

REGARDER LA MORT EN FACE

Actes du XIX^e congrès international de l'association
Danses macabres d'Europe
BUCAREST, 9-12 septembre 2021

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Cristina BOGDAN
Silvia MARIN BARUTCIEFF
(éds.)

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A Desired Place to Die: The Women of Tor de' Specchi Providing Religious Healing in 15th-Century Rome

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(University of Tampere)

Résumé

Le procès de canonisation de Sainte Françoise Romaine au xv^e siècle a enregistré des dizaines de récits de miracles dans lesquels les disciples de Françoise, les oblates de Tor de' Specchi, apportaient aux Romains des guérisons par la religion. Dans ces récits, une personne malade ou mourante recouvrait la santé soit parce que les oblates faisaient elles-mêmes un *votum* à Francesca ou conseillaient à d'autres de le faire, soit parce qu'elles encourageaient la personne malade à entrer en contact avec la relique de Françoise. Cet article étudie les textes de miracles *post mortem* attribués à Sainte Françoise Romaine, répertoriés par les femmes de Tor de' Specchi dans leurs contacts avec les mourants et, en particulier, quel rôle les reliques de Françoise ont joué dans ces miracles. Une caractéristique typique des miracles de résurrection rapportés dans le processus de canonisation de Françoise est l'aide demandée à Tor de' Specchi par les parents des personnes mourantes. L'exemple le plus frappant est celui de Mabilia Ponziani qui a exprimé sa volonté de mourir dans la congrégation, entourée des oblates. Même si les oblates de Tor de' Specchi ne semblent pas avoir eu de modes spécifiques de guérison spirituelle pour les mourants, l'utilisation des reliques indique une certaine hiérarchisation des soins spirituels. Alors que les supports de reliques textiles et certains onguents étaient utilisés pour guérir toutes sortes d'infirmités, les cas d'urgences extrêmes étaient consignés dans un précieux livre conservé à Tor de' Specchi. Les cas répertoriés témoignent de l'effet de consolation que la présence des religieuses de Françoise pouvait apporter à un mourant. C'est pour cette raison que Mabilia Ponziani avait souhaité finir ses jours à Tor de' Specchi.

According to a miracle testimony recorded in one of the canonisation inquests of Santa Francesca Romana, in 1442 Mabilia Ponziani had become ill with plague. Married to Baptiste Ponziani, a son of Santa Francesca Romana, she was a daughter-in-law of Francesca and lived in the Ponziani house in Trastevere, Rome. According to the miracle

narrative, she felt that she was going to die; accordingly, she went to Capitoline Hill and entered Tor de' Specchi, the house of the oblates of Santa Francesca Romana. Mabilia expressed her willingness to die in their house, and her desire was fulfilled. One of sisters of Tor de' Specchi, Jacobella de Brunomonte, testified that the sisters prayed for Mabilia's recovery and Jacobella herself read a book which had belonged to Francesca and was consequently considered a holy relic. Therefore, the book was not only read aloud but also placed on her body over the signs of plague. The narrative concludes that soon Mabilia's condition improved, and she was able to return home the next day¹.

The recording of Mabilia's desire to die in the convent surrounded by the oblate women shows that in the Middle Ages, some places and the presence of certain people were considered to be beneficial for a dying person. The canonisation process of Santa Francesca Romana records dozens of *post mortem* miracle narratives in which Francesca's followers, the oblate women of Tor de' Specchi, provide religious healing for the citizens. In such cases a sick or dying person recovers either because the oblate women made or advised others to make a *votum* to Francesca or helped the recovered person to be in contact with Francesca's relic.

This paper studies the ways in which the women of Tor de' Specchi are recorded as encountering dying people in the *post mortem* miracles of Santa Francesca Romana, and particularly, the role played by Francesca's relics in this. I have two research questions: 1) What forms of religious healing are the oblate women of Tor de' Specchi recorded to have provided in fifteenth-century Rome? and 2) Does the religious healing provided to allegedly dying people differ from that which was generally offered to sick people in the miracle narratives of Santa Francesca Romana? Hence, my aim is to examine whether we can identify care provided by the oblate women specifically for dying people, or whether similar religious healing was provided generally both for sick and dying people. My hypothesis is that among the *post mortem* miracles of Santa Francesca Romana, it is possible to identify a certain hierarchy in the different forms of religious healing. My aim is to find out whether this hierarchy includes a form of healing reserved only for those who were expected to die.

