



Cordelia Warr

Stigmatics and Visual Culture in Late Medieval and Early Modern Italy

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Stigmatics and Visual Culture in
Late Medieval and Early Modern Italy

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	7
List of Illustrations	11
1. Introduction: Stigmata and Visual Culture	19
2. Saint Francis of Assisi as Image	35
3. Representing the Invisible: Saint Catherine of Siena's Stigmatization	69
4. The Stigmatic Spectrum and the Visual Arts	109
5. Gregorio Lombardelli, Invisibility, and the Representation of Saint Catherine of Siena's Stigmata	151
6. Performing Stigmata	185
7. Painting, Printing, Sculpting, Forgery (and Washing)	217
8. Conclusion: The Timidity of the Visual Arts	257
Complete Bibliography	279
Index	309



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List of Illustrations

1. Sassetta (Stefano di Giovanni), *Ecstasy of Saint Francis*, 1437–1444, tempera on wood, 190 × 122 cm, Villa I Tatti, Florence. Image © Berenson Collection, Villa I Tatti, Florence, reproduced by permission of the President and Fellows of Harvard College. Photo: Paolo De Rocco, Centrica srl, Florence. 24
2. *Reliquary of Saint Francis of Assisi*, circa 1330, Limoges enamel (gilded copper, champlevé enamel on gilded copper, crystals), Louvre, Paris, inv. OA 4083. Image © RMN-Grand Palais (Musée du Louvre)/Daniel Arnaudet. 37
3. *Penitence*, the third way of praying, from *De modo orandi*, folio 7r, MS Lat. Rossianus 3, fifteenth century, Vatican Apostolic Library, Vatican City, Rome. Image © 2021 Vatican Apostolic Library (by concession of the Vatican Apostolic Library, all rights reserved). 48
4. Master of the Dossal of Saint John the Baptist, *Saint Francis with Stories of His Life (Orte Dossal)*, circa 1260, tempera and gold on wood, 173 × 83 cm, Museo di Arte Sacra, Orte. Image © Museo di Arte Sacra, Orte. 50
5. Master of the Dossal of Saint John the Baptist, *Saint Francis with Stories of His Life (Orte Dossal)*, detail showing the episode with Canon Ruggero, circa 1260, tempera and gold on wood, Museo di Arte Sacra, Orte. Image © Museo di Arte Sacra, Orte. 52
6. *Crucifix of San Damiano*, twelfth century, tempera on wood, 190 × 120 cm, Santa Chiara, Assisi. Image © Santa Chiara, Assisi, by kind permission. 58
7. *Crucifix of the Stigmata of Saint Catherine of Siena*, twelfth century, tempera on wood, Oratory of the Crucifix, Sanctuary of Saint Catherine, Siena. Image © Lensini. 78
8. Rutilio Manetti, *Saint Catherine Receiving the Stigmata*, 1630, oil on canvas, Oratory of the Crucifix, Sanctuary of Saint Catherine, Siena. Image © Lensini. 79
9. Giovanni di Paolo, *Saint Catherine Receiving the Stigmata*, circa 1447–1465, tempera and gold on wood, 27.9 × 20 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Robert Lehman Collection, 1975, 1975.1.34. Image courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. 80
10. Giovanni di Paolo, *Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine*, circa 1447–1465, tempera and gold on wood, painted surface 28.9 × 28.9 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Bequest of Lore Heinemann, in memory of her husband, Dr. Rudolf J. Heinemann, 1996, 1997.112.2. Image courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. 81

11. Giovanni di Paolo, *Saint Catherine's Prayer and Christ resuscitating her Mother*, circa 1447–1465, tempera and gold on wood, painted surface 27.9 × 21.9 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Robert Lehman Collection, 1975, 1975.1.33. Image courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. 82
12. Giovanni di Paolo, *Miraculous Communion of Saint Catherine*, circa 1447–1465, tempera and gold on wood, 28.9 × 22.2 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, The Friedsam Collection, Bequest of Michael Friedsam, 1931, 32.100.95. Image courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. 83
13. Giacomo Pacchiarotti (attrib.), *Saint Catherine of Siena receiving the Stigmata*, early-sixteenth century, fresco, Oratorio della Tintoria, Sanctuary of Saint Catherine, Siena. Image © Lensini. 84
14. Domenico Beccafumi, *Saint Catherine of Siena receiving the Stigmata*, 1513–1515, oil and gold leaf on wood, 28.6 × 41.6 cm, Getty Museum, Los Angeles, 97.PB.25. Digital image courtesy of the Getty's Open Content Program. 85
15. Matteo Balducci or Giacomo Pacchiarotti (attrib.), *Stigmatization of Saint Francis, Pietà, Saint Catherine of Siena Receiving the Stigmata*, sixteenth century, tempera on panel, 37 × 193.5 cm, Pinacoteca Nazionale, Siena, n. inv. 406. Image by concession of the Ministero della Cultura, Direzione Regionale Musei della Toscana. Photo: Archivio Pinacoteca Nazionale di Siena. 86
16. Andrea di Bartolo, *Five Dominican Beatae*, 1394–1398, tempera on wood, 56 × 97 cm, Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice. Image © Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice. 86
17. Bernardino Fungai, *Stigmatization of Saint Catherine of Siena*, 1495–1497, Oratory of the Confraternity of Santa Caterina in Fontebranda (Oratorio della Cucina), Sanctuary of Saint Catherine, Siena. Image © Lensini. 87
18. Domenico Beccafumi, *Stigmatization of Saint Catherine of Siena*, 1514–1515, oil on wood, 208 × 156 cm, Pinacoteca Nazionale, Siena, n. inv. 420. Image © Lensini. 88
19. Giovanni di Paolo, detail of *Saint Catherine Receiving the Stigmata*, circa 1447–1465, tempera and gold on wood, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Robert Lehman Collection, 1975, 1975.1.34. Image courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. 90
20. Giovanni di Paolo, *Saint Catherine and the Beggar*, circa 1447–1465, tempera and gold on wood, 28.7 × 28.9 cm, Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, Gift of the John Huntington Art and Polytechnic Trust, 1966.3. Image courtesy of the Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland. 91

