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Gender, Dress, and Franciscan Tradition in the Mary Magdalen Chapel at San Francesco, Assisi

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Abstract

Through the inclusion of newly invented scenes, innovative handling of established narratives, and symbolic use of clothing and hair, the Magdalen Chapel at San Francesco in Assisi (ca. 1305–19) presents a Magdalen who successfully models Franciscan values of renunciation, penitence, and caritas, her images thus resonating throughout the Upper and Lower Churches. Yet her position at San Francesco remains equivocal. As a New Testament saint, she logically functions as a model for St. Francis. His vita, however, anachronistically transforms her life, inspiring new narrative episodes—for example, her receipt of a garment—or reshaping established scenes, as at her conversion when demons fly from her submissive body toward the very altar where Francis exorcised sinners. Despite being honored in her chapel, she consistently appears needy, a passive recipient of charity and miraculous works, rather than a miracle worker. As a female, she carries the taint of sexual sin through her exposed and eroticized body; she thus needs to be clothed by a hermit, as elsewhere at San Francesco destitute individuals are clothed by Saints Francis and Martin. A terrible sinner, she is exorcised by Christ, just as Francis posthumously exorcises pilgrims visiting his nearby tomb. And as Christ is honored by the Magdalen's submissive washing of his feet, so Francis is honored by the humble simpleton. Not obviously a miracle-working

saint, Mary Magdalen remains like the Assisi pilgrims petitioning for assistance. Yet her power as intercessor remains unchallenged as her very weaknesses offer audiences hope: if she can be saved, so can they.

The Magdalen Chapel owes its prominence in the Lower Church of San Francesco at Assisi not only to the quality and extent of its pictorial cycles but also to its multiple functions in the early fourteenth-century expansion of the Lower Church. While the authorship and dating of the Magdalen Chapel have been much debated, scholarly opinion favors assigning the frescoes to the same Giottoesque workshop that painted the Lower Church's north transept frescoes and dating them within the first two decades of the fourteenth century, between 1305 and 1319, and possibly by 1308 (Figs. 1–4).¹ Questions of patronage appear resolved. While it remains uncertain whether the chapel's subject matter, including that of its stained-glass windows (ca. 1300–1305), was selected by the patron or, as is more likely, was predetermined by the Franciscans as part of a larger iconographic whole, the space functioned as a funerary chapel for Assisi's Franciscan bishop, Teobaldo Pontano (r. 1296–1329). He appears twice within

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1. Sarah Wilkins offers a historiography regarding artist, date, and patronage: “‘She Loved More Ardently Than the Rest’: The Magdalen Cycles of Late Duecento and Trecento Italy” (PhD diss., Rutgers University, 2012), 145–50. She asserts a *terminus post quem* of 1305, after the painting of the Scrovegni Chapel, yet before 1319, when Assisi was beset by civil strife. Viviana Vannucci believes the chapel was painted in two campaigns, begun by Giotto in 1307–8 and completed by his followers after 1310, possibly between 1312 and 1314: *Maria Maddalena: storia e iconografia nel Medioevo dal III al XIV secolo* (Rome: Gangemi, 2012), 152–55. Janet Robson attributes it to Giotto's workshop, ca. 1305–8, asserting that the Magdalen frescoes “were undertaken at the same time, and by the same group of artists, as the decoration of the north transept”; see her “The Pilgrim's Progress: Reinterpreting the Trecento Fresco Programme in the Lower Church at Assisi,” in *The Art of the Franciscan Order in Italy*, ed. William R. Cook (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 39–70, at 53 and fig. 7. See also Lorraine Schwartz, “The Fresco Decoration of the Magdalen Chapel in the Basilica of St. Francis at Assisi” (PhD diss., Indiana University, 1980), 107–53. For a comprehensive overview and excellent reproductions, consult Giorgio Bonsanti, ed., *La Basilica di San Francesco ad Assisi*, 4 vols., *Mirabilia Italiae* 11 (Modena: Franco Cosimo Panini, 2002), esp. 1:360–405 (pls. 630–717), 3:171–76, and 4:381–93.

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Figure 1. Giotto and Shop, Mary Magdalen Chapel, west wall, 1305–19, Lower Church of San Francesco, Assisi (photo: Ghigo Roli).

Figure 2. Giotto and Shop, Mary Magdalen Chapel, east wall, 1305–19, Lower Church of San Francesco, Assisi (photo: Ghigo Roli).

Figure 3. Giotto and Shop, Mary Magdalen Chapel, south wall, 1305–19, Lower Church of San Francesco, Assisi (photo: Ghigo Roli).

Figure 4. Giotto and Shop, Mary Magdalen Chapel, north wall, frescoes 1305–19, stained glass ca. 1300–1305, Lower Church of San Francesco, Assisi (photo: Ghigo Roli).

Figure 5. Detail of Figure 2, Teobaldo Pontano and the Magdalen (photo: Stefan Diller/www.assisi.de). See the electronic edition of *Gesta* for a color version of this image.

the chapel, once dressed as a Franciscan, kneeling alongside the Magdalen (Fig. 5), and once dressed in bishop's robes with St. Rufinus, patron saint and first bishop of Assisi.² In addition to these two donor portraits, the chapel contains frescoes of seven narratives from Mary Magdalen's life, seventeen standing saints, and numerous half-length saints, angels, and holy figures; further supplementing these, the chapel's stained glass comprises eleven scenes from the Magdalen's vita, with five standing figures, including Christ, the Virgin, Mary Magdalen, Mary Cleophas, and Mary Salome.

2. Scholars believe the Franciscans established the chapels' dedications prior to approving their specific patrons, though the extent of the Order's control is uncertain. See Irene Hueck, "Die Kapellen der Basilika San Francesco in Assisi: die Auftraggeber und die Franziskaner," in *Patronage and Public in the Trecento: Proceedings of the St. Lambrecht Symposium, Abtei St. Lambrecht, Styria, 16–19 July 1984*, ed. Vincent Moleta (Florence: Olschki, 1986), 81–104; and Robson, who accepts Hueck's position ("Pilgrim's Progress," 51–52). On Pontano's patronage, see esp. Wilkins ("She Loved More Ardently," 150–58), who discusses his skullcap and cloak (156–57); and Vannucci, *Maria Maddalena*, 155–60. For the dating of the stained glass, see Frank Martin in Bonsanti, ed., *Basilica di San Francesco*, 4:388–92.

The chapel's themes and functions, however, extend beyond Pontano's personal needs to respond to the larger Franciscan environment. Scholars have considered parallels between St. Francis's life and ideals and the Magdalen's within the Upper and Lower Churches of San Francesco, the most obvious being their preaching missions; themes of conversion, penance, and charity; and their commitment to both the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa*, resulting in the *vita mixta*. Nurith Kenaan-Kedar, for example, sees the Magdalen's narrative as reinforcing the values expressed in the Lower Church's crossing vaults, with its allegories highlighting Franciscan virtues of obedience, poverty, and chastity.³ Sarah Wilkins suggests that the four frescoes on the chapel's middle level stress the Magdalen's active life, while the three lunettes above document her contemplative experiences in the wilderness, thus demonstrating the power of the *vita mixta*.⁴ Lorraine Schwartz's broad consideration of the chapel's iconography explores the Magdalen's relationship to the Franciscan Order, while Katherine Jansen and Michelle Erhardt each discuss more generally Franciscan devotional literature that considers Francis a second Magdalen.⁵ Regarding the chapel's extended purposes, Donal Cooper and Janet Robson have published important studies demonstrating that the Magdalen Chapel formed part of the Lower Church's major renovation and expansion, designed to increase access for the overwhelming numbers of pilgrims visiting St. Francis's tomb below the Lower Church's high altar. They propose that the Magdalen Chapel may have both served as a confessional and held masses for visitors prior to their entry into the transept and circulation around the tomb itself.⁶

3. Nurith Kenaan-Kedar, "Emotion, Beauty and Franciscan Piety: A New Reading of the Magdalene Chapel in the Lower Church of Assisi," *Studi medievali*, series 3, 26, no. 2 (1985): 699–710.

4. Wilkins, "She Loved More Ardently," 17, 45–46, and 180. For the Magdalen Chapel's resonances within its Franciscan milieu and additional references, see *ibid.*, 35–50; and Lorraine Schwartz, "Patronage and Franciscan Iconography in the Magdalen Chapel at Assisi," *Burlington Magazine* 133 (January 1991): 32–36. Michelle Erhardt also considers the Magdalen through a Franciscan lens: "The Magdalene as Mirror: Trecento Franciscan Imagery in the Guidalotti-Rinuccini Chapel, Florence," in *Mary Magdalene: Iconographic Studies from the Middle Ages to the Baroque*, ed. Michelle Erhardt and Amy Morris, *Studies in Religion and the Arts* 7 (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2012), 21–44.

5. Schwartz, "Fresco Decoration of the Magdalen Chapel," 154–215; Katherine Ludwig Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen: Preaching and Popular Devotion in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 138–42; and Erhardt, "The Magdalene as Mirror," 22.

6. Donal Cooper and Janet Robson, "Imagery and the Economy of Penance at the Tomb of St. Francis," in *Architecture and Pilgrimage, 1000–1500*, ed. Paul Davies, Deborah Howard, and Wendy Pullan (Farnham/Burlington: Ashgate, 2013), 165–86; and Robson, "Pilgrim's Progress," 39–70.

Several aspects of the Magdalen Chapel, however, have not been sufficiently noted. First, the chapel's fresco and stained-glass narratives use imagery of clothing and hair to develop and enhance its themes.⁷ While scholars have noticed how images at San Francesco clearly use dress to show Francis's adherence to poverty, charity, and penance, they have not commented on how the Magdalen's changing dress—a term that includes clothing and accessories, hair, and even the state of *undress*—chronicles her spiritual development, from her moment of conversion to her soul's final assumption into heaven.⁸ In order to link the Magdalen's life and values to those of St. Francis, the chapel's artists borrowed elements from depictions of Saints Mary of Egypt and Agnes, thereby creating innovative and perhaps unique images within the Magdalen's iconographical tradition. And while the Magdalen serves as a powerful model of redemption at San Francesco, she accomplishes this, paradoxically, by assuming the roles of egregious sinner and pitiful petitioner: she appears in narratives not only as a dangerously erotic figure, but especially as one in need of help. Remarkably, the Magdalen Chapel's frescoes create a visual rhetoric of inversion, for throughout the chapel, the Magdalen appears repeatedly as the supplicant, kneeling and pleading for forgiveness and assistance, with submissive postures and behaviors; she appears upright only once. But these visual expressions of what were traditionally seen as stereotypical female weaknesses ultimately reinforce her powerful reputation as a consummate intercessor, for pilgrims visiting the site—themselves humbly confessing, petitioning for mercy, and hoping for redemption—would have witnessed her woeful appeals consistently and affirmatively answered. If even she—a prostitute!—could convince Christ to resurrect her brother and be saved herself, she offered hope to all sinners.⁹

The unknown artists of the Magdalen Chapel thus used a variety of pictorial devices and narrative choices both to inte-

grate the Magdalen's story into its larger Franciscan context and to present her as a powerful model for salvation. She plays a remarkably important role at San Francesco, a church whose imagery otherwise focuses only scant attention on female holy experience.¹⁰ The Magdalen's eminent position in her own chapel remains exceptional, and her imagery resonates throughout the double church, taking on broader significance than has heretofore been acknowledged.

