

Politics and Prophecy in the *Life* of Umiliana dei Cerchi

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Prophetic power, a *topos* in hagiographic texts, can be strategically utilised in a variety of ways.¹ Political prophecy, in particular, shows how certain individuals, with their manifold qualities both as saints and as ordinary human beings, touch public life. While prophetic power links the saint with the supernatural, political prophecy grounds the saint in the world both during life and after death. This paper addresses both the political and the prophetic in the oldest extant *Life* of the thirteenth-century Florentine mystic, Umiliana dei Cerchi, written by the Franciscan friar Vito of Cortona shortly after her death in 1246. In particular, I shall focus on the ways in which the account of her prophetic powers blurs the line between public and private, personal and political.² That is, where previously Umiliana's cult has been studied for its political connections, I will concentrate here on Umiliana herself, in life and after death, as representative of political forces.

Umiliana dei Cerchi (1219-1246) is a useful example of the localised effect of political prophecy. Umiliana's prophetic visions repeatedly connect her to the political events of Florence of her day despite her unceasing attempts, both in word and deed, to extricate herself from social and familial bonds. Familial bonds, it should be noted, were public as well as private, and Umiliana's hagiographer extends her rejection of marriage and of material wealth far beyond mere disdain of her family and into condemnation of the very fabric of Florentine society.³ Whether rejecting the authority of her husband's family, her father's family, or the state, Umiliana found herself both inside and outside existing social structures.⁴ This duality is reflected in

her visions, which permit her—and her hagiographer—to comment on the political situation of her city, while avoiding direct entrance into it herself.

The problematic element of political prophecy in female saints' lives has been most often studied in women writers who exerted great influence.⁵ But Umiliana is one of many women who did not write. Their prophetic words were represented in the hagiographic accounts of their lives, most often composed by men. Although these accounts offer less direct access to the words of these women, they do, however, permit a glimpse at the dramatic ways—whether intentional or not—their words were used.⁶

While Umiliana had strong ties to the Franciscans of the old Florentine church of Santa Croce (indeed, for several centuries she was mistakenly credited with founding the Franciscan Third Order in Florence), she herself did not join the poor Clares or any of the other officially sanctioned orders in Florence. Instead, Umiliana appears to have been an active participant in a loosely organised group of penitent laywomen.⁷ More importantly for this investigation, Umiliana lived in one of the most violent and unstable periods in Florentine history. Although the *Life* stresses both Umiliana's physical and spiritual detachment from the world, her life, death, and the subsequent birth of her cult are inextricably connected with the social status of her family, the rise of the Franciscan Order, and the political events in Florence.⁸

According to the *Life*, Umiliana spent her brief existence in an almost constant struggle with her father, husband, and other male relatives. Unlike the *vitae* of many other saints, this one begins not with the holy woman's birth in 1219 (her entrance into her father's family), but with her marriage sixteen years later (her entrance into her husband's family). The *Life* provides few details regarding Umiliana's life before and during marriage, although it would appear that one month after her marriage she decided to consecrate herself to God:

Et quasi Dei plena, uno mense peracto post ad ventum suum ad virum, spernere cœpit pompas seculi et ornatus, ita ut faciem non ornaret; et vestimentorum cultus, quæ ob viri reverentiam portabat, erant sibi non ad gaudium, sed ad crucem tantum.

[And as if she were filled with God, one month after she joined her husband, she began to spurn the ostentation and ornamentation of that age, such that she did not make herself up; but the care for her clothes, which

was a sign of respect for her husband, was not a pleasure for her, but a heavy cross. §1.2]

Despite the opposition of her husband, Umiliana spent her five years of marriage engaged in covert acts of charity: preparing food for the poor during the night, giving away possessions, even secretly tearing the sheets of her bed into pieces to give to the poor (§1.2-5). Her husband's death, five years after their marriage, signaled a change in Umiliana's piety, as her charity moved out into the open:

Post mortem viri in domo ipsius, eo quod liberior erat, liberalitatem suam liberalius ostendens pauperes saepe tenebat in mensa sua et magis orationibus insistebat.