21. Giovanni di Paolo, *Saint Catherine of Siena Exchanging Her Heart with Christ*, circa 1447–1465, tempera and gold on wood, 29.8 × 24.1 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Bequest of Lore Heinemann, in memory of her husband, Dr. Rudolf J. Heinemann, 1996, 1997.117.3. Image courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. 93
22. Cristoforo Cortese (attrib.), *Stigmatizations of Francis of Assisi, Helen of Hungary, Walter of Strasbourg, Catherine of Siena*, from Tommaso Caffarini, *Libellus de Supplemento*, p. 81, MS Segn. T.I.2, fifteenth century, Biblioteca Comunale degli Intronati, Siena. Image © Biblioteca Comunale degli Intronati, Istituzione del Comune di Siena. 97
23. Cristoforo Cortese (attrib.), *Stigmatizations of Francis of Assisi, Helen of Hungary, Walter of Strasbourg, Catherine of Siena*, from Tommaso Caffarini, *Libellus de Supplemento*, folio 29r, cod. Lat. 1574, fifteenth century, Biblioteca Universitaria, Bologna. Image © Alma Mater Studiorum Università di Bologna – Biblioteca Universitaria di Bologna. 99
24. Cristoforo Cortese (attrib.), *Saint Dominic*, from Tommaso Caffarini, *Libellus de Supplemento*, p. 56, MS Segn. T.I.2, fifteenth century, Biblioteca Comunale degli Intronati, Siena. Image © Biblioteca Comunale degli Intronati, Istituzione del Comune di Siena. 116
25. Cristoforo Cortese (attrib.), *Catherine of Siena*, from Tommaso Caffarini, *Libellus de Supplemento*, p. 57, MS Segn. T.I.2, fifteenth century, Biblioteca Comunale degli Intronati, Siena. Image © Biblioteca Comunale degli Intronati, Istituzione del Comune di Siena. 116
26. Cristoforo Cortese (attrib.), *Henry Suso, Bridget, Mark, Pietro Petroni, James, Tarsilla, and Catherine of Siena*, from Tommaso Caffarini, *Libellus de Supplemento*, p. 57, MS Segn. T.I.2, fifteenth century, Biblioteca Comunale degli Intronati, Siena. Image © Biblioteca Comunale degli Intronati, Istituzione del Comune di Siena. 117
27. Cristoforo Cortese (attrib.), *Saint Jerome beaten by an Angel, Catherine of Siena receives the Crown of Thorns from Christ, an Angel removes the Heart of a Hermit, Christ exchanges his Heart with that of Catherine of Siena, Christ transfixes Catherine's Left Hand with a Nail*, from Tommaso Caffarini, *Libellus de Supplemento*, p. 58, MS Segn. T.I.2, fifteenth century, Biblioteca Comunale degli Intronati, Siena. Image © Biblioteca Comunale degli Intronati, Istituzione del Comune di Siena. 118
28. Cristoforo Cortese (attrib.), *Christ exchanges his Heart with that of Catherine of Siena, Christ transfixes Catherine's Left Hand with a Nail*, from Tommaso Caffarini, *Libellus de Supplemento*, p. 58, MS Segn. T.I.2, fifteenth century, Biblioteca Comunale degli Intronati, Siena. Image © Biblioteca Comunale degli Intronati, Istituzione del Comune di Siena. 119

29. Cristoforo Cortese (attrib.), *Catherine of Siena, Clare of Montefalco, and Margaret of Città di Castello*, from Tommaso Caffarini, *Libellus de Supplemento*, p. 59, MS Segn. T.I.2, fifteenth century, Biblioteca Comunale degli Intronati, Siena. Image © Biblioteca Comunale degli Intronati, Istituzione del Comune di Siena. 120
30. Cristoforo Cortese (attrib.), *Crucified Saints, the Ten Thousand Martyrs, Saint Peter Martyr*, from Tommaso Caffarini, *Libellus de Supplemento*, p. 65, MS Segn. T.I.2, fifteenth century, Biblioteca Comunale degli Intronati, Siena. Image © Biblioteca Comunale degli Intronati, Istituzione del Comune di Siena. 122
31. *Imploring Divine Power*, the sixth way of praying, from *De modo orandi*, folio 10r, MS Lat. Rossianus 3, fifteenth century, Vatican Apostolic Library, Vatican City, Rome. Image © 2021 Vatican Apostolic Library (by concession of the Vatican Apostolic Library, all rights reserved). 127
32. Fra Angelico, *Fiesole Altarpiece (Madonna and Child with Angels and Saints Thomas Aquinas, Barnabas, Dominic and Peter Martyr)*, 1419–1425, tempera and gold on wood, 212 × 237 cm, San Domenico, Fiesole. Image © Photo SCALA, Florence. 128
33. Fra Angelico (attrib.), *Christ Glorified in the Court of Heaven*, central predella panel from the *Fiesole Altarpiece*, circa 1423–1424, egg tempera and gold on wood, 31.7 × 73 cm, National Gallery, London, NG633.1. Image © The National Gallery, London. 129
34. Fra Angelico (attrib.), *Virgin Mary with the Apostles and Other Saints*, left predella panel from the *Fiesole Altarpiece*, circa 1423–1424, egg tempera and gold on wood, 32 × 64 cm, National Gallery, London, NG633.2. Image © The National Gallery, London. 129
35. Fra Angelico (attrib.), *Forerunners of Christ with Saints and Martyrs*, right predella panel from the *Fiesole Altarpiece*, circa 1423–1424, egg tempera and gold on wood, 31.9 × 63.5 cm, National Gallery, London, NG633.3. Image © The National Gallery, London. 130
36. Fra Angelico (attrib.), *The Dominican Blessed*, far left predella panel from the *Fiesole Altarpiece*, circa 1423–1424, egg tempera and gold on wood, 31.8 × 21.9 cm, National Gallery, London, NG633.4. Image © The National Gallery, London. 131
37. Fra Angelico (attrib.), *The Dominican Blessed*, far right predella panel from the *Fiesole Altarpiece*, circa 1423–1424, egg tempera and gold on wood, 31.6 × 21.9 cm, National Gallery, London, NG633.5. Image © The National Gallery, London. 132