Giving and Receiving: Dressing the Magdalen, Dressing the Poor

The fresco and stained-glass narrative cycles in the Magdalen Chapel depict both Gospel stories and later legendary episodes from the Magdalen's vita. Included in the fresco cycle are three of the most common Gospel scenes of the saint: the *Conversion at the House of Simon the Pharisee* (Fig. 1), the *Raising of Lazarus* (Fig. 1), and the *Noli me tangere* (Fig. 2). These reappear among the stained-glass cycle's eight Gospel scenes, but there the artists include an expanded narrative of Mary and Martha's time at Bethany.¹¹ Perhaps surprisingly, given this Franciscan setting, neither narrative cycle includes scenes representing the Magdalen's role in Christ's Crucifixion, Deposition, or Lamentation. The post-Gospel scenes vary

see Ruth Mazo Karras, "Holy Harlots: Prostitute Saints in Medieval Legend," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 1 (1990–91): 3–32.

10. Prior to the Magdalen's chapel, the Upper Church's apse honored the Virgin Mary with scenes from her life by Cimabue, but otherwise women appear rarely as protagonists and only occasionally in traditional frescoes and stained-glass depictions of Old and New Testament narratives or scenes from the life of St. Francis; even St. Clare hardly appears (in the Upper Church, only on the entry arch and in the nave narrative, mourning St. Francis's death; see Bonsanti, ed., *Basilica di San Francesco*, 2:pls. 1566 and 1719). In the Lower Church, the Virgin Mary appears prominently in the north transept's *Infancy of Christ* frescoes, but the chapels added during the church's expansion, with the exception of the Magdalen's (and Catherine of Alexandria's later chapel, ca. 1368), honor male saints. Schwartz considers the unusually prominent inclusion of female saints within the Magdalen Chapel and interprets them as expressions of themes of sisterhood and birth/rebirth; see "Fresco Decoration of the Magdalen Chapel," esp. 161–76.

11. The stained-glass Gospel scenes appear in the two rightmost lancets, beginning in the one furthest to the right and moving from bottom to top in both. Martin (in Bonsanti, ed., *Basilica di San Francesco*, 4:394–95) identifies the episodes as *Supper in the House of Simon the Pharisee*, *Meeting at the Gate of Bethany*, *Raising of Lazarus*, *Supper at Bethany*, *Christ Appears to the Marys*, *Christ Defends the Magdalen from Martha's Reproaches*, *Christ Appears to the Magdalen*, and *Noli me tangere*; Wilkins instead identifies *Christ Appears to the Marys as Christ with Mary Magdalen*, *Joanna*, and *Susanna* ("She Loved More Ardently," 223–25).

7. In "Fresco Decoration of the Magdalen Chapel," 154–98 (passim), Lorraine Schwartz offers some useful comments on the dress of various figures in the chapel. Margrit Lisner considers dress color in several of the Assisi fresco cycles, though not in the Magdalen Chapel; see her "Die Gewandfarben der Apostel in Giotto's Arena-fresken: Farbgebung und Farbikonographie," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 53, no. 3 (1990): 309–75, esp. 344–61. I thank Amy Neff for this reference.

8. For example, Alastair Smart, in *The Assisi Problem and the Art of Giotto* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 151–58 and 163–64, comments on clothing's importance in the first two bays of Francis's narratives in the Upper Church, as do Donal Cooper and Janet Robson, *The Making of Assisi: The Pope, the Franciscans, and the Painting of the Basilica* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2013), 154.

9. Pope Gregory conflated various New Testament women under the name Mary Magdalen; see Susan Haskins, *Mary Magdalen: Myth and Metaphor* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993), 3–32. Tradition interpreted her sins as sexual and branded her a prostitute;

more distinctly in the fresco and glass cycles, with the fresco cycle including four narratives: the saint's *Voyage to Marseilles and the Miracle of the Governor's Wife* (Fig. 2), *Mary Magdalen Elevated by Angels* (Fig. 2), the *Hermit Priest Giving a Garment to the Magdalen* (Fig. 3), and the *Last Communion and Elevation of the Magdalen's Soul into Heaven* (Fig. 1). The glass cycle instead depicts only three additional narratives, found in the third lancet from the right. Reading now from top to bottom and beginning below an image of the *Virgin Mary Holding Christ*, these include *Mary Magdalen in the Wilderness Covered by Her Hair*, *Mary Magdalen Receiving a Garment from an Angel*, and *Mary Magdalen's Burial* (Fig. 4).

Most significant in relation to the Magdalen's dress, the fresco of a *Hermit Priest Giving a Garment to the Magdalen* (Figs. 3, 6) appears prominently located above the south wall's main entrance into the Magdalen Chapel. As many have noted, this is not an episode found in the Magdalen's earliest written vitae, but rather is almost certainly taken from those of Mary of Egypt, the saint depicted on the window wall opposite, at the lower left (Fig. 4). Mary of Egypt, after forty-seven years in the desert, "blackened and burned by the fiery sun," was visited by the priest Zosimus.¹² Like the Magdalen, she was a former prostitute who grew miraculously long hair while in the wilderness, but instead of being shown as young and nude, as is most common for the Magdalen, she typically appears as an elderly woman; here at Assisi, she unusually is wrapped in a long white garment, possibly a veil rather than a sewn gown.¹³

The borrowed story of the Magdalen living in the wilderness of La Sainte Baume as a naked hermit, visited by a priest who covers her nakedness with a garment, was widespread in the Magdalen's vitae by the eleventh century, and possibly already present in texts as early as the ninth.¹⁴ Yet images of the Magdalen receiving a garment never gained currency, possibly due to texts such as the twelfth-century Cistercian *Vita beatae Mariae Magdalene et sororis ejus sanctae Marthae*, which denies the episode ever occurred and correctly recognizes it as borrowed from tales of the Egyptian ascetic: "But the rest of

the tale . . . that she saw no man afterwards until she was visited by I know not what priest, from whom she begged a garment, and other such stuff—is false and a fabrication of storytellers drawn out of the accounts of the Penitent of Egypt."¹⁵ Jacobus de Voragine similarly seemed suspicious of the story in his enormously popular thirteenth-century *Golden Legend*. There he referred only briefly to her receipt of a garment from a priest who "found her closed up in a cell," not a cave, in an addendum that he credited to either Hegesippus or Josephus, an afterthought to his standard account of her post-Ascension time in Marseilles and her thirty-year retirement to a cave in the wilderness, and finally death.¹⁶ Nowhere does Jacobus's text mention her nudity or any miraculous growth of modesty-providing hair, issues to which we shall return.

While images of the Magdalen with long, flowing hair at her cave in the wilderness abound in late medieval and Renaissance pictorial cycles, the Assisi fresco of the *Hermit Priest Giving a Garment to the Magdalen* is the earliest example known to me of a male holy figure offering the nude saint a garment. Indeed, the Assisi chapel fresco remains the only such example known to me among pre-Counter-Reformation works depicting the Magdalen, and so may be unique.¹⁷ The rare precedents that exist occur in image cycles of Mary of Egypt, not the Magdalen. Two early thirteenth-century French examples appear in stained-glass window cycles: at Chartres Cathedral, ca. 1210, and at Bourges Cathedral, ca. 1215.¹⁸ At

12. Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans. William Granger Ryan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 227–29. On Mary of Egypt, consult Karras, "Holy Harlots," 6–19; and Benedicta Ward, *Harlots of the Desert: A Study of Repentance in Early Monastic Sources*, Cistercian Studies Series 106 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1987), 26–56.

13. See Bonsanti, ed., *Basilica di San Francesco*, 1:pl. 675.

14. See Jean Misrahi, "A *Vita Sanctae Mariae Magdalene* (B.H.L. 5456) in an Eleventh-Century Manuscript," *Speculum* 18, no. 3 (July 1943): 335–39; and J. E. Cross, "Mary Magdalen in the *Old English Martyrology*: The Earliest Extant 'Narrat Josephus' Variant of Her Legend," *Speculum* 53, no. 1 (January 1978): 16–25, esp. 19, 22, and 23.

15. David Mycoff, translator and annotator, *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene and of Her Sister Saint Martha*, Cistercian Studies Series 108 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1989), 98. The eleventh-century *Apostolic Life of Blessed Mary Magdalene* similarly rejected stories conflating Mary of Egypt's narrative with the Magdalen's; see Ward, *Harlots of the Desert*, 26–27. On the eremitical Magdalen's origin and development in texts and imagery, see Jansen, *Making of the Magdalen*, 37–38 and 124–42; the earliest known depiction of a nude and hair-covered Magdalen is in a fresco by Bonamicus (1225, San Prospero, Perugia); see Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, 232; and Vannucci, *Maria Maddalena*, 96–99.

16. *Golden Legend*, 381.

17. Marga Anstett-Janssen, "Maria Magdalena," in the *Lexikon der Christlichen Ikonographie* (Rome: Herder, 1974), 7:539, listing Assisi as her sole example, calls it "rare" (*seltene*); Wilkins, "'She Loved More Ardentlly,'" 181, calls it the "only appearance" of this scene.

18. On these and other images of Mary of Egypt receiving a garment, see most recently Vannucci, *Maria Maddalena*, 92–94, 103, and 106, where she suggests that an illuminated manuscript of Mary of Egypt may be the intermediary between French examples and the Assisi imagery. For excellent color digital images of the windows and details of each panel discussed here and below, go to http://www.medievalart.org.uk/Chartres/142_pages/Chartres_Bay142_key.htm (Chartres, Bay 142, see panel B1) and http://www.medievalart.org.uk/bourges/21_pages/Bourges_Bay_21_key.htm (Bourges, Bay 21, see panel 22), a website maintained by Stuart

Figure 6. Detail of Figure 3, *Hermit Priest Giving a Garment to the Magdalen* (photo: Stefan Diller/www.assisi.de). See the electronic edition of *Gesta* for a color version of this image.

Chartres, a nude Mary of Egypt, with blonde hair to her ankles, kneels before Zosimus and clutches a garment to her (Fig. 7). At Bourges, an extensive cycle comprising thirty panels includes a naked Mary of Egypt accepting a shapeless garment from Zosimus while he warily turns away his head (Fig. 8); she wraps it like a shawl around her undressed body in the two subsequent scenes.

