

Mendicants and the Urban Mediterranean, c.1200–1500

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Portuguese Elites and the Reform of Female Mendicancy

Generally known today as “Observant movements,” the initiatives aimed at reforming the Church in late medieval Europe strongly impacted the religious orders.¹ Backed by the papacy, monarchs, and a nobility increasingly involved in a quest for piety, the spirit of the Observance reached Portugal in the late 1300s.² Until the mid-sixteenth century, monarchs favoured the Franciscan and Dominican reformed factions, supporting their foundations and intensifying the presence of these friars in court as counsellors and confessors. Portuguese social elites mirrored the monarchs’ preferences and, supported by their mendicant advisors, took an active role in their reformist endeavours, acting as the main agents behind the reform and the creation of new mendicant convents throughout Portugal.³

Female mendicant orders were especially impacted by these reform initiatives, which resulted not only in the reform of existing communities but also in the proliferation of new Dominican and Clarissan nunneries. New convents emerged both from new foundations and also from the absorption of communities of penitent lay women into the mendicant orders, a process which was favoured because of the decreasing popularity of non-professed forms of religious life and the efforts of the Church to institutionalize them.⁴ Portuguese nobility became more demanding of those responsible for the care of their souls, asking for the observance of religious rules and thus favouring official and reformed religious orders.⁵

Unlike the friars, mendicant nuns were increasingly subjected to an enclosed, contemplative life, which was almost paradoxical to the nature of their orders, reducing their contact with lay society and restricting their presence in their urban communities.⁶ In addition, as Anne Clark has noted, nuns’ religious activities were much more limited than those available to men because of their exclusion from the priesthood.⁷ The late medieval reform initiatives, which favoured strict enclosure for nuns, accentuated these restrictions.⁸ A more particular movement aimed at reforming the French Franciscan family in the early fifteenth century went even further, adding a severe view of evangelical poverty. Known as the Colettine reforms, these initiatives, anchored in the figure of Colette Boylet of Corbie (d. 1447), aimed to

recover both the rule written by Clare of Assisi, which was approved in 1253 by Innocent IV and known as the *First Rule of St. Clare*, and also the *Privilege of Poverty* (1216), which was a papal decree that allowed the community of St. Damian of Assisi to live without possessions or a regular income.⁹ At a time when the majority of Clarissan communities did not follow this strict life, professing instead, among other rules, the more permissive rule composed by Pope Urban IV in 1263, the Colettine reforms were adopted from France to the southern Low Countries, reaching the Iberian Peninsula (Aragon) around 1458 and Portugal in 1496.¹⁰

However, the desires of the nobility to patronize such radical foundations did not always find support within Observant factions of religious orders. Despite being promoted by the powerful house of Beja and Viseu, an important patron of the Observants in Portugal, the first attempt in the mid-fifteenth century to found a Clarissan convent under the *First Rule* in this territory met with the Observants' resistance.¹¹ As Maria de Lurdes Rosa has noted, Observant friars were arguably suspicious of the viability of an enclosed life of strict poverty to be practiced at this new house, an issue which was complicated by the fact that this convent was composed mostly of noblewomen.¹² This led the Duchess of Beja and Viseu, Beatriz of Portugal (d. 1506), to change her plans, founding instead a community of Observant Clarissan nuns under the less austere 1263 Rule of Pope Urban IV.¹³

It was not until 1496 that the first Clarissan community was established in Portugal under the *First Rule of St. Clare* with the creation of the Colettine convent of Jesus in Setúbal. Still connected to Duchess Beatriz's aspirations, the convent was founded by Justa Rodrigues Pereira (d. c. 1528), a lady of her household and nursemaid to her son, Manuel (d. 1521), by this time Duke of Beja and Viseu and a great supporter of the project. Justa's endeavour also had the monarchs' support: King João II (d. 1595) and his wife, Leonor de Viseu (d. 1525), who was Manuel's sister and played an instrumental role in the consolidation of the Colettines in Portugal.¹⁴ The choice of Setúbal was arguably connected with the fact that the monarchs chose this town as their preferred residence after marrying there in 1471. A port town near Lisbon, Setúbal benefited from the monarchs' frequent presence, which favoured the town's development and attracted numerous elites.¹⁵ Manuel, Duke of Beja and Viseu and King of Portugal (r. 1495–1521) after inheriting the throne from João II, his cousin, and brother-in-law, provided considerable support for Justa's endeavour.

