

[Palmer on Doyno, 'The Lay Saint: Charity and Charismatic Authority in Medieval Italy, 1150-1350'](#)

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Mary Harvey Doyno. *The Lay Saint: Charity and Charismatic Authority in Medieval Italy, 1150-1350.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019. 330 pp. \$58.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-5017-4020-6.

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The historiography of lay piety and sanctity, rooted in the idea of the apostolic life and expressed through acts of penance that at times produced manifestations of miraculous power, is deep and rich, including foundational works by Herbert Grundmann, Lester Little, Caroline Walker Bynum, and André Vauchez, among many others. It has long focused heavily on the urban worlds of medieval Italy, an environment that produced more lay saints than any other, and that abounded above all in female lay saints. That this ground is so well trodden and its evidence so well studied makes the achievement of Mary Harvey Doyno's new book, *The Lay Saint: Charity and Charismatic Authority in Medieval Italy, 1150-1350*, all the more remarkable.

Doyno's important book tracks efforts by the papacy and the mendicant orders to mitigate the radical potential of charismatic lay sanctity, domesticating and disciplining it. Doyno emphasizes that this potential derived from the fact that lay saints wielding spiritual powers had a claim to charismatic authority that originated from their own penitential piety, rather than being granted by the institutional church. She notes that from the era of Innocent III onward, this was seen as an increasingly unacceptable threat to proper ecclesiastical authority, one that blurred the key distinction between clergy and laity. This was deemed most threatening when the charismatic lay penitent in question was a woman. The church answered this challenge by promoting forms of holy lay life largely stripped of charismatic components, rooted instead in acts of simple piety, above all charity, and in zealous respect for and defense of established institutional authorities and their norms. Doyno's book thus shows us much that is familiar but requires that we think about it in new ways.

Throughout this book, Doyno urges readers to think twice about what the available evidence reveals and what it occludes. Much of what we know about early lay saints is told to us by mendicant authors for whom these lay holy figures appear as mendicants in waiting, eager for the habit of the Franciscans or the Dominicans, and even as members of the famous third orders. But Doyno points out that in many cases this last claim is not only false but impossible. Prominent holy women like Rose of Viterbo or Margaret of Cortona were not tertiaries because in their time no third orders existed. Instead, such hagiographical claims become appreciable as one part of a larger project, in which, again and again, we see the sanctity of lay people, and above all of women, stripped of its charismatic power and outward, interventionist orientation in favor of a humble respect for law and an emphasis on interiority. Doyno is at her analytical best when she highlights the many disjunctions

between official accounts like these and other evidence—notarial, pictorial, and hagiographical—that reveals echoes of a rich, densely populated world of lay sanctity. Her analyses of this evidence offer the reader tantalizing glimpses of a world scarcely documented and only fleetingly visible, a world of independent lay piety and local religious communities that grew up organically around the many holy figures examined in this book before being systematically erased by a church keen to subordinate this unruly charismatic holiness to its own institutional authority.

The first of this book's three parts examines the rise of charismatic lay sanctity in the twelfth-century communes and the first efforts by the papacy to mitigate its more problematic aspects. In chapter 1 we are treated to a close analysis of the career of Ranieri of Pisa, a miracle-working layman on a mission to regenerate a corrupt church, as well as of Innocent III's effort to promote a model of lay sanctity more reflective of proper attitudes toward the church and its clergy via the life of Omobono of Cremona. Chapter 2 tracks the emergence of the communal lay saint, a figure that worked to address the injustices inherent to urban life while demonstrating a proper deference for ecclesiastical and communal authority. Accounts of holy men like Facio of Cremona or Raymond the Palmer of Piacenza are shown to systematically deemphasize their more problematic aspects, so that Raymond preaches only in private and Facio's healing powers are always properly subordinated to his overriding obedience to ecclesiastical authority. For Doyno, these were urban laymen elevated to a sacred ideal type. The ultimate example of this, examined in chapter 3, is Pier Pettinaio of Siena, for whom piety was largely a matter of charity, and the commune figures as the ultimate bulwark against economic injustice and abuses of power. In all of these examples, we see lay sanctity understood as inherently local and deeply urban rather than representative of the more global mendicant project. We see, too, a persistent tendency to present the lived realities of lay life as opportunities for spiritual achievement rather than obstacles to it. Finally, we see a tendency to present the lay saint as fundamentally respectful of established institutional authority. Pier Pettinaio's sanctity is inseparable from his lay status, his professional life as a comb-maker, and his deep-seated respect for the commune as the ultimate source of justice.