The Assisi chapel's stained glass (Fig. 4) further compounds the slightly later fresco's unusual iconography by preceding it with an alternate version of the wilderness story and the Magdalen's receipt of clothing.¹⁹ This treatment is also the earliest I know of this variant and may similarly be unique within Magdalen iconography. Three scenes in the third lancet from

the right depict her experience as an ascetic in the desert, and each clearly asserts her identity via a label: "S-MA-MAG." She appears first below the image of Mary with Christ: standing alone while "dressed" only in her long, brownish blond hair, she raises her hands in prayer toward Christ in the adjacent lancet (Fig. 9). Immediately below, in her next scene, an angel—not a hermit priest—descends to give her a voluminous white garment, and below that, a hooded male figure stands behind the now-covered saint while a lion sits at her feet (Fig. 10). This last episode certainly refers to her imminent death and burial, and confirms its origins, like those of the fresco cycle's *Hermit Priest Giving a Garment*, in the tales of Mary of Egypt.²⁰

The stained-glass window cycles of Mary of Egypt at Chartres and Bourges Cathedrals again offer the closest parallels to the Assisi window. In the two-scene account at Chartres of her wilderness stay, following Zosimus's gift of a garment, he and

Whatling. The website at <http://www.therosewindow.com/> also reproduces high-quality images of the stained-glass windows discussed in this essay.

19. On these, see Egidio Giusto, *Le vetrate di S. Francesco in Assisi: studio storico iconografico* (Milan: Alfieri and Lacroix, 1911), 264–74; Wilkins, "She Loved More Ardentlly," 221–26; and Martin, in Bonsanti, ed., *Basilica di San Francesco*, 4:388–92.

20. Martin (in Bonsanti, ed., *Basilica di San Francesco*, 4:390) equivocates regarding the saint's identity in the Assisi windows, labeling the three panels "Magdalene (or Mary of Egypt)."

Figure 7. *Mary of Egypt Receiving a Garment from Zosimus*, bay 142, panel B1, Chartres Cathedral, ca. 1210 (photo: Stuart Whatling). See the electronic edition of *Gesta* for a color version of this image.

a lion bury Mary of Egypt's nude body, now covered only by her hair.²¹ The more extensive Bourges cycle offers clearer prototypes for the Assisi window's first and third wilderness scenes, and additional imagery at the cathedral suggests particular ties there between Mary of Egypt and the Magdalen. Bourges was a center for worship of the Magdalen and, as Margaret Jennings has noted, she and Mary of Egypt most unusually appear in the spandrels just below the west facade's central *Last Judgment* tympanum in a triadic arrangement with the Virgin Mary, depicted above, interceding with Christ. Representing the power of penitence in conjunction with this scene of final judgment, both former prostitutes are confessed sinners, converted and saved.²² Their close relationship is repeated in the cathedral's stained glass: the northernmost ambulatory chapel includes lengthy narrative windows for both, on either side of one dedicated to St. Nicholas.²³ While the Magdalen window depicts her conversion and role in Lazarus's

21. http://www.medievalart.org.uk/Chartres/142_pages/Chartres_Bay142_PanelB2.htm.

22. Margaret Jennings, "The Three Marys of Bourges," *Downside Review* 119, no. 414 (January 2001): 35–50.

23. For detailed images of Mary of Egypt's window, see note 18 above; for the Magdalen window at Bourges, see http://www.medievalart.org.uk/bourges/17_pages/Bourges_Bay_17_key.htm; eight of the bottommost panels are nineteenth-century replacements. See also Colette Deremble, "Les premiers cycles d'images consacrés à Marie Madeleine," *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome* 104, no. 1 (1992): 187–208, at 201–2. Similarly at Auxerre Cathedral, narrative windows of these two Marys are adjacent to each other; consult Virginia Chieffo Raguin, *Stained Glass in Thirteenth-Century Burgundy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 153–55.

Figure 8. *Mary of Egypt Receiving a Garment from Zosimus*, bay 21, panel 22, Bourges Cathedral, ca. 1215 (photo: Stuart Whatling). See the electronic edition of *Gesta* for a color version of this image.

death and resurrection, and omits any scenes in the wilderness, the Mary of Egypt window focuses on her experience as a prostitute and desert penitent. Like the Magdalen in the Assisi stained glass, she at first appears alone, covered only by her hair (panel 21, Fig. 11), but after Zosimus's visit and his gift of a cloak (panel 22, Fig. 8), the priest returns at her request the following Holy Thursday to administer the Eucharist (panel 23). Following her death and the elevation of her soul into heaven yet another year later (panel 24), Zosimus shrouds her body (panel 25) and buries it with the assistance of a lion (panel 26, Fig. 12). Thus, the first and last of the three wilderness scenes in the Assisi window correspond narratively and thematically with Bourges panels 21 and 26 of Mary of Egypt, suggesting that such northern *vita* cycles informed the Assisi stained glass.²⁴

24. Deremble ("Les premiers cycles," 187–208) discusses the saint's earliest French glass cycles and notes the Assisi Magdalen wilderness window scenes' reliance on Mary of Egypt's windows (206); Vannucci (*Maria Maddalena*, 103 and 106) believes French artists influenced the Italian glassmakers. Scholars have suggested northern stained glassmakers worked in the Upper Church at Assisi, including on several apse windows; these number among the earliest figurative stained-glass windows in Italy (ca. 1255). Frank Martin (in

Figure 9. Detail of Figure 4, Christ above Mary Magdalen (left); Virgin Mary and Christ above Mary Magdalen in the Wilderness Covered by Her Hair (right) (photo: author). See the electronic edition of *Gesta* for a color version of this image.

Figure 10. Detail of Figure 4, St. Mary Cleophas above St. Mary Salome (left); Mary Magdalen Receiving a Garment from an Angel above Mary Magdalen's Burial (right) (photo: author). See the electronic edition of *Gesta* for a color version of this image.

I believe that images of St. Agnes of Rome, who received a garment from an angel rather than from a hermit, served as the source for the stained-glass cycle's second Magdalen wilderness scene (Fig. 10). Several Italian Magdalen pictorial cycles include compositionally similar scenes of the Magdalen at her cave visited by an angel trailing a veil from its arms, but in those depictions, the angel offers her a basket of bread, a host, or a eucharistic chalice, not the veil itself. An early example of this motif appears, for example, in the fresco cycle in San Lorenzo Maggiore in Naples (ca. 1295–1300).²⁵ But the motif of an angel offering a naked, long-haired saint a garment for the sake of modesty also recalls the tale of St. Agnes, a third hirsute saint associated with prostitution whom scholars identify as the source for the story of the Magdalen's miraculous hair growth: surprisingly, that miracle is a detail not found in the Magdalen's written vitae or originally in Mary of Egypt's, but derives from the vita of Agnes.²⁶ As the *Golden Legend* relates, Agnes was stripped of her clothing and sent to a brothel

because she refused to marry a pagan prefect's son. God first made her hair grow long to cover her nakedness, and then, in the brothel, an angel appeared and formed a "shining mantle about her." When the prefect's son tried to force himself upon her, a devil killed him, but Agnes resurrected him.²⁷

Although depictions of the naked Agnes receiving the mantle from an angel while covered only by her hair are not widespread, images do exist. One example, a stained-glass lancet at Le Mans Cathedral (Fig. 13) from the first half of the thirteenth century, appears directly adjacent to the lancet with Mary Magdalen's narrative.²⁸ The two saints appear in even closer proximity in a small devotional triptych by Andrea Orcagna, from 1340–45 (Alana Collection, Delaware), depicting *Agnes Receiving a Covering Garment from an Angel* at the center and *Mary Magdalen Visited by an Angel* on the left wing (Fig. 14). Visually, the two hair-covered saints appear indistinguishable; only their narrative circumstances differentiate them. The Magdalen kneels outside her cave as an angel trailing a long white veil that covers its hands and shoulder offers the saint an ampoule and what is likely a host. Agnes instead receives her voluminous garment in an interior, with her fallen attacker and devil below her.²⁹ I suggest not only that

Bonsanti, ed., *Basilica di San Francesco*, 4:579–80) summarizes scholarly opinions regarding those; see also his "The St. Francis Master in the Upper Church of S. Francesco/Assisi: Some Considerations Regarding His Origins," *Gesta* 35, no. 2 (1996): 177–91.

25. On the San Lorenzo Chapel, see Wilkins, "'She Loved More Ardentlly,'" 84–96 and fig. 2.5.

26. The *Golden Legend* includes nothing about Mary of Egypt's or the wilderness Magdalen's hair. Haskins (*Mary Magdalen*, 120) suggests Agnes as the source for their miraculous hair; Roberta Milliken analyzes the Magdalen's hair, Mary of Egypt's, and Agnes's in *Ambiguous Locks: An Iconology of Hair in Medieval Art and Literature* (Jefferson, NC/London: McFarland, 2012), 188–212. Some suggest Mary of Egypt's long hair derived from the Magdalen's; see Ronald Pepin and Hugh Feiss, trans., *Saint Mary of Egypt: Three*

Medieval Lives in Verse (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2005), 36n69.

27. *Golden Legend*, 101–4, quote on 103.

28. For excellent color images of Light B (Mary Magdalen) and Light C, panel 4 (Agnes), see http://www.medievalart.org.uk/LeMans/109_pages/LeMans_Bay109_Key.htm.

29. The *Martyrdom of St. Lawrence* appears on the right wing. See Ada Labriola's entry on Andrea di Cione in *The Alana Collection*, vol. 1, ed. M. Boskovits (Florence: Polistampa, 2009), 16–22, who notes only the ampoule.

Figure 11. *Mary of Egypt in the Wilderness Covered by Her Hair*, bay 21, panel 21, Bourges Cathedral, ca. 1215 (photo: Stuart Whatling). See the electronic edition of *Gesta* for a color version of this image.

Agnes inspired the motif of the Magdalen's miraculous hair growth, but also that her imagery served as the source for the unusual Assisi stained-glass scene of the Magdalen receiving a white garment from an angel. The specific labeling of all three Magdalen scenes in the Assisi lancet confirms that they do not result from confusion on the part of the artists, but were purposefully appropriated from cycles of Saints Mary of Egypt and Agnes and inserted into the Magdalen's narrative. Their designers may well have recognized the need for identifying labels—such inscriptions do not appear on any of the other eight Magdalen scenes in the Assisi lancets—because they were adopted from other narratives.