[Since she was freer after the man's death in his own home, more openly showing her generosity, she often used to invite poor people to her table, and she applied herself all the more in her prayers. §1.6]

According to Florentine dowry laws of the time, a widow was required either to be supported by her husband's family, or else be awarded the return of her dowry.⁹ However, a year after her husband's death, for reasons that remain unclear, Umiliana left the house of her husband's family, and returned to her father's house without her dowry. There, an effort was underway to remarry her. Although the hagiographer provides no information regarding Umiliana's thoughts about her first marriage, he reports at length about her opposition to the second. When Umiliana's relatives suggested a potential suitor, Umiliana by way of response declared that she was ineligible for marriage as she had already been married to Christ:

...et tantam cordis accepit constantiam de non nubendo, et tanta veri Sponsi certificata est voluntate, quod ante flammae quam viro parata erat tradere corpus suum: et ex tunc ad prima verba, quae de recipiendo marito audivit, confidenter respondit, dicens: "Quid me laceratis quotidie de marito? Adducite ad me illum cui me tradere cupitis, et ex alia parte faciatis mihi fornacem accendi, ut inter utrumque posita eligam quod voluero."

[...and with such firmness of spirit she refused marriage, and with such desire she was sure of her true Husband, that she would have sooner thrown her body on the flames than into the arms of a man. And from then on, at the slightest mention of her taking a husband again, she responded

confidently: “Why do you torture me every day for a husband? Bring me the one to whom you wish to hand me over, and on the other side, let me build a furnace, so that in the meantime, I shall choose in which of the two places to be placed.” §1.7]

Discouraged from his efforts to remarry her, Umiliana’s father turned to the re-acquisition of her dowry. Although this money was owed to her by law, she refused to sign an order for its return, declaring that heaven forbade the taking of oaths. Her father then tricked her into signing a document that returned the dowry to him. Disgusted by her father’s actions, Umiliana declared:

Ut video non est fides in terra, quia pater filiaē, et filia patri detrahit et dene-gat veritatem. Habeat igitur me pater meus in domo sua deinceps, non ut filiam, sed ut famulam et ancillam.

[Thus, do I see that there is no faith on earth, because a father disparages and denies the truth to the daughter, and the daughter to the father. There-fore, henceforth, my father retains me in his home, not as a daughter, but as a servant and a slave. §1.8]

By taking away her dowry, Umiliana’s father, who perhaps wanted little more than the funds necessary to support an extra dependent, eliminated the possibility for Umiliana to live within Florentine society, either by remarrying (which would have required a dowry) or by continuing to live under the protection of her husband’s family. His actions, however, actually helped to shape Umiliana’s religious life. Poverty did not put an end to Umiliana’s good works, for, true mendicant that she was, she began to beg for alms. Umiliana donated the money she collected from wealthy Florentine women to the poor sisters of St Clare, creating a “feminine currency”: money that came from women, through a woman’s actions, for the benefit of other women. Thus her estrangement from her family led to her formation of alternative social groups composed solely of women and religious men.

Denied entrance into a local Franciscan convent, Umiliana closed herself off in a tower in one of the family’s properties located in the heart of the city of Florence. Vito declares that God preordained this situation in order that he might reveal, through Umiliana, that anyone, male or female, religious or lay, rich or poor, could lead a saintly life. Indeed, following the description of Umiliana’s self-imposed enclosure, Vito poses a series of rhetorical questions that establish Umiliana’s spiritual practices

as rivaling those of the desert fathers (§2.11).¹⁰ What is more, Vito argues, Umiliana led her spiritual life right in the middle of the city, surrounded by—but immune to—its many temptations. Florence, then, is a kind of desert wasteland in which the flower of Umiliana’s faith strangely finds root.

The city and its evil distractions figure prominently in Umiliana’s politically charged visions, for it is precisely when she was closed off from the city that her deeper prophetic insight emerged. Indeed, as we have little reported conversation from Umiliana herself, her visions serve to speak for her, relaying her spiritual progress and offering instruction to the reader. Vito states that Umiliana “preached more with her works than with her words; she continued to preach even after her death; and she will preach,” as he puts it, *in perpetuum*.¹¹ Thus begins a series of miracles and visions, each somehow centred on Umiliana’s eyesight or vision. When she was at first denied the gift of tears, Umiliana took matters literally into her own hands by placing burning embers on her eyes, in the hope that these would both restore her tears and limit her sight of the world. Moved by pity, God granted her tears that flowed like rivers (§2.13). In another instance, after her lamp was unexpectedly extinguished, a dove appeared and illuminated her room, finally coming to rest on Umiliana’s cherished icon of the Madonna and child (§2.14). On yet another occasion, when the lamp went out again, Umiliana poured water instead of oil into the lamp, assured that God would perform a miracle on her behalf, and miraculously the flame was fed (§2.15). She had learned from her previous visions that she could count on God’s aid.