38. Master of the Dominican Effigies, *Christ and the Virgin Mary with Dominican Saints and Blesseds*, circa 1340, tempera and gold leaf on panel, 117.8 × 56 cm, Museo e Chiostrì Monumentali di Santa Maria Novella, Florence. Image © Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported, photo by Sailko (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/deed.en>), published with kind permission of the Parrocchia di Santa Maria Novella. 133
39. Unknown painter from the Veneto, *Saint Margaret of Hungary*, San Nicolò, Treviso, second half of the fourteenth century, fresco. Image © Ufficio Diocesano per l'Arte Sacra e i Beni Culturali della Diocesi di Treviso. 134
40. Pier Francesco Fiorentino, *Virgin and Child with Saints*, 1494, tempera on panel, Sant'Agostino, San Gimignano. Image © Lensini. 136
41. Pier Francesco Fiorentino, *Blessed Bartolo Buonpedoni of San Gimignano*, detail of the predella panel of *Virgin and Child with Saints*, 1494, tempera on panel, Sant'Agostino, San Gimignano. Image © Lensini. 138
42. Pier Francesco Fiorentino, *Saint Catherine of Siena*, detail of the predella panel of *Virgin and Child with Saints*, 1494, tempera on panel, Sant'Agostino, San Gimignano. Image © Lensini. 138
43. Pier Francesco Fiorentino, *Christ as Man of Sorrows*, detail of the predella panel of *Virgin and Child with Saints*, 1494, tempera on panel, Sant'Agostino, San Gimignano. Image © Lensini. 138
44. Pier Francesco Fiorentino, *Margaret of Hungary*, detail of the predella panel of *Virgin and Child with Saints*, 1494, tempera on panel, Sant'Agostino, San Gimignano. Image © Lensini. 138
45. Pier Francesco Fiorentino, *Fina of San Gimignano*, detail of the predella panel of *Virgin and Child with Saints*, 1494, tempera on panel, Sant'Agostino, San Gimignano. Image © Lensini. 138
46. Lorenzo di Niccolò di Pietro Gerini, *Reliquary Tabernacle with Scenes from the Life of Fina*, early-fifteenth century, tempera on panel, Civic Museums, San Gimignano. Image © Lensini. 141
47. Giovanni Antonio Bazzi (il Sodoma), *Swooning of Saint Catherine of Siena after the Stigmatization*, 1526, fresco, Chapel of Saint Catherine, San Domenico, Siena. Image © Lensini. 164
48. Giovanni Antonio Bazzi (il Sodoma), *Vision of Saint Catherine of Siena after the Stigmatization*, 1526, fresco, Chapel of Saint Catherine, San Domenico, Siena. Image © Lensini. 166
49. Giovanni Antonio Bazzi (il Sodoma), *The Execution of Niccolò di Tuldo*, 1526, fresco, Chapel of Saint Catherine, San Domenico, Siena. Image © Lensini. 167

50. Carlo Crivelli, *Saint Peter Martyr*, detail from the *Ascoli-Piceno Altarpiece*, circa 1476, tempera on poplar, 90.5 × 26.5 cm, National Gallery, London, NG788.13. Image © The National Gallery, London. 174
51. Cima da Conegliano, *Saint Peter Martyr with Saints Nicholas and Benedict*, 1505–1506, oil on wood, 330 × 216 cm, Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan, inv. 177. Image © Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan. 175
52. Bartolomeo Bulgarini, *Saint Peter Martyr*, detail of the *San Gimignano Polyptych*, circa 1353–1355, tempera on panel, Asciano, Salini Collection. Image © Lensini. 176
53. Giovanni Pietro and Giovanni Ambrogio De Donati, *Dead Christ*, 1490s, wooden articulated sculpture, Chapel 43 (The Holy Sepulchre), Sacro Monte di Varallo, Varallo, Piedmont. Image © Archivio fotografico Ente di Gestione dei Sacri Monti; photo by Mariano Dallago. 196
54. Giovanni Pietro and Giovanni Ambrogio De Donati, detail of *Dead Christ*, 1490s, wooden articulated sculpture, Chapel 43 (The Holy Sepulchre), Sacro Monte di Varallo, Varallo, Piedmont. Image © Archivio fotografico Ente di Gestione dei Sacri Monti; photo by Mariano Dallago. 196
55. Donatello, *Crucifix with Articulated Arms*, circa 1412–1413, polychromed wood, 168 × 173 cm, Santa Croce, Florence. Image © Photo SCALA, Florence. 198
56. Donatello, detail of *Crucifix with Articulated Arms*, circa 1412–1413, polychromed wood, Santa Croce, Florence. Image © Photo SCALA, Florence. 199
57. Fabio Angelucci da Mevale, *Madonna and Child with Saints Joseph, Anthony of Padua, Francis of Assisi and the Archangel Gabriel*, 1577, fresco, San Francesco, Trevi, Perugia. Image © Creative Commons CC_BY_SAit 3.0; photo by Diego Baglieri (<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=82249741>). 219
58. Nikolaus Tzafouris, *The Diamond Triptych (Mandylion, Saint George Slaying the Dragon, Saint Francis of Assisi, Saint Anthony of Padua, the Deësis)*, detail of open triptych with *Deësis* (middle), *Saint Francis* (left wing), *Saint Anthony of Padua* (right wing), after 1453, egg tempera on wood, central panel 27.3 × 22.2 cm, side panels 20.3 × 15.2 cm. Private collection. Image courtesy of Sam Fogg, London. 220
59. Nikolaus Tzafouris, *The Diamond Triptych (Mandylion, Saint George Slaying the Dragon, Saint Francis of Assisi, Saint Anthony of Padua, the Deësis)*, detail of closed triptych with *Mandylion* (external right wing), after 1453, egg tempera on wood, 27.3 × 22.2 cm. Private collection. Image courtesy of Sam Fogg, London. 221

60. Tobias, Stimmer (attrib.), *Saint Francis 'anatomized' by his Fellow Criminals*, circa 1570–1571, woodcut, 13.3 × 23.7 cm, from Johann Fischart, *Der Barafuesser Secten und Kuttenteit*, British Museum, London, 1880,0710.887. Image © The Trustees of the British Museum. 232
61. Tobias, Stimmer (attrib.), detail of *Saint Catherine of Siena*, from *Saint Francis 'anatomized' by his Fellow Criminals*, circa 1570–1571, woodcut, from Johann Fischart, *Der Barafuesser Secten und Kuttenteit*, British Museum, London, 1880,0710.887. Image © The Trustees of the British Museum. 232
62. Paolo Uccello, *Crucifixion Triptych*, mid-1450s, gold and tempera on wood, 45.7 × 55.5 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, bequest of Lore Heinemann, in memory of her husband, Dr. Rudolf J. Heinemann, 1996, 1997.117.9. Image courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. 239
63. Paolo Uccello, *Saint Bridget of Sweden*, detail of the left wing of the *Crucifixion Triptych*, mid-1450s, gold and tempera on wood, 45.7 × 14.3 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, bequest of Lore Heinemann, in memory of her husband, Dr. Rudolf J. Heinemann, 1996, 1997.117.9. Image courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. 240
64. Maso da San Friano (attrib.), *Saint Bridget of Sweden*, circa 1545–1585, oil on wood, 116.2 × 45.1 cm, York Art Gallery, York, presented by F.D. Lycett Green through The Art Fund, 1955. Image © York Museums Trust. 242
65. Paolo Uccello, *Profanation of the Host*, first scene from the predella of the *Communion of the Apostles*, 1467–1468, tempera on wood, 41 × 58.5 cm, Galleria Nazionale delle Marche, Urbino. Image © Galleria Nazionale delle Marche, Urbino. 244
66. Joos van Ghent, *Communion of the Apostles*, 1473–1475, oil on wood, 331 × 335 cm, Galleria Nazionale delle Marche, Urbino. Image © Galleria Nazionale delle Marche, Urbino. 244
67. Joos van Ghent, detail of the *Communion of the Apostles*, 1473–1475, oil on wood, Galleria Nazionale delle Marche, Urbino. Image © Galleria Nazionale delle Marche, Urbino. 245
68. Luca Signorelli, *Communion of the Apostles*, 1512, oil on wood, 232 × 220 cm, Museo Diocesano, Cortona. Image © Photo SCALA, Florence. 246
69. *Woman exchanging the Host for her Garment*, from Giovanni Villani, *Cronica*, folio 149v, MS Chigi L.VIII.296, late-fourteenth century, Vatican Apostolic Library, Vatican City, Rome. Image © 2021 Vatican Apostolic Library (by concession of the Vatican Apostolic Library, all rights reserved). 248

70. Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *Monument to Maria Raggi*, circa 1647–1653, marble and gilt bronze, Santa Maria sopra Minerva, Rome. Image under licence from MiC – Direzione Regionale Musei Lazio – Photographic Archive. 258
71. Workshop of Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *Model for the Monument to Maria Raggi*, circa 1647, papier-mâché, Palazzo Venezia, Rome, inv. PV 10374. Image under licence from MiC – Direzione Regionale Musei Lazio – Photographic Archive. 259
72. Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *Pen and Ink Sketch for the Monument to Maria Raggi*, circa 1647, Arch. Chigi, Cartella A, inv. 24910, Vatican Apostolic Library, Vatican City, Rome. Image © 2021 Vatican Apostolic Library (by concession of the Vatican Apostolic Library, all rights reserved). 260
73. Plautilla Nelli (attrib.), *Saint Catherine of Siena with a Lily*, sixteenth century, oil on panel, 39 × 28.5 cm, Museo Diocesano San Rufino, Assisi. Image © Museo Diocesano San Rufino, Assisi. 265
74. Bartolomé Carducho, *Stigmatization of Saint Francis*, 1600, oil on canvas, 263 × 173 cm, Colegio Fundación de Santamarca, Madrid, inv. 228. Image © Colegio Fundación de Santamarca y de San Ramón y San Antonio, Madrid. 269
75. Camillo Procaccini, *Stigmatization of Saint Francis*, 1593, etching, 51 × 33.8 cm, British Museum, London, U.5.133. Image © The Trustees of the British Museum. 270
76. Carlo Crivelli, *Virgin and Child with Saints Francis and Sebastian*, 1491, egg and oil on poplar, 175.3 × 151.1 cm, National Gallery, London, presented by Elizabeth Mary, widow of the second Marquess of Westminster, 1870, NG807. Image © The National Gallery, London. 272
77. Carlo Crivelli, *Saint Francis*, detail from the *Ascoli-Piceno Altarpiece*, circa 1476, tempera on poplar, National Gallery, London, NG788.6. Image © The National Gallery, London. 273

1. Introduction: Stigmata and Visual Culture

Abstract

By expanding the discussion of stigmata to focus on visual culture, it is possible to deepen our understanding of contemporary visibility as well as our awareness of debates concerning images and image making between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries. Francis of Assisi (d. 1226) and Catherine of Siena (d. 1380) are important to this debate as the two saints most frequently depicted with miraculous stigmata. However, limiting considerations to representations of these two saints prevents a full understanding of the role of gender in the visual culture of stigmata. By placing Saints Francis and Catherine within the wider context of stigmatic visibility, it is possible to broaden our understanding of issues relating to gender, miracles, and the representation of knowledge.

Keywords: stigmata, visual culture, female stigmatics, Francis of Assisi, Catherine of Siena, miracles

Within the context of the late medieval and early modern Catholic Church, stigmata are often understood as miraculous bodily marks echoing the wounds received by Christ on the cross. The most famous were those received by Francis of Assisi (d. 1226) after a vision when he was staying at a hermitage on Mount La Verna, north of Arezzo, in 1224. In the life of Saint Francis, accepted as the official version at the general chapter of the Franciscan Order held in Pisa in 1263, Saint Bonaventure (d. 1274) described their appearance: nail-like protuberances in the centre of the hands and feet, and a bleeding side wound.¹ The wounds were miraculous, their placement on Francis's body was clearly significant, and the Franciscans promoted them as unique.²

¹ Bonaventure, 'The Major Legend', p. 633 (Chapter 13). This text is generally known and referred to as the *Legenda Maior*. As noted by Frugoni, after the destruction of early *vitae* ordered by the General Chapter held at Paris in 1266, Bonaventure's text became definitive. However, early sources were not in agreement on the physical appearance of the stigmata. See Frugoni, *Francesco e l'invenzione delle stimmate*, pp. 25, 33, 51.

² See, for example, Thomas of Celano, 'The Life of Saint Francis', p. 281 (Book 2, Chapter 9). This text is generally known and referred to as the *Vita Prima*.

However, the marks on Francis's body did not appear *ex nihilo* and the history of stigmata is a long one. Body markings referred to as stigmata had been known since Antiquity.³ It was only in the century following the death of Saint Francis that the definition of stigmata as miraculous marks, mirroring those received by Christ on the cross, gained ground. It was not uncontested and a wider definition of stigmata was actively promoted in some quarters, particularly by the Dominicans.

Francis's stigmata appeared within a culture of affective piety, one that the order he founded did much to propagate, but which was already embedded in the religious practices of the previous century.⁴ It is now over twenty-five years since Giles Constable, in his 'The Ideal of the Imitation of Christ' published as part of his *Three Studies in Medieval Religious and Social Thought* (1995), re-focused attention on the fact that stigmata could be understood in a much wider sense than that represented by Francis of Assisi. Constable pointed out that Francis 'was not an isolated example of an otherwise unknown and unprecedented phenomenon'.⁵ Constable was followed by Richard Trexler who emphasized that 'the roots of the stigmata phenomenon lay in the slow but inexorable growth, well before Francis, of a self-mutilating or -mortifying sub-culture'.⁶ This culture of affective piety encompassed the performance of suffering with Christ, literal compassion. Many lives of holy people recorded that they used their physical sufferings as an attempt to understand those of Christ during the Passion. These afflictions could result in marks on the body. They ranged from those due to medical conditions such as leprosy, through to the results of self-mortification, and miraculous imposition of wounds often as the result of the fervent prayers of the recipient. Work by scholars such as Constable and Trexler helped to demonstrate that placing too much weight on Saint Francis has been detrimental to an understanding of an overall view of stigmata.