¹ LUGANO Placido (ed.), *I Processi inediti per Francesca Bussa dei Ponziani (Santa Francesca Romana) 1440-1453*, Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca apostolica Vaticana, 1945, p. 304. Hereafter *I processi*.

By religious healing I refer to healing practices which included ritual elements. In the Middle Ages medical and religious healing were used in conjunction when trying to heal an infirmity. Cures were sought from doctors, barbers, apothecaries and folk healing practitioners but also from saints: they all belonged to the same “medical marketplace” of the time. This coexistence of medical and religious methods has been described as medical pluralism. Different kinds of curing methods complemented each other². Medieval canonisation processes record exceptionally well how cures were sought from both medical experts and saints. Of course, in miracle narratives doctors and other experts must fail so that a miracle can take place. Therefore, saints are the ultimate healers in canonisation processes. Still, medical experts have important role in hearings as they testify that nothing but a miracle could have cured an infirmity³.

Santa Francesca Romana, originally known as Francesca Bussa dei Ponziani (1384-1440), was an aristocratic Roman woman; a wife to papal troop commander Lorenzo Ponziani; a visionary mystic; and an organiser of charitable services. In 1425 the group of ten women led by Francesca was accepted as oblates of the Olivetan monastery of Santa Maria Nova. In 1433 the first oblates moved into Tor de' Specchi, the house on Capitoline Hill acquired for the sisters. In 1436, after Lorenzo's death, Francesca moved there as well. In addition to being a mystic and a benefactor of the poor, Francesca was also interested in politics and was thus willing to reform the society and the Church of her time. This earthbound character of Francesca is evident also in the oblate rule which she gave to the women of Tor de' Specchi: the sisters did not live in *clausura*, but they actively interacted with the people and the city surrounding them⁴.

² Most recently on the medieval medical pluralism see KUULIALA Jenni, 2020, “The Saint as a Medicator: Medicine and the Miraculous in Fifteenth and Sixteenth-Century Italy”, in *Social History of Medicine*, doi:10.1093/shm/hkaa053.

³ ZIEGLER Joseph, “Practitioners and Saints: Medical Men in Canonization Processes in the Thirteenth to Fifteenth Centuries”, in *Social History of Medicine* 12/2 (1999), p. 191-225; LETT Didier, “*Judicium medicine* and *judicium sanctitatis*. Medical doctors in the Canonization Process of Nicholas of Tolentino (1325): Experts Subject to the Inquisitorial Logic”, in S. Katajala-Peltomaa, K. Salonen (eds.), *Church and Belief in the Middle Ages. Popes, Saints, and Crusaders*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2016, p. 153-169.

⁴ BARTOLOMEI ROMAGNOLI Alessandra, *Santità e mistica femminile*, Spoleto, Fondazione Centro italiano di studi sull'Alto medioevo, 2013, p. 315-316.

Immediately after Francesca's death in 1440, the people who had formed the closest circle around her started to lobby for her canonisation. The goal of a canonisation process was to find out whether a candidate in question was a true saint. Canonising a saint was a laborious and expensive work⁵. It also required time. Francesca was canonised only in 1608. Testimonies of canonisation processes are the result of an inquisitorial undertaking. The depositions document oral testimonies which have been translated from the vernacular into Latin, edited and dissected by inquisitors and notaries in order to put them into the form of a miracle narrative⁶. The witnesses did not speak freely about their experiences but answered the predetermined list of questions which the commissioners presented them. The language used could have altered the recorded depositions. Even if clerics gave their depositions in Latin, laypeople used the vernacular. Hence, the miracle narratives are clerical constructions of oral testimonies. They do not replicate verbatim the discussion held at the hearing and obviously not the actual event which had been interpreted as a miracle. A miraculous event was a momentous occurrence and therefore hard to forget. In Francesca's case the hearings were held only few years after her death. Still, the information based on witnesses' autobiographical memory may be highly constructed. The experience was retold and reminisced about with other people, which led to the formation of communal memory. Also, memories were fitted to the commonly known pattern of a miracle story. In this way some aspects were repeatedly mentioned and became essential elements of miracle depositions⁷.