These visions of light and illumination indicate a shift in Umiliana’s spiritual vision as well. Immediately following these miracles, Umiliana underwent a series of satanic temptations, each accompanied by a vision. The devil revealed to her the cadavers first of her deceased family members, and then of her still-living daughters, but Umiliana paid no heed to these visions (§2.16).¹² Next, the devil presented visions of the Madonna and child and Umiliana’s own beloved sister-in-law, which she again ignored (§2.16). Thwarted, Satan retreated, but not without first giving Umiliana a sound thrashing. His physical beatings suggest that she in fact got the better of him by refusing to be moved by grief, fear, or even love. Umiliana apparently felt little warmth toward much of her family, as their interests diverged greatly from her own. While detachment is a *topos* in the lives of many saints, Vito goes one step further by presenting Umiliana’s familial ties and responsibilities and the social rank they reflect as demonic in origin.

On another occasion, Umiliana had a vision of the cadavers of what the devil claimed were religious women and their lovers, killed in their own jealousy-inspired rage (§2.17). It is possible that this vision was in fact based on an historical event; even so it seems odd that the hagiographer would choose to highlight such a scandal. It serves, however, to support Umiliana's place apart from the convent, perhaps suggesting that the convent walls were even more permeable to worldly thoughts and deeds than her own house.

One final vision is relayed by Vito through Umiliana herself to a visiting Franciscan. Umiliana had again been plagued by a series of visions in which Satan had presented himself to her first as an abbot in search of spiritual guidance, then as her confessor, and finally as the Madonna and child (§2.18). It is apparent that Umiliana had gained an understanding about such visions by this point, and that she was able to discriminate with ease between divinely and demonically inspired visions. Moreover, her actions indicate that she perceived that, after the series of demonic visions of holy people, this particular Franciscan was, in fact, the real thing.

Later in the *Life* a holy woman, Gisella of Mugello, asked Umiliana to advise her whether she should go out into the desert as a hermit or continue living in the world. Umiliana, recognising the dangers of isolation for a woman, saw Gisella's desire to flee the world as a temptation, and counseled her to continue living her holy life as she had been doing (§3.21). Thus living in the world and living apart from the world are *both* presented as temptations. By continuing to live as an urban laywoman, Umiliana proved her strength in rejecting the temptations of a life that afforded her a more direct association with her fellow citizens. She is depicted as all the more powerful and holy for resisting their lures. Yet the consecrated religious life is as much a temptation to Umiliana as the worldly life. It is a temptation that is conquered not through flight, however, but through co-existence. Umiliana's contacts with religious women and men reveal that she played an active part in their lives, and they in hers, even though she herself did not take vows as a nun, but as a tertiary, a lay Franciscan.

Having assured his audience that Umiliana was not fooled by satanic temptations, Vito then turns to her political revelations. The prophetic revelation of political events by women presented a double challenge to the hagiographer and his society. First, as Eve's words had led to Adam's downfall—and with him that of the entire human race—women's advice was not generally held in high regard.¹³ Although the birth of Christ offered the opportunity of redemption, Mary's contri-

bution was understood as providing flesh for the Word, acting as a vessel for its entrance into the world. Thus it might be said that her expression manifested itself through her flesh, in her body.¹⁴ Under the traditional injunction against preaching by women, it was vitally important that prophetic and revelatory works be attributed to divine origins so that it might be clear that once again the Word came from God alone, albeit through female flesh. Secondly, since women in late medieval Florence were also barred from political activity, any entry into the civic world was regarded with suspicion, even if it came through divine intervention. As Elizabeth Petroff has suggested, “the most difficult revelations to be responsible for [were] political revelations, since the political world was forbidden to women.”¹⁵