Overcoming the difficulties met by Duchess Beatriz a few decades earlier, in 1496 Justa was able to acquire a papal brief that placed the community under the jurisdiction of the Observant Franciscan friars, thus guaranteeing the nuns' *cura monialium*.¹⁶ The conditions that favoured this shift need further investigation but were probably informed by the position of the Duchess's children as monarchs and the situation in Gandia (Aragon), where the first Colettine community in Iberia had been granted Observant care with the support of Franciscan Vicar General Jaime Zarzuela and Pope Sixtus IV. The Spanish Observant Franciscans initially refused to accept the nuns' *cura monialium* because of their affiliation with the order's Conventual faction.¹⁷ In 1464, Vicar General Jaime Zarzuela issued a document demanding that the friars take on this responsibility.¹⁸ Even

so, it was not until 1479, when the nuns appealed to Rome, that the friars assumed their care.¹⁹

Thus, in adopting a life of strict enclosure and evangelical poverty, these communities depended on the laity's good will. The Colettines of Setúbal benefited from several favours from the monarchs after their 1496 foundation. In addition to contributing to the construction of the nuns' convent complex, with King João II taking care of the church's high altar and King Manuel finishing the naves, the monarchs helped this community by obtaining from the papacy the promise of an indulgence to those who offered alms for the convent's construction when visiting the church.²⁰ The crown also contributed to the community's subsistence by occasionally gifting them with provisions.²¹ Furthermore, the monarchs issued privileges in favour of those who served the convent.²² This was particularly important for the maintenance of alms collectors who greatly contributed to the convent's economic stability.²³ Collecting donations throughout the kingdom, these men volunteered to help the convent in exchange for spiritual and fiscal privileges.

The nuns, however, soon seem to have faced some challenges in maintaining their austere way of life. Leonor de São João notes in her *Tratado da Fundação*, a chronicle narrating the convent's history, that in 1561 the friars in charge of the nuns' care tried to convince them to accept fixed annual donations from the crown, which they refused in the name of holy poverty.²⁴ However, in 1579 the nuns finally agreed to the institution of this annual contribution.²⁵ This raises questions about the viability of the severe religious practices fomented by the movements that aimed at reforming mendicant women in the late Middle Ages. Prescribing enclosure and strict poverty, the Colettines' way of life subjected the nuns to a precarious income based on the laity's goodwill. As noted, although members of the nobility, inflamed by a sense of piety, supported the nuns' reform, the Portuguese Observant friars might have initially opposed the women's adoption of radical poverty because of the logistical and material burden it imposed on the friars themselves. The friars' efforts to convince the nuns of Setúbal into accepting an annual fixed income suggest that their initial reservations regarding the feasibility of such a way of life lingered after they took over the care of these convents.

Additionally, the strategies employed by these women to overcome the limits of enclosure and maintain lay support for their convents by serving the urban community, reveal how the life of poverty and seclusion advocated by reforms such as that initiated by Colette of Corbie was, almost paradoxically, made possible by the nuns' engagement with their cities. As will be shown, although they were enclosed, Portuguese Colettine nuns were deeply connected to their urban environments, environments which they served in several ways and from which they received support. Through strategies such as the promotion of Colette of Corbie's sanctity, processions through the city, and the mobilization of the convent's relics and images outside the enclosure, these women worked to have what I call an "absent presence" in their cities, by marking their presence in the urban community without leaving the cloister.