Significant research has since taken place into medieval and early modern stigmatic experiences, redressing this aspect of the imbalance in scholarship on stigmatization in the Middle Ages and early modern period. Caroline Muessig, Gábor Klaniczay, Tamar Herzig, and Susan Rodgers and Joanna Ziegler, for example, have all done groundbreaking research on aspects of the history of stigmatization within the Christian tradition,⁷ on stigmatization in the Hungarian royal family,⁸ on female stigmatics in the fifteenth century,⁹ and on the performance aspects of stigmata.¹⁰

3 Muessig, 'Signs of Salvation'.

4 McNamer, *Affective Meditation*.

5 Constable, *Three Studies*, p. 217.

6 Trexler, 'The Stigmatized Body', p. 466.

7 See, for example, Muessig, 'The Stigmata Debate'.

8 Klaniczay, 'On the Stigmatization of Saint Margaret of Hungary'.

9 Herzig, *Christ Transformed into a Virgin Woman*.

10 Rodgers and Ziegler, 'Elisabeth of Spalbeek's Trance Dance of Faith'.

In 2012 Klaniczay hosted a conference at the Institut d'études avancées de Paris on stigmatics and stigmatization, which resulted in a special volume of the *Archivio Italiano per la Storia della Pietà* 26 (2013) on stigmata. Muessig's important book *The Stigmata in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (2020) traced stigmatic theology through to the early seventeenth century.¹¹ Work by these scholars, amongst many others, has helped to focus attention on stigmatics other than Saint Francis and to re-draw the lines of enquiry.

One aspect of this expanded equation is the way in which women experienced the stigmata and were, in turn, experienced as stigmatics. Both Caroline Walker Bynum (1988) and John Coakley (2006), for example, recognized stigmatization as a particularly female phenomenon,¹² and some of the holy women investigated by Gabriella Zarri in her *Le sante vive* (1990) were stigmatics.¹³ That the majority of stigmatics between the thirteenth and the sixteenth centuries were female was first noted in the work of Antoine Imbert-Gourbeyre (1818–1912), a professor of medicine in Clermont-Ferrand. His *La Stigmatisation* remains the only attempt at a comprehensive overview.¹⁴ Imbert-Gourbeyre's interest in stigmatics resulted from his political and religious beliefs, his meeting with the Belgian stigmatic Louise Lateau (1850–1883) in 1868,¹⁵ and his medical training. His working definition of stigmata, despite his claims to the contrary, appears to have been far-reaching and to have included those who had a wide range of stigmatic symptoms but who were not necessarily identified as stigmatics during their lifetime or immediately afterwards.¹⁶ He listed over three hundred stigmatics between the death of Saint Francis of Assisi and the end of the nineteenth century. Of these, about two-thirds lived in Italy and a minority, around 13 percent, were male.¹⁷ The majority of stigmatics who lived between the beginning of the thirteenth and the end of the sixteenth centuries were also Dominican or closely associated with the Dominican Order. Despite evidence for the earlier examples having been taken mainly from material available in large seventeenth- and eighteenth-century religious compilations,

11 Muessig, *The Stigmata*.

12 Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, pp. 200–201, 273–275; Coakley, *Women, Men and Spiritual Power*, pp. 10–11.

13 Zarri, *Le sante vive*.

14 Imbert-Gourbeyre, *La Stigmatisation, l'extase divine et les miracles de Lourdes*. See also Imbert-Gourbeyre with Bouflet, *La Stigmatisation*, a reprint of the first volume with a critical introduction and additions to the text by Joachim Bouflet published in 1996.

15 Among the many publications on Louise Lateau see Klaniczay, 'Louise Lateau et les stigmatisées du XIXième siècle'; Lachapelle, 'Between Miracle and Sickness: Louise Lateau'.

16 For basic biographical details of each stigmatic see Imbert-Gourbeyre with Bouflet, *La Stigmatisation*, pp. 41–56. For a brief overview of Imbert-Gourbeyre's work see Muessig, *The Stigmata*, pp. 9–12.

17 The statistics given in Wilson, *The Bleeding Mind*, and in Biot, *L'Énigme des stigmatisés*, are both derived from the analysis of Imbert-Gourbeyre.

rather than being rigorously authenticated through primary source material, the breadth of Imbert-Gourbeyre's work has ensured that *La Stigmatisation* remains an important publication.

Female stigmatics raised deep and troubling questions for many churchmen, something that has been investigated by Herzig in her work on the Dominican tertiary Lucia Brocadelli of Narni (d. 1544) and the German Dominican inquisitor Heinrich Kramer (d. 1505), best known for his *Malleus Maleficarum* (*Hammer of the Witches*) of 1486.¹⁸ Kramer's views were notable for the negative significance given to female sexuality.¹⁹ His career and the *Malleus Maleficarum* have led to him being characterized as a woman-hater. As Herzig has argued, like many of his contemporaries, Kramer viewed women as the inferior sex, more vulnerable than men to the overtures of the devil, but women's susceptibility could also make them more sensitive to God's will.²⁰ Thus Kramer supported Lucia Brocadelli's claims to have received the stigmata, although the idea of women receiving Christ's wounds was disconcerting to others precisely because women were inferior,²¹ so much so that some deemed it impossible for women to receive stigmata.²²

Francis's stigmata mirrored the wounds that Christ received on the cross, but others had stigmata that manifested in a variety of different ways and this seems to have been particularly so for women: Rita of Cascia (d. 1457) received a wound on her forehead, which her supporters linked to the crown of thorns;²³ others had their hearts physically changed;²⁴ yet others 'performed' their stigmata whilst in ecstasy.²⁵ Miraculous stigmata were sometimes imposed incrementally, something experienced by Osanna Andreasi (d. 1505).²⁶ For others, their stigmata disappeared as miraculously as they had appeared.²⁷ Stigmata also manifested themselves through pain, rather than through externally visible imprints, wounds, or scars, as

18 Herzig, *Christ Transformed into a Virgin Woman*.

19 Broedel, *The Malleus Maleficarum and the Construction of Witchcraft*, p. 24; Stephens, 'Witches Who Steal Penises'.

20 Herzig, 'Fear and Devotion in the Writings of Heinrich Institoris'.

21 Herzig, 'Stigmatized Holy Women as Female Christs'.

22 For example, the Observant Franciscan friar Samuele Cassini (d. after 1510). For a short discussion see Muessig, *The Stigmata*, pp. 9–10, 141–142.