The hagiographer’s own motivations are therefore significant. Originally from Cortona, Vito lived most of his life in Florence at the newly established church of Santa Croce.¹⁶ Tradition holds that he was charged by Francis himself and sent to Florence where he became a powerful defender not only of the Franciscan order, but also of orthodoxy in general. He apparently knew Michele degli Alberti, another Franciscan of Santa Croce and Umiliana’s confessor, quite well, and received many testimonies from Umiliana firsthand. Vito’s Franciscanism is hardly immaterial. Himself a member of a recently established order, one that emphasised precisely the same qualities he emphasised in Umiliana’s *Life*, those of poverty, chastity, and humility, he must also have been aware of the thin line that separated such an officially sanctioned order from the growing heretical movements of the time.¹⁷ Nor can one underestimate the growing presence of the Cathars in Florence at the time of Umiliana, and the fine line between mortifying the body and rejecting it completely.¹⁸

Shortly after Umiliana’s death in 1246, Vito was designated by the order to write an official account of her life. God had, in fact, called Umiliana at a most opportune moment. In 1246, a few months before Umiliana’s death, Frederick of Antioch, son of Emperor Frederick II, seized control of the city, and began purging it of Guelph (pro-papal) power and resources. At this juncture, Umiliana’s prophetic visions and political events begin to meet. Her involvement, however, is indirect, and can best be characterised by indifference. This indifference, however, is especially reserved for conflicts caused by the Ghibelline (pro-imperial) actions.

For example, when an eminent Florentine prior, brutally slain in the Guelph and Ghibelline (pro-imperial) conflict, was placed by the devil before Umiliana, she did not even look up from her prayer, indicating that she was utterly uninterested in both

the grisly spectacle and its political implications (§2.19). Since the vision is meant to be a temptation it suggests that the hagiographer saw direct involvement in public life, with all its intrigues and dangers, to be the greatest threat to the young woman's sanctity.

Despite this threat, the account of Umiliana's life and death do indeed stress her involvement, although indirectly and often against her will, in the very political affairs she sought to avoid. In this way, Vito can have it both ways, presenting Umiliana as detached from worldly events, while using the text to highlight the very same events she avoided. Thus he is able to interweave a political commentary into Umiliana's *Life*. The vision immediately following that of the prior is not so much a vision as a window on actual events in Florence. Before the Guelphs had withdrawn from Florence, they clashed with the Ghibellines in bloody battles, disrupting the entire city. As fire and destruction raged in various parts of the city, the devil entered Umiliana's room crying: "Rise Umiliana, and see what is happening. Here is the entire city destroyed and consumed in flames, and the fire is moving toward your house!" (§2.19). In this case, historical events decisively enter the *Life* just as they nearly literally entered Umiliana's cell. Her response, however, once again reveals her ability to discern the demonic origins of these events:

Cui cum videretur velle assentire, et ad videndum aliquantulum declinare corpus, dixit: Frater corpus, si vis talia conspicere, vade et vide, sed animam tecum protervus non adduces. Quo audito diabolus statim discessit confusus.

[Since it seemed that (her body) wanted to follow (the devil), and since her body seemed to turn aside a little bit, she said: "Brother body, if you want to observe so much, go and look, but, insolent one, do not lead (my) soul with you. Upon hearing this, the devil immediately went away, confounded. §2.19]

The Guelph and Ghibelline conflict is presented here as the work of the devil, and although not a conjured vision at all, is placed in the same category as those that are. If this sinister implication has not been made explicitly enough in this depiction of political discord, later in the *Life* the hagiographer again pairs imperial rule with Satan. Umiliana, thirsting for martyrdom, was often heard to exclaim, "Oh, if only there were some *potestà* here in Florence that would torment me...in Christ's name" (§4.36). Umiliana was aware, of course, of the divine order against self-destruction, yet she

longed for a powerful and godless tyrant who might take care of her martyrdom for her. Since at the time of this request there was not yet such an imperial power in Florence, Umiliana had to gradually “annul” herself. Although her version of martyrdom is not an uncommon element in saints’ lives, the explicit reference to the potential oppressor waiting in the wings brings local politics into the universal typology of the holy person.

