the writings of the Dominican Archbishop Antonino of Florence, and the at times belligerent statements of reformers such as Girolamo Savonarola and Ludovico Barbo, were able to create a normative discourse that separated between music that belonged to holy inspiration and music as an expression of profane entertainment. This ultimately facilitated these friars to become active as commissioners, producers and users of organs, and to exploit the presence of the organ in their churches to draw audiences that they could mold to disseminate their ideals of societal reform. And this, in turn, allows modern scholars to re-address the impact of the Observance on fifteenth- and sixteenth-century musical practice.

In a different vein, music is also an important topic for Kristin Hoefener, who charts the chant repertoire in the Portuguese Dominican Convent of Jesus (Aveiro), by analyzing a series of chant books produced by the sisters in their in-house scriptorium. Beyond commenting on the literate culture of this Dominican house, Hoefener investigates what information can be obtained from the chant repertoire produced in the convent in so far as it has survived in the convent library, and to what extent it adheres to the findings about liturgical standardization and ‘liturgical Observance’ studied by scholars such as Claire Jones and Paula Cardoso.⁴⁷ This, at least, seems the case in the apparent serial production of such liturgical works, and it comes to the fore again in a number of processions linked to specific devotions that expressed the Convent’s Observant identity, such as the *Salve regina* procession after Compline, and the commemoration of the Blessed Virgin on Saturdays. The enhanced participation in processions

47 Cf. Claire Taylor Jones, *Ruling the Spirit: Women, Liturgy and Dominican Reform in Late Medieval Germany* (Philadelphia: PENN, 2018); Paula Cardoso, *Art, Reform and Female Agency in the Portuguese Dominican Nunneries: Nuns as Producers and Patrons of Illuminated Manuscripts (c. 1460-1560)*, PhD thesis (Lisbon: University Nova Lisbon, 2019).

and related devotional activities also expressed itself in the emergence of additional chapels throughout the convent, where specific female saints were venerated, including the Virgin, Saint Caterina of Siena, and Saint Ursula and her virgin companions.

One of the most fascinating female preachers and visionaries connected with the wider Franciscan Observant world was Juana de la Cruz, alias the 'Guitar of God', whose *Libro del conorte* (*Book of Consolation*), which includes more than seventy of Juana's visionary sermons, is scrutinized by Pablo Acosta-Garcia, who is in the process of creating the first critical edition of the work. He analyses the two surviving manuscripts that contain the sermons. By doing so, he puts forward a number of codicological, philological and methodological problems that need solving before a proper understanding of the text is even possible, and he re-addresses the problem of collective authorship in the writing, compilation and use of Juana's *Libro del conorte* in her home community. Acosta-Garcia therefore asks fundamental questions that, beyond their relevance for our understanding of Juana's work and its genesis properly speaking, offer potential venues to tackle problems scholars are often confronted with in the study of authorship and cultural production in female Observant religious houses.

In his evaluation of tertiary congregations in late medieval West-Flanders, Koen Goudriaan shows that the complex and at times conflict-ridden development of this group of Tertiaries to an extent flies in the face of modern scholarly assumptions about interactions between such groups and the Observant Franciscans, and that the available documentation allows for an intriguing caveat with regard to the traditional assignment of Tertiaries to an 'active' life (as opposed to the 'contemplative life' of fully enclosed religious groups). Moreover, he shows that the spirituality developed in the communities of this Flemish group, which points towards a measure of contemplation, was deliberately non-literary. Goudriaan contrasts this with the strong embrace of a vernacular literary culture in other tertiary groups in the Low Countries, in line with the promotion of pragmatic devotional literacy in the world of the *Devotio moderna* with which many of these other Tertiaries were closely aligned. He proposes to see the adversity to book culture as a vignette for the peculiar spirituality of this west-Flemish tertiary group, which seemed to have stayed outside the orbit of the *Devotio moderna*, and which did not really partake in the literary program pushed by the Observants either. Until now, this west-Flemish

tertiary group has remained under the radar, as scholars tend to focus for various reasons on communities with a recognizable literary legacy.

