MORETTO DA BRESCIA:
VIEWING FEMALE SPIRITUALITY IN SIXTEENH-CENTURY LOMBARDY

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For my parents
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To my family, thank you for every bit of encouragement along the way. And to Paul, for his coffee-making, patience, and love.
This dissertation focuses on four devotional paintings executed by north Italian artist Il Moretto da Brescia between 1540-1550. These works depict holy women and virgin martyrs as spiritual exemplars for the faithful. In an effort to contextualize Moretto’s oeuvre within the broader religious climate of Cinquecento Brescia, I discuss the works in relation to the larger Reform movement of the time. I am specifically interested in the ways in which Moretto’s images of women religious reflect and contribute to his female viewers’ self-conception as brides of Christ. Brescia offers a unique set of circumstances as regards women’s opportunities for devotion, as the newly formed Company of St. Ursula provided an alternative to the convent or matrimony. Founded by living saint Angela Merici, Brescia’s innovative Ursuline order offered young women the choice of pledging holy virginity while continuing to live at home with their families. The notion of uncloistered virginity was particularly controversial and the amount of autonomy Merici’s followers enjoyed was quite unprecedented. It is my contention that Moretto’s work during the decade after Angela Merici’s death represents a show of support for her fledgling Company, and encouraged members of the order to meditate on their status as brides of Christ through a series of paintings that highlight various beliefs about holy chastity. These analyses are grounded in Merici’s own writings about the Ursuline mission, fleshing out our understanding of the meanings female religious would have been able to make from Moretto’s canvases. In a small memorial portrait of Angela Merici herself, Moretto presents a vision of her
miraculously incorrupt remains, reminding viewers of the heavenly rewards of a chaste life. An altarpiece featuring St. Ursula and her 11,000 Virgin Companions provides a model of solidarity and strength, as the namesake of Merici’s order stands with her army of virgins. Merici’s words to her followers emphasize the need for preparedness in the battle of holy chastity. Finally, in two works depicting groups of female saints standing together, reading, praying, and conversing, Moretto offers a visual manifestation of all the Ursulines might be if they remain united against life’s hardships.
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Introduction

Therefore, my Sisters, I urge or rather, beg of you since you have been chosen to be the true and chaste spouses of the Son of God, to realize first of all how important, new and admirable this choice is. You must do all that lies in your power to remain faithful to this divine vocation, and welcome all the ways and means necessary to go forward and persevere in it to the end; good beginnings are not enough without perseverance.

-Angela Merici, Rule (1535)

Scholarship has traditionally set up sixteenth-century painter, il Moretto da Brescia, as a bridge between Leonardo and Caravaggio, an assessment which tells us little about the art of these two masters, while simultaneously devaluing Moretto's work as something to be considered only against painters whose legacies loom larger in the art historical landscape. It is my intention to reclaim in some small measure this artist’s agency and demonstrate the ways in which his engagement with others’ artistic production generated devotional art that addressed his viewers’ unique spiritual needs. As a framework within which to explore these larger issues, this dissertation focuses on four paintings Moretto executed between 1540 and 1550. These works, featuring female saints and spiritual leaders, exemplify this

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artist’s cognizance of his contemporaries’ formal innovations, as well as his deep involvement in the religious life of his community.

The context within which Moretto worked was greatly informed by the influence of a holy woman called Angela Merici. This Franciscan tertiary was well known in Brescia as a wise spiritual counselor, and served the upper echelons of society through religious guidance and conflict resolution. Merici herself was especially interested in the spiritual lives of Brescia’s young women, leading her to establish her religious order, the Company of St. Ursula, in 1535. Members of the Company vowed to remain chaste, while continuing to live with their families. The group promoted mutual support among its members, mostly young virgins of lower socio-economic status. To formalize the Company’s purpose and operation, Merici dictated a Rule to her secretary, as well as Counsels and Testaments to those older widows tasked with tending to the administrative affairs of the group. Merici’s writings provide insight into the ways her followers were encouraged to conceptualize their relationship to the divine and to the world around them. Merici created an unorthodox order espousing uncloistered virginity, making Brescia a unique site as regards female spirituality and its boundaries. Unlike many living saints of the time, Merici did not advocate ecstatic visions or miraculous stigmata, inedia, or any of the other extreme practices associated with women’s religiosity in the early modern period. Rather, she wished her followers to be empowered by their commitment to chastity, and to a large extent, to make their own choices regarding their spiritual lives. As Querciolo Mazzonis has argued, Merici’s
leadership was not characterized by control. Her followers were free to make their own decisions about their daily lives—where to live and with whom, where to pray, and for how long. Membership in the Ursuline Company offered these women something the convent or marriage never could—a modicum of responsibility for their spiritual growth.

My work endeavors to reflect on the intersections between Merici’s ideas as espoused in her extant writings and the representation of female spirituality we find in Moretto’s work in the decade following Merici’s death. Moretto’s work has been examined in relation to topical religious issues of the day, most significantly promotion of the sacrament of the Eucharist, yet the presence of Merici’s innovative Ursulines has been given scant attention in these discussions. Merici’s Company was created in an attempt to give young women an opportunity to dedicate their bodies to God while continuing to work and help support their families. The audacity of her ideas and the success with which she carried them out set Merici apart from other sixteenth-century holy women. The Ursuline Company was a momentous feature of Brescia’s religious climate and Moretto responded to that in his work. He can be seen as both responding to the group’s impact and helping drive that momentum through making its ideals available to the wider community.

Literature on Moretto has been defined predominantly by a discussion of his supposed stylistic influences. He was deemed an offshoot of the Venetian tradition

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3 Ibid.s, 53.
in early texts, such as J.A. Crowe and G.B. Cavalcaselle’s *A History of Painting in North Italy, excluding the Venetian* from 1871 and Bernard Berenson's *North Italian Painters of the Renaissance* from 1907. A decade later, Roberto Longhi highlighted instead the stylistic connection between Moretto and his important Brescian predecessor, Vincenzo Foppa. Fausto Lechi and Gaetano Panazza’s 1939 exhibition catalogue *La pittura bresciana del Rinascimento* describes Moretto’s work as “modest, serene, and meditative,” remaining true to Foppa's artistic legacy. Camillo Boselli’s 1954 monograph presents the painter as combining Venetian and Brescian traits, though Boselli sees him as most heavily indebted to Lorenzo Lotto and Vincenzo Civerchio. A 1988 volume edited by Mina Gregori criticizes the notion of a Brescian school, and argues for a strong Milanese influence within Moretto’s oeuvre. As this brief synopsis of the literature makes clear, most attention devoted to Moretto focuses on determining his stylistic origins, a deepening quagmire of formal analysis that has ceased to be a fruitful endeavor. While it is true that Moretto’s painting shows his interest in works by Titian, Raphael, Foppa, and

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numerous others, inquiries into the implications of this must be advanced beyond purely formal terms to avoid complete stagnation.

Personal faith is another common theme in scholarly literature devoted to Moretto. Though Moretto was a member of the Scuola del Santissimo Sacramento at the cathedral of Brescia, and had connections to other charitable and religious groups in Brescia, most literature has focused instead on the ways in which we might read the artist’s piety into his oeuvre. Characterization of Moretto as an extremely devout individual has been heightened by setting up his contemporary Romanino as a foil in both art and temperament. These two artists are often set against one another, with scholars using stylistic evidence to differentiate their personalities. For example, Lechi and Panazza compare Moretto’s supposed modesty and serenity to Romanino’s “impetuous and dramatic style.”9 Mina Gregori has noted the longstanding tendency to contrast Moretto and Romanino in the literature, and we continue to see this same conversation in more recent scholarship.10 Pier Virgilio Begni Redona deemed Moretto’s religiosity more “doctrinal” than Romanino’s, referring specifically to the former’s Raphaelesque harmonious and dignified figures.11 Just as the preoccupation with stylistic attribution described above, the discussion of how Moretto’s own religious feeling informs his work has served merely to stifle deeper exploration in the scholarship. His piety should not preclude an inquiry into the ways this artist thoughtfully constructed his own reputation and body of work to be successful in his field.

9 Lechi and Panazza, 1939, 10.
The long-held scholarly conception of so-called “peripheral” areas in the early modern period as stylistically retarded in comparison with larger centers such as Florence and Venice has largely been eradicated in recent decades, though there is still a predominance of scholarly attention on those popular cities. Historical tendency to see artists from less dominant regions as little more than un inventive copyists goes a long way toward explaining the scholarly preoccupation with Moretto’s stylistic influences. Similarly, the supposedly less intellectual artists working outside the peninsula's largest cities are far more likely to be regarded in terms of the emotion they express, rather than conceptualizing their work in a way that allows the artist agency and mental acuity. The artistic production of sites like Brescia needs a great deal of study as yet, as well as challenging these limiting assumptions about the artists working outside major centers. To that end, I find it more useful, rather than assuming Moretto took up Venetian or Tuscan style in an attempt to transcend his provincialism, instead, to consider his style on a contextual basis, which reveals a range of formal qualities catering to different commissions. As Moretto drew these widespread influences to himself, he was able to employ specific brushwork, palette, modeling, etc. which best suited the particular painting he was working on. For example, the style of Moretto’s portraiture looks a lot like that of Lorenzo Lotto, or at times even Titian. Wealthy Brescians interested in commissioning portraits of themselves would likely have appreciated this Venetian

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style as cosmopolitan. By contrast, many of Moretto’s altarpieces for local churches are painted with adherence to the figural type and palette of the so-called Brescian school. In this way, Moretto’s religious painting allowed viewers to recognize themselves as part of a tradition spanning back to their ancestors.

Several scholars have endeavored to correct the historical bias in the literature on Brescian art. Serious examination of Brescia’s important contribution to the history of art arguably began with Roberto Longhi’s work establishing a Brescian school headed by Vincenzo Foppa.\(^\text{13}\) Formal elements indicative of this Brescian school include a penchant for naturalism, unidealized figures, and silvery skin tones. Longhi’s views of the historical connections and the evolution of painting in Brescia continue to inform scholarship on Brescian artists, for example Mina Gregori’s 2004 essay which ultimately traces a stylistic succession from Vincenzo Foppa through to Caravaggio.\(^\text{14}\) Andrea Bayer’s work on Brescian painting also acknowledges the huge influence of Longhi’s notion of the “Brescian school.” In her essay, “North of the Apennines,” Bayer’s overview of sixteenth-century painting in this region rather even-handedly attributes local style to Foppa, Milan, and Venice.\(^\text{15}\)

The importance of seeking local roots to a Brescian style cannot be overstated. This

\(^{13}\) Longhi’s seminal articles, “Cose bresciane del Cinquecento” published in 1917 in *L’arte* and “Quesiti caravaggeschi: i precedenti” from *Me pinxit* in 1925, (published together in *Scritti Giovanili*. Florence: Edizione delle opera completo di Roberto Longhi, 1931) mark the beginning of scholarship on Moretto, and remain the most critically significant assessment of his work.


approach at once gave these artists their own history and allowed us to look at the works afresh. More recently, scholars have moved away from issues of style altogether, further expanding our understanding of early modern Brescia’s artistic milieu. Valerio Guazzoni’s *Moretto: Il tema sacro* from 1981 was a marked departure from previous literature on the artist. Guazzoni contextualizes Moretto’s work within Brescian spirituality, examining the Pre-Tridentine circumstances within which Moretto was living and working. 16 The author explores at length the importance of Eucharistic imagery in Moretto’s oeuvre, but gives short shrift to the artist’s work for the Ursulines. While acknowledging that there was an influx of feminine piety in the arts at this time, Guazzoni does not systematically examine Moretto’s images relevant to this theme. His goal is to elucidate the religious conditions that gave rise to Moretto’s devotional works, and this study provides the first real consideration of how Brescian artists were responding to topical issues. Gabriella Zarri’s essay, “Ursula and Catherine: the Marriage of Virgins in the Sixteenth Century,” brings to light the importance of Ursuline imagery of Sts. Ursula and Catherine. 17 She situates Ursuline imagery within the historical tradition of religious women’s patronage, while endeavoring to pinpoint the ways in which these two saints, and pictures of them, were particularly resonant for Angela Merici’s followers. Zarri grounds her analysis in Merici’s own writings, and posthumous biographies of her. The focus of this article is mostly on paintings and

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prints made after Merici’s death, and touches only briefly on Moretto, although her contextualization of Ursuline imagery is an important step toward understanding how Ursuline ideals permeate many of Moretto’s works. Finally, Gabriele Neher’s essay, “Moretto and the Congregation of S. Giorgio in Alga 1540-1550: Fashioning a Visual Identity of a Religious Congregation,” studies three commissions Moretto received from the same patron, arguing that the three works are unified thematically, helping the congregation effectively communicate their values. Based on the iconography of the two altarpieces and set of organ shutters completed by Moretto, Neher outlines the overall message conveyed by their patronage, specifically as an organization defined by its text-based orthodoxy and emphasis on the Virgin’s intercessory power. While Neher’s argument is perhaps less focused on the artist than those we have previously discussed, it is a good model in that she narrows down her study to a small set of images, and contextualizes them by exploring the motives of her patron.

Specific examples make clear more effectively than broad generalizations the ways in which Moretto used style to convey meaning. This dissertation will address particularly shifts in style within a small number of Moretto’s devotional images. Rather than seeking to trace a stylistic progression or assign Moretto’s allegiance to one region or another, we will place each work in context and consider in what ways style contributes to nuances of meaning in concert with iconography and physical location. An important component of this study has been attention to the

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relationship between Moretto’s work and his source material. We find that, in the case of the images pertinent to this study, Moretto’s choices reflect much deeper concerns than the merely plastic. Rather we find these source images to be resonant in the circumstances of their having been commissioned and in the historical implications of their iconography, as well. In the following chapters we will explore the ways in which Moretto’s artistic inspiration expanded the range of meanings his viewers might make from his work. Studying the connections between these paintings and the works they draw from helps us see more clearly the full context within which Moretto’s oeuvre was experienced. In each case, Moretto’s source material can be seen as addressing a pressing issue for members of the Company of St. Ursula in Brescia, whom Moretto offers support through this series of paintings. Entwined with this inquiry, this dissertation studies the contemporary writing of female religious, in consideration of the self-conception constructed therein. Listening to female virgins’ understanding of their own spiritual identity provides insight, again, into the multivalent interpretations available to these women as viewers of devotional art. It is in the extant writing of Angela Merici that we can begin to understand the metaphors through which her followers perceived their own spirituality.

The late fifteenth century can be characterized as a period of instability in much of Western Europe. In chapter one, we will consider the social, political, and religious factors that shaped the Cinquecento in north Italy, fleshing out our picture of the environment that gave rise to Merici’s Ursuline vision and Moretto’s devotional painting. Ranging from the violence of the Wars of the League of Cambrai
to the prevalence of heretical belief, challenges faced by those living in Lombardy led many to seek spiritual solutions. We will explore the ways affective devotional art and charismatic preaching provided strategies for the faithful to navigate tumultuous times.

Chapter two will provide an overview of Merici’s life and the creation of the Company of St. Ursula. In addition to outlining the organizational structure and spiritual aims of the Company, we will discuss the fate of the order after Merici’s death in 1540. This chapter begins our exploration of the ways Moretto’s work intersects with the Ursuline ethos, through a bust-length portrait Moretto made of Angela Merici shortly after her death in 1540. This unusual picture depicts the holy woman obviously deceased, yet propped up as if seated. Its remarkable resemblance to a work from the mid-fifteenth century representing the Bolognese holy woman Caterina Vigri enables Moretto to link visually his subject to an illustrious north Italian forebear. We will come to see that Moretto’s representations of female saints and holy women strategically borrow from earlier works, allowing the artist to create a web of associations between Angela Merici and the female religious before her. Through an analysis of Moretto’s posthumous portrait in relation to other funerary arts, including death masks, relics, and reliquaries, we begin to perceive the work as a visualization of contemporary attitudes regarding the chaste body, and the miraculous incorruptibility associated with the saintly dead. As with the other works discussed in this project, Moretto’s overarching theme is holy virginity and its benefits or consequences.
In the following chapter, we will turn our attention to an altarpiece Moretto executed for the Brescian church of San Clemente in c. 1540-50. This work, *St. Ursula and Her 11,000 Virgin Companions*, conveys community support for Merici’s Company, while the painting’s resemblance to an earlier work of the same subject found in Brescia’s church of Sant’Angelo suggests that the Ursuline order is a continuation of long held local traditions. While scholars have previously acknowledged the indebtedness of Moretto’s Ursula to those of Alessandro Vivarini and Giovanni d’Allemagna, my work goes further by examining the altarpiece within the wider tradition of early modern Ursuline devotional painting. My research shows that Moretto is here drawing on an established iconography portraying Ursula and her followers as a virgin army. Angela Merici’s writing confirms the belief that holy virgins faced a battle against temptations and evils that beset them, and requiring protection and even violent reaction. Further, my study of Ursuline imagery revealed that there was a marked shift in this iconographical tradition following the completion of Carpaccio’s Ursuline cycle for Venice’s Scuola di Sant’Orsola. From the beginning of the sixteenth century, then, artists began portraying Ursula elevated above her followers on a pedestal, and separating the followers from one another in a more theatrical, refined depiction. Thus, when Moretto turns to this subject, opting for a representation of Ursula’s army as united and mutually supportive, in opposition to the then currently fashionable pedestaled Ursula, Moretto harks back to an antiquated style, enabling him to reinforce one of the central tenets of Merici’s philosophy—that of the Ursulines as a fortress of strength united against dangers they may face in the world.
Chapter four investigates an altarpiece Moretto executed in 1540 for the Veronese church of San Giorgio in Braid. Commissioned by the head abbot, a Brescian himself, Moretto’s *Madonna and Child in Glory with Five Saints* proclaims the patron’s civic pride by adorning his church with art harkening to his Brescian roots. In a composition clearly derived from Raphael’s *Ecstasy of St. Cecilia*, this work has Moretto exploring early modern modes of behavior appropriate for brides of Christ—those who have given themselves to the divine with a vow of holy virginity. Merici’s Ursuline followers were urged to conceptualize their relationship with Christ as a spousal one, in emulation of the saints depicted in Moretto’s work, most notably St. Catherine of Alexandria and St. Agnes. Moretto’s template, Raphael’s famous Bolognese altarpiece of St. Cecilia, was painted for a local holy woman, Elena Duglioli dall’Olio, whose renown was predicated on her own chaste marriage. Again we see Moretto building connections between the lives and ideals of north Italian female religious—offering his viewers saintly exemplars whose choices, challenges, and ultimate salvation have historical resonance and aspirational value.

In the concluding chapter, we will study Moretto’s *Five Female Saints* from 1540-50 painted for the church of San Clemente in Brescia, where it hangs alongside his earlier *St. Ursula*. I will argue that this work, never before grouped with Moretto’s Eucharistic pictures, is, in fact, a reflection on Christ’s Real Presence in the consecrated Host. Additionally, Moretto’s unusual depiction of the five virgin-martyrs asks the viewer to meditate on their physical suffering as an evocation of imitatio Christi. The emphasis on worship implicitly bound up with pain and
sacrifice was particularly resonant for female religious during the early modern period. An analysis of Angela Merici’s writing demonstrates the importance of body work such as fasting, showing a willingness to endure suffering for Christ.

This dissertation is concerned not simply with reviving the reputation of an artist who has been underappreciated in the scholarly tradition. Rather, this project is an attempt to better understand how the female viewer (or anyone conversant with Angela Merici’s ideals) would have made meaning from the works Moretto executed between 1540 and 1550, particularly in light of the specific religious environment in mid-sixteenth-century Brescia. When Merici created her Company of St. Ursula it set Brescia apart from its surroundings, circulating radical ideas of uncloistered virginity, mutual support, and spiritual interiority. These ideas helped inform the Brescia in which Moretto worked, just as Moretto’s artistic output visibly shaped the local religious community’s hopes and concerns. It is at the intersection of these two spheres that a fuller picture begins to emerge.
Chapter One

“In these perilous and pestilential times . . .”

Life and Faith in Quattrocento Northern Italy

Religious thought and practice in fifteenth-century northern Italy is marked by a spirit of reform, in which problems faced by the Church proper and its lay members were approached in creative and sometimes unexpected ways. By examining the circumstances that created a feeling of instability amongst the faithful at this time,\(^\text{19}\) we can better understand their changing devotional needs and the methods by which those needs were met. The unpredictable nature of life in the Quattrocento, with the frequent threat of warfare and plague, demanded an extreme spirituality. Additionally, fifteenth-century believers had to face the increasing menace of heresy from the north, while a lack of consistent support or guidance by the papacy contributed to the climate of spiritual insecurity. I would like to more fully explore these issues before turning to the resulting response in the devotional lives of the north Italian people. I will be focusing more specifically on conditions in Brescia and its immediate environs, as these will have the most bearing on my discussion of Moretto’s oeuvre. That said, the spiritual situation in Quattrocento

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Brescia was not unique, and serves as an appropriate case study for the state of religious practice and belief in the broader area of northern Italy at that time.

**Challenges of Life in Fifteenth-Century Italy**

**Plague and Warfare**

Throughout the fifteenth century, Brescia experienced recurrences of plague, as well as several periods of violence. Neither epidemics of illness nor bouts of unrest were new to the people, but both circumstances had spiritual implications, manifesting in the visual arts and devotional practices.

After the Black Death of 1348 in which one-third to one-half of Europe’s population was decimated, plague reappeared regularly on the continent until well into the seventeenth century.\(^{20}\) Brescia had a particularly bad episode in 1452, and again in 1469 and 1478.\(^{21}\) Upon the recurrence of plague in 1469, Brescia’s government voted to build a chapel dedicated to Saint Roch, where devotees could leave ex-votos, and upon which site casualties of future outbreaks would be interred.\(^{22}\) As Louise Marshall has noted, the commissioning of architecture and art works during times of plague, especially those dedicated to the so-called ‘plague saints’ Sebastian and Roch, was a way for the afflicted to take positive action.\(^{23}\)


\(^{22}\) Ibid.

Marshall argues that appeals for the intervention of plague saints were not the desperate acts of a panicked populace, but rather were viewed as efficacious protection from a wrathful God’s punishment. Works like Moretto’s *Saint Roch with an Angel* from c. 1545 (Fig. 1) exemplify such beliefs. This devotional painting is evidence that ‘plague saint’ images continued to be desirable in northern Italy into the mid-sixteenth century. Franco Mormando sees images of St. Sebastian and others as more than mere pleas for divine aid, but instead as a “form of visual medicine.”24 Citing fifteenth-century humanist Marsilio Ficino’s writings on health, Mormendo notes that contemporary thinking linked physical well-being to the sensuous engagement with beauty, including viewing precious objects.25 By this notion, gazing upon a painting like Dosso Dossi’s *Saint Sebastian* from 1518-21 (Fig. 2) might boost one’s immunity, so to speak.

We will see that iconography of a different kind brought comfort, however, when violence threatened the city. Much like their experiences with the plague, Brescians endured periods of warfare with great regularity during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Venice’s struggles to consistently hold their Terraferma territories caused a seemingly unending series of battles against Milan, the French, and later, the League of Cambrai. Northern Italy was an attractive region from an economic standpoint, as it was rich in natural resources and provided easy access to

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25 Ibid., 125-126.
trade with the north of Europe.\(^2^6\) Brescia itself was the site of battles between Milan and Venice in 1418,\(^2^7\) 1426,\(^2^8\) and a particularly dramatic skirmish in 1438.\(^2^9\) This last fierce conflict loomed so large in the collective memory of the region that in the following century, Tintoretto would immortalize the “siege of Brescia” in a painting for the Palazzo Ducale in Venice (Fig. 3).

Yet, though Brescia endured much in the fifteenth-century tug-of-war between Milan and Venice, it was the events in the first half of the sixteenth century that would have the most devastating effect on the people and the face of the city itself. As the War of the League of Cambrai raged on from 1506, Brescia became a prize to be won. On February 16, 1512, famed military commander Gaston de Foix entered the gates of Brescia with the French army, which proceeded to sack the city mercilessly for days.\(^3^0\) By the time Venice was able to retake the city, thousands were dead, homes looted and burned, and churches desecrated.\(^3^1\) Andrea Bayer notes that deteriorated conditions in the city led to many more deaths that summer, due to a polluted water supply and another plague outbreak.\(^3^2\) Sources estimate that


\(^{2^8}\) Ibid., 34.


\(^{3^0}\) Ibid., 261. Contemporary accounts of the sack include those of Ambrogio Aruscone (a Brescian living in Milan), Marco Negro (a Venetian serving in Brescia as superintendent of munitions), and Innocenzo Casari (a Brescian clergyman).

\(^{3^1}\) Ibid., 266-270.

between 1509 and 1516 the city’s population dropped from 60,000 to 17,000.\(^{33}\) As many as 14,000 people were said to have died during the Sack of 1512 alone.\(^{34}\) With destruction and looting disallowing hospitals and pharmacies to provide care for the wounded and sick, loss of life was exponentially greater.\(^{35}\) Recovery from the Sack and its aftermath was prolonged, and the city lay in the shadow of its memory for many years.

One of the most disruptive and long-lasting consequences of the devastation of the Sack were efforts to strengthen the city’s fortifications—this process involved the so-called *Spianata*, or leveling of huge swathes of the city’s residential neighborhoods, including monasteries and parish churches.\(^{36}\) With many families displaced, and the razing of what were by all accounts some of the most beautiful areas of the city, life was unsettled and the future uncertain. The government’s decision to tear down the interior wall that had proved a huge liability during the war meant that the center of the city was also a site of demolition and general disorder.\(^{37}\)

During the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, the atmosphere of violence pervading Lombardy was reflected in the devotional arts. Images of Brescia’s two patron saints exemplify this phenomenon. Sts. Faustino and Giovita were


\(^{34}\) Bayer, 10.

\(^{35}\) Ibid., 29.

\(^{36}\) For an excellent discussion of the alterations to the city’s fortifications after the sack on 1512, see: Bayer, chapters 1-2.

\(^{37}\) Ibid., 10.
clergymen-brothers from a noble Brescian family martyred by the emperor Hadrian in the second century.\textsuperscript{38} Though primarily revered for having converted vast numbers of pagans before being beheaded, Faustino and Giovita posthumously proved their mettle on the battlefield when they appeared miraculously during the siege of Brescia of 1438.\textsuperscript{39} Interestingly, it is only after this event that we see increasing depictions of the saints in military garb.\textsuperscript{40} A pair of organ shutters painted by Moretto provide a well-known example of such iconography, featuring Faustino and Giovita as knights on horseback (Figs. 4 & 5). Commissioned by the Comune for the cathedral in 1515, Moretto’s panels harken to a time in Brescian history when the city’s patrons came to their aid. As Brescia struggled to heal itself from the desolation of the sack of 1512, representations of their local martyrs as warriors at the ready undoubtedly provided comfort to the faithful. Evidently, such images continued to be desirable in the decades to come—we can point to, for example, Romanino’s \textit{San Domenico Altarpiece} from 1545-50 (Fig. 6), which depicts Faustino and Giovita in armor and kneeling in reverence, witnessing the Coronation of the Virgin in a heavenly vision. Further, such images can be seen as manifestations of civic pride in referencing the city’s famed arms manufactory.\textsuperscript{41}


\textsuperscript{40} Bowd, 225.

\textsuperscript{41} For a full exploration of military iconography in Brescian art, and its relation to the arms and armor industry, see: Christiane L. Joost-Gaugier, “The History of a Visual Theme as Culture and the Experience of an Urban Center: “Uomini famosi” in Brescia,” \textit{Antichità} viva XXIII/1 (Jan-Feb 1984), 5-14.
Heresy and Witchcraft

The unpredictability of fifteenth-century life provoked by the recurrence of plague and violence was often attributed to divine punishment. Such notions were bolstered by increasing reports of heretical activity in northern Italy. As Stephen J. Bowd notes, the first prosecutions of heretics and witches in post-1450 Europe occurred in the valleys near the Bresciano. The Church had long been concerned about superstitious beliefs amongst the laity, as well as the more serious offenses of practicing magic, sorcery, or diabolic witchcraft. Pope Innocent VIII's bull *Summis desiderantes* of December 5, 1484 provides a clear definition of witchcraft, as understood by the Church at this time. In giving inquisitors permission to root out heresy in northern Germany, the bull describes the problem thusly:

> many persons of both sexes give themselves over to devils male and female, and by their incantations, charms, and conjurings, and by other abominable superstitions and sortileges, offences, crimes, and misdeeds, ruin and cause to perish the offspring of women, the foal of animals, the products of the earth, the grapes of vines, and the fruits of trees, as well as men and women, cattle and flocks and herds and animals of every kind, vineyards also and orchards, meadows, pastures, harvests, grains and other fruits of the earth; that they afflict and torture with dire pains and anguish, both internal and external, these men, women, cattle, flocks, herds, and animals, and hinder men from begetting and women from conceiving, and prevent all consummation of marriage; that, moreover, they deny with sacrilegious lips the faith they received in holy baptism...

In addition to the killing of humans, animals, and crops, witches were believed to obtain all manner of powers, including that of flight, from the demons with whom they communicated. The *Malleus Maleficarum*, an infamous treatise of 1486 written

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42 Bowd, 174.
for those who would fight witchcraft, purported to educate its reader on the origin and characteristics of the practice, providing a detailed guide to trying (i.e., torturing) and punishing the accused.\textsuperscript{44}

While accounts of witchcraft in northern Europe were on the rise during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the Italian peninsula also saw a marked increase in stories of this kind. As noted above, the Alpine valleys of northern Italy were rife with tales of diabolic activity, with the Val Camonica in the Bresciano being a particular hotspot. A contemporary chronicler described the locals in this way, “largely ignorant, goitrous, and almost entirely deformed and lacking all the finer points of society. Their customs are rustic and wild, and there are few who know, let alone, obey, the commandments of God.”\textsuperscript{45} Supposedly, the rustic and unlearned nature of these people made them more susceptible to devilish temptations, which explained the high rates of diabolic witchcraft in the region. Contemporary reports differ as to how many witches were tried in the Bresciano, but all evidence makes clear that there were consistent witch-hunts of the area, and several mass executions in which up to 100 burnings might occur.\textsuperscript{46} Certainly, it was not only in rural areas that witchcraft was believed to be practiced. Several high profile trials took place in Brescia itself in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries as well.