Why did Assisi's Magdalen Chapel artists borrow scenes depicting the receipt of a garment from two different saints' iconographic traditions, episodes that remain rare or even unique within the Magdalen's pictorial tradition? The explanation rests on the theme's importance at San Francesco.³⁰ St. Bonaventure, in his *Legenda maior* (i, 2), characterized the episode of *St. Francis Offering His Mantle to a Poor Knight*, depicted in the center of the Upper Church nave's first bay

30. For the general significance of gifting of clothing, see Philine Helas, "The Clothing of Poverty and Sanctity in Legends, and Their Representations in Trecento and Quattrocento Italy," in *Weaving, Veiling, and Dressing: Textiles and Their Metaphors in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. Kathryn Rudy and Barbara Baert (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 245–87, where besides imagery of St. Martin (247–62), she considers the thirteenth-century Franciscan tertiary, Margaret of Cortona (264–70), and Catherine of Siena (270–81).

Figure 12. *Burial of Mary of Egypt*, bay 21, panel 26, Bourges Cathedral, ca. 1215 (photo: Stuart Whatling). See the electronic edition of *Gesta* for a color version of this image.

(ca. 1290–96; Fig. 15), as relating to *caritas* and poverty, two primary Franciscan concerns: Francis, upon seeing a noble but impoverished knight, was motivated "with such tender compassion that he immediately took off his garments and clothed him with them, so that at one and the same time he fulfilled a twofold service of love, in that he both concealed the shame of a noble knight and relieved the penury of a poor man."³¹ Joel Brink recognized the *St. Francis* fresco's ideological resonance with Simone Martini's *St. Martin Dividing His Cloak with a Beggar* in the Lower Church's St. Martin Chapel; painted ca. 1312–19, about the same time or just a few years after the Magdalen Chapel, it reminds viewers that Francis was considered a "second Martin."³² Notable in both the *Her-*

31. As quoted in Smart, *Assisi Problem*, 264. For dating the St. Francis cycle, see Cooper and Robson, *Making of Assisi*, 12 and passim; Donal Cooper and Janet Robson, "'A Great Sumptuousness of Paintings': Frescos and Franciscan Poverty at Assisi in 1288 and 1312," *Burlington Magazine* 151 (October 2009): 656–62; and Paul Binski, "The Patronage and Date of the Legend of St. Francis in the Upper Church of S. Francesco at Assisi," *Burlington Magazine* 151 (October 2009): 663–65.

32. Joel Brink, "Sts. Martin and Francis: Sources and Meaning in Simone Martini's Montefiore Chapel," in *Renaissance Studies in Honor of Craig Hugh Smyth*, ed. A. Morrogh et al. (Florence: Villa I Tatti, 1985), 2:79–92. Helas also discusses the role of dress in the St. Martin Chapel in "The Clothing of Poverty and Sanctity in Legends," 245–87, esp. 247–62. For the chapel's dating, see Diana Norman, "Sanctity, Kingship and Succession: Art and Dynastic Politics in the Lower Church at Assisi," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 73, no. 3 (December 2010): 297–334, at 312–13.

Figure 13. *Agnes Receiving a Garment from an Angel*, bay 109, light C4, Le Mans Cathedral, first half of the thirteenth century (photo: Stuart Whatling). See the electronic edition of *Gesta* for a color version of this image.

mit Priest Giving Mary Magdalen a Garment and the *Mary Magdalen Receiving a Garment from an Angel*, however, are the role reversals: in each case, the Magdalen passively receives charity rather than actively dispensing it, as the male saints Francis and Martin do. All three saints' narratives treat the receipt of garments, thus unifying the Upper and Lower Churches by clearly highlighting the Franciscan virtue of *caritas*; the Magdalen herself certainly exemplifies that virtue during her *Conversion at the House of Simon the Pharisee* (Figs. 1, 16), when she anoints Christ's feet. But these two scenes of the naked Magdalen receiving garments emphasize her neediness: like the poor knight and beggar, she requires assistance.

The location of the *Hermit Priest Giving a Garment to the Magdalen* on the Magdalen Chapel's entry wall (Fig. 3) also reinforces its heightened significance: it appears on the outer side of the chapel and nave's shared wall, directly below the Upper Church's nave wall with the fresco of *St. Francis Offering His Mantle to a Poor Knight* (ca. 1290–96; Fig. 15) on its inner side.³³ While possibly a coincidence, the awkwardness of its placement within the Magdalen Chapel's narrative sug-

33. Artists at Assisi widely used such spatial devices to create meaningful resonances, as in the two *Crucifixions* in the south and north transepts in the Lower Church placed directly below the Upper Church's two by Cimabue. Vannucci (*Maria Maddalena*, 155 and 178n71) also notes the thematic relation of the *Hermit Priest Giving a Garment to the Magdalen* to *St. Francis Offering*

Figure 14. Andrea Orcagna, *Portable Triptych with Agnes Receiving a Covering Garment from an Angel* (center) and *Mary Magdalen Visited by an Angel* (left wing), 1340–45, Alana Collection, Delaware (photo: Alana Collection, Newark, Delaware). See the electronic edition of *Gesta* for a color version of this image.

gests its location may have been manipulated in order to stand in that particularly resonant position relative to the Francis scene above. As viewers enter the Magdalen Chapel from the nave of the Lower Church, their gazes move easily from left to right along the lower register of narrative scenes on the first-seen west wall (to the entry's left; Fig. 1), and continue left to right on the opposite east wall (Fig. 2), since the north wall includes no frescoed narratives.³⁴ Thus, the *Magdalen's Conversion at the House of Simon the Pharisee* and the *Raising of Lazarus* begin the sequence on the west; the *Noli me tangere* and *Voyage to Marseilles with the Miracle of the Governor's Family* continue the chronological sequence on the east. But then, instead of continuing to turn from left to right and so

His Mantle, but makes no comment regarding the frescoes' vertical proximity.

34. When entering from the adjacent chapel to the east, the west wall remains the first viewed. Scholars' reconstruction of the pilgrims' Lower Church pathway makes it unlikely that visitors would have entered from the transept; see Robson, "Pilgrim's Progress" and Cooper and Robson, "Imagery and the Economy of Penance."

Figure 15. St. Francis Master, *Homage of a Simpleton*, *St. Francis Offering His Mantle to a Poor Knight*, and *Dream of St. Francis*, ca. 1290–96, Upper Church of San Francesco, Assisi (photo: Stefan Diller/www.assisi.de). See the electronic edition of *Gesta* for a color version of this image.

Figure 16. Detail of Figure 1 with the Magdalen's Conversion at the House of Simon the Pharisee (photo: Stefan Diller/www.assisi.de). See the electronic edition of *Gesta* for a color version of this image.

move to the south wall, in order to follow the chronological sequence, viewers need first to look immediately above the two scenes on the east wall to the single fresco of *Mary Magdalen Elevated by Angels* (Fig. 2) before continuing left to right along the top register to the south wall's only narrative, the *Hermit Priest Giving a Garment* (Fig. 3), and finally returning to the west wall for the concluding *Last Communion and Elevation of the Magdalen's Soul into Heaven* (Fig. 1). A desire to locate the Upper Church and Lower Church gifting scenes in as close vertical proximity as possible may have influenced the designer's choice to compromise the fluidity of the Magdalen's narrative.³⁵

Franciscan attention to the charitable gifting of garments appears elsewhere in the double church. In the first two decades of the fourteenth century, approximately contemporane-

ous with the Magdalen and St. Martin Chapels, the vaults of the Lower Church crossing were frescoed with the *Glorification of St. Francis* and allegories of three Franciscan virtues. Here a personification of Charity was included in the *Allegory of Poverty* (Fig. 17).³⁶ Gifting of garments occurs twice in that vault fresco. A young man at the lower left exemplifies *caritas* by removing his outer mantle and giving it to a poor older man in ripped clothing, while an angel flying above the central figures of Christ marrying Poverty to Francis carries what may be that same garment, along with a bag of money, up to a heavenly figure. This last ascent recalls the outcome of St. Martin's

35. Kenaan-Kedar ("Emotion, Beauty and Franciscan Piety") reads each wall as a unit, a logical alternative to my chronological reading; Marilyn Aronberg Lavin offers an unnecessarily complicated approach in *The Place of Narrative: Mural Decoration in Italian Churches, 431–1600* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 53–54.

36. On the vault frescoes, see Julian Gardner, *Giotto and His Publics: Three Paradigms of Patronage* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 81–112, where he dates the *vele* frescoes 1317–19 (107); and Janet Robson, "Judas and the Franciscans: Perfidy Pictured in Lorenzetti's Passion Cycle at Assisi," *Art Bulletin* 86, no. 1 (March 2004): 31–57, at 41–42, where she dates them 1308–11; in a later article, she dates them 1305–11: "The Changing Imagery of Saint Francis in the Basilica of San Francesco in Assisi," in *Sanctity Pictured: The Art of the Dominican and Franciscan Orders in Renaissance Italy*, ed. Trinita Kennedy (London: Philip Wilson and Knoxville: Frist Center for the Visual Arts, 2014), 18–31, at 28–29.

Figure 17. *Allegory of Poverty*, first two decades of the fourteenth century, Lower Church of San Francesco, Assisi (photo: Stefan Diller/www.assisi.de). See the electronic edition of *Gesta* for a color version of this image.

gift to the poor man, for it reappears in the next scene at Martin's bedside, now worn by Christ himself.³⁷ Further, Poverty appears in a heavily patched garment, perhaps intended to be reminiscent of Francis's heavily mended tunic, a relic kept at San Francesco and shown to pilgrims.³⁸ Clearly, this theme of clothing the naked, one of the Seven Works of Mercy based on Matthew 25:34–40, pervades the double churches of San Francesco.³⁹

Nudity and Dress: Spiritual and Sartorial Transformations

Dress and undress play additional roles at San Francesco, particularly as clothing's rejection symbolizes the abandonment of worldly values in favor of spiritual ones for both St. Francis and the Magdalen. In the Upper Church, *St. Francis's*

37. Robson ("Judas and the Franciscans," 41) instead sees the "rich red robe and a *palazzo*" as representing "secular items" rejected by Francis at his renunciation; similarly Gardner (*Giotto and His Publics*, 95) sees the "opulent red garment, the purse, and the house" as representing goods surrendered when "embracing poverty."

38. See Don Michele Faloci Pulignani, "Le sacre reliquie della basilica di San Francesco in Assisi nel secolo XIV," *Miscellanea Francescana* 1 (1886): 145–50; on its current state of preservation, see Maureen C. Miller, *Clothing the Clergy: Virtue and Power in Medieval Europe, c. 800–1200* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), 141. For the issue of Franciscans patching their habits, see David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans: From Protest to Persecution in the Century after Saint Francis* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), 119.

39. On their development, consult Federico Botana, *The Works of Mercy in Italian Medieval Art (c. 1050–c. 1400)*, *Medieval Church Studies* 20 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 1–13; I thank Amy Neff for this reference.