In nearly complete contrast with the non-literary lifestyle of these west-Flemish Tertiaries stands the literary culture described in the article of Patricia Stoop, which fleshes out and contextualizes the order-transgressing nature of Observant-style convent preaching in an analysis of mendicant (and particularly Franciscan) sermons held in Flemish and Dutch communities linked to the *Devotio moderna*. Although many women within this reform movement used the preaching services of confessors and preachers from within their own movement, they also collected sermons from Observant Dominican and Franciscan friars, or invited them to preach in their convents. The sermons of the latter, and the way they circulated are central in this contribution. In addition, it zooms in on the question to what extent these sermons helped disseminate Observant ideas and spiritual concepts into female *Devotio moderna* communities, and therewith, alongside of texts produced within the ambiance of the Modern Devout, might have influenced these women's spirituality.

In their contribution, Valentina Živković and Ana Marinković discuss the appropriation of saints and the cult of new saints in a localized Dominican context, starting from the observation that the study of the diffusion of Observant reform and the study of the promotion of specific saints' cults should go hand in hand. To this purpose, the authors examine specific saints' cults in Observant Dominican friaries in the Dubrovnik and Kotor regions, with reference to international networks of friars, as well as the activities of major agents in and commentators upon this process, such as the sixteenth-century Dominican preacher and hagiographer Serafino Razzi, and with recourse to the visible sources still available to modern researchers. This combination of perspectives and sources, and the concentration on a specific region allows for a proper typology of the cults established, which exhibit a distinctive mixture of cults devoted to universal Dominican Observant saints (such as Vincent Ferrer), and those devoted to local *beatae*, such as the Dominican tertiary and anchoress Osanna from Kotor. Thus, it can be shown how the Dominican Observant reform could take root locally while becoming an integral part of a wider reformist network.

Finally, Emila Jamroziak shows that the history of Observant reforms in the Cistercian order, in fact the first truly organized and institutionalized religious order in Western Christendom, still needs to be written. The

bulk of scholarship on the Cistercian order focuses on the period prior to ca. 1300, and Jamroziak makes clear that this is in various ways a function of a series of scholarly assumptions about a so-called golden age, and concomitant assumptions about the uniformity of the original Cistercian way of life. As a result, later developments and innovations have been almost automatically interpreted as a form of decline, therewith hampering in-depth scholarship on a wide range of reform initiatives, including the highly interesting impact of Observant reforms in the later medieval period. Jamroziak identifies three viable axes of reform that can be fruitfully studied to understand how the Observance touched (parts of) the Cistercian order. In the process, she also shows how some of these developments can only be understood if we recognize the interaction with other movements (such as the *Devotio moderna* and the model of the Carthusian lifestyle), and if we take seriously the role higher education played in some of the most enduring Cistercian reform initiatives.

In many ways, this volume is a testimony of work in progress on topics that need further exploration. Its contributions disclose new aspects of the dynamics of late medieval religious reform, and their manifold societal repercussions. They are offered to the field to provide scholars the opportunity to benefit from the provisional results gained from the investigations undertaken by the authors, and to stimulate the ongoing international discussions on the wider impact of the late medieval Observance, in line with the objectives of the international project network “Observer l’Observance: Diffusion, réseaux et influences des réformes régulières en Europe (fin XIVe – première moitié du XVIe siècle)”. It is my hope that these discussions will not solely reverberate among specialists of late medieval religious culture, but that they also will reach other scholars of the late medieval and early modern world, and can facilitate fertile forms of cross-disciplinary comparison, whether this is a comparison with geographic regions not included in this volume, a comparison with the profile of the cultural production in non-Observant or ‘Conventual’ order branches, or a diachronical comparison with the cultural production in the early Reformation period on all sides of the emerging confessional divide.

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