The tyrant does, of course, eventually arrive in 1246, in the form of Frederick of Antioch. By that time, however, Umiliana had just about made her own exit, dying only a few months after Frederick seized control of the city. Umiliana, who decidedly avoided public spectacle during her life, began to speak through her dead body—now itself a public spectacle and object of adoration. The politics that surrounded Umiliana’s life and death help to separate Umiliana’s life from the lives of so many other lay penitent women of the time. As the Emperor Frederick and his followers gathered under the Saracen banner, Guelph opposition, organised by the Franciscans, centred on Umiliana. By seizing hold of the cult of Umiliana, establishing her as both Franciscan and Guelph, and by controlling the location and veneration of her remains, the Franciscans were able to establish a focal point for the growing Guelph resistance. Through Vito’s text, Umiliana’s death became conflated with imperial oppression, and her body became, quite literally, a body of resistance.

Umiliana’s remains were first interred under a stairway in the old church of Santa Croce, and appropriately provided the foundation for the political ascent of the Franciscans in Florence. Not long after her interment, her body was removed from this location and a public procession and translation was held, suggesting that the popularity of her cult had increased along with the mounting Ghibelline presence. An envoy of the pope, in Florence on what was perhaps a secret mission, was drawn by these events. When the Ghibellines captured him, he prayed to the woman about whom he had heard so much that very day, and was miraculously freed before dawn.¹⁹ Thus, the very first miracle of Umiliana was politically charged. Moreover, it was only after her body was literally placed in the public square that such a miracle happened, or could have happened. Now a decidedly public—and political—figure, Umiliana was interred again, this time under the pulpit in Santa Croce. At this time, only Guelph supporters were permitted in the Florentine church, and Umiliana, evidently a Guelph in death even as she had been in life, became a permanent fixture.²⁰ Supported by her memory and the invention of it, the Franciscans exhorted the crowds to defy imperial rule and honour the pope.

Franciscans, supporters of the papacy and therefore Guelphs, were forbidden to have contact with Florentine men, but were, however, permitted to be spiritual advisors to Florentine women.²¹ Umiliana may therefore have unintentionally legitimised Franciscan contact with the up-and-coming Cerchi family, without raising Ghibelline suspicion. Although the *Life* closely links Umiliana with Franciscan spiritual—and Guelph political—ideals, it also highlights her family as an oppositional force. By analogy, then, her family, or at least the male members of her family, was linked with the imperial forces, the Ghibellines, the Saracens, and ultimately with the devil himself. Thus Vito's negative connotations offered later generations a tangible way to expiate the sins of their forefathers. Until Umiliana's time the Cerchi family had remained more or less out of the political fray, adopting the strategy of supporting whomever was in power at the moment. Through the cult and veneration of the family *santa* the Cerchi family joined forces with the Franciscans and eventually became one of the major Guelph powers in Florence. The adoption of Umiliana by the Franciscan order indicates not only a self-conscious attempt to drape her often extreme spirituality in the garments of orthodoxy, but also a key moment in Florentine politics, as the Franciscans stepped in and overtly influenced the affairs of the state.

The success of the cult of Umiliana was a result of several factors: good timing, her physical presence in the Santa Croce quarter, her strong ties with the Franciscans, her powerful yet politically undecided family, and most of all her insightful hagiographer. Vito's rhetorical goal was threefold. First, he took what was essentially an independent spiritual movement and placed it firmly under the auspices of Franciscanism. Secondly, he took Umiliana's silence about and disdain for political activity, and channeled that behaviour into a cohesive political force. Finally, he drew the wealthy and powerful Cerchi family into the political battles of the time, forcing a previously neutral political force to side with the Guelphs. The Cerchi's own political silence, therefore, was represented and then purged in Umiliana's political detachment and subsequent creation as the champion of anti-imperial forces.

The maintenance of Umiliana's tomb and relics was funded, in fact, by the Cerchi, the same family that had sought to put an end to Umiliana's spiritual practices. In the late seventeenth century, during a resurgence in the popularity of Umiliana's cult, Alessandro dei Cerchi, chronicler of the family, requested official approval of the cult. In 1694, in a completely different political climate than the one in which she had lived, Pope Innocent XII approved the cult of Umiliana dei Cerchi, and beatified her.

Through her prophetic revelations, Umiliana's place in Florentine politics was established. Hagiographic accounts of her political prowess were later developed and even expanded in subsequent accounts of her life.²² That which her first hagiographer had himself foretold was brought to light in time: "she preached more through her works than her words, she continued to preach after her bodily death, and she will preach forever" (§2.13).