Figure 18. *St. Francis Master*, *St. Francis's Renunciation of His Inheritance*, ca. 1290–96, Upper Church of San Francesco, Assisi (photo: Stefan Diller/www.assisi.de). See the electronic edition of *Gesta* for a color version of this image.

Renunciation of His Inheritance (Fig. 18) represents Francis's determination to return all his worldly property to his earthly father—a wealthy cloth merchant—and accept his heavenly father. This scene of Francis's conversion also appears among the St. Francis Master's frescoes (ca. 1260) that line the two sides of the nave in the Lower Church. In both, the bishop of Assisi uses his own cloak to cover the naked Francis, who, as Bonaventure reported, echoing Thomas of Celano's earlier account, "immediately took off all his clothes and restored them to his father . . . [and] cast aside even his breeches, and made himself naked in the presence of all."⁴⁰ The earlier duecento *Re-*

40. *Legenda maior*, ii, 4; as quoted in Smart, *Assisi Problem*, 266; Thomas reports in his first and second lives of St. Francis, the saint "stripped off his clothes and threw them aside, giving them back to his father. He did not even keep his trousers, but stood there in front of everyone completely naked." From <http://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/halsall/source/stfran-lives.html>, ed. Paul Halsall, trans. David Burr. On this episode in Franciscan texts and imagery, see

nunciation appears directly opposite the St. Francis Master's *Stripping of Christ under the Cross* from John 19:23–24, and—similarly understood as a voluntary action—deliberately imitates it. As scholars have noted, this Lower Church pairing of disrobing scenes confirms Francis as *alter Christus*;⁴¹ it also expresses his spiritual conversion in terms of dress, in this case, undress.

The new dress Francis dons post-conversion also affirms visually his spiritual transformation. The fresco cycles at San Francesco omit any reference to Francis selecting the new order's habit, a scene found uniquely on the Bardi dossal (Cappella Bardi, Sta. Croce, Florence), but after he discards his well-to-do worldly dress, Francis, with few exceptions, appears for the rest of the nave cycle and throughout San Francesco with a head tonsure and wearing Franciscan dress—a simple hooded habit, a knotted cord, and sandals—including in the *Stigmatization* and other wilderness episodes.⁴² Further confirming the sacred and symbolic significance of the Franciscan (and occasional Clarissan) habits depicted throughout San Francesco, the relics shown to the Assisi faithful included multiple examples of Franciscan dress and a remarkable example of Christ's. The church's inventory, compiled after 1348, lists multiple tunics worn by St. Francis, plus his belt and shoes; St. Clare's tunics, veils, and a cord belt; and the habits of Saints Louis and Anthony of Padua. It also includes Christ's seamless

garment, the highly venerated relic made by the Virgin Mary and removed at the Crucifixion, as depicted in the Lower Church's *Stripping of Christ under the Cross*.⁴³

Like Francis, the Magdalen experienced both a spiritual and sartorial transformation when she renounced her wealthy, worldly existence and lived as a wilderness penitent for thirty years, for her renunciation is also expressed most eloquently through changes of dress: at first through loosened hair and voluntary nudity; later through acquisition of increasingly muted garments and, finally, a crown.⁴⁴ In her chapel's first three pre-wilderness scenes on the middle register—*Conversion at the House of Simon the Pharisee*, *Raising of Lazarus*, and *Noli me tangere* (Figs. 1–2, 16)—she wears her typically bright red robes with gold-patterned edging. Except when wiping Christ's feet, her hair is up, arranged tidily on her head. While her richly red garment recalls *caritas* and Christ's Passion, it also contrasts with Franciscan garb and reminds viewers that she was “wellborn, descended of royal stock,” as Jacobus de Voragine reported, adding, “Magdalene, then, was very rich.” In the wilderness she thus abandoned not only her prostitute's life of “sensuous pleasure,” as Jacobus termed it, but, like Francis, renounced her affluent upbringing: “[a]fter Christ's ascension, however, they all [Mary, Martha, and Lazarus] sold their possessions and laid the proceeds at the feet of the apostles.”⁴⁵ This status change is apparent in the fresco of her journey in a rudderless boat to Marseilles (Figs. 2, 19): now her garment lacks gold edging and its traditional red color is muted. Following her proselytizing work in Marseilles, she passes thirty years as a wilderness hermit, so isolated, the *Golden Legend* reports, “[t]here were no streams of water there, nor the comfort of grass or trees.” Therefore, angels lifted her daily at the seven canonical hours to feed her “not with earthly viands but only with the good things of heaven. . . . [She] needed no material nourishment.”⁴⁶ The first of the two wilderness narratives in fresco at Assisi, *Mary Magdalen Elevated by Angels* (Fig. 20), emphasizes her Francis-like renunciation of worldly values by highlighting her nudity: only her long, now-unbound

Richard Trexler, *Naked before the Father: The Renunciation of Francis of Assisi* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989); illustrated in Bonsanti, ed., *Basilica di San Francesco*, 4:pl. 294.

41. On Christ's voluntarily stripping, see Anne Derbes, *Picturing the Passion in Late Medieval Italy: Narrative Painting, Franciscan Ideologies, and the Levant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 30–31 and 149–53; Rosalind Brooke, *The Image of St. Francis: Responses to Sainthood in the Thirteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 289–91; and Holly Flora, “Fashioning the Passion: The Poor Clares and the Clothing of Christ,” *Art History* 40, no. 3 (June 2017): 464–95. On religious stripping more generally, see Susan Smith, “The Bride Stripped Bare: A Rare Type of the Disrobing of Christ,” *Gesta* 34, no. 2 (1995): 126–46; illustrated in Bonsanti, ed., *Basilica di San Francesco*, 4:pl. 313.

42. See Cordelia Warr's excellent discussion of Franciscan dress in the Bardi dossal (Santa Croce, Florence) in *Dressing for Heaven: Religious Clothing in Italy, 1215–1545* (Manchester/New York: Manchester University Press, 2010), 99–116. Two notable exceptions at San Francesco of Francis not wearing his habit include *Miracle at Greccio* in the Upper Church and *Francis in Glory* in the Lower Church's crossing vaults. In the first, he dresses appropriately for his liturgical role, for even Franciscans donned elaborate ecclesiastical garments when celebrating the liturgy; see Miller, *Clothing the Clergy*, 139–40. In the second, his elaborate golden garb demonstrates the principle of inversion: on earth he dressed most humbly; in heaven he is rewarded with fine garments. On inversions, see Cordelia Warr, “Clothing, Charity, Salvation and Visionary Experience in Fifteenth-Century Siena,” *Art History* 27, no. 2 (April 2004): 187–211, at 208–9.

43. See Pulignani, “Le sacre reliquie,” 147–49. Relics of the Magdalen were also present, including some of her hair (150). While the relic of the seamless garment was widely believed to be at Argenteuil (see Mary Dzon, “Birgitta of Sweden and Christ's Clothing,” in *The Christ Child in Medieval Culture: Alpha es et o!*, ed. Mary Dzon and Theresa Kenney [Toronto/Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2012], 117–44), San Francesco's inventory lists a large tabernacle “in quo est de tunica inconsutili christi quam fecit ei beata virgo maria” (Pulignani, “Le sacre reliquie,” 147).

44. Smith particularly focuses on the act's connections with “penitence, the renunciation of worldliness, and voluntary self-abasement” (“Bride Stripped Bare,” 140).

45. *Golden Legend*, 375.

46. *Ibid.*, 380.

Figure 19. Detail of Figure 2 with *Voyage to Marseilles with the Miracle of the Governor's Family* (photo: Stefan Diller/www.assisi.de). See the electronic edition of *Gesta* for a color version of this image.

tresses cover her clearly naked body. In this ascetic state of undress she completes her thirty years of contemplative penance, her narrative paralleling not only Francis's own renunciation, but also his revelatory wilderness experiences, such as at his Stigmatization or Ecstasy, where, in the latter, his fellow brothers saw him praying and lifted above the ground.⁴⁷

In the following Magdalen scene, the unusual *Hermit Priest Giving a Garment* (Fig. 6), discussed above, a tonsured hermit stands before her cave, dressed in a brown hooded cloak over a brown garment clearly meant to evoke a Franciscan habit, though he wears shoes, not sandals, and no waist cord is visible. In an allusion to monastic investiture, when Franciscan initiates first renounce their worldly possessions and then take the habit—or Clarissans, the veil—the hermit reclothes the Magdalen, offering the bare-breasted, long-haired saint a

much-faded garment. More visible at her reappearance in the next and final fresco (Fig. 1)—a continuous narrative with Bishop Maximin administering her the viaticum at his church in Aix, and angels bearing her soul into heaven—the new garb replaces the bright red, ornamented garment from her pre-wilderness scenes below. Kneeling before Maximin, she wears this pale red gown, modest and undecorated, and her hair is now controlled and tightly bound on her head. In the final episode, when her soul is raised by four angels, she appears, like them, in pure white, her hair again bound and now capped triumphantly with a pointed golden crown (Fig. 21), as she and the angels look to the bust-length Christ on the ceiling vault.⁴⁸ The lowly penitent has attained salvation, and her altered dress, hair, and crown reflect her elevated state.

But while her receipt of a garment and her transformations of dress and hair may hint at investiture, the Magdalen's imagery also reminds audiences of her flawed and very human

47. Claire Renkin discusses parallels between the stigmatization of Francis and the Magdalen in the wilderness in trecento and quattrocento images; see "A Feast of Love: Visual Images of Francis of Assisi and Mary Magdalen and Late Medieval Mendicant Devotion," in *Poverty and Devotion in Mendicant Cultures, 1200–1450*, ed. Constant J. Mews and Anna Welch (New York/London: Routledge, 2016), 92–104.

48. Some authors identify this last scene as the saint's assumption, but as the *Golden Legend* states, following her death, "her most holy soul migrated to the Lord" (381). I thank Amy Neff for alerting me to the unusual presence of the crown on the Magdalen's head.

Figure 20. Detail of Figure 2 with *Mary Magdalen Elevated by Angels* (photo: Stefan Diller/www.assisi.de). See the electronic edition of *Gesta* for a color version of this image.

lay status, quite unlike that of St. Clare and her followers. Clarissan novices, when invested into their order, don habits and are shorn of their hair. In the St. Clare dossal (1283; Santa Chiara, Assisi), Francis himself cuts the hair of Clare and her sister Agnes, and in the Beata Margherita of Cortona dossal (ca. 1300; Cortona, Museo Diocesano), Margherita's hair is similarly cut by a Franciscan friar at her profession of the Third Order.⁴⁹ Images of St. Clare and the other Clarissans at Assisi and elsewhere typically show their heads modestly veiled, as do depictions of female members of the Third Order; no hair is visible. While the Magdalen's dress transforms over the course of her narrative from that of a more worldly being to that of a purer and penitent one, her visible hair and dress remain those of a lay person. Pilgrims to San Francesco could thus more readily identify with her as an ordinary sinner who

did not "take the veil" and become a nun, yet one who offered a penitential model for redemption.