23 On representations of Rita of Cascia see Cuccini, 'Iconografia ritiana antica'.

24 These included Clare of Montefalco and Margaret of Città di Castello. See Warr, 'Re-reading the Relationship'.

25 See, for example, Muessig, 'Performance of the Passion'.

26 Silvestri, *La vita e stupea di miracoli*, folios 279v–282v (Book 3, Chapters 4–6). The book is unpaginated but page numbers have been marked in the copy in the Vatican Library.

27 According to her biographers, the wounds in the feet and hands of Lucia Brocadelli, for example, were rendered invisible at her request. See Herzig, *Christ Transformed into a Virgin Woman*, pp. 197–198.

was the case for the foremost Dominican stigmatic of the later Middle Ages, Saint Catherine of Siena (d. 1380).

The expansion of research into stigmata that were received in the late Middle Ages and early modern period has thus instigated new and significant lines of enquiry, which have improved our knowledge about the physical manifestations of historic stigmata, how they were defined, and who received them. They have also placed Saint Francis within a wider, largely female, context. One area that has not yet received sufficient attention is the visual culture of stigmata and stigmatization. In this area, in particular, the figure of Saint Francis as the pre-eminent stigmatic casts a long shadow. It has skewed research into the picturing and visualization of stigmata.

There is an extensive literature dealing with Saint Francis's stigmata in visual art. In the late 1960s André Vauchez had already noted the unease surrounding the miracle of Francis's stigmatization and how early representations of Francis with the stigmata gave rise to anxiety and ire, often centred on the perception that these representations showed Francis as a rival, rather than a follower, of Christ.²⁸ As a stigmatic, Francis became a living image of Christ, something that was explored by Paroma Chatterjee in her 2012 article on 'Francis's Secret Stigmata'. Chatterjee focused on what she characterized as 'a crisis in visual representation', one which pushed 'the ethics of mimesis to their very limits'. Through his reception of the stigmata, Francis became 'a human being transformed into an *acheiropoietos*',²⁹ an icon of Christ made by God. As Chatterjee cogently argued, there were numerous difficulties attendant on the representation in paint of Francis, who himself could already be classed as a representation through the transformative experience of the stigmatization.

At the heart of these issues is a series of questions that congregate around visualization. Saint Francis's stigmata were a prompt to consider the body of the saint as, in some way, a reliquary, a representation, or a visualization of the body of Christ. How, then, should painted images of Saint Francis with the stigmata be categorized? In a seminal article on 'St. Francis of Assisi as a Second Christ in Early Italian Painting' (1974), Henk Van Os explored instances where Francis was shown 'primarily as the bearer of the stigmata'.³⁰ He drew attention to the figure of Saint Francis with arms outstretched in the form of a cross in Sassetta's panel from the altarpiece originally in San Francesco, Borgo San Sepolcro (Berenson Collection, Villa I Tatti, Florence).³¹ Here, the display of the saint directly linked his

28 Vauchez, 'Les stigmates de Saint François et leurs détracteurs'.

29 Chatterjee, 'Francis's Secret Stigmata', p. 40.

30 Van Os, 'St. Francis of Assisi as a Second Christ'.

31 Van Os, 'St. Francis of Assisi as a Second Christ', p. 119. On the Borgo San Sepolcro altarpiece see Israël, *Sassetta: The Borgo San Sepolcro Altarpiece*.



1. Sassetta (Stefano di Giovanni), *Ecstasy of Saint Francis*, 1437–1444, tempera on wood, 190 x 122 cm, Villa I Tatti, Florence.

wounds to Christ's crucifixion and it did so outside the context of the narration of the stigmatization (fig. 1). In this instance, the claim that Francis's stigmata were unique was communicated through painted imagery by a visual conflation: the recollection of the physical shape of the cross or position of Christ crucified with the figure of the stigmatized Francis.

Although there was no immediate causal link between the vision which Francis received on La Verna and his reception of the stigmata, the presentation of the stigmatization in visual art soon evolved to show a connection, most often in the form of golden rays, between the vision of the seraph and the imposition of the stigmata.³² Painted images of the stigmatization show the apparently contemporaneous appearance of vision and stigmata. The arguments put forward by Vauchez, Van Os, Arnold Davidson, and Chatterjee, amongst the multitude of discussions relating to the representation of Saint Francis as a stigmatic, demonstrate the centrality of visualization to stigmata and stigmatization. They reveal some of the complexities of the issues involved, from debates about the physical appearance of the stigmata, to questions about how and whether they should be depicted, and the effect of images on the viewer.

The expansion of the Franciscan Order helped to ensure that knowledge of Francis's stigmata was rapidly disseminated.³³ The legacy of his affective spirituality, one that was focused through emotional connection, also contributed towards significant changes in the visual arts. As Anne Derbes has shown, in the thirteenth century the Franciscans were at the forefront of developments in the representation of the Passion of Christ that included an increased emphasis on Christ's suffering.³⁴ The shift to a distressed, tortured, and anguished Christ demonstrated reciprocity between images of Christ and Francis's lived suffering with Christ. Francis responded to paintings and images or visions and his affective piety informed subsequent visual art. Francis also became the subject of art that showed his *compassion*, his suffering with Christ, and was the stigmatic most depicted in the visual arts in Italy between the thirteenth and the seventeenth centuries. Many cycles of his life, such as that in the Bardi Chapel in Santa Croce, Florence, privileged the portrayal of the stigmatization, and non-narrative images of Francis on altarpieces and other panels began to be painted showing him with the stigmata from shortly after his death.³⁵ The importance ascribed to Francis's reception of miraculous stigmata and the prevalence of images showing those wounds has resulted in studies on the representation of stigmata in visual art being dominated by Saint Francis. His

32 Davidson, 'Miracles of Bodily Transformation', pp. 460–468.

33 On the expansion of the order see, for example, Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order*, pp. 62–74, 155–176.

34 Derbes, *Picturing the Passion*, pp. 16–24.

35 See the examples in Cook, *Images of Saint Francis of Assisi*.

reception of the stigmata, the stigmata themselves, and the ways in which they were visually promoted have become the touchstone against which others are compared.