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\textsuperscript{44} Heinrich Institoris. \textit{Malleus Maleficarum}, trans. by Montague Summers. London: J. Rodker, 1928. \\
\textsuperscript{45} Giuseppe da Orzinuovi, Letter to Ludovico Querini, August 1, 1518, Sanudo, \textit{Diarii XXV}, col. 602. \\
\textsuperscript{46} Michael Tavuzzi. \textit{Renaissance Inquisitors: Dominican Inquisitors and Inquisitorial Districts in Northern Italy: 1474-1527}. Leiden: Brill, 2007, 253-258. \\
\end{flushright}
Three priests who had become witches were burned in 1499, and we have a lengthy account of the 1518 trial of a Brescian healer called Benvenuta Pincinello. Reports of wild sabbats, night flights, and ritual child-killing caused anxiety amongst the populace, all suggesting that the very institution of Christianity was under threat. Michael Tavuzzi notes the linkage between social tensions and the incidence of accusations of witchcraft. In seeking an explanation for what are now believed to be false allegations, scholars have suggested that blaming local problems on the malicious behavior of a person or persons on society's outskirts might serve as a way to exorcise the people's collective anxiety. This theory opens up the interesting idea that accusations of heresy and witchcraft may have been a source of societal turmoil, while simultaneously functioning as a method by which the community could release such tensions. Perhaps such explanations are not mutually exclusive.

Official Church Presence (and Absence)

Criticism of corrupt Church practices, which had dramatically led to the fourteenth-century Western Schism, remained widespread into the new century, giving the impression of a religious communities left to fend for themselves. For those living away from Rome's immediate authority, like the people of Brescia, a lack of support or guidance by a weakened papacy exacerbated the people's

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47 Sanudo, vol. 26, cols. 34-37. It is worth noting that 'witch' was a gender-neutral term during the medieval and early modern periods, and many male witches were indeed tried and burned, though texts like the *Malleus Maleficarum* tend to emphasize the female witch, in particular her sexual deviance.

48 Ibid., vol. 25, cols. 632-650.

49 Tavuzi, 151-152.

unease. In addition to being geographically isolated from the papacy in Rome, a conspicuous lack of episcopal presence in the city further contributed to a discomfited populace. Cardinal Gasparo Contarini addresses the problem in a treatise of 1517,

I cannot fail to deplore with all my heart the calamity of our age, when you will find very few guardians of the Christian people who spend their time in the cities entrusted to their care ... But concerning the people over whom they are placed, they do not even receive news as to whether they are making progress in the Christian religion or whether they are forsaking it, and they completely neglect and disregard the poor of their flock. Is this the conduct of a Bishop?”

Not only did their appointed bishops reside in Venice, sometimes failing even once to visit their assigned diocese, but the Brescians additionally balked at Venice’s insistence on appointing one of their own, an outsider. A bishop’s absence expressed a clear disregard for the souls under his spiritual charge, but meant that more practical administrative duties were neglected as well. Brescian humanist Laura Cereta exemplifies the dissatisfaction brewing in the city in a letter of 1485 to then-bishop Paolo Zane over his neglecting upkeep of the cathedral. She writes, “Look at how our church which is half in ruins, languishes under a crumbling roof.

No one need call out the guard, for none was commissioned...”\textsuperscript{54} Cereta further admonishes that the host is unprotected and “freely accessible to the impious.”\textsuperscript{55} Despite such complaints and several official entreaties to the ruling government to allow Brescia a bishop native to the city, Venice refused to relinquish this powerful position within their mainland holdings.\textsuperscript{56} 

While Church law allowed that it was for the pope to appoint bishops, in actual practice ruling governments selected their preferred candidate for the pope’s consideration.\textsuperscript{57} The papal court hosted ambassadors from all of Christendom, whose job it was to convince the pope of the worthiness of their choice of bishop. This political exchange was vitally important for the elite families of Venice, Florence, Milan, and other dominant city-states, as it solidified their power over both secular and sacred spheres of influence within their territories.\textsuperscript{58} The social status, property, and income associated with episcopal sees made the bishopric an attractive occupation, which historically led to such positions being gifted to

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{55} Ibid., p. 48.
\item \textsuperscript{56} For a thorough discussion of Venetian (largely successful) efforts to secure Terraferma bishoprics during this time, see: Oliver Logan. \textit{The Venetian Upper Clergy in the 16\textsuperscript{th} and early 17\textsuperscript{th} Centuries: A Study in Religious Culture}. Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1996, ix-84.
\end{itemize}
individuals for past service or loyalty. Venice was very aware of the social, political, and economic benefits of having their own patricians installed in the episcopacies of the Terraferma—in fact, between 1405 and 1550, 85 of 111 bishops nominated in their territory were Venetians.

A perceived lack of centralized Church authority, and a dearth of local religious leadership shoring up the distance between the laity and remote Rome, created a spiritual dilemma of sorts in northern Italy. From the Early Christian period, devotees had long looked to saintly intercessors and exemplars to provide solace and assistance in hard times. We noted this tendency in the proliferation of images of Sts. Roch and Sebastian in response to plague outbreak, as well as Brescian use of militarized iconography of Sts. Faustino and Giovita as a comfort during wartime. While locally revered figures had always been a feature of Christianity in Italy, during the medieval period the papacy assumed exclusive control over canonization and in determining what constituted proper veneration of holy persons. Additionally, the papacy greatly curbed the creation of new saints as part of their reforming efforts, hoping to silence impugnments of the flawed canonization process. Precise numbers of canonizations prior to official Vatican record-keeping (1588) are impossible to determine, though evidence suggests that

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59 Of course, with residence in one’s own diocese neither a requirement nor even expected, the prospect of being appointed to a backwater was not distasteful for members of elite families. Christopher Cairns. *Domenico Bollani Bishop of Brescia: Devotion to Church and State in the Republic of Venice in the Sixteenth Century.* Niuewkoop: B. De Graaf, 1976, 127.

60 As Chittolini asserts, despite a contentious relationship between Venice and Rome, diplomatic matters tended to at the papal court were handled mostly courteously and amenable. Chittolini, 476, 478.

61 Van Engen, 321.
the latter half of the fifteenth century saw fewer than fifteen. Protestant criticism of the institution of sainthood continued into the following century. In fact, Peter Burke has dubbed the mid-sixteenth century a “crisis of canonization,” as the Church did not create a single saint from 1523 to 1588. In a time of terrible illness, recurrent violent episodes, and steeply declining morality, saintly protection was a crucial part of any believer’s faith. The promotion of a new saint’s cult would have additionally given people the sense that, even in the midst of an increasingly chaotic world, true sanctity continued to thrive and miraculous events continued to show evidence of God’s love for His people.

**Spiritual Solutions**

Devotional practice changed at the end of the Quattrocento and into the following century in response to less assertive papal regulation, rampant episcopal absenteeism, and a lack of new Church-sanctioned holy figures. Missing the security of a universal and centralized Church authority, the faithful developed devotional practices based on personal experience and grass-roots local activity.

**Lay Worship**

One way in which fifteenth-century Italians took increased responsibility for their own spiritual lives was through membership in confraternities, lay

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64 On the continued veneration of local individuals not officially sanctioned by the Church, see: Kemp, 107-138.
organizations with a religious purpose. Such sodalities had emerged in the ninth and
tenth centuries, with foci ranging from singing lauds, flagellating in procession, or
engaging in charitable activities. Christopher Black suggests that these
brotherhoods developed “because of a lack of adequate resident parish priests”,
giving weight to the idea that lack of Church authority demonstrably affected
devotional practice at this time. The suggestion that confraternities were attractive
for the control they gave members over their devotional lives is corroborated by
Nicholas Terpstra’s research into the relationship between mendicant orders and
confraternal organizations in Renaissance Italy. Terpstra finds that confraternities
with greater autonomy from clerical supervision retained members and remained
active longer than those groups whose activities were closely bound up with
mendicant orders or church works.

In addition to allowing the layperson to focus meaningfully their spirituality,
membership in a confraternity provided practical benefits such as business contacts,
social interactions, and the surety of aid in the event of illness or death. The
importance of such help could not be overlooked in uncertain and troubling times.
In response to changing needs of the faithful during the latter half of the fifteenth
century, confraternities evolved with new purposes to better address pressing
issues of the day.

65 Christopher F. Black. *Italian Confraternities in the Sixteenth Century*. Cambridge:
67 Black, 27.
68 Nicholas Terpstra, “Confraternities and Public Charity,” in *Confraternities &
Catholic Reform in Italy, France, & Spain*, eds. John Patrick Donnelly, SJ. and Michael
69 Ibid.
One such change can be found in the proliferation of confraternities with a charitable mission. The fifteenth century marks the creation of the so-called Ospedali Maggiori, organizations which brought together the efforts of various charities within a community, to better apply that care to the needy.\textsuperscript{70} The first institution of this kind opened in Brescia in 1447.\textsuperscript{71} Another important charitable lay organization of the Quattrocento was the Oratory of Divine Love—founded in Genoa in 1497.\textsuperscript{72} Elisabeth G. Gleason eloquently describes the meaning behind their name, “From love of God would flow love of neighbor and concern for his spiritual and physical welfare.”\textsuperscript{73} Oratories soon spread to Brescia, Rome, and Venice, where the groups set about opening hospitals, providing financial assistance to orphans and fallen women, and bringing spiritual comfort to persons about to be executed.\textsuperscript{74}

Though charitable organizations had been in existence from the early medieval period, this kind of activity gained in popularity during the fifteenth century, allowing devotees to tend to their own spiritual needs and create positive change in their communities.

Similarly, Eucharistic devotion, or adoration of the Host, had long been part of lay worship, but began to be practiced in a more codified manner toward the end of the fifteenth century.\textsuperscript{75} Most famously, the Quarantore or Forty Hours’ Devotion developed in the following century in Milan. In this practice the Eucharistic host

\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., 98.
\textsuperscript{72} Black, 29.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., 9.
\textsuperscript{75} Black, 30.
would be displayed in a monstrance atop the altar for some extended period of time, becoming the focus of meditation and prayer. The opportunity to contemplate Christ’s Incarnation, and the miracle of His real presence in the Eucharist was especially attractive at a time marked by an increasing preoccupation with Christ’s Passion.\textsuperscript{76} Michael P. Carroll has noted that the Forty Hours’ Devotion places great importance on visual engagement with the host, requiring that devotees, or “watchers” as they are called, continuously look upon the Eucharistic host the entire time it is exposed on the altar.\textsuperscript{77}

\textit{A Stylistic Revolution}

Quattrocento devotional practice is characterized by an emphasis on the Incarnation, on Christ’s fully human nature. John Van Engen strikingly refers to this facet of early modern religiosity as an “unquenchable fascination with the Passion,”\textsuperscript{78} an assertion that is borne out in an examination of popular iconography of the period. The subject was famously addressed in Leo Steinberg’s \textit{The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and Modern Oblivion} from 1983.\textsuperscript{79} Drawing on works from the entirety of the early modern period, Steinberg argues that many representations of Christ revealed his body as never before, showing the influence

\textsuperscript{76} Van Engen, 323.
\textsuperscript{77} Michael P. Carroll. \textit{Catholic Cults and Devotions: A Psychological Inquiry}. Kinston, Ont: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1989, 108-112. Despite Carroll’s somewhat outlandish comparison of the sunburst monstrance with the mother’s breast, his recognition of the Quarantore as a peculiarly visually-focused practice is an important observation about devotional culture.
\textsuperscript{78} Van Engen, 323.
of Incarnational theology. Images of the nude or nearly nude Christ ranged from nativity scenes and *Madonna lactans* images to Pietàs and *Ecce Homo* types. Not merely a way to literalize the notion of the Word made flesh, depictions of Christ taking nourishment or displaying painful wounds lessened the distance between devotees and the object of their devotion. Far from being a remote and supernal figure, this Christ was just like them—subject to the same needs and desires, if better at resisting his baser impulses.

Some artists created works that married contemporary interest in the Incarnation with the popularity of Eucharistic devotion. Raphael’s *Disputà* from 1509-1510 (Fig. 7) is perhaps the most famous of these—with the painter arranging his elaborate multi-figured composition around the Eucharistic host displayed in a sunburst monstrance on the altar. North Italian patrons also showed interest in painted images of the Eucharistic host. Moretto’s oeuvre contains at least seven works with overtly Eucharistic themes, leaving aside images of the *Madonna and Child, Last Supper*, or other iconography traditionally understood as referencing Christ’s sacrifice. Moretto depicts St. Clare holding a monstrance containing the Eucharist host (Fig. 8), and more explicitly references contemporary devotional practice in two paintings showing a monstrance displayed atop an altar with a nearly nude Christ suspended in the air above (Figs. 9 & 10). Such images would have facilitated meditation on the miracle of transubstantiation, Christ’s literal presence in the Eucharist. Thus, through painted images of the host, the faithful

80 Ibid., 12.
were able to engage in Eucharistic devotion even when the physical host was not available to be “watched.”

We might also look to the work of sculptors Guido Mazzoni and Niccolò dell’Arca for indications of how contemporary interest in Christ’s humanity manifested in the visual arts. Mazzoni and Niccolò’s life-size terracotta figural groups feature an unprecedented naturalism in their depiction of the human body and its adornments. In works like Niccolò’s 1462 *Lamentation* in the church of Santa Maria della Vita in Bologna (Fig. 11), the artist carefully rendered facial expressions, gestures, and even clothing to capture a dramatic moment in time. Through the wind-swept draperies and wide-mouthed cries, we understand that Christ’s companions have just come upon his corpse, and we are witness to their initial outpouring of grief. It is this attention to emotional naturalism, coupled with verisimilitudinous form that makes Mazzoni and Niccolò’s oeuvres so novel. Contemporary descriptions of the works, including a sonnet by humanist Giovan Francesco Caracciolo,\(^\text{81}\) marvel at their incredible illusionism. Caracciolo suggests that even Polykleitos, Praxiteles, and Phidias, those ancient masters of naturalistic form, would envy Mazzoni’s figures, which lack only movement and speech.\(^\text{82}\) This realism was enhanced through portrait-likenesses of prominent local citizens. As Timothy Verdon notes, Mazzoni’s Neapolitan *Lamentation* from 1492-94 (Fig. 12) depicts the donor in the guise of Joseph of Arimathea.\(^\text{83}\) This portrait, coupled with

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\(^\text{81}\) E. Percopo, “Guido Mazzoni e le sue opere in Napoli,” *Napoli nobilissima*, vol. 3 (1894), p. 42.  
\(^\text{82}\) Ibid.  
the figures’ contemporary garb, may have served to recreate the popular Passion plays in which stories of Christ’s life were reenacted by the wealthy and influential. By situating these biblical figures in the viewers’ own time and place, Mazzoni and artists like him were able to foster a feeling of connectedness for fifteenth-century devotees with the remote objects of their devotion. Brescia, too, was home to a terracotta Lamentation group, by an unknown artist and dated from the late-fourteenth to early fifteenth century (Fig. 13). The dramatic gestures and overwrought expressions stimulate affective viewing, a response furthered by the placement of these life-size figures in the worshiper’s shared space.

Another, perhaps more extreme example of the popular focus on Christ’s humanity at this time and its manifestation through naturalism is the Sacro Monte da Varallo, a north Italian pilgrimage site founded in 1491. This tourist destination functioned as a simulated trip to the Holy Land, with a number of structures erected to stand in for sites at which occurred important events in the life of Christ, such as the Nativity and the Crucifixion. (Fig. 14) Consisting of only three tableaux at the time of its founding, the tourist site grew quickly to 28 structures by 1514. While the Sacro Monte featured life-size polychromed sculptures similar to those created by Guido Mazzoni, the visitor was able to have an even more intense experience by moving chronologically through replicas of the sites of the Passion, peopled with

84 Verdon, 79-81.
sacred figures and onlookers—retracing Christ’s steps in his last hours.  
Additionally, the sculptures were adorned with real clothing, human hair, and were surrounded with actual cups, plates and other objects of quotidian life. Less than 100 miles from Brescia, many of the faithful were drawn to the site to experience a less costly “trip” to Christ’s homeland.

The new naturalism exemplified by the sculptures of Mazzoni and Niccolò dell’Arca and the tableaux of the Sacro Monte da Varallo will play an important role in the devotional art developed by Moretto and his contemporaries. As Steinberg has argued, interest in an accurate representation of Christ in all his physicality becomes a hallmark of Cinquecento art. Additionally, careful attention is paid to expressing the interior state of these holy figures—whether that be the Virgin’s horror at seeing her dead son or Christ’s sorrow in displaying his mortified body to the viewer. Through seeing these sacred persons exhibiting recognizable emotions, demonstrating familiar responses even in extraordinary situations, viewers were encouraged to share those feelings. By employing pathos in their religious images, evoking an affective response from the beholder, artists were providing devotees with a powerful and personal connection with these holy figures. Fostering

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88 Hood notes that two primary sources describe pilgrims visiting the tableaux at night, the lamplight and surrounding darkness contributing to the observers’ feelings of intimacy and emotional connectedness to the scene before them. Hood, 301-302.
89 Steinberg, 10.
heightened emotions in the faithful became the great tool not merely of artists, but of many religious figures of the early modern period.

*Guiding Personalities*

Before the clergy were able to provide effective spiritual aid to their flock, the monastic system was to undergo a period of extreme reform. Within every monastic order many individuals perceived rampant corruption, luxury, and vice, despite members who wished to abide more strictly by the Rule of their founder. Ultimately, groups of men left their orders to establish houses characterized by a more rigorous adherence to their vows of poverty, chastity, and humility. It was during the early fourteenth century that some dissatisfied members of the Franciscan order first set about creating Observant communities, with the Dominicans, Carmelites, Augustinians and other orders quickly following suit. The newly created Observant orders gave rise to charismatic figures such as Franciscan Bernardino da Siena and Dominican Girolamo Savonarola, fiery personalities who traveled the peninsula, preaching admonishments to the rapt faithful.

The lasting impact of Savonarola’s visit to Brescia speaks to the powerful influence of these individuals on those who heard them sermonize. The preacher was revered in Brescia long after his violent death. In fact, Moretto painted Savonarola’s portrait a quarter of a century later (Fig. 15), depicting the monk gazing resolutely out at the viewer, and clasping a martyr’s palm. He was remembered for a particularly prescient address in 1486. Speaking against vice in

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Brescia, Savonarola predicted a bloody end for the people if they did not repent and eschew wickedness. A record of the preacher’s time in Brescia written by the so-called Pseudo-Burlamacchi recounts Savonarola’s words of warning that

a great scourge was coming to Italy, particularly to Brescia, and that he should call everyone to penitence, for fathers would see their children killed, horribly and pitilessly torn apart in the streets of Brescia, and this in the lifetime of people who were then living and present.\footnote{La vita del Beato Ieronimo Savonarola scritta da un anonimo del sec. xvi e già attribuita a fra Pacifico Burlamacchi, ed. Piero Ginori Conti [Roberto Ridolfi]. Florence, 1937. Reprinted and translated in Donald Weinstein. Savonarola: The Rise and Fall of a Renaissance Prophet. New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2011, 67.}

The Dominican’s apocalyptic sermon was considered prophetic when Brescia was brutally sacked by Gaston de Foix’s French troops on February 18, 1512.\footnote{Ibid.} It was his having predicted the Sack of 1512, and attempting to warn the people of the danger they faced, that led to Brescians’ enduring reverence for Savonarola, long after his death in 1498.

The prevalence of zealous preachers in fifteenth-century Italy coincided with the increasing influence of another group of spiritual advisers, female mystics or “living saints.” A growing number of women, such as humanist Laura Cereta, were engaging in secular and sacred activities traditionally available only to men, while being careful to remain within safe boundaries of gender norms.\footnote{It is hardly coincidental that the rise of female mysticism during the early modern period paralleled growing fears of diabolical witchcraft in these same regions. As Gabriella Zarri notes, “The phenomena of mysticism and witchcraft were strictly correlated, and they represented contrasting models of two powers in competition: the power of God and that of the devil.” Zarri, “Female Sanctity, 1500-1660,” in Reform and Expansion, 1500-1660. R. Po-Chia Hsia, ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, 196.} Even as female
religious gained reputations for prophecy and uncanny biblical knowledge, contemporary biographies reveal the ways in which these women conformed to expectations of a particularly feminine spirituality. Most “living saints” were said to have had childhood visions of Christ or other heavenly beings, experienced the stigmata, demonstrated miraculous knowledge of theology and religious texts (despite being illiterate and having received no formal education), and received prophecies for which they were sought out by powerful contemporaries. Some celebrated north Italian women of the fifteenth-century who exhibited two or more of these qualities are Beata Stefana Quinzani, Beata Osanna d’Andreasi, Columba of Rieti, Suor Laura Mignani, and Saint Angela Merici. The trope of the female mystic as seer was pervasive enough that even Pseudo-Burlamacchi tells us of a Brescian prophetess who, during Savonarola’s visit to the city, correctly foretold the events of the friar’s life and violent death—a prediction that so frightened the Dominican he allegedly burned her letter to ashes. Seemingly less traumatic was the counsel Osanna d’Andreasi provided her patrons, the Gonzaga family of Mantua. Osanna offered spiritual guidance, and included the city and its rulers in her prayers. At the


95 Columba was consulted by Pope Alexander VI. See: Antonio Cistellini. *Figure della riforma pretridentina: Stefana Quinzani, Angela Merici, Laura Mignani, Bartolomeo Stella, Francesco Cabrini e Francesco Santabona.* Brescia: Morcelliana, 1948, p. 10.

96 *La vita del Savonarola,* p. 68.

holy woman’s death, her fellow tertiary Stefana Quinzani wrote to both Francesco Gonzaga and his wife Isabella d’Este, proposing herself as a replacement for Osanna’s services. Stefana’s letter tellingly omits the subject of soothsaying, instead presenting her as a devout and humble servant to the Gonzaga; a mentee of the late Osanna desiring to continue her good works. Deemphasizing her prophetic abilities ensured that Stefana would avoid criticisms of heresy or witchcraft, which were, as we know, increasingly common in Quattrocento Italy. It was, in fact, two Dominican friars who recorded Stefana’s miraculous experiences, securing her reputation as a worthy successor to the esteemed Osanna d’Andreasi.98

The presence of a female mystic was a great source of pride for courts and cities alike. Gabriella Zarri notes that at the time St. Catherine of Bologna was ordered to leave the court of Ferrara and establish an Observant house for Poor Clares in Bologna, Borso d’Este went so far as to appeal to Rome in hopes of retaining Catherine’s illustrious presence. His efforts were unsuccessful and he bitterly lamented the loss of her spiritual influence at court.99 The great honor of personal association with a female mystic at this time is reflected in the visual arts as well, in works like Francesco Bonsignori’s 1519 portrait of Beata Osanna, commissioned by Isabella d’Este for the church of S. Vincenzo in Mantua (Fig. 16). The donor herself appears kneeling at the holy woman’s feet, along with a friend,

Margerita Cantelma, and three Dominican nuns. Osanna is shown holding lilies and a heart stabbed with a knife and crucifix, while she crushes a demon underfoot. As Sally Hickson has shown, these attributes allude to Osanna’s connection to St. Catherine of Siena and to her own mystical visions about Christ’s Passion. The work memorializes the deceased mystic while aggrandizing Isabella and her family through proximity to Osanna’s sanctity. Similarly, a portrait of Catherine of Bologna (Fig. 17), attributed to the Master of the Baroncelli Portraits, shows the holy woman flanked by kneeling figures, the donor Giacomo di Giovanni Loiani and his first and second wives. As a prominent member of the Bolognese community, Loiani chose to associate himself with this locally venerated holy woman. As in the portrait of Beata Osanna, Catherine holds an identifying attribute, in this case a book, celebrating her own spiritual writing and manuscript illumination.

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102 Surprisingly, the powerful role of holy women in fifteenth-century elite society, like those of Osanna and Caterina de’ Vigri, was not immediately reflected in the visual arts. We do not see a larger number of depictions of female saints concurrent with the rise of “living saints.” As a Brescian native, court painter to Milan, and teacher of Moretto, Vincenzo Foppa’s oeuvre stands as a good example of the preferred subject matter at this time. While Foppa paints many half-length Virgin and Child images, he infrequently depicts female saints, even as part of Sacre Conversazioni. Foppa painted Sts. Agnes and Chiara as panels in polyptychs, as well as St. Catherine of Alexandria (twice). We find similarly few representations of female saints in the works of his north Italian contemporaries, such as Andrea Mantegna, Francesco Cossa, and Cosimo Tura. It is helpful to compare Foppa to Moretto, and the differences between their work show on a microlevel how changing attitudes toward female religiosity played out in the visual arts. It is in the work of artists like Moretto that we begin to see a shift in emphasis toward female imagery in devotional art, and a seeming increase in tending to a specifically female viewership.
Society in late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Italy faced a unique set of challenges, including widespread military conflict, recurrent plague outbreaks, and a destabilized central Church. We see fears manifest in an increased focus on diabolic witchcraft and other heretical activity, as we equally perceive spiritual countermeasures that gave people a feeling of control and peace. An increase in charitable organizations and devotional groups for laypersons combined with a more direct and earthy visual tradition to unify communities and bring the divine into daily life. And lastly, the faithful embraced holy preachers and mystics, eager to accept guidance in uncertain times. In the following chapter we will focus more narrowly on one female mystic, Angela Merici, and her lasting impact on Brescian religious history.

Just as Osanna d'Andreasi provided spiritual advice and comfort at the Mantuan court, Angela Merici filled a similar role for the Brescian faithful, who revered her as nothing less than a living saint. As discussed in chapter one, Brescia was subject to the destruction and disruption of plague, warfare, heresy, and absence of Church authority that characterized the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries in north Italy. Angela Merici arrived in Brescia as a Franciscan tertiary under orders to bring solace to a grieving woman whose husband and sons had recently been killed in battle. As a tertiary, she was able to travel more freely, interact with members of lay society, and retain some level of autonomy over her spiritual practice and with whom to share it. Chapter two will explore in greater depth Merici’s influence on female religiosity in Brescia.
This chapter begins an exploration of the intersection between Angela Merici’s spiritual message and Moretto’s images of female spirituality. Firstly, we will discuss Merici’s biography, her creation of the Company of St. Ursula, and the fate of the order in the years following her death. We will see that, due to some of Merici’s bold ideas, the Company’s infancy was marked by controversy and an uncertain future. Understanding popular perception of Angela Merici and the Ursuline order will help contextualize Moretto’s images of female saints from 1540-50. Moretto’s posthumous portrait of Angela Merici provides a good starting point to discussing the ways in which Moretto’s devotional paintings addressed Merici’s spiritual legacy.

**Angela Merici’s life**

Angela Merici was a female mystic who, for nearly twenty years, served as spiritual mentor to the townspeople of Brescia. It was here that she was to establish her Company of St. Ursula. Born in the nearby town of Desenzano, Merici experienced a miraculous vision in her girlhood. Father Francesco Landini, Vice-
Superior of the Company, in a 1566 letter to a fellow priest in Milan, recounted the vision as told to him by women who had been close to Merici. According to Landini, the young Merici withdrew to a field to pray, as was her custom, where she witnessed the heavens open and pairs of angels and virgins processing down a staircase. She heard celestial music, as the virgins sang, accompanied by angels playing instruments. Merici recognized amid the retinue her recently deceased younger sister. The procession stopped, and Merici’s sister revealed to her that God “wanted to be served by her, and would have her make a Company of Virgins.”

Antonio Romano, interviewed in the *Processo Nazari*, corroborated Landini’s account. Romano, with whom Merici lived for fourteen years, ostensibly heard about the event from the holy woman herself. He, too, indicates that Merici was praying in a field, whereupon she saw the heavenly procession descending in song. Romano further notes the presence of Merici’s sister amongst the virgins, but does not say that Merici was at this time given her divine mission to found the Ursuline Company.

It was in her capacity as a Franciscan Tertiary that Merici was sent to Brescia in 1516, to console Catherine Patengola, a woman mourning the loss of her husband and two sons. This introduction into Brescian society afforded Merici the opportunity to meet and befriend many influential citizens. During the 1520s,

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103 Extract from a letter of P. Francesco Landini, December 21, 1566. (Ledchowska, 381-382). “…si voleva servir di lei e che essa avrebbe fatto una Compagnia di Vergini…”
105 Ibid., 9364-938v.
Merici made several pilgrimages—to Mantua, the Holy Land, Rome, Varallo and Milan. By at least 1533 Merici began holding informal meetings with a group of women, in the home of Elisabetta Prato, counseling them on spiritual matters. On the feast of St. Catherine, November 25, 1535, Merici and her 28 female followers signed their names in the Book of the Company, making official their religious affiliation. Two years later, the order, called the Company of St. Ursula, was sanctioned by the Church, (at least locally), when Merici’s Rule received ecclesiastical approbation. In 1537, the Company elected members to the roles of authority outlined in Merici’s Regola, with the founder herself as mother-general.

*The Company of St. Ursula*

Merici established the Company of St. Ursula as a means for women to live as chaste brides of Christ while remaining a part of the secular world. For several years, beginning in about 1532, Merici began to form a group of young women who sought spiritual guidance and community. Their unofficial gatherings took place in the oratory of a wealthy Brescian widow, and it was in this space that the Company was officially founded on November 25, 1535. This date was significant for Angela Merici as it was St. Catherine of Alexandria’s feast day, an exemplar she hoped her followers would look to in their devotions. The Company’s founding rite, furthermore, reenacted an important event from the life of St. Catherine, her so-

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called mystical marriage to Christ.\textsuperscript{108} When young women were formally admitted to the Company, in addition to having their names recorded in a book, they participated in a ceremony called the Crowning of the Virgins, which served as a symbolic spiritual wedding. In promising to remain chaste, members of the Company attained the status of brides of Christ. The importance of this ritual and the Ursuline connection to St. Catherine are reinforced in a painting by Brescian artist Romanino (Fig. 18). Depicting the mystical marriage of St. Catherine, this artwork is noteworthy also for its inclusion of a portrait of Angela Merici herself. Typically dated to 1540, the year of Merici’s death, the work is thought to have been painted posthumously, under the historical assumption that, during her life, the holy woman did not wish to be represented in portraiture. Here Romanino shows St. Catherine kneeling before the Virgin and Child, receiving her wedding ring after having laid her crown on the ground beside her. At right, the aged Merici is depicted in the garb of a Franciscan Tertiary, which she continued to wear all her life, and is being presented by St. Ursula. Romanino's painting can be seen simultaneously as a celebration of the Company and as a memorial to its founder. For a member of Merici’s order, however, the viewing experience could suggest something much more personal. In the figure of St. Catherine, she might see herself and recall her own entrance into the holy Company, with Merici looking on as she surely would have done during admittance ceremonies.