⁵ KRÖTZL Christian, KATAJALA-PELTOMAA Sari, "Approaching Twelfth to Fifteenth-Century Miracles: Miracle Registers, Collections and Canonization Processes as Source Material", in C. Krötz, S. Katajala-Peltomaa (eds.), *Miracles in Medieval Canonization Processes. Structures, Functions and Methodologies*, Turnhout, 2018, p. 15-25.

⁶ GOODICH Michael, "Mirabilis deus in sanctis suis: Social History and Medieval Miracles", in K. Cooper, J. Gregory (eds.), *Signs, Wonders, Miracles. Representations of Divine Power in the Life of the Church*, Woodbridge, The Boydell Press, 2005, p. 143. See also LETT Didier, *Un procès de canonisation au Moyen âge: Essai d'histoire sociale; Nicolas de Tolentino, 1325*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 2008, p. 257-270.

⁷ SMOLLER Laura A., "Miracle, Memory, and Meaning in the Canonization of Vincent Ferrer, 1453-1454", in *Speculum*, 73 (1998), p. 432-433.

Despite the epistemological challenges posed by these sources, the value of the testimonies of canonisation processes has been generally accepted by historians. Even though the language of depositions is not of witnesses but that of commissioners and notaries, the message, or the narrative level, is that of witnesses⁸. To testify to a miracle was not possible without giving information about the surrounding circumstances of the miracle and the people present. This resulted in a great deal of information. Compared to the sources of later stages of canonisation, the documents of *in partibus* hearings are rich in details⁹. Hence, depositions include important material concerning lives and beliefs of medieval people¹⁰.

In the three hearings held in 1440, 1444 and 1451 (plus additional cases recorded in 1453), 199 miracles attributed to Santa Francesca Romana were recorded. In Francesca's canonisation process, two-thirds of the witnesses were women. This reflects both Francesca's cult's popularity among women and the fact that commissioners of the hearings gave value to the testimonies of women. Many of the witnesses, especially in the first two hearings, belonged to Francesca's congregation or had connections with women belonging to it. It is also notable that most of the male witnesses belonged to the clergy. Members of the clergy or religious orders were given higher importance as witnesses in canonisation processes than lay people¹¹. Another characteristic of Francesca's cult is that it concentrated on a few high-ranking Roman families¹². Moreover, in

⁸ KUULIALA Jenni, *Saints, Infirmary, and Community in the Late Middle Ages*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2020, p. 27.

⁹ HANSKA Jussi, "From Historical Event to Didactic Story. Medieval Miracle Stories as a Means of Communication", in C. Krötzl, M. Tamminen (eds.), *Changing Minds. Communication and Influence in the High and Later Middle Ages*, Rome, Institutum Romanum Finlandiae, 2013.

¹⁰ On the use of canonization processes in historical research see KATAJALA-PELTOMAA Sari, "Recent Trends in the Study of Medieval Canonizations", in *History Compass* 8/9, 2010, p. 1083-1092.

¹¹ GOLINELLI Paolo, "Social Aspects in Some Italian Canonization Trials. The Choice of Witnesses", in G. Klaniczay (ed.), *Medieval Canonization Processes – Legal and Religious Aspects*, Rome, École Française de Rome, 2004, p. 179.

¹² On the families which promoted Francesca's cult, see ESCH Arnold, "Die Zeugenaussagen im Heiligensprechungsverfahren für S. Francesca Romana als Quelle zur Sozialgeschichte Roms im frühen Quattrocento", in *Quellen und Forschungen aus italienischen Archiven und Bibliotheken*, Band 53, Tübingen, Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1973, p. 93-151.

the first two hearings, most of the witnesses came from two regions of Rome in which Francesca's cult was the strongest: Capitolium and Trastevere. It was in these areas where Francesca had had the most influence during her life, since the Ponziani house was located in Trastevere and Tor de' Specchi in Capitolium.