Representations of Francis's stigmata have most often been juxtaposed with those of the Dominican Catherine of Siena, a natural consequence of the early polemic about her stigmata, which were invisible during her lifetime. Catherine's contemporaries and those who pushed for her canonization lauded her reception of the stigmata as the equal of the miracle accorded Francis.³⁶ She is, after Francis, the saint most represented at the moment of stigmatization or with stigmata, as shown in Lidia Bianchi and Diega Giunta's encyclopaedic *Iconografia di Santa Caterina da Siena* (1988).³⁷ David Ganz has recently drawn attention to the tensions involved in representing Catherine's invisible stigmata.³⁸ His work prompts questions about the contested visual presence of stigmata, which existed in a liminal space between the visible and the invisible.

Miraculous stigmata were an exceptional sign of God's favour yet recipients often attempted to hide their physical manifestation, since to show their stigmata to others would have reeked of pride. Saints such as Francis resolutely concealed their stigmata during their lifetimes, masking their materiality and preventing visual access. They could be physically screened from sight by being covered with clothing, or could be miraculously hidden, usually at the request of the recipient, present only to the stigmatic through the pain that they caused, as was the case with Catherine of Siena. Stigmata were thus both visible (they could be seen, even if only partially and at certain times) and invisible (or hidden from view). To further complicate matters, the marks were not always permanent. Non-miraculous stigmata, those that were inflicted in the course of religious self-mortification for example, healed, perhaps leaving a scar but perhaps not. Miraculous stigmata could also disappear. Opportunities to see stigmata were, therefore, severely restricted such that only a very few witnesses could claim to have seen them during the life of the holy person.

It was precisely this preoccupation with shielding the stigmata from sight that signalled the importance of their visual presence. Hidden stigmata had strong visual elements. Though they could not be seen, they were known, and knowing was intimately related to seeing. Intellectual knowledge of a holy person's stigmata required an act of mental visualization. The mention or description of stigmata set up visual images in the mind of the listener/reader. Stigmata, even those that could not be seen in life, were also depicted in manuscripts and monumental art. They existed visually in several different ways: most obviously as marks on the body, as word-visualizations on the page, and as depictions in painting and

36 See the discussion in Chapter 4.

37 Bianchi and Giunta, *Iconografia di Santa Caterina da Siena*.

38 Ganz, 'The Dilemma of a Saint's Portrait'.

sculpture. Although each was linked through the category stigmata, there were varying expectations within and across the groups, which made the visual culture of stigmata complex and multi-faceted.

The term 'visual culture' is an important one for this book, but it is also a much-debated one. It is difficult – and often perilous – to attempt a definition.³⁹ Some of the major scholars in the field associate visual culture with modernity.⁴⁰ However, it has always had strong links to earlier periods and scholars have argued that aspects of its genesis can convincingly be traced back to Michael Baxandall's publication, in 1972, of *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy* and Svetlana Alpers's *The Art of Describing* in 1983.⁴¹ For many, visual culture is intimately linked to what Nicholas Mirzoeff has called 'visual technology', which can range from computer and television screens to oil paintings.⁴² Important here is the way in which visual culture is expressed or, more accurately, materialized, for it is frequently understood as embodied in material form, albeit perhaps one which is fleeting. It must be captured in such a way that it can be seen on screen or on canvas. Thus, the 'visual' of 'visual culture' is concerned, either explicitly or implicitly, with actual images/objects and with the physical act of seeing. Others have contested that 'seeing' should not be narrowly defined and that it can include the practice of visualizing, including mental visualization.⁴³ Visual culture that is not purely object-based is particularly relevant during the period discussed in this book. Visualization was closely linked to memory, for example, and preachers used words to engender images in the minds of their audience, something that has been explored by, amongst others, Lina Bolzoni.⁴⁴ In the words of W.J.T. Mitchell, the study of visual culture is intrinsically linked to the 'invisible, the unseen, the unseeable'.⁴⁵

An investigation into stigmatics can raise important issues about seeing and knowing, and how perception is used in order to judge truth. The problematic nature of visual perception in relation to knowledge is recognized in visual culture studies yet this is often in the context of contemporary modes of vision. In the

39 Bal, 'Visual Essentialism and the Object of Visual Culture'. Mieke Bal's article was published in the *Journal of Visual Culture* 2:1 in 2003. Responses to the article were published in the following issue: Norman Bryson, pp. 229–232; James Elkins, pp. 232–237; Michael Ann Holly, pp. 238–242; Peter Leech, pp. 242–246; Nicholas Mirzoeff, pp. 247–249; W.J.T. Mitchell, pp. 249–252; Griselda Pollock, pp. 253–260; as well as Bal's reply, pp. 260–268. See *Journal of Visual Culture* 2:2. Authors writing in a number of textbooks since the 1990s have provided short and helpful discussions. See, for example, Herbert, 'Visual Culture/Visual Studies'.

40 See, for example, Mirzoeff, *An Introduction to Visual Culture*.

41 Morra and Smith, 'Introduction', pp. 10–11. See also Cherry, 'Art History and Visual Culture', p. 481.

42 Mirzoeff, *An Introduction to Visual Culture*, p. 3.

43 Bal, 'Visual Essentialism and the Object of Visual Culture', p. 9.

44 Bolzoni, *The Web of Images*.

45 Mitchell, 'Showing Seeing: A Critique of Visual Culture', p. 170.

late Middle Ages and early modern period, visualizations, real and imagined, played a significant role in the dynamics of perception and judgment. Acts of visualization – the imagining of the ‘invisible, the unseen, the unseeable’, as well as physical representations captured in painting or on and in the human body – are central to the investigations undertaken in this book. Seeing and knowing were linked to aspect blindness and aspect perception,⁴⁶ something exemplified in the reactions of those who saw the heart of Clare of Montefalco (d. 1308) which had been extracted and sliced open by her sister nuns after her death. Some, indeed most, were able to see the instruments of Christ’s Passion sculpted in relief within her heart, but at least one person stated that he could see no such thing.⁴⁷ A similar phenomenon was recorded in the case of Stefana Quinzani (d. 1530) whose regular performances of the Passion were attended by an audience who appear to have interacted with her ecstatic body. Marks that appeared on her skin during these events were attested to by some as showing her Christ-like suffering, but others claimed not to have seen them. In a curious play on the biblical narration of doubting Thomas (John 20:24–29) those who saw, believed. Indeed, such information served to distinguish between those who believed and those who did not. In contradistinction to those who processed what they saw as part of a religious experience rooted in Christ’s suffering, others were unable to reconcile their beliefs with the visual material presented to them. The difference was not one based in Christian belief but one linked to thinking about visual perception and judgment, to visualizing and picturing practices and how these were both used in evidence and argument.