If part 1 reveals the nature of challenges posed by charismatic lay holy men, part 2 demonstrates that all the tensions brought to the fore by such figures were only magnified when the individual in question was a woman. In chapter 4 Doyno discusses women like Bona of Pisa who wielded charismatic powers but were more dependent on male, institutional authority than were Ranieri and his ilk. This apparent dependency, however, is to some extent an expression of the same hagiographical accounts that misleadingly emphasize themes of cloister despite evidence that many women, like Umiliana de' Cerchi of Florence, had numerous associates and were clearly not living lives of enclosure. Rose of Viterbo, above all, offers a glimpse of a whole world of laywomen pursuing holy lives, often collectively, while under very limited clerical oversight. It is here that Doyno most emphasizes the need to look past anachronistic attempts to present such women as tertiaries. Key to this is recognition that the holiness of lay holy women, like that of men, was systematically reshaped into more acceptable forms, so that women like Zita of Lucca, studied in chapter 5, appear as female counterparts to Pier Pettinaio. Like him, Zita largely lacks charismatic powers and appears as a kind of ideal laywoman, truly zealous and astonishingly capable in her pursuit of entirely conventional pious practices. Zita's piety was harnessed first by Lucca's popular regime and then, after its fall, by her elite employers, the Fantinelli family. Rather than being an obstacle to her spiritual achievements, Zita's labor as a domestic servant, like Pier's as a craftsman, was integral to it.

The final two chapters of Doyno's book constitute its third part, focused on the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and charting the accelerating efforts of the mendicants to gain control over the religious lives of lay penitents, carefully controlling and recalibrating those of women in particular. Chapter 6 examines the case of Margaret of Cortona, whose Franciscan hagiographer, Giunta da Bevegnati, erases her life as a laywoman and worker and instead depicts her as a Franciscan visionary whose intense piety serves as a salutary spectacle, inspiring onlookers to reconsider the state of their own souls. Like Ranieri of Pisa and Bona of Lucca, she was active in charitable work, but this aspect of her piety matters to Giunta only because it shows that she has abandoned her former self-centered and worldly ways. By contrast, in the telling of her confessor, the secular cleric Ser Badia, Margaret appears as a civic saint akin to her male counterparts, a critic of the unjust economic practices and abuses of power so common to urban worlds. Where Giunta sought to render Margaret's piety internal and largely apolitical, Doyno deploys Ser Badia's account, alongside notarial documents and a variety of visual depictions, to reveal Margaret not as a reclusive visionary but rather as a civic holy woman. In chapter 7, Doyno argues that the transition from lay civic sanctity to a more mystical mendicant spirituality, long ago described by Vauchez, was not a natural evolution but rather a deliberate response to the challenges to gender and power norms posed by lay holy women. If lay male holiness had multiple acceptable forms by the late thirteenth century, whether the ideal model of Omobono or the more practical model of Pier Pettinaio, the holiness of laywomen continued to put unsustainable strains on both. The result was the necessity, for women, of affiliation with ecclesiastical institutions and male oversight, a necessity that mendicant authors presented as evidence of the inseparability of lay penitent women and their own orders. When such women achieved holiness, as Giovanna of Orvieto did, they were argued to have done so by being atypical and gravitating naturally toward seclusion, or by being utterly and completely dependent on others, like the blind, deaf, and deformed Margaret of Città di Castello. Finally, by the end of the fourteenth century, the baton of mendicant oversight was passed to the Dominicans. Yet, in a short but powerful epilogue, Doyno argues that this did not bring a dramatic rupture with the history set forth in her book. Instead, the promotion and eventual canonization of Catherine of Siena is presented as the culmination of that history, the establishment, finally, of a path to holiness for laywomen, one only possible once all trace of the independent lay saints of earlier centuries had been written out of existence.

Without doubt, Mary Harvey Doyno has written a book that all historians of lay piety, Italian urban life, and gender and medieval Christianity must read. Her study of these many lay saints presents us with the contours of a centuries-long debate over the right forms of holiness and the right locus of spiritual authority, a debate largely and deliberately erased by much of our evidence but recovered here to great effect. This was a debate with many interlocutors, including the papacy, the mendicant orders, and the governing regimes of the communes, but above all including unknown numbers of everyday lay men and women who lived their lives in pursuit of the holy and the just. Doyno is to be praised not only for usefully rethinking an important field of study, but also for her restoration of those everyday people to their rightful place in late medieval debates about holiness.

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