The above presented case of Mabilia Ponziani is one of the many recordings of dying people recovering and escaping death in Francesca's process. These kinds of miracles are called resurrection miracles. Of the 199 recorded miracles, 42 are resurrection cases. Three quarters of the resurrections are recorded among Francesca's *post mortem* miracles. A typical feature of resurrection miracles recorded in Francesca's canonisation process is that relatives of a dying person seek help from Tor de' Specchi¹³. In the canonisation inquests the women of Tor de' Specchi gave testimonies about people seeking help from them. A common way for the sisters to help those in need was to visit a dying person and employ Francesca's relics.

After a holy person's death, there were three ways in which a saint's help was believed to be available. One could pray at distance for the saint's intercession and afterwards make a pilgrimage to the saint's shrine as a counter-gift. Alternatively, one could first visit the saint's shrine and pray there for a miracle. A third possibility, a kind of middle way between the other two, was to be in contact with the saint's portable relics. In these cases a person usually made a promise to visit the shrine if cured from a certain infirmity, and the invocation was amplified by the contact of holy relics. In resurrection miracle cases, visiting a shrine was rarely an option¹⁴. Therefore, invocation at distance, with or without relics, was practically the only option to raise the dead. Not every saint's cult was promoted with portable relics. Santa Francesca Romana's canonisation process, however, provides many examples of portable relics being used to help people, including those who were believed to be dead or dying. Among Francesca's *post mortem* miracles, there are 45 cases in which

¹³ On the speciality of this feature see NISSI Jyrki, "Communal Acts in the Process of Death: A Comparison between Nordic and South European 15th Century Hagiographic Material", in *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 2020, doi: 10.1080/03468755.2020.1808526.

¹⁴ Allegedly dead newborn babies were carried to certain shrines. PROSPERI Adriano, *Dare l'anima. Storia di un infanticidio*, Torino, Einaudi, 2005, p. 206-207.

healing is caused by Francesca's relics, discussed further below¹⁵. Of those cases, 17 are resurrection miracles. Thus, relics were not only used at the most desperate situations, when someone was thought to be dying.

Receiving religious healing from Tor de' Specchi required interaction with the women of the congregation. If one knew a member of the congregation, or otherwise had a connection to the people who had known Francesca, help was perhaps more easily reachable. Belonging to her family, Mabilia, who was introduced at the beginning of this paper, was part of the innermost circle of Francesca's cult. Thus, for her it was probably quite natural to turn to Tor de' Specchi when she felt that she was near death. Mabilia's narrative gives almost a harmonious picture of the course of events; she senses she will die soon, goes to Tor de' Specchi, expresses her wish to die there, and the oblates start to take care of her with their prayers and relics. Other resurrection cases give a somewhat different picture of the interaction between a person asking for help and the women of Tor de' Specchi. The most illustrative example of a distressed person's interaction with the oblate women is perhaps the case of a dying woman named Stephana. The miracle narrative records that her mother, Rentzia, came crying to Tor de' Specchi and asked the women to come and visit Stephana. Reportedly, when two oblates, Jacobella de Brunomonte and Catherina Guidolini, were around the dying Stephana, a *votum* was made promising that if she was revived, Stephana would dress in white and visit Francesca's grave in Santa Maria Nova. The information about the *votum* is repeated in the testimonies of Rentzia, Jacobella and Catherina. The two sisters of Tor de' Specchi testified being present as the *votum* was made¹⁶. Thus, as a grieving Rentzia went to knock on the door of Tor de' Specchi, Jacobella and Catherina, at least, followed her to Stephana's home and all three made a *votum* together. The recording of Rentzia, crying, asking for the women's help suggests that the oblate sisters of Tor de' Specchi must have always been, at least subconsciously, prepared to help those in agony¹⁷.

¹⁵ I have excluded the cases that occurred directly after Francesca's death in which an alleged miracle is experienced after a person has been in contact with Francesca's corpse.

¹⁶ *I processi*, p. 326.

¹⁷ Help was acquired from Tor de' Specchi also during the night. *I processi*, p. 298, 308.