Merici’s legacy lived on not merely in artworks like those of Romanino and Moretto, of course. She was careful to set out in writing the spiritual principles and tenets upon which the strength of her Company depended, ensuring that her absence would not mean the destruction of all that she had built. Prior to her death Merici dictated to her secretary, Gabriele Cozzano, three documents: her Regola, Ricordi, and Testamento. Her Rule outlined the structure and purpose of her Company. Four Matrone, generally widows, were elected to handle important affairs of the group, including organizing their monthly meetings and overseeing their finances. Merici is explicit that these women should act as mothers to the young “daughters” of the Company. Four virgins were to be elected as spiritual guides for their sisters in the group, visiting each girl at home for biweekly spiritual counsel. When larger or more difficult problems arose, matrons were expected to consult one of four Colonelle or district leaders who held more authority and, presumably, more resources to help. Additionally, Merici’s Rule calls for the election of four priests to act as agents for and fathers to the Ursulines.

Virginity was the main requirement for membership in the Company. Merici emphasized that the young members of her order also must receive spiritual counsel from consecrated virgins. The matrons and Colonelle, mature married or widowed women, served in administrative and advisory capacities, while the four men elected by the Company acted in matters of business. As an example, Merici

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109 Merici’s original Rule was lost during the process of her canonization. The earliest copy is from 1569.
111 Merici dictated her Testamenti as a guide for the Matrons, and her so-called Counsels were meant to advise the Colonelle.
instructs that should an Ursuline be orphaned, she be helped by the men associated with the Society.\footnote{Mariani, et. al., 542.}

The Ursuline order offered an alternative to marriage or the convent, the two acceptable paths for young women in early modern Italy. Women were believed to be inferior to men in intellect, physical strength, will power, and control of their sexual desires. The notion of the ‘weaker sex,’ what Cissie Fairchilds has called the ‘patriarchal paradigm,’\footnote{Cissie Fairchilds. \textit{Women in Early Modern Europe, 1500-1700}. Harlow, England: Pearson Education, 2007, 7-15.} was perpetuated by select biblical texts, such as the narrative of Adam and Eve in the book of Genesis, and by the writings of ancient scholars, such as Aristotle and Galen, who looked upon the female as a defective male brought about by an unfortunate imbalance of humors.\footnote{Ibid., 12-13.} Protecting women from their own lusts and the temptations of the outside world necessitated seclusion, first in the homes of their fathers, and subsequently, as they reached sexual maturity, in those of their husbands or in the cloister. Social and political incentives sustained these two restrictive life choices. Families made important alliances through marital ties, and the extravagant expense of a dowry meant that all but one or two daughters had to be relegated to the religious life, as a less costly alternative to marriage. Membership in Merici’s Company was attractive to daughters of tradesmen and craftsmen who likely struggled to afford either marriage or monastic dowries, and whose financial situation perhaps required the income these young women contributed to the household. In addition to daughters of bakers, shoemakers, and goldsmiths, nine girls in the early Company worked as

\footnote{\textit{Mariani, et. al., 542.}}


\footnote{Ibid., 12-13.}
domestic servants. The family of an Ursuline enjoyed, along with the financial incentive, the cachet of having a spouse of Christ among them.

While the presence of a chaste young lady in the home reflected well upon the family name, the Company of St. Ursula was a cause of concern in other respects. Most particularly, uncloistered virgins provoked considerable anxiety in the sixteenth century. The temptations of the world were abundant, and a virginal young woman particularly vulnerable to them, without some institutional strictures to buffer her. The only sure protection for the chaste body was simply to remove it from society, hence the emphasis on the contemplative life as a suitable path for young women. Merici herself was aware of the dangers of the world to which her followers would be susceptible, admonishing them, “When going along the streets, go with downcast eyes and go quickly, not lingering or stopping here or there, nor staying to look curiously at anything. For everywhere are varied and dangerous snares and diabolical jests.” Through membership in Merici’s Society, these women remained outside, or rather in between, the two acceptable modes of managing female presence in the world. Neither married nor veiled, Ursulines upset conventional expectations as uncloistered brides of Christ, a perilous position that

115 Descriptione delle Vergini si come di tempo in tempo sono acceptate. Sec. L Gen. f. 100.
116 Jo Ann Kay McNamara records that there was an Ursuline living in one-fourth of Brescian homes at the time of Merici’s death. McNamara does not provide documentation for this statistic, and I find it uncorroborated in other texts. Still, if true, the high number indicates great community support for Merici’s mission. McNamara, 1996, 461.
117 Mariani, et. al., 537. “Quinto che andando per le vie vadino con gli occhi bassi, et con i suoi panetti serati honestamente: Et vadan prestamente non indugiando, ne fermandosi qua, o la, per le vie stando a mirar curiosamente cosa alcuna: peroche in ogni loco vi sono molti pericoli, varie insidie, et lazi diabolici.”
their leader clearly recognized, as evidenced by her comments regarding appropriate public behavior.

Sources

It is a testament to Angela Merici’s status in Brescian society that she was able to establish her unusual order without significant resistance. Primary sources provide us with evidence of the holy woman’s actions and beliefs, both in her words and the words of those who knew her. Extant texts include Merici’s own writings from 1535, dictated to her friend and chancellor, Gabriele Cozzano. Merici’s Regola or Rule outlined the structure and purpose of her Company. Her Ricordi or Counsels served as a guide for the Colonelle, and her Testamento was written to advise the Matrons. From these three documents, of which only copies exist, emerges a clear picture of Merici’s spirituality, and goals for her Company.

Additionally, we have a copy of the so-called Processo Nazari from 1568, in which Brescia’s public notary, Giovanni Battista Nazari, at the urging of the Ursulines, took sworn testimony from four men, recording their personal recollections of Merici. Three of the witnesses were powerful citizens of Brescia with whom Merici had become close during her life: Agostino Gallo, a textile merchant and landholder; Antonio Romano, a fur merchant; and Giacomo Chizzola, an aristocrat and politician. The fourth testimony in the Processo Nazari, that of

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118 The original text written by Cozzano was lost at the suppression of religious orders in 1810, when archives of the Company were dispersed, though a copy is extant in the Acts of the Canonization Process.

Bertolino de Boscolis, bears witness to seeing Merici levitate in ecstasy while in prayer at the Brescian church of Santo Barnaba in 1534.

Other important documents include D. Pandolfo Nassino’s *Registro di molte cose seguite*, a miscellany of Brescian life that includes an unfinished obituary of Angela Merici. Bernardino Faino’s *Hortulus Brixianae Sanctitatis*, extant in a copy by Floriano Canali, a collection about Brescian holy persons, contains the testimony of Don Giacomo Tribesco, Canon of St. Afra, recounting his memories of conversations with Angela Merici. Bernardino Faino, superior general of the Company into the seventeenth-century, also compiled his *Miscellanea* with biographical information on Merici. Faino records what he found in the archives of the Company, including the *Libretto dove sono scritte tutte le Vergine, quale si domanda la Compagnia di S. Orsola* which contained names of those admitted to the Company between 1535 and 1538. Additionally, Faino copied a *Libro Rosso* (the *Book of St. Angela*), which lists names of virgins admitted to make the vow of virginity.

After Merici’s death, during a most tumultuous time for the Ursulines, Gabriele Cozzano, Merici’s secretary and champion, wrote his *Epistola Confortatoria alle Vergini della Compagnia di Sant’Orsola*. As the Company faced criticism and anxiety, with pressure from within and without to conform to societal expectations for female religious, Cozzano again reached out, writing a *Riposta contra quelli*
persuadono la clausura alle Vergini di Sant’Orsola.\textsuperscript{123} Cozzano entered into heated battle with Merici’s successor as mother-general, Lucrezia Lodrone, who quickly began implementing controversial changes within the Company. Ultimately Lodrone’s connections allowed her to obtain a Bull from Pope Paul III, giving her unprecedented power over the other members of the Company. In response, Cozzano wrote a \textit{Dichiarazione della Bolla},\textsuperscript{124} in which he laments the contents of the Bull, denouncing it as a “false and sham petition.”\textsuperscript{125} This missive is the last issued by Cozzano in defense of his beloved Merici and her order. He is thereafter absent from the historical record.

Acts of Process concerning the beatification of Angela Merici are recorded in the \textit{Sacra Rituum Congregatione Romana seu Brixien ... et Brixien V. Servae Dei Sor. Angelae Merici Fundatrix Monialium Societatis S.tae Ursulae Beatae nuncupatae}.\textsuperscript{126} Merici was beatified in 1768. Documents of importance to the Acts of Process for Merici’s canonization are found in \textit{Sacra Rituum Congregatione Brixien. Canonizationis Beatae Angelae Merici, Fundatrix Societatis S. Ursulae. Processus Apostolicus super Virtutibus et miraculis in specie}.\textsuperscript{127} Merici was canonized in 1807.

\textsuperscript{123} Gabriele Cozzano. \textit{Risposta contra quelli persuadoo la clausura alle Vergini di Sant’Orsola}. Queriniana ms.D. VII.8.
\textsuperscript{124} The original was lost during the Acts of Process, but a copy of the text preserved in the ASV SCRit Processus 341, fol. 969 et seq.
\textsuperscript{125} \textit{Dichiarazione della Bolla}, ASV SCRit Processus 341, fol. 978r.
\textsuperscript{126} In the Vatican Secret Archives, catalogued \textit{Arch. Cong. SS. Rituum, Processus} 339, 340.
\textsuperscript{127} In the Vatican Secret Archives, catalogued \textit{Arch. Congr. SS. Rituum, Processus} 341-344.
Useful biographies of Angela Merici include those by Carlo Doneda (1768)\textsuperscript{128} and Girolamo Lombardi (1778),\textsuperscript{129} both of whom had access to the Ursuline archives prior to the dispersal of 1810. Of the many recent biographies of Merici, that of Teresa Ledóchowska from 1968\textsuperscript{130} contains appendices of the writings of Angela Merici, the witnesses of the Processo Nazari, the testimony of Giacomo Tribesco, the writings of Gabriele Cozzano, and the Bull of Paul III. The most current and definitive Merician biography, Angela Merici: contributo per una biografia from 1988,\textsuperscript{131} also publishes these same documents, as well as the newly-discovered earliest surviving copy of Merici’s Rule, the so-called Regola trivulziano.

The witnesses who gave testimony during Merici’s process of canonization, Agostino Gallo, Antonio Romano, and Giacomo Chizzola, shed light on the holy woman’s reputation among important individuals in the city. We can begin to see that Merici herself was held in highest esteem by the Brescian people which afforded her a certain freedom to found her atypical religious company. For instance, Gallo testified that, while living in his home, Merici was visited every day by various religious and laypersons in search of spiritual help.\textsuperscript{132} Further, Gallo recounts that educated men, even theologians, would ask Merici to expound upon Scripture, so wise and holy was she.\textsuperscript{133} Chizzola, too, notes the profundity of Merici’s

\textsuperscript{128} Doneda.
\textsuperscript{130} Teresa Ledóchowska OSU. *Angela Merici and the Company of St. Ursula According to the Historical Documents*, trans. by Mary Teresa Neylan, OSU. Rome & Milan: Ancora, 1968.
\textsuperscript{131} Mariani, et. al.
\textsuperscript{132} Gallo: PN, f. 941v, in MTS, 537.
\textsuperscript{133} Gallo., 944r-v, in MTS, 539.
sermons on a variety of topics, which could last up to an hour.\textsuperscript{134} And as mentioned above, Bertolino de Boscolis bore witness to seeing Merici levitate in ecstasy while in prayer at the Brescian church of Santo Barnaba.\textsuperscript{135} Two years prior to Boscolis’ testimony at the \textit{Processo Nazari}, Francesco Landini mentioned the same miraculous incident in a letter.\textsuperscript{136} Merici’s nearly divine status among the Brescian people was crucial for the unchallenged establishment and continuance of an order as unconventional as the Ursulines. Just how critical her presence was in acceptance of the Company was made clear in the years following her death, a period in the group’s history marked by external and internal crisis.

\textit{The Company after Merici’s Death}

It was a mere five years after the official founding of the Company that Angela Merici passed away after a lengthy illness.\textsuperscript{137} The obituary written by her contemporary, Pandolfo Nassino, records that, upon the occasion of her death on 27 January 1540, the holy woman’s remains were displayed for a subsequent thirty days in the crypt of the Church of St. Afra in Brescia.\textsuperscript{138} Dressed in the habit of a Franciscan Tertiary, Angela Merici’s body remained incorrupt during this time.\textsuperscript{139} While serious criticism did not threaten the Company during Merici’s tenure, several accounts attest that almost immediately after she died, dissenting voices attacked the order for its uncomfortable placement between married life and the cloister, and for such intimate interaction of noblewomen with females of the lower

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\textsuperscript{134} Chizzola: \textit{PN}, f. 941r, in MTS, 536.
\textsuperscript{135} Bertolino de Boscolis, \textit{PN}, ff. 940r-v, in MTS, 536.
\textsuperscript{136} \textit{Estrato d’una lettera del P. Francesco Landini} in MTS, 531.
\textsuperscript{137} Doneda: 574-575.
\textsuperscript{138} Nassino, 574-575.
\textsuperscript{139} Nazari, 945.
\end{flushleft}
classes. Cozzano, in his *Riposta*, writes that clergy began to speak against the Society, decrying its founder, even doubting Merici’s salvation. Cozzano paraphrases their arguments thusly, “And what did she think she was doing? Imitating Saint Benedict, Saint Claire, Saint Francis…. She wanted to be more, … thinking to put virgins in the midst of the world, a thing that not even the patriarchs dared.”

Cozzano’s *Epistola Confortatoria* tells us that several girls abandoned the Company to take the veil or marry, succumbing to pressure from parents and clergymen. He addresses the Ursulines, sharing their “just sorrow that some sisters of the company have left, falling from such a good place as many stars from the sky.” Further, he fears “some others, being poisoned against the merit of this elected life, already think to do the same.” Cozzano laments these defections, as they clearly incited fears about the group’s future.

In December 1545, perhaps in hopes of reestablishing a sense of solidarity, Lucrezia Lodrone, the Society’s new mother-general, imposed a cincture, a black

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140 Pastoral Letter of Mgr. A. Paleotti, Archbishop of Bologna, placed before the *Regole della Compagnia di S. Orsola*, Bologna, 1608. (Quoted by G. Lombardi: *Vita della B. Angela Merici*, Venice, 1778, p. 201). Paleotti is the first to suggest that contemporary criticism of the Company concerned the mingling of different classes.


142 Cozzano. *Epistola Confortatoria*, fol. 958v. «... il vostro giusto dolore che haveti preso per essere uscite alcune sorelle della compagnia, cascando de cosi bel luogo a fozza di tante stelle dal cielo.»

143 Cozzano. «... altre ancora, essendo attossichate nel precio di così eletta vita, già inchinarsi a far il simile ...»
leather belt, to be worn on penalty of expulsion from the order.\textsuperscript{144} A good number of
the Company balked at Lodrone’s establishment of uniform attire not for the
clothing item itself but because it was an alteration of Merici’s original vision. Many
Ursulines were disturbed that such a significant change was to be made so soon
after their leader’s death. Despite protestations, Lodrone issued a second,
equivocal decree on April 20, 1546. It reads in part, “… it has been commanded by
the greater part of the company, and the lady-governors of said company, under the
order of December 1545 and of the Apostolic Bull, that each of the company must
wear a black cincture, … under pain of being cast from said company, and other
pains as contained in the Bull...”\textsuperscript{145} As Teresa Ledóchowska has noted, Lodrone’s
decree was issued with a markedly threatening tone, and did not derive from a
unanimous decision—a far cry from the democratic, nurturing environment Merici
had fostered during her time as leader.\textsuperscript{146}

Many powerful Brescians continued to support the Company and its Rule as
Merici had founded it. The diocese responded to Lodrone’s decree with a counter-

\textsuperscript{144} Lodrone’s original decree has since been lost, but is referenced in the Decree of
Aurelio Duranti, Donato Savallo and Lucrezia Lodrone dated 20\textsuperscript{th} April 1546, text
printed with the \textit{Regola della Nove Compagnia di Santa Orsola di Brescia}, 1569.
\textsuperscript{145} Ibid. “... statuimo et ordinamo come ancora per la molta più maggiore parte de la
confraternita, et gubernatrici de ditta compagnia sotto al di undese Dicembrio 1545
fu statuito et ordinato et in essecutione de quella, et de la Bolla Apostolica che
cadauna de ditta compagnia si de presente, come per lavenire debba portare uno
cingulo de corio negro … sotto pena de essere casse de ditta compagnia, et altre
pene come se contiene in le dette Bolle...”.
\textsuperscript{146} Teresa Ledochowska, Vol. II \textit{The Evolution of the Primitive Company}. Trans. by
Mary Teresa Neylan, OSU. Rome and Milan: Ancora, 1967, 16.
decree,\textsuperscript{147} endorsing the original Rule. Two factions within the Ursuline order itself emerged, representing pro-cincture and anti-cincture positions. The fight turned ugly when the bishop excommunicated Lodrone in 1546, which prompted Lodrone’s powerful associates to quickly promulgate the Bull from Pope Paul III, backdating it to June 9, 1544, rendering Lodrone’s excommunication void. Further, the Bull gave the mother-general power to issue decrees and exact penalties \textit{without ecclesiastical permission}, a truly extraordinary amount of authority for a layperson, let alone a female. Following this victory, Lodrone officially made the wearing of the cincture a requirement of membership in the Ursuline order, and began a new register which records only the names of Ursulines favorable to her policies. In one last attempt to safeguard Merici’s legacy, her faithful secretary, Gabriele Cozzano, wrote a pamphlet explicitly disavowing Paul III’s Bull,\textsuperscript{148} but by this time Lodrone’s influence was too strong and she reigned, without compromise, as head of the Company until her death in 1555.

This tumultuous early history of the Company of St. Ursula (greatly condensed here) highlights the extent to which Merici’s presence stabilized and sustained the group and its acceptance in society. At the time of Merici’s death, no one could have predicted the great dramas that would play out between factions of the Company, specifically the rather tyrannical rule of Lodrone, and the Ursuline order adhering more and more to the model of traditional (cloistered) female religious groups. Still there must have been anxiety about the Society’s future, being

\textsuperscript{147} Written by the diocese’s vicar-general Gianpietro Ferretti, the counter-decree was published as an appendix to the first edition of the Rule (1569), reprinted in Ledochowska, vol II, 368-369.
\textsuperscript{148} Cozzano, \textit{Dichiarazione della Bolla}, ASV SCRit Processus 341, fol. 973r.
in its infancy and falling outside social norms. Certainly the few members who left the Company after Merici’s death, prompting Cozzano’s *Epistola Confortatoria*, indicate that the order’s continuance was indefinite.

The visual arts marked one realm in which support for the Company could be publicly expressed in the years following Angela Merici’s death. As Brescia’s leading painter, Moretto can be expected to have been in the vanguard in addressing this important local topic, and indeed he was. It was during the month-long period after Merici’s death, at which time her incorrupt corpse was on public display at Sant’Afra, that Moretto executed the first two paintings that we can definitively link to the Ursulines. The first painting, depicting Merici’s supine corpse, covered her sarcophagus as late as the time of the process of her beatification in 1768 (Fig. 19). This panel has since been lost, though the Accademia Carrara in Bergamo possesses a later copy now attributed to Bartolomeo Cesi from c 1600-1610.

Moretto’s second painting shows Merici’s corpse seated upright against a dark background (Fig. 20). Located in the Oratory annex of the church of Sant’Orsola as late as 1758, the work has since been lost. Thankfully, the painting is preserved in Domenico Cagnoni’s 1768 engraving, published in a life of Angela Merici by Carlos


Doneda (Fig. 21). Additionally, there are extant copies in Brescia’s Centro Mericiano and Casa Sant’Angela, as well as in the sacristy of the Duomo of Desenzano. Scholars largely agree that the copy at the Centro Mericiano is by Moretto himself.

Through an examination of the ways Moretto’s painting of Merici relates to historical representations of female religious in death we will see how Moretto conveys the complexity of this history. Though depictions of deceased holy women manifest in a diverse range of objects, including death masks, reliquary busts, relics themselves, and portraiture, Moretto’s posthumous portrait of Merici has to this time been associated solely with the death mask tradition. Our discussion will broaden this scope, demonstrating how Moretto brings to bear a rich visual tradition in his tribute to this important Brescian figure. In visually referencing both common and less ubiquitous object and image types, Moretto is able to memorialize this subject while simultaneously linking her to important her spiritual predecessors.

*Angela Merici on Images*

There appear to be no images of Angela Merici made during her lifetime. Scholars have speculated about Merici’s opinion on religious images, a topic she did not directly address in her writings. Despite a dearth of portraits from life,
evidence suggests that Merici encouraged her followers’ use of spiritual images. For example, her two trips to Varallo speak to her belief that visual stimuli could be an efficacious tool in devotional practice. As discussed in chapter one, the tableaux at Varallo were extremely lifelike, with polychromed sculptures outfitted in human hair, real articles of clothing, and everyday items. While pilgrims moved through the site, they would have seen episodes of Christ’s life play out before their eyes. For Merici and many others, such illusionistic physical manifestations of spiritual events provided powerful inducements to prayer.

Extant description of frescoes from the Ursuline oratory, dated by inscription to December 11, 1533, offer further evidence that Merici supported the use of religious images in everyday worship. The oratory was in the home of Elisabetta Prato and served as the meeting room for the young girls who would become the first members of the Company. Bernardino Faino, superior general of the Company in the seventeenth century, described the oratory’s murals prior to their being destroyed. From Faino’s description we know there was a large Crucifixion scene above an altar-table, other episodes from the life of Christ, and individual depictions of saints, including Brescia’s patrons Giovita and Faustino, St. Ursula (namesake of the Company), St. Afra, St. Elizabeth of Hungary, and mother and daughter saints, Paula and Eustace. Each of these holy figures had resonances for Angela Merici’s life, as well as the lives of her followers. As previously noted, Sts. Giovita and Faustino


were ancient patrons of Brescia, early Christian bishops who, after their martyrdom, had continuously protected the city in times of strife. The depiction of St. Afra, another early Christian martyr, is a reference to the eponymous Brescian church where Angela Merici resided during the last years of her life. The image of St. Elizabeth of Hungary served as allusion firstly to Elisabetta Prato, in whose home the Ursuline oratory was established, and secondly, paid tribute to Angela Merici’s status as a Franciscan Tertiary, a group which St. Elizabeth had come to be associated, albeit erroneously. The reasoning behind the choice to include more obscure Sts. Paula and Eustace in the oratory frescoes can be gleaned from their hagiographies as retold in the *Golden Legend*. The noble Roman widow, Paula, and her virginal daughter Eustace traveled to the Holy Land where they founded an abbey. Perhaps no other saint’s legend so perfectly encapsulated the story of the Ursuline company, in which widows and virgins assembled in the service of a spiritual path. Merici frequently exhorted the colonelli to treat young members of the Company as their own children, and clearly envisioned the relationship as a maternal one. She counsels, “It is right and fitting that mothers should be an example and mirror of life for their daughters, especially in modesty, outward behavior, and good manners generally.”\(^{156}\) We might further see similarities between Paula’s visionary experiences at Bethlehem and Angela Merici’s miraculous blindness during her own pilgrimage to the Holy Land.\(^{157}\) Both women received

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\(^{156}\) Merici, *Counsels*, Ledochowska, 250.

\(^{157}\) Merici’s close friend, Agostino Gallo, recounted her miraculous blindness in his deposition for the Processo Nazari: “In questi anni ella fece il viaggio di Hierusaleme, nel quale perse la vista nell’andarvi, nondimeno mi disse che essendo condotta di luogo in luogo di quelle sanctissime divottioni, sempre le vide con gli
spiritual sight that allowed them to more fully comprehend the events of Christ’s life as they visited the pertinent locations. From this array of holy figures frescoed on the walls of their meeting room, members of the Company were able to meditate on Brescia’s own religious history, as well as on the lives of female exemplars whose charity, bravery, and chastity were worthy models of virtue. It is clear from the early date inscribed on the frescoes, two years prior to the official founding of the Company, that Merici considered these devotional images welcome additions to her followers’ spiritual toolkit. Even more significantly, they speak to her early formulation of a group identity and mission.

Like Moretto, local painter Il Romanino painted a devotional work featuring Angela Merici, dated shortly after the holy woman’s death. Representing the mystic marriage of St. Catherine, Romanino shows Merici being presented to the Virgin and Child by St. Ursula herself. As she kneels in prayer, Merici’s face seems more youthful than it likely appeared at her death, though Franciscan Tertiary’s garb provides a further identifying attribute. Marcia Clifton has argued that Merici may be seen as a “mother figure” for St. Catherine in this image. As mentioned above, I would further assert that young Ursulines were invited to identify with St Catherine, while the elderly widows and matrons who guided the young virgins of the Company might identify with Merici in this work. Thus, like Moretto’s Ursuline imagery, Romanino’s painting acknowledges the importance of Merici’s efforts in Brescia and the interconnectedness of her female followers after her death.

*A Death Mask?*  
occchi interior, come se l’havesse vedute con gl’esteriori ...” Ed. Nazari. MS. copy, Sec. L.G., 942v, reprinted in Ledowchowska, 296.
To understand how the posthumous portrait of Merici might have served the needs of the Ursuline order, we must first establish its place within funerary art of the time. Customarily, during the early modern period, women’s posthumous portraits depict the deceased looking her best, in the peak of health, and most importantly, alive. Piero della Francesca’s profile portrait of Battista Sforza from c. 1472 embodies these conventions (Fig. 22). Perfectly coiffed, elegantly costumed, the late sitter is idealized with high forehead, pale skin, and regal bearing. Moretto, conversely, depicts Angela Merici’s corpse, dressed in the habit in which she was buried, the white head-covering of which effectively acts as her burial shroud.\textsuperscript{158} The plain dark background and unembellished treatment of Merici’s habit help focus the viewer’s attention on her face which Moretto takes care to describe with unflinching accuracy. The artist faithfully records how facial muscles slacken in death, causing Merici’s mouth to droop disturbingly on the left side. Her unseeing eye, barely visible through a half-closed lid, affirms the lifelessness of her body. She returns the viewer’s gaze, yet she sees nothing.

The painting has often been called a ‘death mask,’ and it does resemble these funerary objects in that it accurately records the features of an individual postmortem. Contemporary sources indicate that death masks were common during the early modern period. Giorgio Vasari, in his life of Andrea del Verrocchio, notes their affordability and consequent ubiquity in fifteenth-century Florence.\textsuperscript{159}


\textsuperscript{159} Giorgio Vasari, \textit{Le vite de’ piú eccellenti pittori scultori e architettori: nelle redazioni del 1550 e 1568}, ed. Rosanna Bettarini (Firenze: Sansoni, 1966), 543-44.
Cennino Cennini, in his *Il Libro del’Arte*, provides instructions for mask casting, further indicating their prevalence.\(^{160}\) Eric MacLagan too, in his article “The Use of Death-Masks by Florentine Sculptors,” noted the widespread use of the form in the fifteenth century.\(^{161}\) MacLagan contends that most death masks were used to create inexpensive terracotta busts that depicted the deceased with open eyes.\(^{162}\) Surviving examples of death masks used for display show that the faces were painted and reworked to give the appearance of life.\(^{163}\) For example, two late fifteenth-century terracotta busts likely modeled from death masks portray a man and a woman with open eyes and lifelike polychromy (Fig. 23).\(^{164}\) According to Vasari, such busts as these were displayed on domestic façades and interiors.\(^{165}\) Sharon Strocchia notes the placement of terracotta, wax, or papier-mâché death masks in church interiors as well, where they performed votive and commemorative functions.\(^{166}\)

While often reworked and exhibited in homes and churches, death masks could also serve as models for more polished portraits. Such is the case with a death mask of Battista Sforza (Fig. 24) who is rendered in a marble portrait bust by Francesco Laurana from c. 1474 (Fig. 25) and the above-mentioned painted portrait.

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\(^{162}\) Ibid., 303.
\(^{163}\) Ibid.
\(^{165}\) Vasari, 544.
by Piero della Francesca.167 These posthumous works show the sitter as youthful and attractive, in contrast to the relaxed features and skin of Battista’s death mask. While Laurana and Piero use the mask’s facial structure as a guide for their representations, more unsightly effects of death are smoothed away in their formal depictions of the deceased.168 These examples make clear that paintings and sculptures made from death masks were not only idealized, but also given a lifelike appearance through applied color and facial expression.

Moretto’s representation of Angela Merici participates in the same memorializing function as a death mask, yet differs greatly in intent. The painting neither offers the illusion of life, nor was it a tool for the creation of more conventional portraiture. The very fact that the painting has often been referred to as a death mask in the literature, without regard for the circumstances of its creation or function thereafter speaks to the marginalization of artists like Moretto, who worked in so-called peripheral areas. Moretto’s representation of Merici’s corpse is not a mask. It is important to draw a distinction between different media and the ways in which those objects were understood and used. As argued above, despite some similarities, Moretto’s posthumous portrait of Merici does not adhere to the defining characteristics associated with death masks of the early modern period. Instead, Moretto’s painting is a finished work in which the subject is

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168 The illusionistic quality of Laurana’s marble bust would have been greatly accentuated by polychromy, which unfortunately no longer remains.
depicted as a corpse, an image type that we will find was not without precedent. That Moretto meant the painting to be a finished composition cannot be doubted in light of its being hung by the Church of Sant’Orsola, and the subsequent production of several copies.