The polemic surrounding whether and how the stigmata of Francis of Assisi and Catherine of Siena could be depicted showed the extent of the perceived power of images and the ways in which churchmen chose to deal with them in relation to issues of seeing and knowing. In both instances, visual literacy was at play: in the expectation that viewers would recognize Francis as a second Christ through the arrangement of his limbs and the display of his wounds, or in the idea that they might misconstrue the nature of Catherine’s (invisible) stigmata when they saw them painted. Although ‘visual literacy’ may be a problematic term,⁴⁸ I use it here in the sense of the ability to understand dominant cultural symbols such as when the shape of the cross, the transcendent Christian religious symbol, was imposed on Saint Francis. Such images of the saint were controversial because they went over and above the idea of *imitatio Christi* as bodily suffering experienced in order

46 Hester, ‘Metaphor and Aspect Seeing’; Batkin, ‘Aesthetic Analogies’.

47 Béranger de Saint-Affrique, who wrote Clare’s *vita*, noted that some of those who saw Clare’s heart were not able to see the instruments of the Passion. For a full discussion see Warr, ‘Re-reading the Relationship’, p. 20.

48 Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?*, p. 47.



to follow Christ. They depicted something beyond the wide range of behaviours and activities through which it was possible to live like Jesus and which could also be understood as *imitatio Christi*. These included ministering to the sick and renouncing possessions and, to varying levels, were attainable by many of the faithful. Stigmata were at the extreme end of the range of what was possible. In hagiography and visual art they were configured not just as the end product of a lifetime of *imitatio Christi*, as the visual evidence of Francis's affective suffering with and like Christ, but as signs of the saint's transformation into another Christ. The power of the image here was dependent on an understanding of the link between the way Francis was portrayed and the depiction of Christ on the cross. The viewer's response was, at least partially, conditioned by a knowledge of the iconography of Christ crucified.⁴⁹

In this book, my aim is to expand the discussion surrounding the visualization of stigmata to include questions about the legitimacy of, and rationale for, certain types of representation and what these may tell us about how people used images. Francis of Assisi and, particularly, Catherine of Siena are important to this debate, but I also consider other holy people, particularly women, in order to gain a wider understanding of the issues. The inclusion of these lesser-known stigmatics, who lived between the thirteenth and the end of the sixteenth century, allows an exploration of questions relating to the visual culture of stigmata that go significantly beyond those which have been associated with Saints Francis and Catherine. Within the nexus of seeing and knowing, the contribution of women was frequently underestimated or downplayed, despite an acknowledgement that women had a particularly strong response to visual material. By investigating alternative examples, this book expands our understanding to include questions relating to gender and the representation of knowledge.

Since I am concerned with debates about images, representation, and visualization in relation to stigmata, my focus is also on those who wrote texts that either engaged directly with the question of representing stigmatics in the visual arts or were relevant to the surrounding debates, of whom many were churchmen. Importantly, texts described the appearance of stigmata, often drawing on analogies with different types of visual art. The relationship between art and the words that attempt to describe it is complex and has been eloquently examined and analysed by scholars such as Michael Baxandall, James Elkins, Jàs Elsner and W.J.T. Mitchell.⁵⁰ In *Patterns of Intention*, Baxandall noted that 'language is not very well equipped to offer a notation of a particular picture'.⁵¹ With reference to the stigmatics whom

49 Freedberg, *The Power of Images*. See also David Freedberg's response to John Nash's review of his book in Freedberg, 'Reply to John Nash'.

50 See Elsner, 'Art History as Ekphrasis'; Elkins, *On Pictures and the Words That Fail Them*.

51 Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention*, p. 3.

I discuss in this book, language was used to describe their wounds in ways that provided the reader with a means through which to consider and understand them. The details were often not intended only as a record of appearance but as a signal of value.

The texts and art that I consider in this book enable me to demonstrate that some of those involved in these issues had a sophisticated understanding of visual culture, which developed and mutated in the context of institutional rivalries and debates. They also allow an examination of aspects of the visual literacy of patrons and audiences in Italy, and the ways in which artists supported and contributed to complex and varied visual interpretations of stigmata. As such, the book takes part in the debate about visual culture as 'the field of study that refuses to take vision for granted'.⁵² As I demonstrate, those who wrote on the subject of the representation of stigmatics, such as the Dominicans Tommaso Caffarini (d. circa 1434) and Gregorio Lombardelli (d. 1613), wrestled with crucial questions about the purposes of art. A discussion of works by key artists – including Giovanni di Paolo (circa 1403–1482), the Dominicans Fra Angelico (circa 1395–1455) and Plautilla Nelli (1524–1588), the sculptor Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1598–1680) – adds to our knowledge of their work by showing their use of sophisticated means of conveying important aspects of stigmatic experience.

I start with a chapter focusing on three miracle stories from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries that deal with the depiction of Francis's stigmata in order to question the expectations that people had of the picturing of the miraculous. These examples allow a discussion of the links between truth and representation, and between presence and painting that are important for the third chapter, which discusses the depiction of the stigmatization of Catherine of Siena through the images in the manuscripts of the Dominican Tommaso Caffarini's *Libellus de Supplemento* (*Supplement to the Life of Catherine of Siena*) and Giovanni di Paolo's *Pizzicaiuolo Altarpiece*. The representation of Catherine's stigmata raises specific issues about the relationship between seeing and knowing since the stigmata did not appear visibly on Catherine's body. The fourth chapter continues a discussion of the *Libellus de Supplemento* and Caffarini's arguments for an expanded definition of stigmata, which went against a narrow Franciscan understanding of the term. I contend that this was consciously developed in some Dominican panel paintings of the fifteenth century. The following chapter returns to Catherine of Siena through a detailed discussion of the writings of the Sieneese Gregorio Lombardelli who claimed that it was legitimate to show her with visible stigmata. Lombardelli's arguments built on those of Caffarini. Although his main aim was to support recognition of Catherine as a stigmatic, his discussion of images of her

52 Mitchell, 'There Are No Visual Media', p. 262.

with visible stigmata can be placed within the expansion of discussions about the purposes of art in the post-Tridentine period. In the sixth chapter I move on to examples of stigmatics and stigmata associated with performance. The display of bodily movements associated with Christ's Passion required participants to put their visual literacy to use in interpreting them. At the same time, some of the performances appeared to be instigated or supported by paintings or sculptures. The ways in which stigmata were understood through the emphasis of their visual nature in texts, including hagiographies, is the subject of Chapter 7. I suggest that knowledge of, and comparisons with, various visual arts were central to an appreciation of stigmatic identity. I end with a consideration of the tension that appears to have existed between the excess of some stigmatic behaviours and the emphatic visuality of their description, on the one hand, and the restraint of their depiction, on the other, something which underscores the dangers perceived in physical images, particularly those of stigmatics.

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