The Magdalen's state of nakedness also differs from that of Francis at his renunciation and from male nudity at San Francesco more generally. As argued above, Francis's nudity has positive implications when he renounces his inheritance and strips naked. Bonaventure's account does not suggest any shame attached to his state of undress, and Cooper and Robson quote from Henri d'Avranches's early 1230s versified life of the saint to demonstrate the contrast between Francis's nudity and Adam's at the *Fall*: "[Francis] suffers freely what Adam / Was forced to endure; he suffers by merit what Adam endured for sin." They further note that the *Renunciation* appears diagonally below Torriti's fresco of the *Fall* in the same nave bay, highlighting the difference between Francis's voluntary act and Adam's shame.⁵⁰ More broadly, male nudity at San Francesco, not extensive but more frequent than female

49. On these dossals, see Joanna Cannon, "Beyond the Limitations of Visual Typology: Reconsidering the Function and Audience of Three *Vita* Panels of Women Saints c. 1300," in *Italian Panel Painting of the Duecento and Trecento*, ed. Victor Schmidt, *Studies in the History of Art* 61 (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2002): 291–313, esp. 296, 300, and 305; and Milliken, *Ambiguous Locks*, 72–75.

50. *Making of Assisi*, 164–68; quote on 165. Franco Mormando considers Franciscan attitudes toward nakedness in Renaissance Italy in "Nudus nudum Christum sequi": The Franciscans and Differing Interpretations of Male Nakedness in Fifteenth-Century Italy," *Fifteenth-Century Studies* 33 (2008): 171–97.

Figure 21. Detail of Figure 1 with the Soul of Mary Magdalen Raised to Heaven (photo: Stefan Diller/www.assisi.de). See the electronic edition of *Gesta* for a color version of this image.

nudity, expresses a range of generally positive ideas, including innocence, purity, and heroic martyrdom, along with Christ-like humiliation and suffering, and only rarely shame. Perhaps most significantly, *undress* at San Francesco often confirms a figure's Christ-like nature, for the partially nude figure appearing repeatedly throughout the double churches is Christ himself.

Partially or fully nude females appear only rarely in the duecento and early trecento imagery of San Francesco. As is commonly true in medieval and Renaissance European art, they raise different issues than male nudes, and even undressed holy women prompt thoughts of sin and the dangers of female sexuality.⁵¹ Of the extant imagery at San Francesco prior to 1319, the Magdalen Chapel's generally accepted *terminus ante quem*, all partial or full female nudity relates to the Magdalen, with the exceptions of the allegorical figure of Poverty and Eve.⁵² In Torriti's *Fall*, found in the Upper Church nave fresco cycle, the nudity of both Adam and Eve—her nude body is partially lost—expresses shame; the adjacent female-headed serpent turning toward Eve further implicates her guilt following her capitulation to pride and disobedience.⁵³ While Adam represents an antitype to Francis, the *alter Christus*, I

have shown elsewhere that already in Torriti's opening Creation fresco of *God Creating the Souls of Adam and Eve*, Eve appears in opposition to the Virgin Mary in the *Annunciation*, directly across the nave: Eve's soul, long-haired and blue unlike Adam's red one, is inferior from the moment of her conception.⁵⁴ Eve's creation may even have provided an antitype contrasting Christ's coming, since the depiction of her birth from Adam's side faces that of the birth of Christ from Mary on the opposite nave wall. While Eve's prelapsarian nudity in late medieval art may more generally recall her innocence prior to the Fall, at San Francesco, Eve serves as a negative female model beginning with her first appearance in Torriti's nave frescoes.

The other pre-1319 examples of full or partial female undress at San Francesco appear in the Magdalen Chapel or in other imagery of the saint, where their multivalent meanings ambiguously suggest both positive and negative qualities. We have already noted positive symbolism for female undress in the Magdalen Chapel, since Mary Magdalen's nakedness and exposed hair represent her renunciation of the world and desire for penitential cleansing. On the lower left of the chapel's north wall (Fig. 4), the reformed prostitute Mary of Egypt similarly demonstrates these qualities via her long hair and partial dress, as does the fully naked Magdalen in a 1290s fresco in the nearby north transept chapel of St. Nicholas (Fig. 22).⁵⁵ Standing before her cave and covered only by her long hair, this penitent Magdalen is paired with a fresco of John the Baptist in the wilderness and reconfirms the importance of the saint's depictions to the recurrent themes of penitence and wilderness within this Franciscan setting. More unusually, we see a woman with an exposed breast in the Magdalen Chapel, in the east wall's *Voyage to Marseilles with the Miracle of the Governor's Family* (Fig. 19); this scene is the earliest large-scale treatment known to me in Italy depicting the dead wife and child.⁵⁶ She is the governor's wife, who has died during a pilgrimage voyage and been abandoned on an island with her newborn son. There she miraculously breastfeeds him for two years before being resurrected through the Magdalen's

in the Upper Church's south transept windows, ca. 1275 (ibid., 2: pls. 1839–40).

54. See Penny Howell Jolly, *Made in God's Image? Eve and Adam in the Genesis Mosaics at San Marco, Venice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 38–39.

55. Hueck dates the Nicholas Chapel's construction to the 1290s, the earliest of the Lower Church's private chapels ("Kapellen der Basilika," 88). Alessandro Volpe dates the frescoes 1297–1300 (in Bonsanti, ed., *Basilica di San Francesco*, 4:430–34).

56. Earlier versions of the dead wife and child on the island, although without a revealed breast, appear in stained glass in the cathedrals at Auxerre and Clermont-Ferrand; see <http://www.therosewindow.com/pilot/Auxerre/w22.htm> and <http://www.therosewindow.com/pilot/ClermontF/n1.htm>.

51. Questions regarding women's bodies and sexuality have been explored by many scholars. For an excellent recent overview with extensive references, see Sherry Lindquist, "Introduction: Visualizing Female Sexuality in Medieval Cultures," in *Different Visions: A Journal of New Perspectives on Medieval Art* 5 (2014), <http://differentvisions.org/issue-five/>, part of an entire issue dedicated to the topic.

52. Andrea de' Bartoli's gruesome image of the Empress Faustina having her breasts removed dates ca. 1368; illustrated in Bonsanti, ed., *Basilica di San Francesco*, 1:pl. 182.

53. For Torriti's *Creation* frescoes, see Bonsanti, ed., *Basilica di San Francesco*, 2:pls. 1601–10. The nude Adam and Eve also appear

Figure 22. *Penitent Magdalen in the Wilderness*, St. Nicholas Chapel, ca. 1297–1300, Lower Church of San Francesco, Assisi (photo: Stefan Diller/www.assisi.de). See the electronic edition of *Gesta* for a color version of this image.

power, an episode particularly appealing to the Assisi pilgrims. Her white breast, which she cradles in her pale hand, protrudes prominently from her bright red gown, its nipple clearly silhouetted.⁵⁷ An unusual feature in depictions of this narrative, it is all the more remarkable because *Maria lactans* imagery was not yet widespread in the opening decade of the trecento. The breast may suggest the nutritive powers of both motherhood and the Magdalen's miracle, reiterating the saint's alignment with birth and rebirth, as seen in the *Raising of Lazarus* and the *Noli me tangere*, and in her attentiveness to needy pilgrims.⁵⁸ It also reaffirms the particular interest in female nudity and partial undress

57. See Bonsanti, ed., *Basilica di San Francesco*, 1:pls. 653–54; the breast is visible from the chapel floor.

58. On trecento *Maria lactans* imagery, consult Margaret Miles, *A Complex Delight: The Secularization of the Breast, 1350–1750* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), esp. 33–43. One

seen in this chapel and in imagery of the Magdalen, which is otherwise largely absent from San Francesco.

Instances of the Magdalen's penitential undress also are likely to remind viewers of the saint's sordid past as a prostitute, a past in which artists at San Francesco seem unusually interested. As we have seen, in the Magdalen Chapel the saint appears as an undressed hermit twice in frescoes and twice more in the stained-glass wilderness scenes—an unusual emphasis on her naked body. In the first fresco revealing her renunciation, *Mary Magdalen Elevated by Angels* (Fig. 20), she is veiled only by her luxuriously long blonde hair: it hangs open down her side and along her right thigh, offering a long glimpse of flesh and revealing her right arm up to her shoulder. In this period—indeed, until the nineteenth or early twentieth centuries in the West—a proper woman's upper arms, legs, and torso remained concealed, and her hair was typically bound and covered in public. Thus, while the Magdalen's protective hair represents her penitential renunciation of civilization in favor of contemplation, its exposure makes it an equivocal covering at best. As Roberta Milliken has noted, the Magdalen's hair can never be seen as unambiguously penitential: it always carries hints of vanity and sexuality.⁵⁹ This revealing of the Magdalen's miraculously long hair and sensuous body during her wilderness retreat recalls her earlier life as a prostitute, even while simultaneously signifying her rejection of that worldly existence.

The frescoed *Hermit Priest Giving a Garment to the Magdalen* (Fig. 6) reveals even more erotic flesh and enticements, for the Magdalen's bare breasts peek through this young, beautiful saint's fashionably long blonde hair.⁶⁰ Even the abbreviated imagery in the chapel's stained-glass cycle reveals an alluring Magdalen (Figs. 9–10). While the three images of the wilderness Magdalen there expose only her feet, lower arms, hands, and face, her sinuously serpentine golden hair again envelops her sensuous body. In the St. Nicholas Chapel fresco, she appears as a penitent before her cave, again with bare arms and lower legs and only luxurious blonde hair covering her torso (Fig. 22).⁶¹ Clearly, San Francesco manifests

of the anonymous readers noted that an early *Maria lactans* tympanum appears on San Rufino in Assisi.

59. *Ambiguous Locks*, 183–202.

60. Blonde hair represents the fourteenth-century ideal, as I have discussed elsewhere; see Penny Howell Jolly, "Ideal Woman," in *Hair: Untangling a Social History*, ed. Penny Howell Jolly (Saratoga Springs, NY: Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery, 2004), 48–49, and "Cultural Representations: Head and Body Hair in Medieval Art," in *A Cultural History of Hair*, ed. Roberta Milliken (London: Bloomsbury Publications, 2018), 153–71, at 163–64.