Despite the tendency of scholars to liken Moretto’s posthumous portrait of Merici to death masks, the work shares many characteristics as well with the relic tradition. Obviously, formal similarities are evident between Moretto’s painting of Merici’s corpse and the physical remains of holy persons treated as holy relics. A comparable relic example can be found in the Sienese church of San Domenico where St. Catherine’s head is prominently displayed in an open architectural reliquary (Fig. 26). Both painting and relic grant visual access to the holy person’s dead body, allowing the faithful to see the sanctity with their own eyes. We may ask why the Company of St. Ursula did not endeavor to have Merici’s relics dispersed to their meeting sites, especially as the order expanded to other cities in the later sixteenth century. What prompted Moretto’s unusual portrait of the Ursuline leader? An examination of the historical moment may help us better understand these choices. As discussed briefly in chapter one, Merici’s death occurred in the middle of a 65-year period Peter Burke has called the “crisis of canonization.” With the Church taking a 65-year break from creating new saints, the Ursulines had little hope of elevating their leader’s official status at this time. Still, the Ursulines fostered Merici’s cult, buoyed by phenomena such as miracles and divine light

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169 The relic’s current reliquary and decorative niche date from the mid-twentieth century, according to the church’s own literature. [http://www.basilicacateriniana.com/storia_en.htm](http://www.basilicacateriniana.com/storia_en.htm)

170 Burke, 45-55.
surrounding her incorruptible remains.\textsuperscript{171} Even without papal sanction, the Company of St. Ursula accorded their leader the reverence due a saintly intercessor. Such behavior was by no means exceptional. It was this same spirit that had given rise to the cults of countless local saints throughout the peninsula since the early Christian era, try as the Church might to extinguish these devotional fires.\textsuperscript{172}

Traditionally, the locus of a saint’s veneration was a shrine housing relics, potent remnants of the holy person’s earthly life. Relics could also conveniently be dispersed to numerous sites, so devotees farther afield might be granted access to their sanctity. Due to the ill-timed Protestant threat, and the Church’s reticence in granting canonization during this period, the Company of St. Ursula was deprived of a saint, and of a saint’s relics. Rather, Moretto’s painting acts as a surrogate for Merici’s relics, allowing her followers to effectively “possess” her body. Like holy relics, Moretto’s portrait of Merici could be replicated to facilitate reverence at multiple sites concurrently. Begni Redona has suggested that the Ursulines commissioned a copy of Moretto’s painting each time a new Company was established.\textsuperscript{173}

In addition to this work’s similarities to holy relics, Merici’s posthumous portrait has an affinity to a different, yet related, form of funerary art, the reliquary bust. This association makes sense if we consider Angela Merici’s spiritual connection to St. Ursula, whose legacy was crystallized through this object type.

\textsuperscript{171} Nazari, 595-602.
\textsuperscript{172} For further discussion of the tension between local cult-making and ecclesiastical control, see: Peter Brown, \textit{The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity} Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981, 30-33.
\textsuperscript{173} Begni Redona, 540.
Following the twelfth-century discovery of a huge cache of relics at Cologne, the cult of St. Ursula and her 11,000 virgin companions was fostered overwhelmingly through relic display (Fig. 27).\textsuperscript{174} Scott Montgomery has noted “the absolute centrality of relics in the development and the presentation of the cult.”\textsuperscript{175} Certainly through widespread dissemination of the reliquaries associated with the Cologne group, Moretto and his contemporaries would have appreciated the appropriateness of a reference to these busts in his memorializing image of Merici. The tradition of representing locally revered holy women with reliquary busts grew in popularity following St. Ursula and her companions’ fame. Rather than depicting his subject’s full body here, Moretto truncates Merici’s figure to bust-length, which compositional choice, in tandem with his cadaverous sitter, harkens to reliquary busts like those associated with St. Ursula and her retinue. In addition to the widely-known Ursuline busts, contemporaneous Italian painted wooden reliquary busts, such as that of St. Fina from San Gimignano (Fig. 28), closely resemble their northern counterparts, providing humble examples of female religiosity closer to home.

One of the most important religious functions of reliquary busts was to signify a saint’s “living” presence.\textsuperscript{176} Montgomery, in his article “Fashioning the


\textsuperscript{176} Brown, 86-105. Peter Brown discusses at length the devotional understanding of \textit{praesentia} as regards saints’ relics.
Visage of Sainthood,” notes how the open eyes and parted lips of the reliquary bust of Beata Umiliana de’ Cerchi (Fig. 29) fostered a sense of reciprocal communication between the viewer and the object of their veneration, as if she might at any moment move to speak.\footnote{Scott B. Montgomery, “Fashioning the Visage of Sainthood: The Reliquary Bust of Beata Umiliana de’ Cerchi and the Holy Portrait in Late-Medieval Florence,” in \textit{Italian Art, Society, and Politics: A Festschrift for Rab Hatfield}, eds. Barbara Deimling, Jonathan K. Nelson, and Gary M. Radke Florence: Syracuse University Press, 2007, 38.} The wooden reliquary busts of the holy virgins of Cologne similarly gaze out at the viewer, creating a visual dialogue with the faithful. These often generic faces serve to literally “flesh out” the holy person whose fragmented remains are encased within, but they also gave the devotee a sense of being personally addressed through eye contact and a soft smile. Her portrait’s reference to the “living presence” inherent in sacred relics corroborated Merici’s own attitudes about death and the intercessory power of the holy dead. In her Counsels, Merici assures her followers, “For understand that now I am more alive than I was when I lived on earth, and see better and hold more dear and pleasing the good things which I see you constantly doing, and now, even more, I want and am able to help you and do you good in every way.” \footnote{Merici, Counsels, 10.} The Ursuline leader expected the members of her order to perceive her as accessible and active in their lives. While these sentiments lend themselves to a comparison with relic veneration, as previously noted, Moretto’s painting of Angela Merici upsets genre distinctions, complicating the matter considerably. This work draws on funerary objects such as death masks, relics, and portraiture, while not fitting neatly into any one of these categories. As such, Moretto’s depiction of Merici’s very obviously dead body seems
to frustrate any hope for spiritual dialogue between Merici and her followers—unlike traditional reliquary busts, this holy figure does not gaze out or acknowledge her devotee. Yet, Moretto’s image does invite participation, providing an active experience of worship through carefully considered stylistic choices that put into practice contemporary ideas about how paintings could be engaged with.

*Painterly Style and Its Meanings*

The likening of Moretto’s posthumous portrait of Merici to the tradition of death masks can at least partially be explained through a similar association of the object with its subject’s death. Masks were created of necessity shortly after death, and captured, often with startling detail, the softened, almost melted physiognomy of the deceased. Moretto’s representation of Merici’s form is permeated by the same naturalism, stressing the close proximity to the moment of her death. In keeping with a connection to relic veneration, Moretto strives to suggest the potency of being in the physical presence of holy remains. Taking a page from the lively aspect of contemporary reliquary busts, Moretto sought to create a sense of veracity and immediacy in his portrait of Angela Merici. Instead of depicting his subject with open eyes and attentive expression, however, Moretto invites his viewers’ deliberation through his painterly application of thick, unblended brushstrokes, as though he quickly captured Merici’s features before she was interred. Moretto gently models Merici’s visage with soft light, respectfully describing the familiar features of this revered figure. It is in representing her garment that Moretto abandons his careful observations, and indicates folds of fabric with almost amateurishly applied swaths of brown paint. There is no true sense of a human
form beneath the wide curving lines of unmodulated pigment that make up Merici’s robe. The seemingly unfinished surface suggests that the artist had neither the time nor inclination to idealize or fictionalize Merici’s appearance. Moretto here modifies his usual style of precise brushwork to produce a heightened communion between viewer and subject. A comparison of the painting with his other portraits underscores just how calculated is Moretto’s depiction of Merici. In the artist’s portrayals of women such as Woman in White, he closely adheres to conventions of sixteenth-century Italian portraiture (Fig. 30). His sitter is finely attired and artfully arranged. The painting is characterized by a close observation of detail and a tightly-worked surface. The effect is one of artifice, contrivance, and performance. The relationship between the viewer and the sitter is not familiar or natural, but distant. The same descriptors hold true for any number of his other portrait commissions.

In striking contrast, Moretto uses a painterly and abbreviated style in his depiction of Angela Merici, a method unique in his oeuvre and charged with meaning. Ultimately, the marks Moretto makes are what give the painting “life.” This view is corroborated by Marco Boschini’s seventeenth-century treatises in defense of painterly brushwork.179 For example, Boschini describes Tintoretto’s working process thusly:

And he gradually covered with living flesh those bare bones, going over them repeatedly until all they lacked was breath itself ... For the final touches he would blend the transitions from highlights to halftones with his fingers, blending one tint with another, or with a smear of his finger he would apply a dark accent in some corner to strengthen it, or with a dab of red, like a drop

179 Marco Boschini wrote La carta del navigare pitoresco (1660) and Breve instruzione (1673).
of blood, he would enliven some surface— in this way bringing his animated figures to completion.\(^{180}\)

In this passage, Boschini emphasizes the vivifying effect of the painter’s “smears” and “dabs.” For Boschini, until Tintoretto adds these overlaying strokes, the image cannot be regarded as fully realized.

Discourse on painting in the sixteenth century reveals a multitude of interpretations and opinions about painterly style, both positive and negative. The most renowned artist in Moretto’s world, and his biggest influence, Titian, was praised for his output featuring loose brushwork, as when Vasari noted “this way of working is most judicious, beautiful, and stupendous, because it makes the pictures seem living.”\(^{181}\) Even as Pietro Aretino was disappointed in the painterly aspect of the portrait Titian executed of him, he admitted of Titian’s style, “Truly it breathes ...”\(^{182}\) Contrarily, Tintoretto, another Venetian son whose painterly manner adorned much of the city, was criticized by Vasari as leaving as “finished works sketches [bozze] still so rough that the brush strokes may be seen, done more by chance and vehemence than with judgement and design.”\(^{183}\) His biographer further notes, “These works ... have been executed by Tintoretto with such rapidity, that, when it was thought that he had scarcely begun, he had finished.”\(^{184}\) Also a patron of

\(^{180}\) Ibid., 10.
\(^{181}\) Vasari, 504. “E questo modo sì fatto è giudizioso, bello e stupendo, perchè fa parere vive le pitture ...”
\(^{183}\) Vasari, vol. II, 509-10. “... lasciato le bozze per finite, tanto a fatica sgrossate, chesi veggiono i colpi de’ pennegli fatti dal caso e dalla fierezza, più tosto che dal disegno e dal giudizio.”
\(^{184}\) Vasari, 510. “Queste opere ... sono state fatte dal Tintoretto con tanta prestezza, che quando altri non ha pensato a pena che egli abbia cominciato, egli ha finito.”
Tintoretto, Pietro Aretino similarly expressed displeasure with the artist’s brushy style, disparagingly suggesting that he “... temper haste to have done with patience in the doing.” Yet not all of Tintoretto’s viewers conceived of his loose application of paint as a rushed job for mere moneymaking ends. Playwright Andrea Calmo, in a letter to the artist, writes, “… you twiddling with your paintbrush and a small crumb of white lead and egg white portray a figure from nature in half an hour,” framing Tintoretto’s swift treatment as a signifier of creativity, in contrast to slow, methodical tradesmen such as “cobblers, tailors, and builders.” Here the notion of rapid execution as an effect of the creative impulse brings to mind the phenomenon of divine frenzy. Vasari, Aretino, and Calmo’s commentaries all associate painterly brushwork with haste, as I would argue Moretto expected his viewers to do. Interestingly, though opinions about the appropriateness and value of painterly style varied, the notion that these images were painted quickly was shared by both supporters and critics of the style. Vasari speaks directly to this widely held assumption in his life of Titian, when he writes,

These last works are executed with bold strokes and dashed off with a broad and even coarse sweep of the brush, insomuch that from near little can be seen, but from a distance they appear perfect.... Although many believe that they are done without effort, in truth it is not so, and they deceive themselves, for it is known that they are painted over and over again ... This method makes pictures appear alive and painted with great art, but conceals the labor.

186 Ibid., 17-18.
187 Ibid., 18.
188 Vasari, 794. “Queste ultime, condotte di colpi, tirate via di grosso e con macchie, di maniera che da presso non si possono vedere e di lontano appariscono perfette ... e ciò adviene perché se bene a molti pare che elle siano fatte senza fatica, non è così il vero e s’ingannano, perché si conosce che sono rifatte ... E questo modo fa parere vive le pitture e fatte con grande arte, nascondendo le fatiche.”
Here Vasari argues against the stereotype that loose brushwork indicates a hasty job, though he is careful to acknowledge that paintings of this sort should be appreciated only at a distance. Most crucial for our discussion is the general view at this time that painting like that exhibited in the clothing of Moretto’s Angela Merici was associated with swift (not to say careless) execution. By adopting a mode of painting that was linked to speedy production, Moretto encouraged the fiction that his representation of Angela Merici was a true likeness, captured at her bedside, and thus, a worthy equivalent to her holy remains.

Through his use of painterly style, Moretto creates an image of fantasized intimacy, in which the viewer occupies a privileged place at Merici’s deathbed. Philip Sohm has elaborated on this aspect of viewer participation in his discussion of Boschini’s treatises.\textsuperscript{189} As Sohm notes, Boschini suggests the spiritual usefulness of loose brushwork when he encourages the beholder to learn to “see” like a painter. By putting him or herself in the artist’s place, the viewer imagines composing the work, visually tracing the brush’s movements. This type of active looking, Boschini advises, stimulates piety as the viewer “finishes” the image. Moretto’s posthumous portrait of Angela Merici facilitates this kind of engaged devotional experience through his painterly technique. The effect appears quite calculated because while Merici’s robe is executed sketchily, as noted above, the holy woman’s face is rendered carefully and in detail. This juxtaposition of styles in the work allows the devotee simultaneously to gaze upon a “true likeness” of the Ursuline leader while reaping the benefits of the active viewing required by painterly brushwork.

\textsuperscript{189} Sohm, 147.
A True Precedent?

The unusual nature of this work has perhaps contributed to its being neglected in scholarship. Considered anomalous, the painting has not been discussed in context in art historical literature. We have explored ways in which the work takes part in the visual tradition of funerary representations of holy women, including death masks, posthumous portraits, reliquary busts and relics, and established that the work does not conform unproblematically to any one of these object types.

As noted above, Moretto’s portrait of Angela Merici takes part in longstanding conventions of representing holy women after death, as in the reliquary bust tradition associated with St. Ursula and her 11,000 virgin companions. Although often taken to be unique, Moretto’s painted rendering of Merici’s bust-length corpse does have precedent in Italy, most notably in a painting of St. Catherine of Bologna from c. 1463. In comparing these artworks and the women who inspired them, we will come to see Moretto’s image of Angela Merici as rooted in a large iconographical tradition of holy women in Italy. Moretto’s painting has never previously been linked to this earlier work, and this comparison gives us a new understanding of Moretto’s connection with the past, exemplifying his attempts to situate Merici and the Ursulines within a lineage of female spirituality in northern Italy. The posthumous portrait of Merici marks a referential tendency in Moretto’s oeuvre we will explore throughout this dissertation. We will see how these pointed allusions to earlier artworks allow him to display his knowledge of the artistic

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190 Cursory descriptions of the portrait of Angela Merici can be found in the two main monographs on Moretto: Begni Redona and dell’Acqua.
tradition and create a multileveled viewing experience linking the present to the past and Brescia to other North Italian sites. Although no documentation exists to prove Moretto traveled to Bologna and saw the portrait of St. Catherine, the uncannily similar works nevertheless speak to a perceived efficacy of this type of devotional work for the veneration of female worshipers. To comprehend fully the ways in which St. Catherine of Bologna can be seen as a precursor to the type of spiritual leadership offered by Angela Merici, it is necessary to learn about her life and legacy.

Portrait of Caterina Vigri

Caterina dei Vigri, originally of a noble Ferrarese family, served as abbess of the Corpus Domini convent in Bologna from 1456-1463. Her religious vocation as an Observant Poor Clare was characterized by ecstatic visions, as well as an unusually active creative expression in writing, painting, and music-making. Caterina's contribution to the spiritual literature of her day, *Le setti armi spirituali*, was distributed within her order, and first printed in 1475. Examples of her artistic production include an illustrated breviary and several extant panel paintings of the Madonna and Child. Venerated by her sisters, Caterina was the subject of a biography published in 1469, *Lo specchio di illuminazione*, written by her close confidant and successor, Illuminata Bembo.

Caterina of Bologna and Angela Merici were, in many ways, at opposite ends of the spectrum of sixteenth-century female religiosity. Caterina, an Observant Poor Clare, lived in poverty and protected from the world by the cloisters' walls. She received ecstatic visions throughout her life in the convent, and revealed this aspect
of her spiritual experience openly. Conversely, Angela Merici was a Franciscan Tertiary, living in the homes and on the hospitality of well-to-do laypersons, freely interacting with secular society. Furthermore, Merici expressed disapproval of the contemporary fascination with visionary episodes, and did not discuss her own heavenly vision received in childhood. The incident was only made known after her death, when her secretary wrote of it, attributing her religious vocation and later creation of the Company to this formative event.

A small painting often attributed to Catherine’s successor Bembo may help us gain insight into Moretto’s portrait of Angela Merici, to which it bears a remarkable resemblance. Dating from the mid-fifteenth century, the bust-length depiction features a deceased Caterina dressed in her nun’s habit and set against a background of stars (Fig. 31). The two works are similar in subject matter—a locally-venerated holy woman recently deceased and seated upright—as well as in the manner of depiction. Both figures are shown in a bust-length, three-quarter view, wearing the attire of their religious order.¹⁹¹ Both artists included a sliver of exposed eyeball in their posthumous portraits, a grotesque detail that serves to call attention to the postmortem state of the body represented. Thus, Bembo and Moretto were able to sensitively clue the viewers in to their sitters’ status as corpse

¹⁹¹ We might chalk up these similarities to chance, however, a certain iconographical detail intimates a closer connection between these two portraits. Looking closely at Caterina’s face, we can discern that her right eye is slightly open, revealing a small portion of her eyeball. The same detail is apparent in Moretto’s paintings of Angela Merici. The viewer may easily miss this small detail, or disregard it as an irrelevant postmortem bodily reaction, yet consideration of the continuity of the exposed eyeball motif from a mid-Quattrocento painting to a work produced 100 years later begins to suggest the ways in which Moretto’s image is meant to function similarly to its precedent.
through the subtle representation of a face imperfectly composed in death. Certainly there are various other methods an artist might employ to indicate a deceased subject: depicting decomposition, placing the figure in a reclining position, showing the sitter interred or enshrouded, to name a few. These solutions were not satisfactory for the paintings of Caterina Vigri and Angela Merici, images which instead seek to demonstrate holiness not conditioned by the mundane effects of death.

The hagiographies of both Caterina and Angela describe their subjects’ corporeal incorruptibility after death. Belief in the connection between holy virginity and miraculous incorruptibility was longstanding and came to be one of the most common elements of hagiographical accounts from the medieval and early modern periods. As early as the fifth century, St. Augustine exalted the holy virgin’s status and the spiritual benefits of this lifestyle, writing, “Virginal chastity and freedom through pious continence from all sexual intercourse is the portion of Angels, and a practice in corruptible flesh, of perpetual incorruption.” Caterina’s legacy in this regard is notable, arguably surpassing all other miraculous phenomena attributed to her. Indeed, her followers exhumed her body a mere eight days after her death, finding her remains intact and exuding a sweet fragrance. Her

\[192\] Surely we can see these images as kindred with three-dimensional devotional works like the head of St. Catherine of Siena, in that objects of these types emphasize physical death as a tool for spiritual meditation.

\[193\] The ability of great piety/purity to physically change the body is further corroborated in tales of holy women with objects found in their organs and heart after death. See, for example, Katharine Park, “The Criminal and the Saintly Body; Autopsy and Dissection in Renaissance Italy,” *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 47, No. 1 (Spring 1994), 1-33.

\[194\] St. Augustine, chapter 12, *On Virginity*, c. 401.
miraculous relics were made visible to the faithful through a fenestrella or small communion window, which opened onto the church sanctuary. In fact, her intact remains were the main evidence upon which her legend was built. Bembo’s portrait of her mentor is a representation of this relic display.

A painting in the collection of the Courtauld Institute and attributed to the Master of the Baroncelli Portraits appears to depict Caterina’s body visible through the window at Corpus Domini, behind the standing figure of Caterina herself, flanked by kneeling donor figures. In the small rectangular window the saint is depicted in bust-length, frontally oriented, and wearing a religious habit and crown. A large cross on her chest is partially cut off by the bottom of the window. Her eyes are closed and face impassive. Her ensemble is identical to that of the standing woman in the center of the painting, who stares out at the viewer, and holds an open book as if reading from it.

We may initially question the identification of this fenestrella as such, given that a small bust-length painting of Caterina exists and may have been displayed in such a way at the convent. Upon comparison, however, we can discern important differences between the posthumous portrait of Caterina and the depiction of her in the Courtauld Institute’s painting. The panel attributed to Illuminata Bembo shows Caterina in three-quarter view and in a plain habit, in contrast to the Courtauld’s painting, which shows the saint head-on and sumptuously adorned. This reflects the actual display of the body, which was likely not set before the window at an angle, and was dressed in luxuriant attire only from the 1470s on. This image makes clear
the importance of bodily purity in constructing an identity of sanctity for Bologna’s holy woman.¹⁹⁵

Caterina’s miraculous incorruptibility served as proof of her holy chastity, as did Angela Merici’s remains, displayed in the church of Sant’Afra following her death. These “living saints” were exhibited as tangible manifestations of sanctity. Moretto’s posthumous painting, historically dismissed as an oddity of little consequence, can be seen instead as an attempt to crystallize the gifts of holy virginity. In this humble, nearly monochromatic painting, Moretto likens his subject to holy women like Caterina Vigri and their legacy as brides of Christ.

This idiosyncratic depiction of Angela Merici shows Moretto’s purposeful manipulation of conventional portraiture and his own style in an effort to satisfy the needs of the Ursuline order. The Company had relied too heavily on their founder’s leadership, which left them ill equipped to carry on after her death. Moretto paints for them a representation not of the woman whose mission they struggled to sustain, but of her physical remains. Moretto's painting harks to the gamut of funerary objects, visually associating the subject simultaneously with the memorial of a death mask and the saintly reverence of a reliquary bust. Moretto’s painterly style engages the viewer, inviting the type of interactive, personal worship then in vogue, and ultimately placing Merici within a lineage of brides of Christ whose sacred virginity afforded them the gift of miraculous incorruptibility in death. In ¹⁹⁵ At this point, we may question what type of access or knowledge Moretto had of this church, relic display, and painting. There is no concrete record that Moretto visited Bologna during his life, though the proximity of Brescia to Bologna and Moretto’s conversance with Bolognese art suggest the artist visited this site on at least one occasion.
this, the Ursulines were reminded of their leader’s perfect example, and the rewards promised them by following her Rule for them. Emphasizing the emptiness of Merici’s mortal body, Moretto’s work further instructs its viewer to seek Merici’s intercession in the celestial realm. Through copies of the painting, Ursulines were able to tangibly extend that promise of intercession anywhere their members gathered.

In the following chapter, in a discussion of Moretto’s painting of St. Ursula, we will expand on themes addressed here, particularly how the work draws upon earlier precedents and the ways in which holy chastity might be understood and performed by members of Merici’s Company.
Chapter Three
“Like a mountain fortress”
_St. Ursula and Her 11,000 Virgin Companions_

Moretto’s _St. Ursula and her 11,000 Virgin Companions_ (Fig. 32), completed between 1540 and 1550, was a timely and richly meaningful devotional tool for the members of the Brescian Company of St. Ursula. Painted soon after Angela Merici’s death, the work served as a memorial to the group’s founder. Furthermore, the painting functions as a show of support for the Company’s mission at a time of great vulnerability. As previously discussed, after Angela Merici’s death in 1545, a growing number of voices in the community began to criticize the group for leaving its vulnerable virgin members unclad. Several Ursulines succumbed to pressure from these dissenters, and left the order to take formal vows. The prominent display of this altarpiece in the Dominican church of S. Clemente displays continued approval of the Ursulines, even as the group was under the threat of complete dissolution. Moretto extends that approval retroactively by choosing a century-old local painting as the source for his work. In this way the artist roots the image of Ursula and her companions within Brescia’s spiritual history. Finally, Moretto’s painting directly addressed the devotional needs of the young members of Merici’s fold, acting as a call-to-arms. Struggling to find their footing in the wake of their founder’s death, members of the Company of St Ursula were embarking on a

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196 Gabriele Cozzano, Merici’s trusted assistant, wrote his _Epistola Confortatoria_ partially to console members of the Company after several of their group defected. He acknowledges their fears that “yet others may give it up in their hearts and be ready to leave as soon as they can do so conveniently and without dishonor.” EC, ASV SCRit Processus 341, fol. 958v et seq. Reprinted in Ledóchowska, 335-348.
spiritual journey together, clad in the armor of chastity. By drawing upon a longheld artistic convention that depicts Ursula as leader of a holy army, Moretto here provides the fledgling Company with a representation of all they might be, if they remain united and ready for battle.

**Virginity and Mutual Support**

Angela Merici’s order was founded foremost on the virtues of virginity and mutual support, which the holy woman makes clear in her instructions for the Company. In her Rule, Merici emphasizes virginity as a requirement for membership to the order. In a chapter entitled, “Of the Admission of Young Girls,” Merici begins, “Be it noted first of all that anyone who desires to enter or to be admitted into this Company must be a virgin. Then, with a firm intention to serve God in this way of life, she must enter gladly and of her own free will.” In chapter 10, entitled “Of Virginity,” Merici again addresses the importance and meaning of chastity for her Ursuline followers,

> Each one must safeguard her virginity, not vowing it through any human consideration, but willingly sacrificing her heart to God; because, as the canonists say, virginity is the sister of all the angels, the victor over our passions and the queen of virtues, possessing every good. Therefore each one must behave so that she will never inwardly or in the sight of others do anything unworthy of a spouse of the Most High.

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197 Merici, Rule, in Ledóchowska, 278. Querciolo Mazzonis has explored the importance of “the will” for Angela Merici’s spirituality, noting her disapproval of the common practice of young girls being coerced into clausura. Merici stressed the importance of a voluntary commitment to holy virginity. Mazzonis,165-173.

198 Merici, Rule, in Ledóchowska, 285.
Here Merici reminds her followers of their status as brides of Christ, while expanding on the full significance of this path. For Merici, chastity entails more than merely eschewing sexual intercourse, rather this holy state refers to appropriate conduct in one's every thought and action. Recognizing the challenges of such a life, the Ursuline leader knew the women of the Company would need to lean heavily on one another to succeed.

To this end, Merici’s writings underscore the importance of unanimity within the group. In her Counsels, written for the older widows charged with caring for the young girls of the Company, Merici advises,

Live in harmony, united together in one heart and one will. Be bound to one another by the bond of charity, treating each other with respect, helping one another, bearing with one another in Christ Jesus ... for I tell you, that if all of you are living together united in heart, you will be like a mountain fortress, a tower of strength against the attacks, assaults, and cunning of the devil.

These words would prove imminently important for the group during the period of difficulties following Merici’s death, in which many of the Company’s members felt pressure to desert the Ursuline mission. Merici’s characterization of the group as a

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200 Merici, Rule, in Ledóchowska, 251-252.
fortress withstanding a violent offensive would have been a familiar image, with roots in early Christian theology.

_Soldiers For Christ_

Christians’ struggle had been couched in military terms from the Church’s earliest days. St. Paul’s epistles make use of this metaphor, most famously in Ephesians 6, where he describes the “armor of God,” “shield of faith,” “helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit.”

For Paul, this accoutrement readied the faithful to face evil in the world. With his “weapons of righteousness” believers could protect themselves against temptation and other hardships of life.

The military metaphor was to gain a more specified application in the Early Christian period when applied more narrowly to holy chastity.

Medieval and early modern sources continued to support the metaphor of chastity as military might. Along with the theological belief, explored in chapter two, that virginity kept the body from decaying in death, a long historical discourse similarly held that a person living according to the vow of chastity should be accorded the status of soldier of Christ. The Early Christian Church Father Methodius explained the perceived connection between holy virginity and holy war in his late third-century treatise on chastity, _Symposium_, writing,

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201 Ephesians 6: 10-17. Andrew T. Lincoln asserts that Ephesians’ use of battle imagery serves a twofold purpose: to encourage the reader to self-identify as a soldier for Christ and to set forth parameters for conduct appropriate to that role (honesty, fairness, peacefulness, and reliance on Christ). Further, the military metaphor asks the reader to stand firm—not to abandon the Christian path when temptations arise. Lincoln, “Ephesians,” in _The Cambridge Companion to St. Paul_, ed. James D.G. Dunn. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, 133-140.

202 2 Corinthians 6: 7.
Do not then lose heart at the deceits and the slanders of the Beast, but equip yourselves and sturdily for battle, arming yourselves with the helmet of salvation, your breastplate and your greaves. For if you attack with great advantage and with stout heart you will cause him untold consternation; and when he sees you arrayed in battle against him by Him who is superior, he will certainly not stand his ground. With sober and virile heart, then, take up your arms against the swollen Beast; do not on any account yield your ground, and do not be terrified by his fury. Endless glory will be yours if you defeat him and carry off his seven diadems, for this is the prize of our contest as our teacher Paul tells us.\textsuperscript{203}

Methodius’ language shows an early association between the masculine quality of virility and maintenance of holy virginity, as well as the vital importance of group identity for victory in this combat. The author is clear that evil will fear the sight of the righteous “arrayed in battle”—an image that continued to resonate for theologians and lay worshipers alike.\textsuperscript{204}

St. Augustine, too, endeavored to remind the faithful of the importance of persevering in their vow even under trying circumstances. In his fifth-century treatise, \textit{On Virginity}, Augustine acknowledged the challenges of maintaining holy virginity, writing, “For it is one thing, for truth and a holy purpose, not to consent unto one who would persuade and flatter, but another thing not to yield even to one who tortures and strikes.”\textsuperscript{205} Augustine assures the reader that, though the strength not to yield lies hidden in the soul, it comes forth when needed.\textsuperscript{206} Thus, Augustine reminds those dedicated to a life of holy chastity that they must be willing to endure

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{204} Recall the exhortation from Ephesians, asking the reader to stand firm. Lincoln notes that the faithful are three times called to “stand” in the letter. Lincoln, 140.
\footnote{205} St. Augustine. Chapter 47, \textit{On Virginity}, c. 401.
\footnote{206} Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
whatever physical or emotional hardships may come. The medieval period conceived of holy virginity as a difficult life, certainly not for the faint of heart. Those undertaking the chaste path in subsequent centuries did so with this knowledge.