In addition to the interaction described between Rentzia and the oblates, the case is illustrative in the way it records the religious healing the sisters offered for Stephana. To make a promise that a person would be dressed in white and visit Francesca's grave is not a typical counter-gift in Francesca's canonisation process. There is only one similar case in which dressing in white is mentioned. Interestingly, that is also a resurrection case¹⁸. The white clothing is a reference to the white habit Francesca used to wear. As the promised counter-gift was rather exceptional, it seems likely that Jacobella and Catherina had instructed Rentzia that such a *votum* could be effective. Hence, the sisters of Tor de' Specchi passed their knowledge of effective *votum* to Rentzia and helped her invoke the saint's help. The fact that Rentzia went to Tor de' Specchi to ask the sisters to visit her dying daughter is essential information in this case. Like Mabilia's desire to die surrounded by the sisters, Rentzia's request evidences that the women of Tor de' Specchi were thought to possess some kind of spiritual knowledge, or even spiritual aura, which was regarded as beneficial for a dying person. Even if not everyone was able to enter the religious house to die there, the help of the oblate women was available to all Romans. The use of relics was not the only method of religious healing the women could provide. Their mere physical presence and their knowledge of effective counter-gifts were regarded as important by the citizens.

The most typical relic used in Francesca's process is some of her cloth or a piece of fabric from a vestment of hers. The use of textile relics has been recorded in 30 cases – thus in two thirds of the cases. Of those 30 cases with textile relics, 11 are resurrection cases. For example, in the case of a dying boy named Julianus, the boy's mother Caterina came to think of her sister Angilella who had known Francesca personally. Caterina left her dying son and went to see her sister. Reportedly Caterina asked whether she had any clothes or other belongings of Francesca. Angilella had Francesca's cloth, which she gave to her sister. Caterina is recorded to have placed the cloth on the throat of the dying Julianus. After an hour he started to speak and was completely cured. Typically for a miracle narrative, it was recorded that medical remedies did not help the dying Julianus¹⁹. This way it has been emphasised that the religious healing

¹⁸ *I processi*, p. 324.

¹⁹ *I processi*, p. 128-130.

provided by the saint was considered more effective than the earthly medicine of doctors.

Few cases give detailed evidence of what these textile relics were like. In the case of six-year-old Lucretia dying, her mother Angelotza reportedly hastened to Tor de' Specchi and asked for a certain linen cloth²⁰. In one case the fabric is recorded to be woollen and black in colour²¹. One cloth was such as Francesca used to wear above her heart during her own infirmity²². Another relic was a linen fabric which Francesca had worn on her head. This particular object is recorded to have been used in three cases, two of them being resurrection miracles²³. In one case it was recorded that a textile relic was made from a regular piece of fabric which was placed on Francesca's dead body²⁴. In three cases a miracle is recorded to have been caused by the shroud with which Francesca's body was covered after her death. None of these cases are resurrections²⁵. One resurrection, however, was caused by a skirt, which had belonged to Francesca. It has not been recorded what kind of skirt this was, but the case is most interesting, because the cloth was not merely placed on the person, but the dying person was actually dressed in the skirt²⁶. This is the only case that mentions dressing a person.

In addition to textile relics, an ointment produced by Francesca was used to heal sick and dying people. Among the *in vita* miracles, Francesca is recorded to heal people with this ointment. In the typical hagiographic style, Francesca's ointment is recorded to be more effective than the cures provided by doctors²⁷. The ointment is recorded to include oil and juices of rue and marjoram²⁸. The ointment, which was white²⁹, was used as a relic in ten *post mortem* miracle cases, only two of which are resurrections. In one it is recorded that the ointment was given from Tor

²⁰ *I processi*, p. 308. On linen cloth see also *I processi*, p. 315.

²¹ *I processi*, p. 313.

²² *I processi*, p. 118.

²³ For resurrections see *I processi*, p. 298, 299. The third one is recorded in *I processi*, p. 300.

²⁴ *I processi*, p. 139-140.

²⁵ *I processi*, p. 132, 132-133, 136-137.

²⁶ "*Cum ex devotione et fide fuisset induta quandam sottanam seu vestem quam consueverat portare beata Francisca...*" *I processi*, p. 289.

²⁷ On the earthly medicine provided by Francesca see KUULIALA Jenni, "The Saint as Medicator", *op. cit.*

²⁸ *I processi*, p. 261.