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Notes

1 For an overview of the historical implications of prophecy, see Marjorie Reeves, "History and Prophecy in Medieval Thought," *Medievalia et Humanistica* 5 (1974), pp. 51-75.

2 The edition of the *Life* used in this paper is Vitus Cortonensis, "Vita beatae Humiliana de Cerchis," *Acta Sanctorum*, Maii IV (Antwerp, 1685), pp. 385-400. Unless otherwise stated, all subsequent references come from this *vita*, and will be cited within the body of the text by chapter and paragraph number. All translations are my own. Other extant versions of the *Life* of Umiliana appear to be based, either as translations or interpretations, on Vito's text. See especially Francesco Cionacci, *Storia della beata Umiliana de' Cerchi vedova fiorentina del terz'ordine di San Francesco, distinta in IV parti* (Florence, 1682); and Domenico Moreni, *Leggenda della beata Umiliana de' Cerchi* (Florence, 1827), ed. in Giuseppe De Luca, *Prosatori Minori del Trecento* (Milan and Naples, 1954), pp. 723-68. For Umiliana and her cult see G. Battelli, *La leggenda della beata Umiliana de' Cerchi* (Florence, 1940); R. Davidsohn, *Storia di Firenze, 2.1, Guelfi e ghibellini* (Florence, 1956; trans. *Geschichte von Florenz, 2.1, Guelfen und Ghibellinen*, Berlin, 1908), pp. 180-8; Maria Romano Franco, *La Beata Umiliana de Cerchi* (Rome, 1977); Anna Benvenuti Papi, "Una Santa Vedova," and "La Famiglia, Territorio Negato," in *In castro poenitentiae, Santità e Società femminile nell'Italia medievale* (Rome, 1990), pp. 59-98, 171-203; Z. Lazzeri, "La Beata Umiliana dei Cerchi," *Studi francescani* 7.4 (1921), pp. 196-206.

3 For a further exploration of the inconsistencies in Umiliana's *Life*, see Anne M. Schuchman, "The *Lives* of Umiliana de' Cerchi: Representations of Female Sainthood in Thirteenth-Century Florence," *Essays in Medieval Studies* 14 (Chicago, 1998): <http://www.luc.edu/publications/medieval/vol14/schuchmn.html>.

4 For an account of Umiliana and her lineage, see Carol Lansing, *The Florentine Magnates* (Princeton, 1991), pp. 98-99, 109-142.

5 Studies of women saints that take into consideration their political prophecies include Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Timea Szell, eds., *Images of Sainthood in Medieval Europe* (Ithaca, 1991); Daniel Bornstein and Roberto Rusconi, *Mistiche e devote nell'Italia tardomedievale* (Naples, 1992; trans. *Women and Religion in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, Chicago, 1996); Michael Goodich, "The Contours of Female Piety in Later Medieval Hagiography," *Church History* 50 (1981), pp. 20-32; Nanda Hoppenwasser, "The Human Burden of the Prophet: St Birgitta's *Revelations* and *The Book of Margery Kempe*," *Medieval Perspectives* 8 (1993), pp. 153-162; E. Ann Matter and John Coakley, *Creative Women in Medieval and Early Modern Italy: A Religious and Artistic Renaissance* (Philadelphia, 1994); Karen Scott, "Io Caterina," *Dear Sister: Medieval Women and the Epistolary Genre* (Philadelphia, 1993), pp. 87-121; and Ute Stargardt, "St Birgitta: An Example of Female Medieval Mysticism and Political Activity," *1983 NEH Institute Resource Book for the Teaching of Medieval Civilizations* (Amherst, 1984), pp. 158-64.

6 Recent studies have focused on texts written by men that describe women's lives in an effort to detect the woman's voice. See especially Catherine M. Mooney, ed. *Gendered Voices* (Philadelphia, 1999). Major studies that utilise hagiography in social history include Pierre Delooz, *Sociologue et canonisations, Collection scientifique de la Faculté de Droit de l'Université de Liège* 30 (Liège, 1969); André Vauchez, *La sainteté en Occident aux derniers siècles du Moyen Age d'après les procès de canonisation et les documents hagiographiques* (Rome, 1981); Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M. Bell, *Saints and Society: The Two Worlds of Western Christendom, 1000-1700* (Chicago, 1982); Peter Brown, *The Cult of Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago, 1981); and Richard Kieckhefer, *Unquiet Souls: Fourteenth-Century Saints and Their Religious Milieu* (Chicago, 1984).