Women’s Self-Conception as Christ’s Soldiers

Angela Merici was well aware of the stakes for the young women in her Company. Recognizing the pitfalls of the mundane world, Merici’s writings address the need for the Ursulines’ self-conception as soldiers in a holy war. Hoping to inspire them to bravery, Merici offered an Old Testament exemplar to her followers, writing, “Armed with these holy precepts, [by which she means the Rule for the Company] let us live so that, like Judith, bravely cutting off the head of Holofernes, we may cut short the deceits of the devil and happily enter our heavenly country.”

The Book of Judith recounts how a beautiful widow saves her city from destruction by entering the enemy’s camp, intoxicating the general, and decapitating him. Judith’s brazen military intervention on behalf of her town is a rare example from Christian scripture of a violent act perpetrated by a female, and viewed positively at

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208 Though Methodius’ Symposium addresses men grappling with a life of spiritual celibacy, by the early modern period, women had fully assimilated the militaristic metaphor into their own constructed identities as holy virgins. Jo Ann McNamara has noted Christianity’s long history of such gender role reversals, in which monks identify as brides of Christ and female religious as Christ’s soldiers. (McNamara,10). Undoubtedly such paradoxical concepts allowed the faithful to come to a new and deeper understanding of their own spirituality, much as a Zen koan functions to liberate the practitioner’s mind through contemplation of its seeming contradiction or impossibility.

209 Merici, Chapter One: Preface, Rule, in Ledóchowska, 78.
that. Merici’s choice to include Judith as an example of right conduct for the Ursulines speaks to her conception of the group as strong, courageous, and ready to take up arms against worldly dangers.

Contemporary with Angela Merici, Dominican tertiary Lucia Brocadelli da Narni, revealed a similar conception of embattled virginity in her Seven Revelations from 1544. Lucia da Narni was a well-known mystic and stigmatic who served as spiritual advisor to the Duke of Ferrara, Ercole d’Este I, until his death in 1505. Seven Revelations recounts in great detail the heavenly visions Lucia received, mainly consisting of Christ explaining the elaborate symbolism of the various tableaux Lucia witnesses. At several points, Lucia recalls Christ acknowledging the trials she undergoes in preserving her chastity. Christ, describing a jewel-encrusted throne, compares the object to Lucia’s virginity and the “difficulty and obstacles” it entails. The throne’s supporting elements are further likened to Lucia’s trials “against the flesh and against [her] nature” and she is recognized as having been “in combat with the waves of the stormy sea.” Christ’s narration of Lucia’s virginal struggle is arrestingly physical, as when he recounts to St. Paul the many injuries she has endured, including a broken head, broken fingers, having been thrown down a well, and having her teeth knocked out. In her Revelations, Lucia emphasizes not

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213 Ibid.
214 Ibid., 237.
only her special relationship with Christ, that allows her even to kiss his five wounds, but also the dangerous realities a holy virgin must be prepared to face.

Caterina Vigri’s treatise *Seven Spiritual Weapons* provides further evidence that military metaphors formed a strong part of early modern women’s understanding of their own spiritual journeys. The treatise, written between 1438 and 1456, treats the religious principles Vigri imparts as an armory to be used against temptations and dangers facing women with a religious vocation. Catherine’s weapons include: fortitude, guarding against self-reliance, trust in God, remembering the Passion, thinking on one’s own death, thinking on the glories of Heaven, and knowledge of Holy Scripture.\(^\text{215}\) Interestingly, for Catherine, the battle is largely a mental one—she speaks often of the devil’s attempts to trick her and lead her away from a righteous path.\(^\text{216}\) Vigri’s text demonstrates a perceived threat from both internal and external foes. Catherine’s suggested prayer for her Clarissan sisters expresses this sentiment most clearly, “My Lord, sweet Jesus Christ, ... I pray that you give me such strength that, with the help of your grace, I can achieve victory over my enemies and with patience sustain this and every battle that they can launch against me.”\(^\text{217}\) This military language again affirms religious women’s self-conception as being engaged in a battle on a spiritual front. Along with inspirational literature like that of Merici, Brocadelli, and Vigri, women embarking

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\(^\text{216}\) Angela Merici similarly addresses the internal battle of holy virginity when she writes, “… one must behave so that she will never inwardly or in the sight of others do anything unworthy of a spouse of the Most High.” Merici, Rule, Ledóchowska, 285.

\(^\text{217}\) Vigri, 10.
on the treacherous path of uncloistered holy virginity found female exemplars in the visual arts to bolster their courage.

**St. Ursula**

Early modern artists tasked with depicting St. Ursula would have turned to Jacobus da Voragine’s thirteenth-century encyclopedia of saints’ lives, *The Golden Legend*. St. Ursula’s hagiography, as recounted in *The Golden Legend*, describes her as a devout British princess who consents to marry a pagan on the promise that she and a vast retinue of chaste companions first be given three years to go on pilgrimage, during which time her husband agrees to study and convert to Christianity. In addition to pilgrimage, she requests 11,000 virgin companions for her journey. On the return trip, Ursula has a prophetic dream of her martyrdom in Cologne, and willingly submits to this destiny, scarcely disembarking with her virginal coterie before being slaughtered by marauding Huns. A familiar trope, repeated in many female saints’ legends, has Ursula refusing marriage to the Hunnish leader, declining to give up her virginity even to save her own life. This final act affirms St. Ursula as the ideal choice for namesake of Angela Merici’s Company.

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219 Scott Montgomery posits that the exorbitant number of companions attributed to St. Ursula derives from an inscription “XI M,” mistranslated as “milium” or thousand instead of the correct “martyrum” or martyrs. The twelfth-century discovery of a large cache of bones appeared to corroborate this unreasonably high number. Montgomery, 2010, 11-12.

220 Voragine, 645. Among those female saints who, like Ursula, refused marriage are St. Agnes and St. Lucy.
In her Rule for the Company, Merici emphasized the importance of maintaining virginity above all else, advising her followers to do as St. Ursula. She urges, “Each one should be ready to die rather than ever consent to tarnish so sacred a jewel and so great a treasure.” St. Ursula’s legend contained many parallels to Angela Merici’s life in particular. Firstly, Merici also made pilgrimage to Rome, impressing clergy she met there. Secondly, and most importantly, the Franciscan tertiary gathered about her a group of young women, educating them and encouraging them to accept a chaste life. Like St. Ursula’s 11,000 virgin companions, members of Merici’s Company were asked to face the dangers of the world, vulnerable to all manner of evils without protection of cloister walls.

St. Ursula’s hagiography, as recounted in The Golden Legend, frames her as a military leader, in accord with the historical precedent connecting soldiering with the spiritually chaste. We find language equating St. Ursula and her companions with soldiers for Christ most strongly in the episode in which the women learn to sail prior to embarkation on pilgrimage. The text refers to Ursula’s “knights” (her virginal retinue) “engaging in the customary preludes of war”, after having sworn their chivalry to their leader. Additionally, their activities are described as “simulating the conditions of war.” From this description, the reader cannot doubt that the group has become an army (or navy, rather) under the command of Ursula herself. The saint’s legend had been intertwined with militaristic rhetoric

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221 Merici, Rule, in Ledochowska, 285-286.
222 Voragine, 643.
223 Ibid.
well before this late medieval account, however, at least since the time of the First Crusade.

The roots of Ursula’s legendary resolve were planted in her most influential hagiography, commonly called the *Regnante domino* or Passio II, and dating from around 1100. Though apparently written for the nuns at Cologne, the anonymous manuscript survives in over 100 copies spread over much of Western Europe, attesting to its great popularity.\(^{224}\) Rife with militaristic metaphor, this account of the saint’s life set the tone for what would become the standardized iconography in pictorial representations of St. Ursula and her legend. As Pamela Sheingorn and Marcelle Thiébaux have noted, the Passio II’s rhetoric of battle reflects the influence of the First Crusade, which began in 1095.\(^ {225}\) The author of the *Regnante domino* related St. Ursula’s story to this current event, allowing people of the twelfth century to connect with a saint and her legend in a palpable and more immediate way. At a time when holy war was powerfully present in the minds of the faithful, the Passio II’s play on crusading imagery likely made for an exciting and effective devotional tool. Indeed, this account of St. Ursula’s legend refers to her as a “commander” and her companions are transformed into her “maiden troops,” “virgin army,” “comrades-in-arms,” and all now wear the “armor of chastity” and are “armed in spirit.”\(^ {226}\) Sheingorn and Thiébaux see the *Regnante domino* as a point of shift in the

\(^{224}\) *The Passion of Saint Ursula*, 9.


\(^{226}\) Ibid., 22-27.
historical legend of St. Ursula in which “Ursula's young women stand as an epic and protective virgin force.”

*Ursula in Narrative Cycles*

The hagiographical conception of St. Ursula and her companions as a holy army is reflected in the visual arts, not surprisingly, for, as noted, artists often looked to accounts such as *The Golden Legend* to formulate their images of these events. In images of the virgins at sea, martyred at Cologne, and gathered under the banner of the cross, we see parallels to the crusaders’ lives, affirming Ursula’s retinue as soldiers of Christ.

Narrative cycles of the St. Ursula legend often give prominent placement to scenes in which the virgins are either learning to sail or traveling by ship. These episodes allow the artist to emphasize St. Ursula’s leadership role and the active role taken by her female companions. For example, frescoes at Sant’Agata de’Goti’s church of SS. Annunziata (Fig. 33) by an unknown early fourteenth-century artist depict the virgins boarding a ship with Bishop Cyriacus and reaching the shores of Cologne. Though Cyriacus appears as the most important figure in the composition, spotlighted by a large gold halo, St. Ursula (identifiable by her crown) can be seen inviting onboard her more apprehensive companions. Bernardo Daddi’s c. 1333 depiction of the fleet’s arrival at Cologne (Fig. 34) features St. Ursula in hieratic scale and given pride of place in her ship, under a floral canopy. Her squadron flies the cross and keys of St. Peter, much like the crusaders bore into battle. Paolo Veneziano’s rendering of the virgins at sea from just two years later (Fig. 35) more

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227 Ibid., 9.
emphatically highlights Ursula’s leadership role. The saint stands astern, gesturing toward the bow where one of her virgin companions adjusts the lines. This particular scene recalls the portion of the Passio II in which the virgins played their “games of battle” before leaving on pilgrimage. As in Daddi’s panel painting, Veneziano depicts the ship prominently displaying the cross, here on both the sails and maritime flag. A fresco from c. 1365 in the Church of S. Domenico in Fabriano, generally attributed to the school of Allegretto Nuzi, similarly emphasizes St. Ursula’s exalted status by framing her beneath a large cruciform pennant (Fig. 36). Mouth slightly open and gesturing with her right hand, the saint is pictured expounding to an attentive audience including Pope Cyriacus and other clergymen. In a late fourteenth-century fresco by an unknown artist at the church of S. Orsola in Vigo di Cadore (Fig. 37), Ursula again takes the leadership role, extending her arm and issuing orders to one of her companions. We also see a recurrence of the cruciform banner above the saint’s head, visually setting her apart from her companions. In these examples of St. Ursula and her coterie of virgins on the water, artists depict the holy army led by an assertive commander as they go bravely to meet their fate. Ursuline narrative cycles featuring these sailing scenes also include episodes depicting the group’s martyrdom at Cologne.

Depictions of Ursula’s martyrdom can scarcely help suggesting scenes of battle, given the large number of figures being killed. The anonymous fresco at the church of SS. Annunziata in Sant’Agata de’Goti (Fig. 38) gives us a rather bloodless depiction of the martyrdom, however. Pope Cyriacus stands behind a swooning St. Ursula. Both figures maintain peaceful expressions as they are run through with
lances. The military bearing of their attackers, mounted, helmeted, and barring entry into the fortified city gate, orients the viewer to read this encounter as a battle. As the crusaders clashed with the infidel in the Holy Land, so Ursula’s army brings their fight to the enemies of Christianity. Though the Sant’Agota de’Goti frescoes deemphasized bodily suffering, many artists did choose to emphasize the of Ursula’s companions’ physical pain, depicting truly horrifying scenes of slaughter. Paolo Veneziano’s representation of the scene is decidedly more gory, featuring a blood-spurting decapitation in the center foreground (Fig. 39). The Huns brandish their swords in hacking strokes as several virgins appear to plead, one actively looking out at the viewer. The women are backed against a crenellated wall, huddling together to be picked off individually by the Huns’ two-handed swings. In similar fashion, Tommaso da Modena’s version of Ursula’s martyrdom stresses the event’s violence (Fig. 40). With the towers of Cologne as a backdrop, the fore- and middleground teem with torsos and flailing limbs. St. Ursula stands out at the right, facing the viewer she limply sways as her would-be assassin yanks her by the arm outside the picture frame. This scene can only be termed a massacre, an accurate description of the Huns’ modus operandi when on campaign.228 A large unattributed fifteenth-century fresco of Ursula’s martyrdom in the church of Santa Maria Donnaregina in Naples (Fig. 41) focuses similarly on conveying the sheer disorder and confusion that is 11,000 simultaneous martyrdoms. St. Ursula appears in hieratic scale at the far left, an arrow already in her throat, with arms crossed and a

228 The emphasis on violence in these scenes is notable in its contrast to the majority of Italian depictions of martyrdom, such as those of St. Sebastian, which tend to prioritize the saint’s beatific acceptance of the end and seldom give any visible sign of physical discomfort, though the saint is pierced with arrows or the like.
serene expression. In fact, all the virgins have perfectly placid expressions as Huns wield axes, sabers, lances, arrows, and other weapons indiscriminately upon them. This work is also noteworthy for its inclusion of many tiny martyrs’ souls floating up to heaven, strewn across the sky. Carpaccio’s well-known cycle (Fig. 42) also emphasizes the scale of the violence by setting up a deeper space in which diminutive figures battle it out in the far middleground. St. Ursula kneels in profile at the picture plane, as a Hun carefully aims his bow at her. Through the juxtaposition of Ursula’s martyrdom at the picture plane with the magnitude of loss of life in the background, the viewer comes to contemplate sacrifice on both personal and universal levels. These images of St. Ursula and her companions meeting the Huns on the battlefield provide a continuation of the conceptualization of Ursula as leader of a holy army, bravely meeting the consequences of their faith, and in the case of St Ursula, the consequences of her virginity (as she was only killed after refusing to marry the Huns’ leader).

Devotional Images

Along with the many narrative cycles of Ursula’s legend, perhaps the most popular Ursuline image type is the devotional painting featuring the saint standing in the center of the composition, facing the viewer and surrounded by her “virgin army.” Ursula is nearly always shown brandishing a banner or flag bearing a cross. In the historical context of the crusading metaphor through which the faithful had come to understand Ursula’s legend, these cruciform standards visually

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229 St. Ursula is sometimes also pictured holding a single arrow, symbol of her martyrdom. This attribute is more commonly found when Ursula is featured in a polyptych amongst the other saints.
connect these holy women to those who have done battle for Christ. Gabriella Zarri sees Ursula’s standard as a “reference to spiritual combat,” linking this symbolic imagery to the bravery deemed necessary for pilgrimage to the Holy Land during times of unrest. Daniela Ferriani goes a step further in her characterization of Ursula’s standards, regarding them as symbols of the saint’s fight in the two wars of virginity and martyrdom. Thus, while not associating her hagiography with any specific crusading group, the inclusion of military standards symbolically links St. Ursula and her companions to the Church’s history of holy wars.

Paolo Veneziano’s 1335 rendering of St. Ursula and her retinue shows the saint in the center of the composition with a large group of women to either side and behind her (Fig. 43). The virgins visible to us are crowned, many looking out at us, as does St. Ursula herself. Her hands are raised in a gesture of affliction, while others of her group signal modesty and succor. The overall effect is one of complete unity, as the individual members of the group become one entity nearly filling the entire panel. The devotional image type is characterized by a focus on the group’s oneness, often manifesting in a uniformity of expression, posture, and/or gesture. In Tommaso da Modena’s depiction of St. Ursula and her companions from c. 1355

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(Fig. 44), the saint looks directly out at the viewer, clapping the banner with her left hand. The women flanking her turn inward, directing their attention to their leader, as do two diminutive donor figures at her feet. Simone da Bologna’s version of the same subject from 1370 (Fig. 45) also shows St. Ursula’s companions gazing upon her, while she holds a small flag and book. Although facing the picture plane, Ursula’s gaze is unfocused and does not engage the viewer. Simone’s Ursula is the focus of veneration, rather than accessible intercessory figure. An anonymous fresco from the church of Sant’Orsola in Vigo di Cadore (Fig. 46) depicts the 11,000 virgins similarly, the tops of their heads receding back as far as the eye can see. St. Ursula retains her pride of place, front and center, holding her now ubiquitous cruciform flag. Here she reaches for two small donor figures, inclining her head mercifully toward them. The feeling of human connection continues with two virgins to Ursula’s right who smile out at the viewer, while a pair at the far left carry on a friendly conversation. The emphasis in scenes like this one is not the sacrifice of martyrdom, though some figures carry martyrs’ palms. Rather, the women are shown as a unit, standing strongly and lovingly together under the symbol of Christ. Niccolò di Pietro’s *Saint Ursula and her Maidens* from c. 1410 (Fig. 47) has the saint in hieratic scale, flanked by groups of her companions, who look about with sweet faces and hold up cruciform banners to frame Ursula’s halo. The whimsy of the virgins’ heads and emphasis on the patterning of Ursula’s clothing make this depiction a lighter one, again focusing on the camaraderie of the virgins and the cross which unifies them. The quality of unity is emphasized in these devotional images, both in the virgins’ physical similitude and spatial proximity. These artistic
conventions made paintings of St. Ursula and her companions a powerful visual metaphor for the spiritual support within a community of female religious. The beginning of the sixteenth century saw artists moving away from iconography stressing the unanimity of the virgins, however, instead giving prominence to St. Ursula’s authority over her companions.

*Innovations*

Vittore Carpaccio’s series of canvases for the Scuola di Sant’Orsola in Venice from 1490-96 brought immense innovation to the relatively standardized content and iconography of Ursula’s narrative. Elizabeth Rodini has noted that Carpaccio’s narrative is unusual in its focus on secular matters, particularly the relationship of Ursula to her betrothed.233 Particularly useful studies of the Venetian narrative cycle have explored Carpaccio’s innovations, which heavily influenced subsequent versions of the saint’s hagiography. Françoise Bardon’s 1983 essay, “De la ‘Passio’ à la ‘Peinture,’ Essai d’analyse historique du récit de la legend d’Ursule” demonstrates that, over the course of the medieval period, St. Ursula’s legend became mingled with *la littérature courtoise*.234 In a lengthier study published two years later, Bardon examines the refined and courtly atmosphere of Carpaccio’s Ursuline cycle, relating these innovations to the increasingly urbane complexion of Ursula’s hagiography.235 Bardon’s groundbreaking investigations were followed by Ludovico Zorzi’s extensive study of Carpaccio’s canvases in the context of contemporary

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theater, furthering our understanding of the new episodes and deliberate staging of Carpaccio's cycle. The work of Bardon and Zorzi opened up new avenues of scholarship on the Venetian paintings, and helped clarify the ways in which Ursuline imagery was changed by Carpaccio's reconceptualization of Ursula's story.

Carpaccio's Glorification of St. Ursula (Fig. 48), the culmination of the cycle, set a new precedent for Ursuline iconography. Here, Ursula is elevated on a tall pedestal of martyrs' palms, while her companions kneel below gazing up at her reverently, hands clasped in prayer. This composition redefines Ursula's relationship with both her followers and the viewer. Carpaccio creates distance, giving us a saint who is more heavenly intercessor than human exemplar. From the first half of the sixteenth century, Ursuline devotional images take up Carpaccio's innovation of the pedestal, evolving a decorative and formal image in lieu of the previously popular iconography emphasizing solidarity and equanimity amongst Ursula and her companions.

Giovanni Martini's depiction of St. Ursula and the Virgins from 1507 from the church of San Pietro martire in Udine (Fig. 49) places the figures under a coffered baldachin. Ursula stands on a short pedestal, mournfully looking out at the viewer. Her coterie has been reduced to 10, scattered to either side, neither addressing one another nor looking up to their leader. The image is one of stillness and self-conscious display. Defendente Ferrari's early sixteenth-century altarpiece of the same subject from the church of San Giovanni in Avigliana (Fig. 50) echoes this new courtly manner in which Ursula stands on a pedestal surrounded by virgins in

sumptuous gowns, gathered like ladies-in-waiting. Behind the tableau, angels hold up a cloth of honor, creating a stagelike space, furthering our sense of watching a deliberately performed drama. Moving to mid-century, Jacopo Bassano puts yet a further spin on the new iconography (Fig. 51). Flanked by Sts. Joseph and Valentine, Bassano’s Ursula is without her virginal retinue and atop a pedestal in an indeterminate setting. She is removed from her narrative; her standard no longer locating us in the story where Ursula stands firm against the Huns, but serving as mere identifying attribute. The richness, the nuance of meaning for a female viewer, particularly a member of a religious order, is lost. Female solidarity is slighted for a representation of saint as intercessor. Ursula points up to the heavens and gazes expectantly at the viewer, ready to receive the prayers of the faithful. Bassano reinterprets the traditional visual language associated with St. Ursula, presenting her not as a military leader on the battlefield, but as a voluptuous, vital work of art. Beside this new Ursula, Moretto’s contemporary painting appears at best orthodox, at worst formulaic. It is this formula, however, that allowed Moretto’s viewers to engage deeply with its subject matter—the unchanging aspect of devotional art of St. Ursula represented primarily the virtue of sorority.

Moretto’s Ursula

Moretto painted his St. Ursula and her 11,000 Virgin Companions in c. 1540-50 for the Dominican church of S. Clemente in Brescia, where it remains in situ.²³⁷ Working in the same years as Bassano, Moretto presents a St. Ursula more in line

²³⁷ Moretto executed a second version of the St. Ursula painting, for the Augustinian convent of Santa Maria Maddalena in Brescia, now in the Musei civici del Castello Sforzesco in Milan.
with the pre-Carpaccio tradition. In his work, the saint is in a full-length, frontal stance, flanked by her holy retinue, and brandishing two tall standards from which stream flags bearing red crosses on white ground. Above the tightly grouped female figures, the dove of the Holy Spirit is revealed in a burst of heavenly light.\textsuperscript{238}

Moretto’s image has been formally connected to the Brescian Company of St. Ursula by Valerio Guazzoni who notes that Moretto referenced Angela Merici at the heart of the painting—by securing Ursula’s cloak with a brooch in the shape of an angel, an etymological reference to her name.\textsuperscript{239} Despite including this topical contemporary allusion to Angela Merici in his painting, Moretto modeled his overall composition after an earlier depiction of the same subject. This earlier work was painted by Antonio Vivarini and Giovanni d’Allemagna in 1442-44 and was housed in the church of Sant’Angelo in Brescia (Fig. 52). Moretto’s choice of source material is, at first glance, perplexing. The Brescian panel by Vivarini and d’Allemagna features a late Gothic aesthetic, characterized by a flat gold background, elegant elongated figures, and emphasis on pattern. Scarcely can we imagine a work with less stylistic affinity to Moretto’s oeuvre. Indeed, Moretto’s updated version of the subject revels in surface textures and establishing a concretely realized setting for his figures. Given the divergent stylistic proclivities of Moretto and the artists of this mid-fifteenth-century Brescian altarpiece, we might question what advantage, beyond mere geographical convenience, led Moretto to this earlier painting as a basis for his own depiction of St. Ursula. After all, we have seen several examples of more

\textsuperscript{238} The second version of the painting features a half-length Madonna and Child in place of the dove.

\textsuperscript{239} Guazzoni, 44.
modern representations of the subject Moretto might have turned to for inspiration, not the least of which was Carpaccio's well-known and original Glorification.

**Strategic Archaism**

Firstly, by choosing a local example of Ursuline iconography from nearly 100 years earlier, Moretto demonstrates a long tradition of Ursuline devotion in Brescia, and thereby roots the Company's mission in this local religious heritage. Creating a sense that Merici’s Ursuline order is merely a continuation of a longstanding local spiritual custom, Moretto’s retrospective painting legitimizes the Company for the Brescian viewer. Further, the traditionalism of Moretto’s source material helps mitigate Merici’s radical views about uncloistered virginity that were currently causing some controversy within Brescian society.

Secondly, Moretto’s visual reference to the earlier painting can be viewed as an example of strategic archaism, an approach employed by sixteenth-century artists in which loyalty to familiar compositional and design elements satisfies patron demands for decorous devotional imagery. Contemporary viewers recognized the spiritual advantage of a deliberately humble style. For example, Alexander Nagel refers to a poem Vittoria Colonna composed about the St. Luke icon, praising its adherence to “the essential schema or design.” It is important to note that nothing here suggests poor technique or ugliness, rather a simplicity in design that was believed to more effectively facilitate devotional practice, “i modo umil, l’atto soave.” An impetus similar to that which led Byzantine icon painters to

record the source image as closely as possible, kept many artists faithful to
devotional images found particularly efficacious. Additionally, Marcia B. Hall has
recently explored the controversy inspired by Michelangelo’s *Last Judgment*, noting
particularly Pietro Aretino’s criticisms of the work. Aretino’s suggestion that
Michelangelo had separated himself from the common people in service of his art
reinforces the notion that the innovative representation of a familiar subject could
lessen its spiritual availability. Stuart Lingo has explored the use of an “archaizing
aesthetic” in the paintings of Federico Barocci, arguing for the importance of
tempering sensual beauty with conservative compositions and visionary subjects. For Lingo, the formal experiments of sixteenth-century artists represented a
distraction, even a threat to worship, and he sees works emulating a certain early
Renaissance pictorial style as a reaction against such gratuitous artistic
experimentation. While Lingo focuses on post-Tridentine art, Moretto’s oeuvre is
just one example of this retrospective artistic mode employed in the tumultuous
first half of the sixteenth century. By retaining the frontality, centrality, and hieratic
organization of earlier devotional art, Moretto adhered to artistic conventions
historically considered efficacious, at times even apotropaic.

242 In a letter of 1545, Aretino criticized most strongly the nudity of saints in
Michelangelo’s fresco, noting they would be appropriate in other settings, but not in the
pope’s chapel. Reprinted in The Works of Aretino, Translated into English from the
243 Marcia B. Hall. *The Sacred Image in the Age of Art: Titian, Tintoretto, Barocci, El
244 Stuart Lingo. *Federico Barocci: Allure and Devotion in Renaissance Painting*. New
245 Ibid., 13.
246 Ibid., 6.
An exploration of Moretto’s oeuvre shows that he was fond of a few particular compositions that he used many times. These arrangements are generally symmetrical and/or are bisected horizontally. Scholarship has overemphasized Moretto’s use of these motifs, however, leading to a misapprehension about Moretto’s knowledge of and engagement with contemporary artistic innovations. It is helpful to consider the ways in which Moretto incorporated new formal ideas into his oeuvre to better consider the function of more orthodox compositional choices in his work. For example, the composition of his *Virgin and Child with Saint Nicholas* from 1539 (Fig. 53) is a clear reference to Titian’s *Pesaro Altarpiece* from c. 1519-26 (Fig. 54). Peter Humfrey has noted the various ways in which this work can be seen as a striking leap forward in Venetian altarpiece design, particularly in its unusual inclusion of donor figures and asymmetrical composition. Moretto’s use of dramatically offset holy figures, playful Christ Child, and youthful donor visually addressing the viewer indicate an awareness of Titian’s visual experiments and a willingness to incorporate these innovations into his own work. Paintings like *Virgin and Child with St. Nicholas* complicate our conception of Moretto’s artistic identity, proving he was much more than a simple and pious technician. Moretto’s work tends to adhere to earlier conventions in composition, though moments like the *Madonna and Child with St. Nicholas* display a canny understanding of current explorations in new compositional solutions. Moretto was an adept businessman who recognized the differing needs of his patrons, and adjusted his style accordingly. Just as the artist might complete a cosmopolitan devotional painting for

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a wealthy donor, he equally appeased the tastes of his more conservative monastic patrons by adhering to image types that provided a focus for meditation and prayer through the use of didactic compositional organization and similar design elements; the St. Ursula is of the latter type. In describing this work, one of Moretto's prominent biographers, Pier Virgilio Begni Redona emphasizes the archaizing arrangement, noting its simplicity and elegance, and attributing this tendency in Moretto’s oeuvre to the influence of reforming efforts at the time, lending further support to the arguments presented by Lingo and others.248

In his St. Ursula, Moretto rejects the fashionable depiction of the pedestaled saint, instead harkening back to the previous century to devotional images showing Ursula and her companions as one close-knit group. As previously noted, Carpaccio’s innovation of the pedestal distanced Ursula from her companions and the viewer, creating a less effective tool for devotion dedicated to the saint as leader of a virgin “army” and exemplar for women religious, instead emphasizing her intercessory role, exalted above her coterie. Furthermore, the physical space introduced by the pedestal extended out to the virgin companions, who were increasingly depicted standing apart from one another, no longer as one body. This iconographical evolution disrupted a longstanding notion of Ursula’s group as the ideal representation of united female spirituality. Scott Montgomery has explored the history of visual representations of Ursula’s “army,” particularly in reliquary displays, finding emphasis on concepts of “group solidarity,” “the Holy Virgins as a

248 Begni Redona, 432.
single entity,” and a “corporate body.”\textsuperscript{249} As we have seen, Ursuline devotional paintings of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries continued this focus on unity until Carpaccio’s \textit{Glorification} inspired a new courtly representation of the subject. By eschewing the pedestaled variety of Ursuline imagery introduced by Carpaccio, Moretto looks back to a tradition better suited to a viewership interested in a visual manifestation of women united in Christ.

In the following chapter, we will explore the ways in which young chaste women were encouraged to conceptualize their own relationship to Christ. Additionally, we will consider the way proper conduct was prescribed and modeled through Moretto’s work and Merici’s writings.