²⁹ *I processi*, p. 272.

de' Specchi by Agnes Pauli Lelli to Jacoba Petri Vicentii, whose daughter Gentilesca was dying from plague³⁰. The other resurrection case with the ointment involves the same family. This time Ceccha, Jacoba's daughter-in-law, was dying from plague. It is simply recorded that the ointment was obtained from the sisters of Tor de' Specchi³¹. It is not clear whether the same ointment lasted for two cases or if Jacoba collected it twice from Tor de' Specchi. In both of the cases it is recorded that Jacoba placed the ointment on the dying body. In the case of Ceccha, it has been recorded that her husband Jacobus, the son of Jacoba, had fled outside the city in order to be safe from the plague. Thus, religious healing provided by Tor de' Specchi was not the family's only way to escape from plague. Social distancing known to us from Boccaccio's *Decameron* was also used.

In addition to textile relics and ointment, the third type of relic found in Francesca's *post mortem* miracles is a book which had belonged to Francesca. It is recorded that the book was the one from which Francesca used to read aloud the office of the Blessed Virgin Mary.³² We have already seen how the book was used as a relic when Mabilia came to die in Tor de' Specchi. In total, the book was used in five *post mortem* cases; three are resurrection miracles. Each of the five cases is located inside Tor de' Specchi. In addition, the book is mentioned in two *in vita* miracles. One is the very first miracle recorded in the process. According to the narrative, when Francesca was still living in Trastevere, golden letters appeared in this book. Reportedly Francesca had a vision in which Saint Paul said to her that these letters were written by an angel³³. In another case it is only mentioned that Francesca was reading the book while she and the sisters were in a vineyard³⁴.

Unlike textile relics and the ointment, the book was used only in extreme danger. As mentioned, three of the cases are resurrections. Two other cases are rare instances of recoveries. In one a woman is recorded as having her face covered by some kind of black pests which gnawed her

³⁰ *I processi*, p. 305-306.

³¹ *I processi*, p. 306.

³² On the importance of books in constructing female sanctity, see ARCHAMBEAU Nicole, "Remembering Countess Delphine's Books: Reading as a Means to Shape a Holy Woman's Sanctity", in C. Goldy, A. Livingstone (eds.), *Writing Medieval Women's Lives*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, p. 33-49.

³³ *I processi*, p. 88-89.

³⁴ *I processi*, p. 278-279.

skin³⁵. Jacobella de Brunomonte placed the book on the kneeling woman's face which resulted in her healing. In the other case a woman had a "secret and dangerous infirmity" which doctors had long tried to heal³⁶. Even though they are not resurrection cases, the two stand out from other healing miracles. These are not the usual infirmities, but unique cases.

The three resurrected persons all belonged to the closest circle of Francesca's followers. Interesting also are the mentions of those who handled the book. In Mabilia's case, Jacobella de Brunomonte is recorded to have read aloud the office and placed the book on Mabilia's body on the spots of plague³⁷. In another resurrection case, the president of the congregation, Agnes Pauli Lelli, was believed to be dying from fever in 1452. The book was placed over her breast by Jacobella de Brunomonte and Augustina Angeli de Viterbio, after which Agnes recovered. The third resurrection caused by the book occurred also in 1452. The book was placed on the dying Angelotzia dello Cieco, also a sister of Tor de' Specchi. Again, it was Jacobella who placed the book on the dying body when a doctor had claimed that she was incurable and the last sacrament was delivered³⁸.

In each case the book is used inside Tor de' Specchi. Unlike textile relics or the ointment, the book was not carried around the city, not borrowed, nor otherwise distributed. Only sisters of the congregation were recorded as handling the book. Jacobella de Brunomonte's role especially stands out. The key to understanding the importance of this book is the narrative about the letters that miraculously appeared. The story that an angel had written a text in the book explains why it was only used by the sisters inside Tor de' Specchi. Such a precious item was reserved for the utmost emergency and was handled by the innermost circle of Francesca's followers. Agnes Pauli Lelli, the beneficiary of one of the resurrection cases, served as the first president of the congregation. Jacobella de Brunomonte, the one who is recorded handling the book in

³⁵ " ... cum horribiliter pateretur in facie, in qua erant quasi quedam brusoli pene nigri: qui totam eius faciem rodebant continuo et inficiebant. " *I processi*, p. 304.