7 For a description of religious laywomen in Late Medieval Italy, see Katherine Jane Gill, "Open Monasteries for Women in Late Medieval and Early Modern Italy: Two Roman Examples," in *The Crannied Wall* ed. Craig A. Monson (Ann Arbor, 1992), pp. 15-47; and her "Penitents, *pinzochere* and *mantellate*: varieties of women's religious communities in Central Italy, c. 1300-1520" (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1994).

8 Anna Benvenuti Papi ("Nascita di un culto" and "Una Santa Vedova" for which see note 1 above), was the first to detail Umiliana's connection to the Franciscan involvement in Florentine politics. I am indebted to her work.

9 For the history of dowry laws in late medieval Florence, see Anthony Molho, *Marriage Alliance in Late Medieval Florence* (Cambridge, 1994); Isabella Chabot, "Widowhood and Poverty in Late Medieval Florence," *Continuity and Change* 3.2 (1988), pp. 291-311; and Maria Consiglia De Matteis, "La donna e la vita quotidiana nell'Italia tardo medievale," *Frau und Spätmittelalterlicher Alltag* (Vienna, 1986), pp. 409-428.

10 Elizabeth Petroff discusses this connection in "She seemed to have come from the desert," *Body and Soul: Essays on Medieval Women and Mysticism* (New York, 1994), pp. 110-36.

11 "Quid de prædicatione, qua magis opere prædicavit quam verbo, et corpore mortua prædicare non cessat, et in perpetuum prædicabit?" (§2.13).

12 In *Florentine Magnates*, pp. 116-17, Lansing argues that these visions demonstrate that Umiliana's duty as a woman in the household was to grieve and bury her deceased family members. When Umiliana rejects this duty she rejects her role within the family and within Florentine society as well.

13 For discussions of women and preaching, see Benvenuti Papi, *In Castro poenitentiae* (see note 1); Adriana Valerio, ed. *Donne, Potere e Profezia* (Naples, 1995).

14 Caroline Walker Bynum, "...and Woman his Humanity," in *Gender and Religion: On the Complexity of Symbols*. C.W. Bynum, Steven Harell, and Paul Richman, eds (Boston, 1986), pp. 151-180.

15 Elizabeth Petroff, *Consolation of the Blessed: Women Saints in Medieval Tuscany* (New York, 1979), p. 54.

16 For information regarding Vito da Cortona's life, see G.G. Sbaraglia, *Supplementum et castigatio ad Scriptores Trium Ordinum s. Francisci*, 3 (Rome, 1936), p. 162; and L. Wadding, *Scriptores Ordinis Minorem* (Rome, 1906), p. 220.

17 For this period in Florentine history and the role of Franciscan friars and tertiaries, see M. Bertagna, "Sul Terz'Ordine francescano in Toscana nel sec. XIII: Note storiche e considerazioni," *Collectanea Franciscana* 43.1-3 (1973), pp. 263-77; R. Davidsohn, *Storia di Firenze*, 2.1, *Guelfi e ghibellini*; Z. Lazzeri, *La Beata Umiliana de' Cerchi*, pp. 196-206; G.G. Meersseman, *Dossier de l'ordre de la Pénitance au XIIIe siècle* (Friburg, 1960); Anna Benvenuti Papi, "Fрати mendicanti e pinzochere in Toscana," in *Mistiche*, eds Bornstein and Rusconi, pp. 85-106; Benvenuti Papi, "Una Santa Vedova" (see note 1).

18 For Umiliana's possible Cathar influences, see Lansing, *Florentine Magnates*, pp. 120-4.

19 *Miracula, Acta Sanctorum*, Maii IV, p. 403.

20 Umiliana's remains can still be found in Santa Croce in a chapel to the right of the main altar.

21 Benvenuti Papi, "Una Santa Vedova," and "Nascita di un culto" (see note 1).

22 In one, Umiliana was reported to have foreseen the entire Guelph-Ghibelline conflict.