\textsuperscript{249} Montgomery, 2010, 1.
Chapter Four  
“As befits loving Sisters” 
*Madonna and Child in Glory with Five Saints*

Moretto’s *Madonna and Child in Glory with Five Saints* (Fig. 55) was painted in 1540 for the Augustinian church of San Giorgio in Braida in Verona. The head abbot at S. Giorgio during these years was Leone Bugatto, a proud Brescian and art lover. There is little information about Bugatto himself, though the art he commissioned for Verona is quite revelatory. In addition to the painting he commissioned from Moretto, in the same year Bugatto requested a set of organ shutters from Moretto’s local contemporary, Girolamo Romanino. The abbot demonstrated his civic pride by ensuring that his church featured the works of the two most famous Brescian artists of his day. Moretto’s altarpiece, promoting five female virgin-martyrs, and painted in the year of Angela Merici’s death, perhaps alludes to the topical events of Brescia’s spiritual community. Lending weight to the notion that Bugatto’s artistic patronage was actively referencing his hometown is the 1545 painting made for S. Giorgio in Braida by Giovanni Francesco Caroto depicting St. Ursula and her 11,000 Virgin Companions (Fig. 56). Merici’s group was well-known in north Italy, and Bugatto would have been cognizant of developments within the order after Merici’s death, having family and friends still in Brescia. It is tempting to see Bugatto’s decision to add a St. Ursula altarpiece to S. Giorgio’s nave as a show of support for the Company during troubled times. Furthermore, the

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Ursulines were at this time associated solely with Brescia, for it was not until the 1560s that the order spread first to Milan, Venice, and then other northern cities.\(^{252}\)

Caroto’s painting is compositionally similar to Moretto’s S. Giorgio work, suggesting an affinity between them, as well.\(^{253}\)

Moretto’s painting depicts St. Cecilia in the center of the composition, standing against a cloudy horizon, and flanked by Sts. Lucy and Catherine of Alexandria on her left and Sts. Barbara and Agnes to her right. In the extreme foreground, at the figures’ feet, various musical instruments lie broken and strewn on the ground. Dominating the upper half of the composition, the Virgin Mary and Christ Child sit enthroned on a lunette of clouds, backed by a large glowing mandorla. Scholars have long acknowledged this work’s indebtedness to Raphael’s *Ecstasy of St. Cecilia* from c. 1517 (Fig. 57).\(^{254}\) Through an examination of the ways Moretto’s *Madonna and Glory with Five Saints* employs his source material, and the ways in which he diverges from it, I will argue that this painting serves as a meditation on holy virginity and mystic marriage, functioning as a display of appropriate modes of behavior for early modern brides of Christ. Further, I will make the case that in addition to his engagement with Raphael’s picture, Moretto sought inspiration in another Bolognese painting, a St. Ursula then attributed to Caterina Vigri (Fig. 58). His allusion to this image again connects his work to female saints and north Italian holy women, a theme that defines much of his work during these years.

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\(^{252}\) The Company of St. Ursula existed in Verona only from the 1580s forward.

\(^{253}\) Lodi, 63-66.

Raphael’s Cecilia

Firstly, it will be useful to examine the circumstances surrounding the creation of Raphael’s influential altarpiece, exploring its inspiration and importance for the Bolognese religious community. Raphael’s Ecstasy of St. Cecilia was commissioned in c. 1515 by Florentine Canon Antonio Pucci and his nephew Cardinal Lorenzo Pucci on behalf of a Bolognese holy woman, Elena Duglioli dall’Olio. The work was to be housed in a chapel dedicated to St. Cecilia (then under construction) in Bologna’s church of S. Giovanni in Monte. Much like Angela Merici, Duglioli was regarded as a “living saint,” and provided spiritual aid to prominent local citizens. Unlike Brescia’s holy woman, however, Dugliogli was not a member of a religious order, but instead married at a young age. Although the Bolognese had long esteemed her piety and spiritual insights, Duglioli’s fame grew when it was revealed around 1506 that her eighteen-year marriage was unconsummated, and that she and her husband purposely lived in a state of holy chastity together. This revelation prompted comparisons with St. Cecilia, whose hagiography recounts her own virginal marriage. Elena’s personal devotion to Cecilia was seen to be manifest in Duglioli’s decision to remain chaste in her

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256 Elena Duglioli dall’Oglio’s life and miracles are recorded in an anonymous legend written approximately ten years after her death in 1520. Biblioteca Comunale dell’Archiginnasio di Bologna (BCA). Leggenda anonima di Elena Duglioli, ms B 4314, f. 47.
Duglioli’s spiritual reputation was also linked to St. Cecilia’s association with music (her attribute being a small portable organ), as Elena was well known for receiving ecstatic visions that included celestial singing. When a papal legate gave Duglioli a relic of St. Cecilia as a spiritual offering, the identification between the two women deepened and prompted the building of the chapel in San Giovanni in Monte.

Raphael’s Ecstasy of St. Cecilia depicts the saint in a landscape in a full-length, frontal stance in the center of the composition. She is flanked by Sts. Paul and John the Evangelist to her right and Sts. Mary Magdalene and Augustine to her left. At the figures’ feet, in the immediate foreground, the artist has rendered a still life of stringed and percussion instruments. Cecilia herself holds a small organ, though her grip is loose and the organ’s pipes are slipping free. While the figures to either side glance variously at the viewer, one another, and down at the instruments in the dirt, only Cecilia seems aware of the miraculous event occurring above their heads. Looking up to the expanse of muted blue sky, Cecilia’s gaze falls on a break in the clouds, into a golden realm occupied by an angelic choir. Forgetting the instrument in her hands, the saint appears fixated on the vocal harmonies emitting from the heavens. As Christian Kleinbub has noted, St. Augustine’s De musica characterizes

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259 Zarri, 1983, 86.
260 Mossakowski, 4.
261 Zarri, 1983, 92-93. Additionally, Zarri notes that Elena’s funds were limited, and though she is often credited with the commissioning of the Cecilia chapel, Raphael’s painting, and a main chapel to John the Evangelist at the same church of San Giovanni in Monte, it is unlikely that she was financially able to contribute much to these efforts. Rather, her supporters, like the Pucci family, donated on her behalf. Zarri, 1983, 101-101.
instrumental music as carnal and imitative in juxtaposition to the pure interior music of the imagination.\textsuperscript{263} Visually expressing this idea, Raphael has Cecilia act as an exemplar for the viewer when she favors celestial music over the worldly melodies represented by the now-forgotten and trampled instruments before her on the ground. The notion of tiers of skillful worship, beginning with that aided by external stimuli (instrumental music) and ascending to that sustained internally by the devotee (imagined music), parallels common attitudes toward the proper use of religious imagery. In this way, Cecilia’s rejection of the mundane and her communion with a heavenly experience serves as a reminder to viewers that the goal of contemplation and prayer must be eventually to discard the visual tools of art and rely instead on mental “vision.”

\textit{Musical Cecilia}

The painting’s iconography has fascinated scholars, spawning investigations into the work’s relationship to such diverse subjects as Florentine Neoplatonism, the theology of Jean Gerson, and even the cult of a pagan Roman goddess.\textsuperscript{264} While Raphael’s altarpiece is undeniably unusual and easily bears the weight of myriad

\textsuperscript{263} Christian Kleinbub. \textit{Vision and the Visionary in Raphael}. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011, 108. In addition to his observation that Raphael’s painting functions as a metaphor for the individual’s rejection of the world for that of the divine, Kleinbub asserts that Raphael’s painting mode shifts from the more “imitative,” naturalistic rendering of the still life instruments to a more diffuse, ethereal style in the upper portion of the composition—a visual corollary to the spiritual practice enacted by the figure of Cecilia herself.

interpretations, its foremost aims were to show devotion to St. Cecilia and tie her sanctity to "living saint" Elena Duglioli and the Bolognese community she served. Most obviously, the saints gathered around the central figure of Cecilia reference the church in which the painting is housed (S. Giovanni) and the Lateran canons in authority there (under the Rule of St. Augustine). These saints, with Paul and Mary Magdalene, share with Cecilia (and Elena herself) the blessing of visionary experiences and the promotion of the virtue of chastity. In a less overt reference, the centrally-planned church in the background landscape over Cecilia’s left shoulder (Fig. 59) has been seen as an imaginative depiction of the church of San Giovanni in Monte in its antique form, thought to have been founded by Bologna’s patron saint (then bishop), St. Petronius, in the fifth century. Interestingly, one can make out scaffolding on the side of the church, perhaps a reference to the building of the Cecilia chapel. As well as harking back to the city’s religious history, this structure acknowledges the shocking claim, which had recently been disclosed by her “spiritual son,” Cardinal Lorenzo Pucci, that Elena Duglioli was not actually the offspring of a local notary, but was in fact the daughter of a Turk called Muhammad II, and had been miraculously transported from Constantinople to Bologna, to continue the spiritual work of St Petronius. Apart from these fascinating visual references to Duglioli and Bologna’s Early Christian mytho-history, most art historical scholarship has focused more specifically on the implications of Cecilia’s engagement with the heavenly music above.

265 Mossakowski, 3.
266 Ibid., 4.
267 Zarri, 1983, 97-98.
Raphael’s painting has been acclaimed for its innovative subject matter, in which the artist modifies a traditional *sacra conversazione* by replacing the standard enthroned Virgin and Child with the central standing figure of St. Cecilia. Further upsetting conventions of devotional art, Raphael’s central figure is not gazing out of the picture plane in expectation of a devotee’s supplications; rather Cecilia is otherwise occupied, eyes trained to the heavens. Raphael’s Cecilia is not merely a devotional work, but rather a work *about* devotion. Unusually, the altarpiece is a narrative, for the juxtaposition of godly and mundane music in the picture is generally read as a symbolic representation of Cecilia’s decision to practice holy virginity in marriage. In this way, the discarded musical instruments in the foreground represent the sensual worldly pleasures Cecilia rejects, while the angelic chorus above signifies the spiritually exalted path of sacred chastity.

Despite copious textual sources alleging this iconography to be radically new, however, Thomas Connolly has convincingly shown that St. Cecilia’s legend had been bound up with musical references since the Early Christian period.\(^{268}\) Her *Passio* from c. 495-500 is often cited as the inspiration for Cecilia’s traditional attribute, the organetto. Her hagiography describes her wedding day thusly: “while the organa played she sang in her heart to the Lord alone with words: ‘May my heart and my body be kept stainless lest I be confounded.’”\(^{269}\) Connolly argues that it is not the presence of an organa at her wedding feast which gave rise to her attribute, as has long been argued, but rather that the “singing in her heart” most endured because it serves as a powerful metaphor for internal prayer, unaided by outside

\(^{268}\) Connolly, 1995, 15
\(^{269}\) Ibid.
influences.\textsuperscript{270} Connolly has demonstrated that it was not only Cecilian devotional writing that centered on music, but that the visual tradition also focused on the musical Cecilia, and that indeed, representations of St. Cecilia holding an organ constitute an established iconography traceable to the early fourteenth century.\textsuperscript{271} In his extensive 1995 study, \textit{Mourning Into Joy}, Connolly argues that Cecilian iconography like that exhibited in Raphael's \textit{Ecstasy} is linked to images of the penitent David, having cast his instruments aside and gazing up to the heavens.\textsuperscript{272} A depiction of David-in-Penitence from a fifteenth-century book of hours (Fig. 60) provides an example of this subject, in which the psalmist kneels in a landscape, with a harp near him on the ground. In his desperate hope to save his son from God's wrath, David has forgotten his worldly care, embodied in the instrument he has cast away. In like manner, Cecilia’s abandoned instruments represent the worldly concerns she willingly trades for the celestial music embodied in the angelic choir visible above.\textsuperscript{273} We can simultaneously read her pose as indicative that she chooses not to worship by playing on her organ the carnal, imitative music St. Augustine warned against, instead “singing in her heart.”

\textit{Moretto's Cecilia}

In addition to its compelling subject matter, \textit{The Ecstasy of St. Cecilia} was praised for Raphael's technical prowess, displayed especially in his rendering of the still life in the foreground. It seems that Moretto was partially drawn to this image as a result of this still life, given that it is one of the few iconographical elements of

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{270} Ibid., 64.
\item \textsuperscript{271} Thomas Connolly, 1983, 129.
\item \textsuperscript{272} Connolly, 1995, 214, 219-221.
\item \textsuperscript{273} Mossakowski, 4.
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 Raphael’s original work that he retains. Further, we may conclude that Moretto was uninterested in the narrative aspect of Raphael’s altarpiece, for though Moretto depicts Cecilia holding the organetto he eschews the rendering of the angelic choir above. Without the heavenly revelation of music to oppose it, the saint’s portable organ serves as a mere identifying attribute; no longer representing the lowbrow foil to heaven’s choral melodies. In the same way, the earthly instruments at Cecilia’s feet, without being juxtaposed with the angel’s vocalizing, have lost their spiritual significance, and the narrative cannot be completed. It is entirely possible that Moretto was unaware of the narrative aspect of Raphael’s altarpiece, however, as his knowledge of the work may not have been firsthand, but rather through a print based on one of Raphael’s earlier designs for the painting.

Marcantonio Raimondi reproduced Raphael’s St. Cecilia in an engraving (Fig. 61), as he had many of the painter’s works. Raimondi’s print differs from Raphael’s final painting in several important ways. Most notably, Raphael’s angelic choir is now a band, playing their own instruments, a change that denudes the picture of its critical juxtaposition between mundane instrumental music and the exalted vocal harmonies Cecilia rightly favors. Anyone looking to Raimondi’s engraving would, therefore, be unaware of the careful way in which the artist opposed instrumental and vocal music, and the metaphoric content behind these disparate ways of making music. Nevertheless, the widespread dissemination of Raimondi’s print allowed artists, like Moretto, to study Raphael’s innovations. Kurt Rathe, in his study “Il Moretto e l’arte grafica” from 1941, was the first to suggest Moretto worked not
from Raphael’s painting itself, but instead from Raimondi’s engraving after it. Visual evidence supports the notion that Moretto looked to Raimondi’s print. Moretto’s Cecilia grasps an organetto with her right hand in exactly the same manner as does Raimondi’s, thumb and index splayed and extended, quite different from Raphael’s original composition. Of course, similarities between Raimondi’s engraving and Moretto’s painting do not preclude Moretto having visited Bologna himself. Valerio Guazzoni suggests that Moretto may have seen Raphael’s altarpiece in person, perhaps on a trip to the Romagna in 1535. The likelihood that Moretto did go to Bologna grows stronger in light of the similarities, discussed in chapter two, between the posthumous portrait of Caterina Vigri in Bologna and that of Angela Merici.

Further support for the notion that Moretto went to Bologna lies with his *Virgin and Child in Glory*, in its resemblance to a Bolognese painting from 1456 housed in the Corpus Domini and attributed to Caterina Vigri. This work depicts

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275 Guazzoni, 1981
276 Kathleen G. Arthur has noted that many works once given to Vigri have more recently been reattributed to artists such as Giovanni Bellini, Orazio di Jacopo, and the Master of the Franciscan Breviary. Arthur also points out, however, that there is not complete scholarly agreement as to the deattributions to Caterina Vigri, most notably in Jeryldene M. Wood’s study of the art of the Poor Clares, in which Wood retains all those attributions credited to Vigri by her contemporary Illuminata Bembo. For our purposes, exploring the ways in which the work was understood by Moretto and his contemporaries, we will take Vigri’s authorship as a given. Niccolò di Pietro is credited with painting a St. Ursula della Misericordia currently in the Pinacoteca Nazionale di Bologna. C. Bernardini, et al. *La pinacoteca nazionale di Bologna catalogo generale*. Bologna: Nuova Alfa Editoriale, 1987, 62. Orazio di Jacopo is now believed to be the author of the *Madonna and Child* at the Bolognese Corpus Domini. R. D’Amico and R. Grandi. *Il Tramonto del medioevo a Bologna: cantiere di San Petronio*. Bologna: Nuova Alfa Editoriale, 1987, 115-116. The Master of the Franciscan Breviary has been given the Christ the Savior also housed at the Corpus Domini in Bologna. M. Medica, “Alcune
St. Ursula being crowned by two floating putti, and flanked by pairs of virgin companions.\textsuperscript{277} At the lower left, the diminutive figure of a nun (commonly identified as Vigri herself) kneels in supplication. The remarkable similarities between Moretto’s Veronese altarpiece and this Ursuline painting make a compelling case for Moretto having visited the site. Certainly, the subject matter would have resonated with Moretto’s Brescian inclination, while the believed authorship of the fifteenth-century work would provide another opportunity for Moretto to draw in associations of holy women across time. Formally, Moretto’s picture has several uncanny correspondences with Vigri’s painting. The lunette of clouds upon which the Virgin rests echoes that formed by the putti in Vigri’s work. Additionally, Moretto’s depiction of Sts. Catherine and Lucy in conversation at the left bears a strong resemblance to the figure at Ursula’s immediate right in Vigri’s composition, whose downward glance may be compared to Lucy. In similar fashion, St. Catherine’s upturned gaze mirrors that of Vigri’s kneeling donor figure. Though inexact, Moretto’s evocation of these women mimics Vigri’s take on the physical and spiritual closeness arising within a group of women religious.

\textsuperscript{277} Of course, executed in the mid-fifteenth century, Vigri’s \textit{St. Ursula} depicts the women standing together on the ground, as was traditional before Carpaccio’s innovations at the turn of the century. Nevertheless, painted for a community of women religious, the more intimate relationship of the figures is appropriate. We will remember that Moretto painted a similarly conservative Ursuline work for a Brescian convent.
Mystic Marriage: Crown

Moretto’s painting features five female exemplars. We might expect Moretto to take a page from Raphael, and represent figures with resonance for a local audience, such as St. George (after the church where the painting was housed) or St. Zeno (patron of Verona). Instead, Moretto surrounds Cecilia with virgin-martyrs like herself: Sts. Catherine of Alexandria, Lucy, Barbara, and Agnes. Additionally, in eschewing Raphael’s narrative construct (by exchanging the angelic choir for the Madonna and Child enthroned), and thus no longer prioritizing Cecilia’s legend over that of the other saints pictured, Moretto’s is a less hierarchical scene. Rather than an evocation of a single woman’s spiritual exaltation, Moretto depicts a gathering of females who share the virtue of chastity. Moreover, in substituting Raphael’s diverse collection of saints for four female exemplars, Moretto’s altarpiece is concerned with an explicitly woman-centric spirituality. Like the other paintings discussed in this study, this work has Moretto exploring themes important to his female viewers, particularly those women living in holy chastity.

In addition to choosing a new cast of characters for his picture, Moretto has made significant changes to Raphael’s composition. For instance, in the lower portion of the canvas, Moretto avoids the more rigidly isocephalic arrangement of Raphael’s work. Rather, two figures are placed closer to the picture plane and lower in the composition, with St. Catherine of Alexandria kneeling to the left and Agnes seated at right. In this way, the heads of the five women pictured provide a visual counterpoint to the curving cloudbank above their heads. Moretto’s decision to place Agnes in spatial symmetry with Catherine provides both harmony and
pleasing variety to the composition. By depicting his figures comfortably reading, praying, and conversing together, Moretto evokes the physical and spiritual closeness arising within a group of women religious.

Although Moretto derived his St. Cecilia from Raphael’s earlier painting, he did not appropriate the figure wholesale. His Cecilia is more physically robust, stands with one foot on a stringed instrument in exaggerated contrapposto, and inclines her head at a more dramatic angle. Her clothes are both brighter and flashier, and her organ smaller and, though still backwards and upside down, its pipes are not threatening to fall from her grasp. One significant innovation that Moretto brings to his conceptualization of St. Cecilia is the inclusion of a halo of roses floating inches above the saint’s head; an ethereal floral crown. By contrast, Raphael’s central figure does not bear a crown, instead her hair is elaborately braided and piled on her head, accented by a nearly imperceptibly thin silver halo. What might have inspired Moretto to give his Cecilia this ornament?

Moretto’s inclusion of the floral wreath is actually a turn toward greater fidelity to Cecilia’s official hagiography, and serves as a potent symbol of her holy virginity. The Golden Legend recounts that, after Cecilia’s husband Valerian’s conversion, he returns home to find his wife in conversation with an angel. The celestial visitor proffers two crowns of roses and lilies to the couple, saying, “Keep ye these crowns with an undefouled and a clean body, for I have brought them to you from paradise, and they shall never fade nor wither nor lose their savor; nor they may not be seen but of them to whom chastity pleaseth.”278 After the angel

278 Voragine, 691.
departs from them, Valerian’s brother enters the room and smells the flowers, but
cannot see the crowns—confirming their mystical invisibility to all but the
spiritually chaste. Moretto’s inclusion of Cecilia’s floral crown, therefore,
explicitly prioritizes a viewership of holy virgins, revealing that which only
members of this sanctified state may witness.

Crown symbolism evokes mystic marriage as well, an event that was
reenacted by new members of the Company of St. Ursula upon their admittance to
the order. During the Ursuline Crowning of the Virgins ceremony, young girls
“married” Christ, as they took their vow to live chastely. Identifying as a bride of
Christ was at once a deeply personal conception of the individual’s relationship to
God and a powerful collective bond between women religious across different
regions, ages, and orders. Certainly Moretto’s understanding of this special
condition was established through his work for numerous convents in Brescia, with
the Company of St. Ursula helping broaden the context beyond the cloister. As
Querciolo Mazzonis has noted, the status of bride of Christ was unusual for
uncloistered women, as members of third orders (like Angela Merici herself) were
not asked to self-identify as spouses of Christ. Of course, many “living saints” and
mystics, including Merici, viewed their relationship with Christ as one of a
bridegroom, even without institutional impetus, though it was still rare for an
uncloistered woman to take on this identity. Despite its being unorthodox, Merici
desired that her Company’s members also consider themselves spiritual brides and

279 Ibid.
280 Secondo Libro Generale, fol. 100; Ledôchowska, Vol. I, 105-106.
281 Mazzonis, 42-43.
remain so for life. Her Testament explicitly describes the Ursulines as "brides, not of earthly, mortal husbands, who will rot away after death, but of the immortal Son of the eternal God."\(^{282}\) Mazzonis argues that the Ursuline order was actually a forerunner in this matter, stating, “The status of the Bride of Christ in the world proposed by Angela’s company did not exist among the ecclesiastical institutions available to women and was an original trait even when compared to other female forms of religious life, such as beguines, tertiaries, and pinzochere.”\(^{283}\) In Merici’s view, the members of her religious order achieved the true pinnacle of female spiritual attainment by becoming spouses of Christ. The last line of her Rule, in fact, describes the Ursuline in death, when “our sweet and most kind Spouse, Jesus Christ, may release her [from purgatory] and receive her into heavenly glory in the company of the virgins, placing upon her brow the golden crown of virginal triumph.”\(^{284}\) In bestowing upon uncloistered women the status of bride of Christ, it is little wonder that the Ursuline Company was seen as daringly controversial by many Brescians. Still the order pushed forward the idea of holy virginity in the world, a concept made manifest in Moretto’s work.

*Mystic Marriage: St. Catherine*

The prominent placement of St. Catherine of Alexandria at the lower left of Moretto’s composition would have immediately suggested to the early modern viewer the familiar iconography associated with Catherine’s mystic marriage, particularly in her genuflecting pose. The mystic marriage of St. Catherine was an

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\(^{283}\) Mazzonis, 45.

especially popular subject in the sixteenth century, more specifically in the Veneto. Stacey Kaplan notes that there were a markedly high number of small panel paintings depicting this scene made for domestic interiors in the region. An example of these works from Moretto’s own oeuvre is a small canvas from c. 1530, currently in a private collection in Brescia (Fig. 62). In accordance with contemporary fashion, Moretto seats figures before a curtain, slightly pulled to the right, revealing a distant landscape. The infant Christ places a ring on Catherine’s finger as she kneels before him, the Virgin looking on. Kaplan argues that the upswing in production of mystic marriage scenes was prompted by a shift in devotional practice, in which St. Catherine came to be seen as an ideal exemplar for new brides. While it is not entirely convincing that Catherine, the epitom of cloistered women religious, and by extension of the chaste contemplative life, should represent a positive role model for secular wives and mothers, Kaplan’s assertion that many of these images were produced during the Cinquecento in the Veneto gives weight to the argument that Catherine’s mere presence in an image would have called to mind her mystic marriage. Unsurprisingly, given the subject’s popularity, Moretto painted St. Catherine’s mystic marriage on several other occasions, as well. His *Madonna and Child with Saints* from 1540-45 (Fig. 63), currently in the collection of the National Gallery in London, features St. Catherine on one knee, receiving her ring from the infant Christ, while Sts. Clare, Joseph, Francis, and Nicholas of Bari serve as witnesses. In a similar altarpiece from 1540-50, for the church of S. Clemente in Brescia, Moretto depicts Catherine’s mystic marriage.

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marriage attended by Sts. Catherine of Siena (also a bride of Christ!), Paul, and
Jerome (Fig. 64). Additionally, there are several half-length depictions of Catherine’s
mystic marriage whose attribution to Moretto is still disputed.286

_The Madonna_

Moretto makes further reference to mystic marriage through his inclusion of
the Virgin Mary in glory, disproportionately large in the upper part of the
composition, and visually addressing the beholder. Carolyn Diskant Muir has shown
that references to Mary as Christ’s bride can be found in the liturgy from as early as
the twelfth century, and that medieval theology often urged female religious to look
to the Virgin as an exemplar as sponsa Christi.287 Noting that physically affectionate
representations of the Virgin and her son often depict the infant Christ, promoting
what appears at first glance to be a maternal relationship, Muir asserts that
additionally “such works reinforce and remind us of Mary’s status as the bride of
Christ.”288 This connotation was only strengthened by spiritual writings associating
Mary with the bride of the Song of Songs, as well as the larger metaphor of the
Church itself as Christ’s, with Mary the age-old embodiment of that Church.289

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286 Begni Redona,
287 Carolyn Diskant Muir. _Saintly Brides and Bridegrooms: The Mystic Marriage in
Northern Renaissance Art_. Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers n.v., 2012, 3-5.;
Marina Warner. _Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary_. New York:
Botsford, in _Women and Faith: Catholic Religious Life in Italy from Late Antiquity to the
Present_. eds. Lucetta Scaraffia and Gabriella Zarri. Cambridge: Harvard University Press,
1999, 31-41.
288 Muir, 4-6. Supporting her argument that the Virgin was conceptualized as a spouse of
Christ in the visual arts, as well as theological writings, Muir discusses manuscript
illuminations and mosaics which depict the Virgin and adult Christ caressing one another.
289 E. Ann Matter. _The Voice of My Beloved: The Song of Songs in Western Medieval
In addition to her role as mother and bride, Mary here is in the guise of the Madonna della Misericordia, sheltering the five virgin-martyrs beneath her voluminous mantle, which spans the canvas, borne aloft by cherubim. The motif of the Madonna of Mercy protecting a group of religious has often been used to express the unanimity of a spiritual community, visually manifesting their shared mission. We know that the articulation of corporate identity was important for many groups, helping strengthen ties between members as well as express a desired appearance to outsiders. This principle was at work even in the conceptualization of holy figures, as we saw in Scott Montgomery’s work on the Ursuline relic cult at Cologne.\textsuperscript{290} Even spiritual societies of laypersons employed the visual arts to convey fellowship. As Ellen Schiferl has noted in her discussion of confraternity portraiture, such as Perugino’s \textit{St. Francis with Confraternity Members} from 1499 (Fig. 65), these group portraits emphasize corporate identity by downplaying individualized physiognomies, rather evoking homogeneity among the group.\textsuperscript{291} Additionally, Schiferl notes these confraternal group portraits express equality through uniformity of dress and radial compositions.\textsuperscript{292} In this way, the work will not allude to individual members or a single period, thus the painting will provide a resonant expression of the group’s core values going into the future, not being linked to a specific time in the organization’s history.

\textsuperscript{290} Montgomery, 2010.
\textsuperscript{292} Schiferl, 13, 18.
A similar strategy applies for the many group portraits of religious orders in which the members gather under the Virgin's protective cloak, a pictorial trope with which Moretto was assuredly familiar. Though Marian devotion was widespread, the Madonna of Mercy was a particularly appropriate symbol for female religious groups, as the Virgin provided the ultimate exemplar for women embarking on a life of holy celibacy. Joanna Ziegler has argued that the example of the Virgin helped beguines "understand their roles as virgins and to inspire them time and again to persevere in seeking the rewards of that state." The earliest known depiction of the Madonna of Mercy type reinforces its association with female religious. A seal dating from 1335 from the Cistercian nunnery of Beaupré shows the female members of the convent sheltered beneath Mary's mantle (Fig. 66). The Madonna of Mercy has been theorized to derive from pagan coins depicting Jupiter shielding Trajan with a large robe. Another trail of evidence has led scholars to posit the Madonna of Mercy as a commutation of medieval depictions of Charity. Undoubtedly this image type has been employed in a vast range of contexts, perhaps most significantly in hospitals and other charitable institutions, where the Virgin's

295 Ibid.
cloak can be seen as a visual analogue to the encompassing hospital building in which the sick find safety and succor.\textsuperscript{297}

The Madonna of Misericordia, rich in symbolic connotations, has been adapted for many settings, yet that early Cistercian seal established from the first an indelible relationship between this particular incarnation of the Virgin and women's religious communities. The Mother of Mercy motif continued to be popular in convent patronage throughout the early modern period, and it is this tradition that Moretto’s Veronese altarpiece takes part in. Examples of the Madonna of Mercy for women’s religious groups exhibit many of the same qualities Schiferl describes in confraternal group portraits, homogeneous physiognomies, uniformity of dress, non-hierarchical compositions, to name a few. For instance, a late fourteenth-century panel painting attributed to the Master of the Orcanesque Misericordia (Fig. 67), for the convent of Santa Maria at Candeli near Florence, displays the Virgin extending her arms to the kneeling nuns arrayed against the ornately patterned backdrop of her cloak’s interior, spread winglike by a pair of angels. The diminutive devotees at Mary’s feet, dressed in identical habits, are further unified in their upturned gazes and hands clasped in prayer. Nothing differentiates the sisters, nor disrupts the spirit of collective worship. Similarly, an anonymous Umbrian artist indicates the perfect accord of a Clarissan community in a Madonna of Mercy work from the first half of the sixteenth century (Fig. 68), in which countless tiers of nuns, uniformly attired, look up at their protectress from beneath her cape. In the same way, a predella panel from 1510 commissioned by a Perugian consorority from

\textsuperscript{297} Ibid., 265-269.
Mariano di ser Austerio (Fig. 69), offers another example of a female religious company visually expressing their group identity as Marian devotees.\textsuperscript{298} The artist accentuates the unanimity of the order through the figures’ identical head coverings and kneeling postures of supplication. Additionally, Mariano depicts the donors as generic types, while individualizing the features of the Virgin and the saints flanking her. The specified physiognomies of the much larger holy figures only serve to support the unanimity of their devotees. These images demonstrate a lengthy pictorial history that presents the Virgin’s enveloping cloak as a metaphor for devotional fellowship. Moretto’s \textit{Madonna in Glory} draws upon this tradition to conceptually unite his virgin-martyrs. In this way, Moretto encourages the notion of these saintly intercessors, Catherine of Alexandria, Lucy, Cecilia, Barbara, and Agnes, as a coherent and unified group of women under the protection and guidance of the Virgin; exemplars for viewers with similar spiritual goals.