61. The emphasis on the yawning mouth of the cave, behind her here and in the two frescoes in the Magdalen Chapel, may reflect interest in establishing the locale of her cave at La Sainte Baume

exceptional interest in the Magdalen as penitential hermit, a theme, on the one hand, consistent with Franciscan interest in hermitage retreats, penitence, and renunciation, yet, on the other hand, emphasizing her errant sensuality: the saint as sinner and even prostitute prior to her conversion.⁶² Martha Easton's incisive observation regarding seminude bodies in the Limbourg Brothers' *Belles Heures*, that "flowing hair substitutes for clothing to evoke the nude body that it ostensibly conceals," applies here as well.⁶³ Yet such sensually appealing images, borrowed from tales of other saintly prostitutes, Mary of Egypt and Agnes, are absent from thirteenth-century French stained-glass cycles depicting the Magdalen and the Italian cycles that precede the Assisi chapel: the Magdalen Master's panel with multiple scenes of the long-haired and undressed saint in the wilderness (ca. 1280; Florence, Accademia) rigidly encloses and covers the saint in her protective hair, as do the depictions of the saint at her cave with tent-like masses of hair in San Lorenzo Maggiore (ca. 1295–1300) and San Domenico (1308–9) in Naples.⁶⁴ When new, the Assisi Magdalen Chapel's instances of erotic nakedness and partial undress were peculiar to San Francesco and surely would have been striking to trecento audiences.

This Franciscan fresco cycle of Mary Magdalen apparently initiates a series of erotic depictions of the saint, for following these images, suggestive views of the saint as penitent continue into the Counter-Reformation and well beyond. The question of overt eroticism in religious art in general and in Magdalen imagery in particular has long perplexed art historians, though mid-sixteenth-century images by Titian rather than depictions from the early trecento are the more common scholarly concern.⁶⁵ One explanation involves the power of nudity to engage

audiences, and it is commonplace to note that late Gothic artists particularly engaged in creating affective imagery to entice audience attention. But such appeals to sensuality seem to conflict with the well-established readings of the chapel as focused on themes more amenable to Franciscans, including penance, *caritas*, and the *vita mixta*.

I suggest additional ways of looking at these frescoes that complicate the Magdalen's role at San Francesco and reconfirm the paradoxical nature of the saint as both lowly sinner and virtuous model, a multivalent view that will persist in her cult for centuries.⁶⁶ Indeed, a possible explanation for the eroticism of her Assisi imagery lies in the Magdalen cult's encouragement of ordinary sinners to identify with this less-than-perfect saint; for many, such modeling would represent a more realistically attainable goal than seeking to be like the Virgin Mary. Thus, these scenes offer conflicting meanings that both model the virtuous characteristics of the saint and recall the pre-conversion life of the sinner. For example, the first scene of her narrative, the *Magdalen's Conversion at the House of Simon the Pharisee* (Fig. 16), represents her famous act of *caritas* when, motivated by love of God, she anoints Christ's feet with tears, then wipes them with her hair and ointment. Robson has identified the man in green at the table as Judas, an unusual inclusion in trecento art.⁶⁷ However, his presence functions to highlight the Magdalen's charity, for his opposing vice of avarice becomes apparent when he challenges her pious action by hypocritically suggesting the ointment be sold and the money given to the poor (John 12:1–8). Here the Magdalen, Francis-like, serves as a virtuously charitable model for all.

At the same time, the *Conversion at the House of Simon the Pharisee* resonates with an event depicted in the Upper Church's first bay above it, on a wall at a ninety-degree angle from it: the very first Francis cycle scene of a simpleton honoring Francis by laying his garment on the street so Francis's feet are not soiled (Fig. 15).⁶⁸ That latter scene, as Rosalind Brooke has suggested, clearly compares the honoring of Francis to reverence for Christ

in Provence, territory owned by the Angevins; "baume" means "balm" in High French, but "baoumo" in Provençal means "cave"; see Jane Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene: Legends, Apocrypha, and the Christian Testament* (New York/London: Continuum, 2002), 93. On possible Angevin ties to Pontano, see, for example, Wilkins, "She Loved More Ardentlly," 152–53 and 177–79.

62. Regarding Franciscan hermitages, see Cooper and Robson, *Making of Assisi*, 190.

63. Martha Easton, "Uncovering the Meanings of Nudity in the *Belles Heures* of Jean, Duke of Berry," in *The Meanings of Nudity in Medieval Art*, ed. Sherry C. M. Lindquist (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2012), 149–81, at 167–69.

64. In the French cycles that include wilderness scenes, the Magdalen appears dressed. Although the Mary of Egypt cycles show nudity, they lack the sensual eroticism of the Assisi frescoes. For the two Neapolitan chapels, see Wilkins, "She Loved More Ardentlly," 79–111.

65. For a recent summary of arguments, see my *Picturing the "Pregnant" Magdalene in Northern Art, 1430–1550: Addressing and Undressing the Sinner-Saint*, *Women and Gender in the Early Modern World* (Farnham/Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014), esp. 197–203.

66. This ambiguous view of the Magdalen is common in Renaissance and later imagery. See, for example, Jolly, *Picturing the "Pregnant" Magdalene*, or Patricia Badir, *The Maudlin Impression: English Literary Impressions of Mary Magdalene, 1550–1700*, *ReFormations: Medieval and Early Modern* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame Press, 2009).

67. "Judas and the Franciscans," 47–48. Regarding the conflation of the accounts in Luke 7:36–50 and John 12:1–8, who includes Judas, see note 72 below.

68. The *Conversion* appears on the chapel's west wall, at the corner abutting the south (nave) wall; the *Simpleton Honoring St. Francis* is at the west end of the Upper Church's first nave bay, directly above the Lower Church chapel's south wall (Fig. 15). The scene of the simpleton immediately precedes *Francis Giving His Mantle to a Poor Knight*, at the center of the bay wall above the chapel's south wall.

at his Entry into Jerusalem (Luke 19:36), when garments are spread before him; Francis is reconfirmed as *alter Christus*.⁶⁹ Yet she and other scholars have failed to note this third parallel, established by the vertical proximity and thematic similarity of the *Homage of a Simpleton* to the scene of the Magdalen revering Christ's feet by anointing and wiping them with her hair. While these last two scenes specifically honor Francis and Christ, respectively, they simultaneously align the Magdalen with the simpleton, a lay citizen of Assisi whom Bonaventure described as "of great simplicity of mind, but who was yet inspired by God"; like him, she is not the honored one.⁷⁰ But her actions demonstrate the power of simple faith and extreme humility, not unlike Christ's own when he washes the apostles' feet, depicted at San Francesco in a stained-glass lancet in the Upper Church apse (ca. 1255) and in the later fresco by Pietro Lorenzetti in his Passion narrative in the nearby Lower Church transept (ca. 1316/17–19); attention to feet seems to represent another theme of interest to the Franciscans.⁷¹ Thus, the Magdalen's very lowliness raises her to being Christ-like.

From Exorcised Sinner to Saint

Besides demonstrating the Magdalen's *caritas* and her Christ-like humility, this same *Conversion at the House of Simon the Pharisee* includes an innovation that emphasizes her

penitential neediness—a consequence of her debauched history as prostitute—but simultaneously reconfirms the magnitude of her spiritual victory and resultant intercessional power. In so doing, it parallels additional episodes in Francis's vita, although once again it reverses the Magdalen's narrative role vis-à-vis that of Francis. Only recently noted by Cooper and Robson, the (presumably originally) seven demons Christ exorcised from Mary Magdalen during her conversion appear in the void at the fresco's far left.⁷² While barely visible today due to paint losses as well as their positioning against the dark blue sky, the Magdalen's demons exit her penitent, submissive body—one appears just above Mary's lower back—and fly off the fresco to the viewer's left, as though moving out the main entryway of the chapel toward the front of the Lower Church nave. Their presence recalls the Magdalen's sinful pre-conversion life as a prostitute and also works compositionally to explain what several scholars have judged a pictorial imbalance created by the kneeling saint's positioning and the seemingly blank sky at the far left. But even with the demons, the composition remains lopsided; by comparison, Giovanni da Milano's Rinuccini Chapel *Conversion* (1365), likely influenced by the Assisi prototype, centers the kneeling saint below the table while demons fly out from the roof directly above her, a much more harmonious arrangement.⁷³

69. Brooke, *Image of St. Francis*, 392–93.

70. Quote from Smart, *Assisi Problem*, 263. Lynda Coon, in *Sacred Fictions: Holy Women and Hagiography in Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 44–51, discusses repentant female saints (including the anointer of Jesus, 47–48, usually identified as the Magdalen) who succeed through simple, unintellectual faith; she calls this *topos* a "rhetoric of inversion." Aligning the Magdalen with the simpleton similarly exemplifies such an inversion.

71. Honoring bare feet is found in the Upper Church apse's central pair of ca. 1255 stained-glass lancets, which function typologically by juxtaposing *Abraham Washing the Feet of the Three Holy Visitors to Christ Washing the Apostles' Feet* (Bonsanti, ed., *Basilica di San Francesco*, 2:pls. 1970 and 1977); for Lorenzetti's, see *ibid.*, 1:pl. 939. Joanna Cannon has considered devotional practices and the honoring of the Virgin's foot in early Sienese art, including in Franciscan art, e.g., Duccio's *Madonna dei Francescani* (1280s; Pinacoteca Nazionale, Siena); see her "Duccio and Devotion to the Virgin's Foot in Early Sienese Painting," in *A Wider Trecento: Studies in Thirteenth- and Fourteenth-Century European Art Presented to Julian Gardner*, ed. Louise Bourdua and Robert Gibbs (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2012), 39–61. Footwear may also be significant in Franciscan art. In the Magdalen Chapel's *Conversion*, Christ's removed sandal appears just to the right of his bare foot and the Magdalen's face and hand (detail in Bonsanti, ed., *Basilica di San Francesco*, 1:pl. 648), while Peter's in Lorenzetti's fresco appears conspicuously below him. Possibly these relate to the controversy regarding Franciscan monks and the wearing of shoes; see Robson, "Judas and the Franciscans," 45; and Burr, *Spiritual Franciscans*, 119–20.

72. Cooper and Robson are the only scholars known to me who have remarked on the demons' presence ("Imagery and the Economy of Penance," 175; see their fig. 7.11 for a detail), an assertion which corroborates my own observation. They further note their inclusion not only in Giovanni da Milano's Rinuccini Chapel (1365; Santa Croce, Florence), but also in the Magdalen fresco cycle at San Domenico in Spoleto (ca. 1400). Drawing on Adelaide Bennett's 2002 publication ("Mary Magdalen's Seven Deadly Sins in a Thirteenth-Century Liège Psalter-Hours," in *Insights and Interpretations: Studies in Celebration of the Eighty-fifth Anniversary of the Index of Christian Art*, ed. Colum Hourihane [Princeton: Index of Christian Art, Department of Art and Archaeology, Princeton University, in association with Princeton University Press, 2002], 17–34), they correct even recent scholars who identify the Rinuccini Chapel as the first or even unique instance of the motif. Bennett, as Cooper and Robson noted, identified earlier northern examples of demons exiting the saint during her conversion. The demons' presence at Assisi also confirms that this first narrative scene conflates the account of the Magdalen's anointing and conversion at the Pharisee's house in Luke 7:36–50 and her later anointing of Christ's feet at her home in Bethany, when Judas is present (John 12:1–8). Luke refers simply to a "woman" who is a "sinner," but his mention of Mary Magdalen "from whom seven demons had gone out" in his immediately following account (8:2) led to her well-established identification with the sinning anointer.