³⁶ " ...paciebatur quandam secretam et periculosam infirmitatem... magno tempore in manibus medicorum fuerat et sanari non potuit. " *I processi*, p. 330.

³⁷ *I processi*, p. 305.

³⁸ *I processi*, p. 327-328.

four cases, became the president in 1454³⁹. Augustina Angeli de Viterbio, with whom Jacobella placed the book on Agnes's body, was one of the first sisters and was present when Francesca died, just like Agnes, Jacoba and Mabilia had been⁴⁰. Thus, the book had a special position among Francesca's relics. The almost ceremonial use of the book suggests that it was believed to be an object capable of the most effective religious healing the followers of Santa Francesca Romana could offer. Therefore it was used only in the most desperate situations.

After studying Santa Francesca Romana's *post mortem* miracles, I am obliged to conclude that the oblates of Tor de' Specchi do not seem to have had a specific form of religious healing reserved only for dying people. The same relics which allegedly raised the dead were used also, for example, when one had a dislocated knee or a nosebleed. Even Francesca's book, which seems to have been the ultimate relic they possessed, was used in cases in which people are not recorded to be dying. Still, the use of relics does seem to have had some kind of hierarchy. The use of textile relics was the most common. In the use of textiles, there were two different ways of conduct: either they were given or loaned to a person asking for help, or the women of Tor de' Specchi personally brought a relic and placed it over a sick person. The textile relics themselves also had a clear hierarchy. The case in which a dying person is dressed in Francesca's skirt implies that this kind of devotional practice was something extraordinary. In the use of Francesca's ointment, it was not as common that the oblates brought a relic to the presence of a sick person. Rather, it seems to have been customary that the oblates gave a small amount of ointment to the person asking for their help, and the sick person or the ones close to him or her rubbed the ointment on the sick body. By contrast, the use of Francesca's book was clearly reserved for the utmost emergency, and it was used only inside Tor de' Specchi by the oblates themselves. The use of this book is the closest thing to a form of religious healing provided only for dying people. Still, two non-resurrection cases, even if being rare kinds of infirmities, do not support the hypothesis of a specific form of healing reserved only for dying people.

³⁹ ESPOSITO Anna, "Tor de' Specchi e la societa romana tra Quattro e Cinquecento", in A. Bartolo mei Romagnoli, G. Picasso (eds.), *La canonizzazione di Santa Francesca Romana. Santità, cultura e istituzioni a Roma tra medioevo ed età moderna*. Firenze, Edizioni del Galluzzo, p. 317.

⁴⁰ *I processi*, p. 103.

This study has raised some further questions about the use of Francesca's relics. The cases with the precious book suggest that among the oblates, there was a hierarchy of persons who used the relic. Jacobella de Brunomonte is mentioned in four out of five cases as the one who placed the book over a sick or dying person. Why was it precisely Jacobella who used the book? It is possible, of course, that in the hearings Jacobella took the responsibility for handling the book, even if some others had been involved in using the relic. In this paper it has not been possible to focus on the contradictions of different depositions regarding the handling of relics. Yet it needs to be pointed out that it seems that deponents of Francesca's canonisation process claimed religious authority, and also healing authority in the sense of medical pluralism, to themselves by emphasizing their role in the use of relics. However, this would be a topic for another paper.

The case of Mabilia, with which I opened this paper, evidences the consoling effect which the presence of Francesca's religious sisters could offer a dying person. For Mabilia, Tor de' Specchi was a desired place to die. I claim that for the oblates themselves, religious healing was a way of expressing their own spirituality as religious women and followers of Santa Francesca Romana. Francesca had shown her followers an example of charitable practice. Visiting sick and dying people, distributing relics, and giving examples of how to invoke a saint were forms of the lived religion of these oblate women. At the same time women spread the cult of Santa Francesca Romana and strengthened the religious importance of Tor de' Specchi in Rome. Acknowledging these more mundane meanings of religious healing is not to say that the women's actions were not motivated by *caritas*, only that caring for their neighbours had multiple meanings for these sisters.