\textit{Ursula as Protectress}

A compelling offshoot of the Madonna of Mercy type relevant to the Brescian milieu in which Moretto was steeped was a northern subject popular in prints of the second half of the fifteenth century: a conflation of the Madonna della Misericordia with St. Ursula and her 11,000 Virgin Companions, sometimes referred to as Ursula as Protectress. In works like Wenzel von Olmutz’s engraving from 1481-1500 (Fig. 70), Ursula is depicted holding an arrow and palm of martyrdom, bearing all the hallmarks of a traditional Madonna della Misericordia. She is in extreme hierarchical scale, centrally located and full-length, serving as protection for small figures

\textsuperscript{298} Luigi Lanzi. \textit{Storia pittorica dell’Italia}. Bassano, 1795, 12.
gathered at her feet. Recognizing the arrow as Ursula’s attribute, we can then correctly read the figures she shelters under her cloak as her virgin companions, dressed as laywomen. In a roughly contemporary hand-colored metalcut attributed to the so-called Master of the Protective Saints of Cologne (Fig. 71), Ursula is again shown in this merciful guise, this time holding three arrows and an open book. Underneath Ursula’s cloak, her virgin companions wear indistinguishable dresses and feature the same long, flowing hair. In the artist’s making no effort to individualize the Ursuline devotees, the print operates similarly to convey unhierarchicial togetherness in worship. Hans Memling’s panel from his 1489 St. Ursula Shrine (Fig. 72) similarly depicts the saint, again with arrow, standing in a church interior with her much smaller companions tucked close about her and shielded by her mantle. Memling echoes the Gothic architecture in Ursula’s form, furthering correlating her with the Virgin as a personification of the Church. The popularity of the Ursula as Protectress subject conveys the depth of devotion to Ursula in Germany and the Low Countries in the late fifteenth century, a devotion certainly mirrored in Brescia under Angela Merici’s Ursuline influence. Moretto would not have had to go far to see an example of St. Ursula in her merciful guise, for a painting of this subject (Fig. 73), then attributed to Caterina Vigri, was on view in Bologna. Vigri’s work eschews Ursula’s attribute of martyrdom, the arrow, instead flanking her with two banners like those displayed in much of the Ursuline devotional art we have studied. Here the saint spreads her own cloak to shield a large group of adoring faithful.

This work, from c. 1444, is currently given to Lorenzo da Venezia, and housed in the Pinacoteca Nazionale di Bologna.
Virgo inter virgines

Israhel van Meckenem’s engraving of Ursula as Protectress from the second half of the fifteenth century (Fig. 74), while exhibiting many of the features characteristic of this subject, marks a new take on the image. Here Van Meckenem depicts Ursula’s mantle as swags of bunting, uplifted by angels, while around her feet six virgin companions are seated, reading and conversing together. In its conceptualization of the companions as a seated group, engaging with one another, Van Meckenem’s work combines the Ursula as Protectress type with another northern subject popular during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, the Virgo inter virgines or Virgin Among the Virgins. The Virgo inter virgines, itself a variant on the sacra conversazione, depicts the Virgin Mary seated with a small group of female saints, generally some combination of Sts. Catherine of Alexandria, Ursula, Barbara, Lucy, Agnes, Cecilia, and other virgin-martyrs. Stanley Weed has argued that Virgo inter virgines images address the three fundamental expressions of early modern female spirituality: sister, bride, and mother. An example of this image type from c. 1500 (Fig. 75), credited to the Master of the Virgo inter virgines, exhibits distinctive features of the subject. The female saints are seated comfortably around the Virgin, reading and playing with the Christ Child. The group is bound by a rectangular fence, physically separating them from standing figures in the middleground. Virgo inter virgines images often show the group of holy women in

an enclosed space, more commonly a lush garden, making this subject particularly popular with cloistered female religious orders. These Virgin inter virgines paintings allude to the hortus conclusus of the Madonna, encouraging female religious orders’ imitatio Mariae devotions. Joanna Ziegler, in her work on the beguines, has explored the importance of imitatio Mariae even for uncloistered virgins, suggesting the spiritual efficacy of this iconography for tertiaries and other “worldly” holy virgins. An example of the Virgo inter virgines from c. 1488, attributed to the Master of the Legend of St. Lucy (Fig. 76), corroborates the notion of this subject as an expression of Marian reverence, while simultaneously displaying an increased emphasis on mystic marriage. Here the Virgin is enthroned against a cloth of honor, in a secluded bower, looking over a vast landscape. To her immediate right, St. Catherine of Alexandria, identifiable by the wheel pattern of her cloak, accepts a ring from the Christ Child, becoming his spiritual bride. At the Virgin’s left, St. Barbara, also prominently displaying her attribute, the tower, on her cape, holds the infant’s hand while extending forth a red carnation, symbol of her own matrimonial bond with Christ. At the lower right, uncommonly, St. Agnes seated with her lamb, further stresses the mystic marriage theme by holding up a ring, signifying her status as a bride of Christ. Hans Memling’s *Virgin and Child*

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302 Stanley E. Weed has conducted the most thorough study of the Virgo inter virgines type to date. See: Stanley E. Weed. *The Virgo inter virgines: Art and the Devotion to Virgin Saints in the Low Countries and Germany, 1400-1530*. Ph.D. diss, University of Pennsylvania, 2002.


304 Ziegler, 112-26, 125.

305 Carolyn Diskant Muir’s study of St. Agnes as a bride of Christ demonstrates that a rash of images depicting this unusual subject cropped up in northern Europe between 1450 and 1520, including several Virgo inter virgines paintings. Her work shows the
Surrounded by Saints from c. 1475 (Fig. 77) is another example of this iconographical phenomenon, depicting St. Agnes in her role as sponsa Christi. Muir notes that these images sometimes placed Sts. Agnes and Catherine on either side of the Virgin and Child, the visual parallel of Agnes with Catherine serving to “reinforce the idea of marriage to Christ by the inclusion of the most famous of his brides.”

Stanley Weed also notes that though common themes in Virgo inter virgines, (namely identification with female saints, mystical marriage, and Marian devotion), could certainly resonate with male and female viewers, ordained or lay persons, the bringing together of these three foci of worship in one image lends itself to the ways in which early modern women were encouraged to practice their faith.

Moretto’s Madonna and Child with Five Saints exhibits many characteristics associated with Virgo inter virgines paintings, showing a similar approach to the visual expression of female spirituality. Moretto depicts the holy figures reading and conversing, as we see in many examples of this Northern subject. Additionally, his figures display the fine dress of the upper class. He also emphasizes holy virginity through the inclusion of St. Cecilia’s crown of roses, and by flanking the central figure with Sts. Catherine and Agnes, female exemplars commonly associated with spike in devotion to St. Agnes as bride coincided with the translation of her relics, as well as the rise of the Devotio Moderna movement. Muir, “St. Agnes of Rome as a Bride of Christ: A Northern European Phenomenon, c. 1450-1520,” Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art Vol. 31, No. 2 (2004-2005), 134-155.

Ibid., 140.


mystic marriage. In this way, Moretto’s painting for the church of San Giorgio in Braidà, like the Virgo inter virgines, represents an ideal female religious community, one that his female viewers would recognize as attractive and aspirational.

_Appropriate Behavior_

Intended for the lay worshiper, Moretto’s work provides a visual expression of ideal faith, as well. Through the varying attitudes of its five saints, the picture models appropriate behavior for the pious female viewer, modes of conduct echoed in Angela Merici’s writings for her Company. In her writings, Merici stresses over and over again the importance of mutual support and communion. To foster this togetherness, her _Testament_, written for the older widows entrusted with overseeing and mothering the Ursulines, directs the mistresses of the order to “assemble your daughters from time to time, let them hear a short sermon, or homily; so they will be able to meet one another again as befits loving Sisters, discussing spiritual things together and in this way give pleasure and encouragement to one another.”

Sts. Catherine and Lucy, conversing at the left of Moretto’s composition, exemplify this religious dialogue, as do many similar Virgo inter virgines scenes. Together with encouraging the discussion of spiritual matters, Merici’s Rule also addresses the necessity of solitary prayer. She provides instruction for both the literate and illiterate of her Company. At the lower right of Moretto’s _Virgin in Glory_, St. Agnes sits studying scripture, exemplifying this important spiritual practice. To further guide her followers, Merici is careful to distinguish between verbal and mental prayer, placing the latter above the former.

309 Merici, _Testament_, in Ledóchowska, 263.
The Ursuline Rule teaches that vocal prayer “keeps our bodily senses alert and prepares us for mental prayer.”\footnote{Merici, Rule in Ledóchowska, 281.} At the most basic level of worship, Merici instructs, “Each of you should say daily at least the Office of Our Lady and the seven penitential psalms with devotion and attention.”\footnote{Ibid.} Similarly, Merici provides a prayer of her own creation for her followers to recite, while again asserting that it is to be a mere prelude to internal worship: “To provide matter and also to open the way for mental prayer, we urge each one daily to raise her mind to God and to train herself by saying in the secret of her heart [the following prayer].”\footnote{Ibid., 282.} The distinction between vocal prayer, that aided by external stimuli, and mental or internal prayer is present in Moretto’s picture as well. St. Barbara, at the back right, gazes up at the Virgin and Child, her mouth slightly open. Though the virgin-martyr rightly meditates on the holy figures before her, and prays to them aloud (indicated by her parted lips), she remains reliant on these outward displays for her spiritual communion. Conversely, St. Cecilia, standing in the center of the composition and vertically aligned with the Virgin above her, looks up into an indeterminate space, participating in the intellectual devotion promoted by Merici and others. Notably, Merici characterizes the mental recitation of a memorized prayer as merely “opening the way” for internal prayer, clearly urging the Ursulines to strive for communion with the divine through their own imagination and interior vision. St. Cecilia’s gaze, soft and unfixed, bespeaks her spiritual achievement. Thus, Moretto’s saints show women engaged in the spiritual pursuits advocated by Merici. A devout
female viewer might expect to meditate on the Virgin and Child as does Barbara, read scripture like Agnes, take part in religious discussions as demonstrated by Catherina and Lucy, and ultimately to achieve the visionary internalized piety that Cecilia epitomizes here. In this way, by uniting these virgin-martyrs under the mantle of the Virgin of Mercy, and depicting the range of spiritual tools available to female devotees at this time, Moretto makes visible the ideal of Merici and her followers.

In the following chapter, we will delve into contemporary worship practices such as Eucharistic devotion and fasting in the context of the sixteenth-century Reform movement. We will analyze the ways Moretto’s work reflected and helped create a religious environment in which saintly exemplars promoted imitatio Christi through physical hardship.
Chapter Five:
“Our flesh and our sensuality are not dead”

Moretto's *Five Female Saints* (Fig. 78) was painted between 1540 and 1550 for the Brescian church of San Clemente. The work depicts Sts. Cecilia, Lucy, Agatha, Agnes, and Barbara standing before an archway within which the dove of the Holy Spirit is revealed in a burst of heavenly light. In its representation of the central full-length figure of St. Cecilia flanked by pairs of saints, the altarpiece shows the clear influence of Raphael’s well-known *Ecstasy of St. Cecilia*, as well as Moretto’s earlier *Virgin and Child in Glory with Five Saints*. These similarities are ultimately superficial, however, as this work features a significantly altered composition, subject, and overall atmosphere. *Five Female Saints* is a dark painting, full of muted colors, with its figures standing not in a bright landscape, but on a shallow ledge against stone and shadow. The Dominican rectors who paid for the artist’s *St. Ursula and her 11,000 Virgin Companions* commissioned this work also, which hangs beside the earlier painting on the right side of the nave. Scholars have questioned whether there may be connections between San Clemente and the Company of St. Ursula, though any conclusions would be speculative as we do not yet have documentary evidence of a direct association between the Dominicans and Ursulines. What can be asserted with confidence is that the commissioning of a St. Ursula altarpiece in Brescia in the years following Angela Merici’s death demonstrated clear support for the Company, and given the growing numbers of the order, it is more than likely that San Clemente’s parishioners would have been well acquainted with at least one member of the Company, whether through family, work, or direct involvement.
themselves. Located mere feet from his *St. Ursula*, Moretto’s *Five Female Saints* similarly addresses themes pertinent to members of Merici’s Company and those sympathetic to their mission. As with the other paintings included in this study, *Five Female Saints* is concerned with holy virginity, the foremost virtue of Merici’s religious philosophy. Additionally, this work reflects the impact of the growing Protestant threat through its emphasis on Eucharistic devotion. We will see that promotion of the Blessed Sacrament was a significant aspect in sixteenth-century Brescia’s religious community, a fact made clear from the many works in Moretto’s oeuvre with Eucharistic themes. I will argue that this picture’s emphasis on tactility and sensuous experience serves to draw parallels between the suffering body of Christ present in the Holy Eucharist and the body work associated with early modern women’s spirituality, exemplified here by Moretto’s virgin-martyrs.

*Lutheranism and Reform in Brescia*

In addition to the threat of witchcraft discussed in chapter one, Cinquecento Brescia was strongly affected by the heresies being fomented in the north. Proximity to Venice and trade with Germany meant that Brescia was fairly steeped in Protestant influence. Lutheran literature was easily available in the region from about 1525 thanks to Brescia’s prominent publishing houses. Massimo Firpo notes that many cities in Venice’s terraferma holdings had visible reformist

313 Britannico was the most active Brescian publisher printing reformist content. Mazzonis, 141.
populations, consisting of peasants, nobility, and clergy alike. Members of all social classes embraced Lutheranism, including members of Brescia’s wealthiest, most powerful families. Upwards of 100 friars left their orders in the Bresciano, and many more were suspected of heterodox leanings. Angela Merici herself addressed heretical influences in her Councils, noting that the Colonelle were responsible for guarding [the virgin members] against the harmful opinions of heretics: when you hear a preacher, or anyone else, has a reputation for heresy, or for preaching novel doctrines outside the common practice of the Church, and contrary to what you have received from us, then tactfully hinder your daughters from listening to people like that, for it often happens that they sow bad seeds in their minds, which afterwards it is very difficult to uproot. Keep to the traditional way and practice of the Church, established and confirmed by so many saints, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The holy woman then goes on to suggest her followers “pray, and get others to pray, that God will not abandon His Church, but will deign to reform it in the way it pleases him.” Merici’s warnings to her followers to be vigilant against the seductive sway of reformist ideas reflect an increasing sense of unease that Protestantism was gaining ground, and that the weak-minded or unwary were more vulnerable to its effects. It became clear to members of the religious community that a coordinated response was necessary to combat the reformist threat.

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317 Cistellini, 450.
318 Merici, Councils, in Ledôchowska, 250.
319 Ibid., 251.
The Church took a three-pronged approach to the problem. Firstly, efforts were made to root out heresy by prosecuting those suspected of reformist activity. Secondly, tactics were devised to dam the flow of Protestant conversions. And lastly, the Church was obliged to publicly refute Protestant criticism of orthodox doctrine and practice.\textsuperscript{320} Said criticisms included the denunciation of the doctrine of transubstantiation, the belief that during the Eucharistic sacrament the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ, though their substance appears unchanged.\textsuperscript{321} Protestants rejected this belief, developing instead the notion of consubstantiation, in which Christ’s body and blood “coexist” with the bread and wine, even as these elements retain their discreet essences.\textsuperscript{322} Additionally, and perhaps more threateningly, Protestants attributed this miraculous event solely to God, divesting the celebrant of his key role in transforming the nature of the Eucharistic gifts whether trans- or consubstantially.\textsuperscript{323} Reformist denial of Christ’s Real Presence in the consecrated host was seen as weakening the sacrality of the mass’s very purpose, as well as lessening the authority of the clergy to mediate between the laity and the divine.

Eucharistic Devotion

Little wonder that the sixteenth century shows an increasing emphasis on the Eucharist and Christ’s Real Presence therein. This emphasis included a rise in frequency of communion, the creation of lay societies dedicated to the Holy Sacrament, as well as a flourishing of artworks with overtly Eucharistic themes.\footnote{Frederick J. McGinness, “‘Roma Sancta’ and the Saint: Eucharist, Chastity, and the Logic of Catholic Reform,” \textit{Historical Reflections}, Vol. 15, No. 1, Culture, Society and Religion in Early Modern Europe: Essays by the Students and Colleagues of William J. Bouwsma, Spring 1988: 101-112.}

Veneration of the Host had a long history in Church practice, having originated in the ritualized display and adoration of the Crucifix as part of Passion liturgy. During the medieval period, Eucharistic devotion became bound up with the contemplation of Christ’s sacrifice, and the Host replaced the Crucifix as the focus of display and worship.\footnote{Johanna Fassl. \textit{Sacred Eloquence: Giambattista Tiepolo and the Rhetoric of the Altarpiece}. Bern: Peter Lang AG, 2010: 130.} As Charles Kovacs III has noted, the growing importance of the Eucharistic Host as an object of veneration coincided with Berengar of Tours’ twelfth-century argument against the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist.\footnote{Charles C. Kovacs III, “Monstrances,” \textit{Eucharistic Vessels of the Middle Ages}. Busch-Reisinger Museum, 1975: 97-98.} Berengar promoted a symbolic interpretation of the sacrament of the Eucharist, and it was on the heels of his espousal that display and contemplation of the Host came to be widespread practice.\footnote{Ibid., 98. For an explanation of Berengar’s philosophical inquiry into the nature of the Eucharist, as well as its consequences, see: Edward J. Kilmartin. \textit{The Eucharist in the West: History and Theology}. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998: 97-102.} It was also at this time that the verb \textit{transsubstantiare}
was applied to the change undergone by the Eucharistic gifts during the sacrament.\textsuperscript{328}

The first half of the Cinquecento heralded a renewed period of contention as to the nature of the Eucharist, with a similar ecclesiastical response promoting veneration of the body of Christ in the form of the Host, particularly highlighting the clergy’s essential role in its consecration. Eucharistic devotion was more rigidly codified in the Quarantore, or Forty Hours’ Devotion, discussed in chapter one. Established in Milan in 1527, the practice quickly spread to neighboring regions, receiving Pope Paul III’s official approval in 1539.\textsuperscript{329} The devotion, between masses, entailed the display of a consecrated Host on the high altar for the period of approximately forty hours, during which time worshipers (called “watchers”) were required to look upon the Host while praying before it.\textsuperscript{330} The sight component of this practice made it particularly suited to reference in the visual arts, where the Eucharist could be made perpetually available for adoration.

As the leading painter of devotional art in sixteenth-century Brescia, Moretto’s oeuvre can be expected to reflect topical issues concerning his patrons, prominent members of the city’s religious community. Working with his clientele

\textsuperscript{328} The first use of \textit{transsubstantiare} in its Eucharistic application is found in Rolando Bandinelli’s \textit{Sententiae} from c. 1150, and the term was officially adopted by the church at the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215. Kilmartin, 145. Notably, the doctrine of Transubstantiation was confirmed by the Council of Trent in 1562, indicating that this tenet of the Church was still felt to be under attack going into the second half of the sixteenth century. Begni Redona, 339.


within the strictures of Cinquecento decorum, Moretto was involved in the collaborative creation of Sancta Brixia for the early modern era. In much the same way that the seam of female spirituality runs through Moretto’s work, Eucharistic devotion is a theme he will tackle again and again. Valerio Guazzoni, the first scholar to make a sustained effort to situate Moretto’s painting within the Brescian religious context, has explored his work as propaganda against the heretical threat of Lutheranism, including a significant number of commissions for pictures referencing the Holy Sacrament.\textsuperscript{331} Indeed, Eucharistic imagery bookends his career.

In March 1521, Moretto and his Brescian contemporary, Romanino, received a joint commission to decorate a chapel dedicated to the Corpus Domini in the local church of S. Giovanni.\textsuperscript{332} The chapel’s iconographical program is dedicated to the theme of Christ as the bread of life. The painters shared the work equally, with each receiving two square panels and a lunette. Moretto painted the Old Testament scenes (\textit{Gathering of Manna} and \textit{Elijah Comforted by the Angel}) (Figs. 79 & 80), and a large \textit{Last Supper} (Fig. 81). Romanino represented stories from the New Testament (\textit{Raising of Lazarus} and \textit{Supper in the House of Simon the Pharisee}) (Figs. 82 & 83),

\textsuperscript{331} Guazzoni, 1981, 41-54. Guazzoni notes that a confraternity dedicated to the Blessed Sacrament had been active at the Cathedral of Brescia since the late fifteenth century, and that Moretto himself was a committed member of this group. He further proposes the possibility that artists like Moretto may have joined such societies in hopes of more easily obtaining commissions from the group and its individual members. The suggestion that Moretto’s confraternal participation was, on some level, mercenary is particularly interesting given the overwhelming tendency in the literature to view him as a man devout in the extreme. Aside from inquiries on his stylistic influences, the artist’s piety has been the theme of the majority of scholarship about him. Few historians besides Guazzoni have endeavored to discern Moretto as a businessman. See, for example: Giuseppe Fusari. \textit{Moretto e la sua bottega: capolavori ritrovati}. Brescia, Museo Diocesano, 2007.

and the *Miracle of the Sacrament* or *Mass of St. Gregory* (Fig. 84). Giovanni Testori has argued that the artists divided the imagery in such a way that Romanino would receive the more emotive works of the New Testament, suited to his own temperament, while Moretto opted for the calmer, more contemplative events of the Old Testament. Guazzoni views the chapel instead as a whole, describing it as “a sort of Eucharistic treatise.” Firstly we are presented with typological scenes, alluding to Christ’s future sacrifice and salvation. Secondly, Moretto depicts the realization of that promise in Christ’s Passion. And lastly, Romanino’s *Mass of St. Gregory* represents the truth of Christ’s Real Presence at each subsequent celebration of the Sacrament.

Moretto would again be called upon to promote Eucharistic devotion in a commission for another confraternity of the Corpus Domini, this time at the church of Santi Cosmas e Damiano in the Bresciano town of Marmentino. This altarpiece, *The Eucharistic Christ with Sts. Cosmas and Damian* from c. 1540, depicts these martyr-brothers genuflecting before a small altar on which the Host is displayed in a monstrance and draped with a translucent veil. A radiant Christ occupies the upper portion of the composition, hovering on a cloudbank and grasping a cross and pillar.

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334 Testori, 23. Testori attempts to read the oeuvres of these artists as both indicative of their personal religious personalities, as well as directly at odds with one another. This has continued to be a popular lens through which to examine the work of Moretto and Romanino, though it creates a problematically restrictive binary from which these painters are said to operate, while telling us little of importance about the artists or their work. For an example of this scholarship, see: Elvira Cassa Salvi, “Religiosità di Moretto e Romanino a confronto,” in Begni Redona, 1988, 258-263.
335 Guazzoni, 17.
336 Ibid.
allusions to the physical suffering before death. A similar work for the church of San
Bartolomeo apostolo in Castenedolo from about five years later again shows Christ
surrounded by instruments of the Passion, and floating above an altar, which
displays a Host in a veiled architectural monstrance. Two saints appear below,
kneeling before a sumptuous altar cloth—this time Sts. Bartholomew and Roch,
gazing up at Christ in reverence. Guazzoni has examined the circumstances of these
works’ commission, finding that a reforming prelate, Donato Savallo, was
responsible for their creation. Savallo had been brought to Brescia in 1512 in
order to stamp out heresy in the region, and these two images address Savallo’s
work in that regard. Scholars see Moretto’s depiction of the Eucharistic Christ as a
direct reference to the Real Presence, and the worshiping saints a powerful
statement about the worthiness of the Host to be venerated. Savallo’s distribution
of images like these to the communities under his spiritual care show just how
important promotion of the doctrine of transubstantiation was felt to be at this time
in the Church’s history.

Moretto’s two Eucharistic Christs for Savallo can be seen as simulations of
Quarantore practice. Scholars have focused research primarily on Baroque
Quarantore devotions, which were by all accounts multisensory spectacles intended
to awe the worshiper and rouse strong emotions. In his recent study, Listening as
Spiritual Practice in Early Modern Italy, Andrew dell’Antonio describes the abundant

337 Ibid., 49-51.
338 Ibid.; Begni Redona, 339.
339 Mark Weil, “The Devotion of the Forty Hours and Roman Baroque Illusions,” Journal
stimuli participants in the Quarantore would have experienced, including sermons, 
music, incense, and visual displays. Further dazzling the worshiper, altars were 
frequently decked out with candles, canopies, and mirrors, in addition to the 
requisite monstrance for the exposition of the Host. Although the Quarantore had 
not yet developed into this theatrical performance in the 1540s, Moretto’s 
Eucharistic altarpieces feature monstrances on altars along with candles, oil lamps, 
draped veils, and other sumptuous furnishings. It is evident that even in the early 
years of the Forty Hours’ Devotion, ritualized Eucharistic reverence emphasized the 
sanctity of the object of veneration through a full range of decorative elements 
meant to draw the eye and communicate the glory of Christ’s True Presence.

A much smaller painting dated to c. 1545-50, and painted for an unknown 
patron, Moretto’s La Fede (Fig. 85) underscores Eucharistic devotion as a primary 
means by which the faithful should worship. The picture shows a three-quarter 
length female figure, leaning a large cross against her left shoulder, and holding up a 
chalice with her right arm, which rests on a ledge. The work has a fictive wooden 
box around its edge, on which a small bouquet of flowers rests at the lower right, the 
ribbon with which they are tied referencing the biblical verse: “the righteous will 
live by faith.” The young personification of this virtue wears a veil through which 
she gazes upon the chalice, above which hovers a consecrated Host, emitting a 
bright glow. Perhaps made for a domestic space, this small painting frankly 

demonstrates that Faith itself is the act of Eucharistic devotion.

340 Andrew dell’Antonio. *Listening as a Spiritual Practice in Early Modern Italy*. 
342 Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; and Hebrews 10:38.
For the Brescian church of Santi Nazaro e Celso, in 1541-42 Moretto painted an altarpiece depicting the *Passion of Christ with Moses and Solomon* (Fig. 86). Christ stands on a lunette of clouds, lit by a glowing diffuse mandorla. He is surrounded by putti carrying instruments of the Passion. Christ displays his wounds to the viewer, as a stream of blood pours from his side, streaming into a chalice held by an angel below. In his other hand, the angel holds a tablet with a Latin inscription that reads, “This is the bread of new life.” At the lower left, a figure identified as Moses looks up at Christ, while resting his forearms on a tablet whose heavily shadowed inscription proclaims Moses’ words from Exodus 16:15, “It is the bread the Lord has given you to eat.” Completing the composition, the figure of Solomon looks out at the viewer, pointing to Christ, and resting casually on a tablet bearing a phrase from the Song of Songs, “Eat, friends, and be inebriated, my dearly beloved.” Although considered of lesser quality, perhaps having been executed largely by assistants, this work serves as a celebration of the Eucharistic gifts, and the Church’s promotion of this sacrament as integral to salvation.

Moretto also contributed a work of overt Eucharistic reference to the church of S. Clemente, in a chapel across the nave from his *Five Female Saints*. In this work, dated by scholars to c. 1550-54, Melchisedek is shown offering bread and wine to Abraham (Fig. 87). This scene from the book of Genesis depicts Melchisedek welcoming Abraham to Salem and showing him homage. The episode serves as a

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[^343]: Moretto also depicted this subject for the Duomo Vecchio in Brescia, though he died before it was completed. The work was finished by Luca Mombello. For the dating of the San Clemente work, see: Begni Redona, 512-13.

[^344]: Specifically, Genesis 14:18-20.
typology of the Eucharist, and reinforces the importance of Eucharistic devotion for the Dominican rectors of S. Clemente, and the entire Brescian community.

*The Dove Pyx*

*Five Female Saints*, also commissioned for S. Clemente, reflects the popularity of imagery evoking the Blessed Sacrament, though scholars have appeared to overlook this, as the work has never been included in discussions of Moretto’s Eucharistic altarpieces. It is more commonly passed off as a retread of Moretto’s Veronese altarpiece, if of slightly lesser quality. One of the marked differences between this painting and the earlier *Madonna and Child in Glory with Five Saints*, both heavily influenced by Raphael’s *Ecstasy of St. Cecilia*, is the setting. In the first picture, Moretto sets his figures in a bright landscape, similar to the scene Raphael depicted in his Bolognese work. Conversely, in *Five Female Saints*, Moretto instead stands his figures in a claustrophobic space against a large shadowy archway. The change in background is at first inexplicable, resulting in a far less pleasing overall composition. However, the artist’s decision to set these virgin-martyrs in front of an arch takes on a meaningful connotation when considering the symbol of the Holy Spirit framed within it. Moretto’s choice to place the dove under an archway would have been recognizable to viewers as a reference to liturgical vessels that were commonly displayed suspended above the high altar.

From the early twelfth century dove-shaped pyxes (or columbas) came into popular use for the storage of consecrated hosts, and were continuously hung from
the ceiling above the altar. An engraving demonstrates the method by which the containers were suspended (Fig. 88)—chains fixed to a plate under the bird connect above it to a longer chain that is attached to the ceiling. Through his inclusion of the floating dove in an archway, Moretto directly references these Eucharistic containers, drawing a parallel between the transubstantiated flesh of Christ held within the pyx and the fleshly bodies of the saints below. Limoges was the primary production site of these popular liturgical vessels, though their use was widespread throughout Christendom. An example of a dove pyx made in Limoges in c. 1200-1225 (Fig. 89), now in the Cathedral and Museum of Salzburg, indicates the appearance of these objects—gleaming metalwork birds with gilding and colorful champlevé enamel embellishments. The consecrated hosts were stored within a smaller container, which was then placed in the hollow of the dove’s body, accessible through a hinged door most often on the back of the bird, as can be seen in the Salzburg pyx. There is at least one example of a dove pyx with a hinged wing, which would have been lifted up as if in flight to access the interior of the bird. There is no evidence that dove pyxes were produced featuring spread wings, as depicted in Moretto’s painting, however, there were popular reports of female

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345 Frederick George Lee asserts that the dove-shaped liturgical vessel has been in use since the early Christian period. He cites the will of a fifth-century bishop of Tours which bequeaths a silver dove to another clergy member. Frederick George Lee. *A Glossary of Liturgical and Ecclesiastical Terms*. London: Bernard Quaritch: 1877, 90.

mystics, at prayer before the altar, experiencing these objects miraculously coming
to life and flying toward them with the Host in their beak.\textsuperscript{347}

\textit{The Suffering Body}

Moretto’s image speaks to the very real presence of God in the Eucharist and
the promotion of a spiritual practice in which women are encouraged to
contemplate the associations between the suffering, sacrificial body of Christ and
the bodies of these female martyrs, and by extension, their own bodies. Though
Moretto’s virgin-martyrs are easily identifiable by their traditional attributes, his
depiction of these saints diverges considerably from standard iconography, allowing
him to focus more specifically on tactility, on the sensations bodies experience or
are made to endure. An examination of the innovative representations of these
saintly exemplars demonstrates how Moretto presents his figures as more than holy
virgins, but as co-sufferers with Christ.