73. As compared by Andrea Begel, "Exorcism in the Iconography of Mary Magdalene," in *Mary Magdalene, Iconographic Studies from the Middle Ages to the Baroque*, ed. Michelle Erhardt and Amy Morris, *Studies in Religion and the Arts* 7 (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2012), 341–60, at 350. Wilkins attributes the Magdalen's pecu-

The Assisi fresco remains the first Italian image known to me of the Magdalen at the house of Simon the Pharisee that incorporates escaping demons. Further, it again suggests ties to northern imagery; as Adelaide Bennett has shown, examples in German and English art predate it.⁷⁴

I believe the decision to introduce demons somewhat awkwardly behind the saint here at Assisi both emphasizes the saint's spiritual neediness and locates her conversion here and now, in this specific Franciscan setting.⁷⁵ The less-than-harmonious composition and placement allow the demons to exit the Magdalen's body behind her, toward the Lower Church's high altar, the site of multiple posthumous exorcisms attributed to St. Francis. It thus aligns these events. A visual tradition for representing Francis's spiritual cures, with the affliction depicted as exiting in the form of one or more demons, was already well established in the saint's imagery by the trecento. Visitors to the Upper Church would have seen *Francis Exorcising the Demons from Arezzo*, a scene that resonates with Christ's exorcism of the Magdalen in her chapel below. There Francis frees Arezzo's citizens from slaughter and strife and restores peace, as evidenced by seven demons who fly out from the walled city.⁷⁶ Exorcisms of individuals appear on the earliest dated panel of St. Francis by Bonaventura Berlinghieri (1235; Pescia, San Francesco), on the Bardi Chapel *Francis* dossal (mid-thirteenth century; Florence, Sta. Croce), and, most significantly, on the altar panel of St. Francis located today at San Francesco and likely made for the Lower Church (ca. 1253; Assisi, Sacro Convento, Museo del Tesoro).⁷⁷ This last, for example, records Francis's posthumous exorcism of the girl from Norcia—a demon exits her open mouth—at this same high altar in the Lower Church.

liar location to her alienation from the others and Luke's assertion that she was behind Christ ("She Loved More Ardently," 161).

74. A thirteenth-century stained-glass roundel of the Magdalen's *Conversion at the House of Simon the Pharisee* in the Franciscan church of Barfüsserkirche is especially noteworthy, due to its Franciscan context and the church's dedication; illustrated in Bennett, "Mary Magdalen's Seven Deadly Sins," fig. 5; see also her fig. 6, an English mid-thirteenth-century example, and her broader discussion of the Magdalen's exorcism, including at the Rinuccini Chapel.

75. Begel notes the appropriateness of depicting the Magdalen's exorcism in Franciscan contexts and how it reinforces Francis as *alter Christus* ("Exorcism in the Iconography of Mary Magdalene," 356–59).

76. Bonaventure's account, which does not specify *seven* demons, is in Smart, *Assisi Problem*, 271–72.

77. Brooke discusses all three panels in *Image of St. Francis*, 168–91; and see Gregory W. Ahlquist and William R. Cook, "The Representation of the Posthumous Miracles of St. Francis of Assisi in Thirteenth-Century Italian Painting," in *The Art of the Franciscan Order in Italy*, ed. William R. Cook, The Medieval Franciscans 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 211–56.

While the Magdalen's exorcism in the *Conversion at the House of Simon the Pharisee* exemplifies her spiritual transformation, it also places the saint in a submissive position within the narrative, quite different from the active postures of Christ or Francis. The Magdalen models hope and conversion, yet she retains the posture of the pitiful sinner, in need of a cure, quite unlike the upright, miracle-working God or saint. The Magdalen's gender—as understood through stereotyped notions regarding female inferiority—plays a role here in perhaps unanticipated ways. On the one hand, it demonstrates her "natural" weaknesses: like ordinary women, she is passive while men are active; her suppliant posture reveals her defective female nature and expresses her seemingly hopeless abjection. As Andrea Begel notes, it was far more common for women to be exorcised than men, suggesting that their bodies were more vulnerable and their natures more sinful.⁷⁸ Yet that very weakness is simultaneously a source of the Magdalen's power and importance for her lay audience, for this terrible sinner is saved, as we see directly above the *Conversion* when her soul is raised into heaven, dressed in white and triumphantly crowned (Figs. 1, 21). Of course, the ultimate goal of the penitential pilgrims visiting San Francesco was the Lower Church's altar of St. Francis and his tomb just below. Circulating through the Magdalen Chapel before entering the north transept and approaching the tomb, visitors would have seen the Magdalen's transformation and been reminded of Francis's cleansing of Arezzo and his posthumous exorcisms at the nearby altar. This allowed worshippers to hope that they, like the once-terrible sinner Mary Magdalen, would be saved at Francis's tomb. Cooper and Robson assert that the Assisi pilgrims of the trecento were less interested in physical healing, seeking instead spiritual transformations.⁷⁹ Thus, the saint's remarkable cure invokes in her audience the *topos* of hope so often associated with her: if even *she* can experience a transformation, then so can we.

The three scenes following her exorcism and conversion—*Raising of Lazarus*, *Noli me tangere*, and *Voyage to Marseilles with the Miracle of the Governor's Family* (Figs. 1–2, 19)—continue this ambivalent view of the saint, who constantly requires assistance and yet is miraculously rewarded. In each, she appears prominently as the supplicant rather than the miracle worker, yet her successes at petitioning Christ emphasize her powerful abilities as intercessor. Following her tearful request, Christ miraculously resurrects her brother Lazarus; in the *Noli me tangere* Christ pulls away and does not allow her to *touch* him, yet he honors her by allowing her to be the first to see and *witness* him as the risen Christ; and adrift with her

78. On the gendering of exorcism, see Begel, "Exorcism in the Iconography of Mary Magdalene," 345–49.

79. "Imagery and the Economy of Penance," 169.

companions in a rudderless boat, her prayers are answered by angels who pull them to safety in Marseilles. Only the lower part of this last fresco, depicting the later event involving the deceased wife and child of the governor of Marseilles on an island, refers to the Magdalen's own miraculous deeds, although her intervention is deemphasized—she does not appear in the scene, and the wife has not yet been revived.

In all seven narratives of the chapel's fresco cycle, the Magdalen appears in a lowered body posture of supplication, either near to the ground or on her knees.⁸⁰ In the stained-glass cycle, where the narrow, vertical lancet panels discourage horizontal compositions and she sometimes stands, she nonetheless beseeches assistance in almost every narrative. Even when included among the five standing figures in the far left lancets (Figs. 9–10), only she angles back her head, her hands joined, to address her prayers to Christ above her; the other holy figures look out at us and remain frontal. But we experience here an inversion in meaning. While the Magdalen models the penitent sinner pleading for forgiveness, her prayers are consistently answered; she thus repeatedly reconfirms her role as powerful intercessor. She appears to lack agency yet at the same time succeeds; always the sensuous sinner, she is finally fully redeemed, and her soul, garbed in pure white and gloriously crowned, is raised triumphantly to heaven by angels (Figs. 1, 21).

Interestingly, Mary Magdalen appears standing upright only once in the Magdalen Chapel's frescoes: on the east wall where the donor Teobaldo Pontano assumes her typical kneeling posture and petitions her by taking her hand and gazing up at her (Fig. 5). This fresco resonates with the narratives immediately above, the *Noli me tangere* and *Mary Magdalen Elevated by Angels* (Fig. 2), and in doing so reaffirms the Magdalen's potent role as intercessor within San Francesco. In the first, she kneels while reaching out, unable to touch Christ while in his transfigured state—his altered condition is indicated by his white garments and glowing body, exuding golden rays; physical love is here replaced by spiritual love. In the upper fresco (Fig. 20), no longer needing earthly nourishment, she kneels while ascending to accept celestial fare during her seven-times daily elevation, confirming her successful transition from the physical to the spiritual realm. Below, in contrast, a standing Mary Magdalen accepts Pontano's hand and returns his gaze. She thus positions herself as a saint,

80. In the *Voyage to Marseilles*, she is likely seated in the boat, but her hands retain the posture of supplication and prayer.

but one on a highly accessible, even touchable, level. Functioning as intercessor *par excellence* to the celestial realm, she remains a true intermediary between earth and heaven, as confirmed in the two frescoes immediately above. Visiting pilgrims in turn could model themselves on Teobaldo, kneeling and petitioning this very human and approachable saint.

Conclusion

The Magdalen remains greatly honored at San Francesco, as indicated by her presence in the St. Nicholas Chapel, by her repeated appearance in New Testament cycles throughout the double church, and especially by having an entire chapel dedicated to her. Through the inclusion of newly invented scenes, along with innovative handling of traditional narratives and use of clothing and hair, the Assisi chapel creates a Magdalen who successfully models renunciation, penitence, and *caritas*, values important to the Franciscans. Her images resonate throughout the Upper and Lower Churches and repeatedly reinforce St. Francis as *alter Christus*. Imaginatively relocating the site of her exorcism and conversion to San Francesco itself, near Francis's tomb, aligns Christ's biblical miracle with Francis's posthumous ones and reassures pilgrims of the shrine's efficacy.

Yet the Magdalen's position at San Francesco remains equivocal. As a New Testament saint, she logically appears as a model for St. Francis. However, Francis's vita also anachronistically inspired new narrative episodes in her life, such as her receipt of a garment, and reshaped established scenes, as when demons fly from her sinful body at her conversion. Despite her prominence in the Magdalen Chapel, she repeatedly seeks assistance, requiring charity and miraculous works rather than performing them. As a female, she carries the taint of sexual sin through her exposed and eroticized body; she thus needs to be clothed by the hermit priest, as elsewhere at San Francesco destitute individuals are clothed by Saints Francis and Martin. A terrible sinner, she is exorcized by Christ, as St. Francis posthumously exorcizes pilgrims visiting his nearby tomb. And it is Christ who is honored by the Magdalen's washing of his feet, as Francis is honored by the humble simpleton.

Like the pilgrims visiting Francis's shrine, Mary Magdalen remains the person either petitioning for assistance or penitentially honoring someone else, and only rarely is she a miracle-working saint. She is one of us, yet her power as intercessor remains unchallenged. Her most evident weaknesses offer audiences hope: if she can be saved, so can they.