St. Cecilia occupies the center of the composition, carrying her portable
organ, as she does in Moretto’s earlier \textit{Virgin and Child in Glory with Five Saints}.
However, in this work Cecilia is not demonstrating interiorized, imaginative prayer;
instead, her focus is directed outward. Cecilia has her organetto tucked under one
arm, as if forgotten, and is pictured leaning over to converse with St. Lucy beside
her. This is not the first time we have seen Moretto pair female saints in
conversation, specifically in his depiction of Sts. Catherine and Lucy in the Veronese
altarpiece. This motif effectively conveys the close relationship recommended for
spiritual sisters. In his work for S. Clemente, however, Moretto suggests a topic of

\textsuperscript{347} Caroline Walker Bynum. \textit{Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of
conversation, and so brings us into the discussion. Listening attentively to her companion's words, Cecilia acts as the viewer's proxy, while Lucy exhibits items associated with her hagiography. Cecilia’s central placement draws our gaze, and we mimic her behavior in turning our attention to Lucy in this unusual incarnation. Owing to a play on her name (Lucia/luce), Lucy had been called upon for afflictions of the eye since the early medieval period. Her standard attribute, as seen in Moretto’s altarpiece, is a plate displaying her own eyes. Lucy's attribute likely started as a reference to ex-votos left by the faithful in hopes of the saint's intercession in healing infirmities of the eye. Nevertheless, by the thirteenth century, this iconography had developed a more dramatic, gut-wrenching origin story. Hagiographies of Lucy in the late medieval and early modern periods explained her attribute as an allusion to the saint’s self-inflicted blinding. In response to persistent suitors’ attraction to her beautiful eyes, Lucy gouged them out so she would no longer be an object of sexual desire. Moretto depicts Lucy grasping a short pointed instrument, doubtless the tool with which she removed her eyes—raising it between herself and Cecilia as if demonstrating its use. As she alludes to her own self-harm, performed in service of her faith, Lucy establishes this work’s central theme, physical suffering and sacrifice as a path to salvation.

349 Ibid.
350 Ibid., 74-75.
351 More commonly Lucy is depicting holding a sword, or with a sword jutting from her neck—referencing an episode in her hagiography in which she is miraculously able to keep preaching after being stabbed in the neck. Examples of St. Lucy showing this standard iconography include Ghirlandaio’s St. Lucy and Donor from 1494 and Domenico Beccafumi’s St. Lucy from 1521.
Behind Lucy, and higher in the composition, stands her patron, St. Agatha. According to her legend, it was only after a spiritual experience at Agatha’s shrine that Lucy committed herself to a life of holy virginity. The similarities in Lucy and Agatha’s attributes (body parts exhibited on a platter) also speak to their affiliation. Here again Moretto deviates from standard iconographical representations, eschewing Agatha’s platter, instead depicting the saint holding her severed breasts in her hands, lifting them up in offering to the dove of the Holy Spirit. In dispensing with the plate usually used to display Agatha’s breasts, Moretto reinforces through touch her attribute as part of her; part of her that she, much like Lucy, sacrificed for God. These martyrs’ physical suffering echoes that of Christ, identifying the saintly body with the Eucharistic host as the mechanism by which the faithful seek to embody Christ’s sanctity. Early modern viewers would have understood Agatha’s offering in the larger context of female religiosity. There was an expectation of physical suffering as part of a woman’s spiritual practice, and surrender to that suffering out of love. Angela Merici’s Rule, for example, uses language associated with physical suffering as a supplication to God, as when she prays, “Unhappy am I that I have not as yet shed a drop of my blood for love of Thee .... If I could I would willingly shed my blood if that sufficed to cure the blindness of [heathens’] souls.” It is with this understanding that Moretto’s viewers would have encountered the figures of both Lucy and Agatha, emphasizing the physical suffering they experienced in profession of their faith.

352 Examples of standard iconography associated with St. Agatha include a fresco by an anonymous artist in the church of S. Gottardo in Camino from 1428 and a depiction of the saint from Pietro della Francesca’s *Perugia Altarpiece* of 1460-70. 353 Merici, Rule, 282-283.
Despite scholarly arguments purporting a sexual or sadistic connotation to images of St. Agatha’s martyrdom, several historians have convincingly shown that medieval attitudes toward the breast were as food, symbol of fertility and motherhood.\textsuperscript{354} Anne M. Ashton’s study of breast iconography in early modern art established that St. Agatha’s breasts were associated with “spiritual nourishment” and “nurturing potential.”\textsuperscript{355} Ashton asserts that the “offering of Agatha’s sacrificed flesh identifies her body once more with the body of Christ and has Eucharistic connotations.”\textsuperscript{356} The correlation between the martyr’s body and Christ’s body as present in the Eucharistic host is made manifest in Moretto’s image, in which Agatha is made co-sufferer with Christ by offering her breasts up to Christ’s true presence.

There had long been an association between saints’ bodies and the Eucharistic gifts, in that both were regarded as worthy of reverence and capable of thaumaturgic and apotropaic powers. Charles Kovacs III expounds on the historical connection between relics and the consecrated Host, noting that in the twelfth century, with the advent of Eucharistic devotion, the Church removed relics from their reliquaries in order to repurpose the containers for exposition of the Host.\textsuperscript{357} The sanctity of holy relics was officially applied to the Eucharistic host under the doctrine of Transubstantiation, established at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215.\textsuperscript{358}

\textsuperscript{356} Ibid., 191.
\textsuperscript{357} Kovacs, 99.
\textsuperscript{358} Ibid., 98.
The similarities between sacred relics and the consecrated host, what Kovacs dubs a “parallel nature,” led to their being, at times, held within the same vessel for display and veneration.\(^{359}\) The earliest extant monstrance intended specifically to expose the Host for devotion was made in 1286, and subsequent centuries saw the development of vessels in the form of towers, disks, crosses, and figural monstrances.\(^{360}\)

**Food as Devotional Practice**

Caroline Walker Bynum’s research into the significance of food for medieval women’s spirituality also addresses a perceived relation between female flesh and that of Christ. Bynum’s work makes the important point that what has been called “pain craft” or ritualistic bodily suffering was an important form of imitatio Christi, thus medieval worshipers’ relationship to physical discomfort, to pain, was intermingled with notions of sacrifice, mysticism, and even pleasure.\(^{361}\) As Bynum eloquently states, “The flesh of Jesus—both flesh as body and flesh as food—is at the center of female piety, and this flesh is simultaneously pleasure and pain.”\(^{362}\) Moretto’s painting asks his viewers to meditate on the fleshly sacrifice of Christ, as well as that of the virgin-martyrs. Further, Moretto’s iconography encourages viewers to associate the real presence of Christ in the Eucharistic host with women’s bodies more generally.

\(^{359}\) Ibid., 99.

\(^{360}\) Ibid.


\(^{362}\) Bynum, 245.
Women’s spirituality in the sixteenth century continued to be steeped in issues surrounding food—eating, not eating, and reception of the Eucharist particularly. The surge in Eucharistic devotion at the time contributed to these practices, with many of the faithful endeavoring to increase the frequency with which they received the Blessed Sacrament. Merici herself did not leave her followers a specific schedule, in her typical hands-off fashion, rather she advised the Colonelle to be good role models through “frequent reception of the Sacraments of Penance and the Holy Eucharist.”

Caroline Walker Bynum’s work emphasizes the very physical nature of women’s religious practice, stating emphatically, “In fact and in image, suffering (both self-inflicted and involuntary) and food (both Eucharist and fasting) were women’s most characteristic ways of attaining God.” Moretto’s altarpiece attends the two categories of suffering Bynum identifies, in its reference to St. Lucy’s self-inflicted blinding and its pointed representation of St. Agatha’s forcible mastectomy. Bynum further asserts that women’s religiosity focused to a large degree on Christ’s humanity, in striving for union with the divine by sharing his suffering through personal bodily mortification or, in rarer circumstances, through miraculously experiencing the wounds of Christ’s Passion. Eucharistic devotion provided another powerful way for women to achieve union with Christ, intermingling their suffering flesh with that of their savior.

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363 Merici, Counsels, 249-250.
365 Ibid., 128-133.
The extent to which food was bound up with women’s religiosity cannot be overstated. In addition to a fervor for Eucharistic devotion, female religious viewed salvation through the context of eating. Angela Merici’s own writings encouraged her followers to envision the afterlife as full of “joyful and unfading feasts,” a celebration without end as reward for the sacrifices and hardships of earthly life.\footnote{Merici, Councils, 248.}

And although Merici differed from many early modern mystics in her suspicion toward miraculous feats of worship, such as bodily mortification or visions, she was very much of her time as regards the topic of fasting. Her Rule features a chapter on fasting, with detailed instructions for how and when to perform this spiritual practice. Indeed the Ursulines were expected to fast very often and for extended periods of time. Merici implores, “O Eternal God, by bodily fasts Thou dost curb our vices, lift up our minds, and give us virtue and its rewards.”\footnote{Merici, Rule 280.} She further teaches that fasting brings goodness and spiritual richness, where the Original Sin of greed had caused wickedness and spiritual poverty.\footnote{Ibid.} Always practical, Merici was careful to assert that eating and drinking regularly was a means to “nourish their bodies, thereby to serve God the better;” “indiscreet” restriction was to be avoided for this reason.\footnote{Ibid.} Members of the Company were not to partake in extreme practices such as inedia, or surviving solely on the Eucharistic host. Rather, adequate nutrition gave the faithful the ability to engage in charity and do God’s work.

Despite her admonitions to fast safely, Merici understood the importance of a spiritual practice that tended her follower’s mind and body. In the preface to her

\footnote{Merici, Councils, 248.}
Merici acknowledges the body’s predisposition for temptation, which no amount of purification could completely remove. She warns, “Remember that here on earth we are in the midst of snares and dangers; our flesh and our sensuality are not dead.” Here Merici reminds members of her Company that though their relationship to their body may change with their commitment to holy virginity, they are still fleshly and subject to the weakness of that condition. Despite the many ways women’s bodies were employed in worship, the flesh also had the potential to be corrupted through indulgence and impulsiveness.

The sensuous, therefore, could be seen as a double-edged sword, in that this desirous and weak body was the same instrument which allowed women to merge with Christ—through physical suffering and the sacrament of the Eucharist. The conception of the duality of the chaste body, of the sensuous as road to sin or path to righteousness, is brought forth in Moretto’s altarpiece. Lucy’s exhibition of the instrument that blinded her prompts the viewer to meditate on the excruciating pain of this event and the faithfulness required to persevere. This evocation of physical suffering is juxtaposed to the soft comfort of Agnes’ lamb, symbol of the salvation that soothes and heals body and soul.

It is not entirely unusual to see Agnes depicted embracing her animal attribute, however, given this work’s emphasis on the body and the sensuous, it is interesting to note how Moretto’s depiction of the saint differs here from her appearance in his Veronese altarpiece. In *Madonna and Child in Glory with Saints*, Agnes is seated, engrossed in a book. Her lamb, standing on its hind legs beside her,

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370 Merici, Rule, 277.
gazes up as she rests one hand on its back. The arrangement is affectionate, but decidedly less intimate than that found in the S. Clemente picture. Interestingly, in Carolyn Diskant Muir’s research on images of St. Agnes as a bride of Christ, she identifies the motif of the lamb jumping up at Agnes’ side as a sort of “wedding portrait” in which the saint’s spiritual bridegroom is symbolized by the lamb of God.\(^{371}\) Certainly that subtext would have been appropriate in this later image given its exploration of the various ways women might achieve union with Christ.

Female religious were urged to view the savior as father, spouse, and child. Understanding Agatha’s offering up her breasts through this lens of multiple identities, the gesture is more pointed, particularly as it relates to her role as a mother. These holy virgins will never give birth—Moretto’s depiction of Agatha powerfully expresses renunciation of her ability to give birth by vowing to remain chaste. Giving up maternity was a serious issue for any woman considering a life of chastity. St. Augustine addressed the topic as far back as the fifth century, writing, “There is no reason why the virgins of God be sad, because themselves also cannot, keeping their virginity, be mothers of the flesh. ... However, That Birth of the Holy Virgin is the ornament of all holy virgins; and themselves together with Mary are mothers of Christ, if they do the will of His Father.”\(^{372}\) In this way, chaste women were given to understand that they shared, in some small part, in the maternity of the Virgin Mary. Beyond this maternal connection to Christ, however, breasts were a significant symbol of a woman’s capacity to do good works, to offer service, charity, and spiritual support in her community. At her martyrdom, Agatha responded to the

\(^{372}\) Augustine, On Virginity, chapter 5.
breast torture inflicted on her by exclaiming, “No matter: I have other breasts you cannot harm, breasts that give spiritual nourishment to all my senses, and them I dedicated long, long ago to God.”

Agatha’s continued perseverance in her faith under harrowing circumstances reinforces the notion that one should accept worldly suffering as merely another way to understand and worship Christ.

St. Barbara

Moretto’s inclusion of St. Barbara at the lower right, leaning lazily against her tower, further solidifies his Eucharistic theme. St. Barbara was primarily associated with posthumous miracles in which she aided Christians near death to survive long enough to make confession and receive the Holy Sacrament. Her ability to help the faithful achieve a good death was touted especially in the late fourteenth-century Compilatio de Sancta Barbara, written at a Ghent monastery by John of Wackerzeele. Copied and disseminated throughout Western Europe, Barbara’s hagiography contributed to the development of iconography explicitly connecting the saint to the sacrament of Holy Communion. Thus, her legend was framed in a Eucharistic context. Megan Cassidy-Welch has examined fifteenth-century images of Barbara, and has noted shifting iconography that shows the evolution of devotion to this saint.

Cassidy-Welch points to the changing depiction of Barbara’s attribute over the course of the Cinquecento in which her tower gradually takes on the appearance of a liturgical vessel—specifically, the monstrance used to display the Host on the

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This change in iconography makes overt Barbara’s association with the Eucharist, and supports the notion that viewers of Moretto’s altarpiece would have seen Barbara as a reference to the importance of both confession and communion. Mathilde van Dijk’s inquiry into the marked reverence for St. Barbara amongst adherents of the Devotio Moderna also gives evidence that this saint was a visual cue to the Eucharist.

The Devotio Moderna movement began in the late fourteenth century in the Netherlands when groups of like-minded individuals began living communally to share a life of devotion. Rejecting what they felt was an increasingly impious world, members of this movement endeavored to model piety in secular modern society. The religious communes set up by those engaged in the Devotio Moderna life were met with some derision by outsiders, being viewed as puritanical and self-righteous. It was a quite radical decision to join these communities, entailing the complete severance of one’s life of family, occupation, and the like. Fortunately, there remains a large body of contemporary literature that sought to outline the ideals and practices of the New Devotion, offering historians a broad understanding.

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375 Ibid., 373.
378 Ibid., 2.
of the essential tenets of the movement, as well as the diversity and complexity within its many separate enclaves.\textsuperscript{379}

Van Dijk explores the ways in which members of the Devotio Moderna community understood St. Barbara’s posthumous miracles, and how these were important for their faith. She notes that people involved in the Devotion movement were encouraged to see their lives as preparation for death, and thus Barbara’s role in ensuring the worshiper last rites would have been an important one.\textsuperscript{380} Additionally, Van Dijk points out that the recipients of Barbara’s miracles were often sinners, sometimes guilty of great offenses, but were granted her help at the time of death because they had a devotion to St. Barbara in life.\textsuperscript{381} In this way, devotees could see Barbara as an intercessor even for those faithful who meet death with sins on their conscience.

Gabriella Zarri has questioned the influence of the Devotio Moderna on women’s devotional writing in Italy during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, noting that there is not yet evidence of a significant impact of the New Devotion in Italy at this time.\textsuperscript{382} Despite a dearth of sources showing concrete links between the Devotio Moderna movement in the north and Cinquecento spirituality in Italy,

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\textsuperscript{380} Van Dijk, 227-228.
\textsuperscript{381} Ibid., 226.
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Angela Merici’s Company of St. Ursula has always invited comparisons with the beguines as the other major example of holy virgins living out in the world. We can also see a shared sensibility in the emphasis on interiorization espoused by adherents of the Devotio Moderna and that taught in Merici’s writings. The Ursuline Rule supported each member's personal spiritual practice, to be experienced mentally and in solitude. Regarding daily prayer, Merici warns that the virgins must not remain in the church after mass, rather “Those who wish to pray at greater length should go to their own rooms, and there, in seclusion, let them pray in the way and for as long as the Holy Spirit and their conscience dictate.”

Similarly in her chapter on obedience, Merici requests that her followers look inward for guidance and spiritual elevation, writing, “above all, you must obey the counsels and inspirations constantly to be heard in your hearts by the action of the Holy Spirit...” These sentiments echo the messages imparted to members of the Devotio Moderna. For example, in Geert Groote’s fourteenth-century treatise, *On four kinds of matter for meditation*, the author establishes from the New Devotion movement’s earliest days an emphasis on the use of personal meditation and prayer to achieve a deeper understanding of Scripture. Additionally, in his famous Letter 62, Groote outlines the benefits of meditation on spiritual literature and Christ’s Passion, advising, “Those teachings of the Scripture which gladden us in our present troubles or draw out our desire for the promised future are especially to be chewed over and reflected upon.”

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383 Merici, Rule, 283.
384 Ibid., 285.
385 Van Engen, 1988, 85.
might live rightly, chastely, and in society have many parallels with the Devotio
Moderna. Further, both groups similarly faced skepticism and disapproval from
their neighbors. Another correlation between the two movements consists of their
devotion to saintly intercessors like St. Barbara, invoked for her role in ensuring the
faithful would receive the Eucharist before death.

We have seen how Eucharistic devotion occupied a central place in sixteenth-
century Brescian religious practice. The prevalence of the subject in Moretto's
oeuvre speaks to a significant interest in promoting the Blessed Sacrament, a
response to Lutheran attacks on the doctrine of Transubstantiation. *Five Female
Saints* draws upon contemporary fervor for Eucharistic veneration to suggest a
parallel between Christ’s suffering body, literally present in the consecrated Host,
and the physical hardships endured by virgin-martyrs like those pictured. A female
viewer of this altarpiece would have identified St. Barbara's presence as a pointed
Eucharistic reference. She would have understood the gestures of Sts. Lucy and
Agatha as allusions to their martyrdoms, visually linked to Christ's sacrifice
represented by the “liturgical vessel,” the dove of the Holy Spirit. Additionally,
Agnes' presence would have called to mind rhetoric regarding one's personal
relationship with Christ, the lamb of God—as mother, child, and spouse. A woman
dedicated to holy virginity observing Moretto's work would have been able to draw
strength from these female exemplars' sacrifice and commitment to their faith, as
the worshiper was asked to do daily through intensely physical devotional practice.
She could take comfort in the certainty that her reward would be union with the
divine in the hereafter, a moment prefigured in the reception of Holy Communion.
Thus, the importance of the Eucharist as a central tenet of the faith was powerfully reaffirmed here in Moretto's altarpiece.
We shall spend this short life in such consolation that all our pain and sadness will be transformed into joy and happiness, and we shall find that the thorny, steep and stony paths will become flowery, smooth, pleasant and strewn with treasure; for the Angels and the heavenly choirs will be with us in so far as we share in their angelic life.

-Angela Merici, Rule (1935)

Conclusion

The life of the Company as Merici conceived it was short, indeed. We know that her Rule was altered just a few short years after her death, with the mandatory adoption of a black cincture, something their founder had not advocated during her life. The freedom and personal responsibility that Merici promoted was not a priority for the women who succeeded her in power. Further, the make up of the Company changed significantly after 1550. Early members of the Company were predominantly from lower class families, and valued the opportunity to pledge holy virginity while simultaneously being able to work and provide economic support at home. A mere decade after Merici’s passing, many more Ursulines came from distinguished Brescian families, giving an increasingly aristocratic sensibility to the group. Most significantly, Ursulines began living congregationally and in convents from 1572, at Carlo Borromeo’s urging. Obviously these living arrangements radically changed the mission of the order, eliminating the innovative principle upon which Merici built her Company—that of independent spiritual growth.

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386 Merici, Rule, in Ledochowska, 278.
387 Mazzonis notes that these new wealthy members of the order were often daughters or granddaughters of the Matrone who had served the Company in administrative capacities during Merici’s life. In that light, the shift from lower class to a more elite membership seems inevitable. Mazzonis, 2007: 204.
spurred by mutual support from other holy virgins, living in the world. From the beginning of the seventeenth century, then, the Ursulines began to be associated with the charitable works and education for which they are still known to this day. As we have seen, Merici’s Company was by women for women, and did not emphasize the activities of charity and education to the extent that later Ursuline groups would.

Given the rapid transformations within the order following Merici’s 1540 death, the period covered in this dissertation (1535-1550) marks a time of unique circumstances that was not to last. The four paintings discussed in this study come out of a period in which Merici’s vision was still clear, and its affects still strongly felt in the Brescian community. Those who had known her were still active in the Company, and many held true to her original vision. Moretto’s works encapsulate a view of female spirituality that derives from a truly unique place, theologically and artistically, capturing a fleeting spirit. The devotional imagery he crafts shows an appreciation of local traditions and those farther afield. His sources multiply meanings though the work always retains its fundamental efficacy. Moretto’s images are tools the faithful can use to build, to repair. These pictures are weapons, wielded against false doctrine, doubt, or complacency. That the artist’s work covers the interiors of nearly every church in the city and its environs testifies to contemporary perception of the works’ spiritual value.

My research is the beginning of what I hope will be a larger reevaluation of Moretto’s oeuvre, for there is much work to be done. An examination of the artist’s patrons would help place Moretto in further context with other artists of his day.
For example, one might study the patronage of Leone Bugatto, the abbot at Bologna’s San Giorgio in Braida. He remains a lesser-known figure, though it is apparent that he was conversant with Brescia’s art scene, and participated in it through commissions to Moretto, Romanino, and perhaps others. Another avenue that may prove fruitful would be investigating the patronage of members of the Company of St. Ursula. The Matrone and Colonelle were older women, many from well-off families, and archival records may shed light on commissions from 1530-1550 that would provide a more detailed understanding of subjects supported by the group.

Another long overdue area of inquiry is that of borrowing in Moretto’s artistic practice. As with the works discussed in this dissertation, many of Moretto’s pictures have identified sources, whether paintings or prints. This study bears out the notion that this artist’s appropriation is never random—his sources are employed meaningfully and when studied, deeply enrich the works’ devotional potential. It would go a long way toward rectifying the slights Moretto’s legacy has endured these many centuries were scholars to turn their attention to an inquiry into the ways Moretto employs borrowing in his work more generally. It is my hope that this study of a small group of images—each of which had a clear source from which the artist purposefully worked—may be taken as evidence that Moretto’s engagement with the art of the past is worthy of the same scrutiny that art historians have given his most illustrious contemporary, Titian, for example.

Moretto is an artist who is identified with his home above all else—his moniker ‘Il Moretto da Brescia’ never lets us forget where he is coming from. It has
been gratifying to investigate his work outside the conversation about Brescian style versus Milanese style or Venetian style or take-your-pick. I was determined to let his work stand on its own, not against the art of someone or somewhere else. Yet my study ended up being about Brescia, too. Free from the assumptions about stylistic concerns that have dominated the literature for so long, I was able to think anew about the Brescia he lived in and the one he helped create. Moretto’s evocation of female spirituality as strong, sacrificial, and ultimately vivifying speaks highly of the artist, but even more so of the climate that helped him to understand it in this way.


Cistellini, Antonio. *Figure della Riforma Pretridentina: Stefana Quinzani, Angela Merici, Laura Mignani, Bartolomeo Stella, Francesco Cabrini, Francesca Santabona*. Brescia, Morcelliana 1948.


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Descriptione delle Vergini si come di tempo in tempo sono acceptate. Sec. L Gen. f. 100.


*Leggenda anonima di Elena Duglioli*. Biblioteca Comunale dell’Archiginnasio di Bologna, ms B 4314, f. 47.


Percopo, Erasmo. “Guido Mazzoni e le sue opera in Napoli,” *Napoli nobilissima*, vol. 3 (1894): 42.


*Regola della nova Compagnia di Santa Orsola di Brescia per la quale si vede come si habbiano a governar le vergini di detta Compagnia acciocchè vivendo christianamente possino doppo la loro morte fruir i beni de vita eterna*. Edizione Turlino, 1569 Brescia, Biblioteca Queriniana, Cinq. EE.I.m.I.


La vita del Beata Ieronimo Savonarola scritta da un anonimo del sec. xvi e già attribuita a fra Pacifico Burlamacchi, reprinted and translated by Donald Weinstein.


Figure 1. Moretto. *St. Roch with an Angel*, c. 1545, Szépművészeti Museum, Budapest

Figure 2. Dosso Dossi, *St. Sebastian*, 1518-21, Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan
Figure 3. Tintoretto, *Siege of Brescia*, 1584, Doge’s Palace, Venice

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Figure 58. Attributed to Caterina Vigri, *St. Ursula and Her Companions*, 1456, Gallerie Accademia, Venice
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Figure 66. Unknown artist, Seal of the Cistercian nunnery of Beaupré, 1335, from Pedrizet, pl. II. 3
Figure 67. Master of the Orcanesque Misericordia, *Madonna of Mercy*, c. 1375, Accademia Gallery, Florence

Figure 68. Unknown Umbrian artist, *Madonna of Mercy with St. Francis, St. Clare, and Clarissans*, first half of the sixteenth century, location unknown
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Figure 75. Master of the Virgo inter virgines, *Madonna and Child with Sts. Catherine, Cecilie, Barbara, and Ursula*, c. 1500, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

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EDUCATION

PhD 2015 Indiana University
(Italian Renaissance Art)
Dissertation: “Moretto da Brescia: Viewing Female Spirituality in Sixteenth-Century Lombardy” (Giles Knox)

MA 2005 University of Kansas
(Art History)

BA 2003 Humboldt State University
(Double major: Art History and French)

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

2015 Adjunt Faculty, Renaissance to 1950, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis

2014 Adjunct Faculty, Prehistoric to Medieval Art, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis

2014 Associate Instructor, Appropriation and Allusion in Religious Art of the Italian Renaissance, Indiana University

2012-2013 Associate Instructor, Introduction to Art History and Visual Culture for Non-Majors, Indiana University

2012 (summer) Adjunct Faculty, Prehistoric to Medieval Art, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis

2011 (summer) Associate Instructor, Sinners and Saints in Renaissance Art, Indiana University

2011-present Instructor, Prehistoric to Medieval Art, School of Continuing Studies (on-line), Indiana University
2011-present  Instructor, Introduction to Art History and Visual Culture for Non-Majors, School of Continuing Studies (on-line), Indiana University

2010-2011  Associate Instructor, Introduction to Art History and Visual Culture for Non-Majors, Indiana University

2010 (summer)  Teaching Assistant, Duke TIP Italy

2009-2010  Associate Instructor, Sinners and Saints in Renaissance Art, Indiana University

2009  Associate Instructor, Renaissance to Contemporary Art, Indiana University

2008  Associate Instructor, Sacred Spaces, Indiana University

2008 (summer)  Teaching Assistant, Duke TIP Italy

2008 (summer)  Associate Instructor, Prehistoric to Medieval Art, Indiana University (May 6-June 12)

2008  Associate Instructor, Renaissance to Contemporary Art, Indiana University

2007  Associate Instructor, Prehistoric to Medieval Art, Indiana University

2005-2006  Lecturer, Renaissance to Contemporary Art/Non-Western Art, Truman State University

2005  Assistant to the Director, Spencer Museum of Art

2005  Grader, History of Photography, University of Kansas

2004-2005  Graduate Teaching Assistant, Prehistoric to Medieval Art, University of Kansas

CLASSES TAUGHT

Introduction to Art History and Visual Culture for Non-Majors
Prehistoric to Medieval Art
Renaissance to Contemporary Art
Non-Western Art
Italian Renaissance Art
Sinners and Saints in Renaissance Art (lecture)
Sinners and Saints in Renaissance Art (seminar)
Appropriation and Allusion in Religious Arts of the Italian Renaissance

GRANTS/FELLOWSHIPS/AWARDS

2014   Friends of Art Award in the History of Art
2011-2012  Future Faculty Teaching Fellowship, Indiana University
2011   Friends of Art Travel Grant
2009   Friends of Art Travel Grant
2006-2007  Middeldorf Fellowship, Indiana University
2003   Outstanding Senior in Art History, Humboldt State University

PUBLICATIONS


CONFERENCES/PRESENTATIONS/PAPERS

2014   Southeastern College Art Conference
   Paper: “Artistic Appropriation as Intellectual Agency in the Italian Renaissance”

2013   Midwest Art History Society
   Paper: "Holy Heroines: Moretto da Brescia’s St. Ursula in Context"

2011   Graduate Student Seminar, 47th Annual, Art Institute of Chicago

2010   2010 Florida State University Graduate Student Symposium
   Paper: “Image as Relic: Moretto’s Paintings of Beata Angela Merici”

PROFESSIONAL SERVICE
### 2012-2013
Peer Reviewer, *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*

### 2012
Coordinator, Undergraduate Workshop, Applying for Graduate School, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis

### 2008-2009
Co-Chair, Brown Bag Lecture Series, Indiana University

### 2007
Co-Chair, Art History Symposium, Indiana University

### 2007
Co-President, Art History Association, Indiana University

### 2006
Faculty Evaluator, Assessment Program, Truman State University

### 2003
President, Humboldt Art History Association, Humboldt State University

## PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

- College Art Association
- The Renaissance Society of America
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