Conveying Legitimacy through the Convent's Public Church

Among the various methods the Colettines adopted to legitimize themselves as the true followers of Clare of Assisi was the promotion and sanctification of their founding mother, Collette of Corbie. This was an effort they first undertook by exhibiting works of art in their church at Setúbal. One example of their use of art is evident in a panel picturing Colette as a haloed abbess being crowned by an angel as she stands alongside St. Agnes and St. Clare of Assisi. It is a scene that transports the mother of the Colettines to the same level of importance as these two founding figures of the Clares (Figure 3.1).

Despite efforts to canonize Colette following her death in 1447, she was not formally recognized as a saint until 1807. Several factors contributed to the length of this process, from the Reformation and Counter Reformation, which influenced views of sanctity, to the lack of Franciscan interest in promoting a figure such as Colette.²⁶ Similarly, the authorization of Colette's cult came only in the early seventeenth century (1604–1635), delaying the broader dissemination of her iconography not only as a saintly woman, but in general as an abbess. The only pictorial representations of Colette known today from an early period are in the two illuminated versions of Pierre de Vaux's *Vie de Soeur Colette* made between 1460 and 1477 at the Burgundian court.²⁷ Colette's depiction in art appears to have been very limited before the authorization of her cult in the early seventeenth century and remained rare until her canonization in 1807.²⁸ This reveals the singularity of Setúbal's panel. Beyond being one of the earliest representations of Colette, this panel can also be placed among the first known pieces to depict her as a saint, as confirmed by the inscription in her halo: "Sca Coleta."²⁹

Given information provided by the *Tratado da Fundação*, this painting, which arguably had its origin in the Low Countries, might have been among works of art sent by Maximilian I of Habsburg (d. 1519) to his cousin Leonor de Viseu and used to decorate the church's main chapel in 1500.³⁰ The same theme was repeated with only a few alterations in a new altarpiece destined for the church's high altar, made some years later (c. 1517–1530) and arguably commissioned by Leonor (Figure 3.2).³¹ The high altar was not only one of the most prestigious places in the monastic building but also a location that could be seen by the laity, who would therefore be exposed to the message conveyed in the portrayed scene, familiarizing them with Colette and her sanctity. In the new panel, Colette is given a more prestigious position, changing places with Agnes and thus appearing closer to Clare.

This theme was also transmitted to the new Colettine house of Madre de Deus, founded by Leonor de Viseu in Lisbon in 1509, as attested by a surviving panel made circa 1510–1520.³² As with the two previous paintings, in this scene, the haloed Colette is identified with the inscription "S. Colleta." This reveals the extent of the effort to promote the Colettines through the affirmation of Colette's sanctity.³³



Figure 3.1 Apparition of an Angel to Saint Claire, Saint Agnes and Saint Colette, Quentin Metsys (attributed), ca. 1491–1507.

Source: Museu de Setúbal/Convento de Jesus. Photo: Museu de Setúbal/Convento de Jesus.



Figure 3.2 Apparition of an Angel to Saint Claire, Saint Agnes and Saint Colette, Jorge Afonso (attributed), ca. 1517–1530.

Source: Museu de Setúbal/Convento de Jesus. Photo: Museu de Setúbal/Convento de Jesus.

The Deployment of Relics and Miraculous Images Outside the Enclosure

Since its earliest days, Setubal's convent, like many others, made efforts to acquire relics that brought it the promise of divine favour and with this prestige and devotees. Whatever spiritual motives any monk or nun may have had, the acquisition and promotion of relics was paramount in the economy of medieval and early modern monasteries, fostering the cult of saints and attracting valuable donations.³⁴ The idea that those who obtained and housed a relic were blessed for it was well established from the early Middle Ages.³⁵ Relics manifested the presence of the holy on earth, bringing religious authority to those who kept them.³⁶ Thus, possessing a relic entailed a role of mediation between the people and the holy, which was provided by the close proximity between the relic keeper and the entity from which the object originated.³⁷ This was of special value for nuns who, as mentioned, contrary to the friars and parish clergy, were generally deprived from serving their local communities in more public ways; through these sacred objects, the nuns could have a more active role in their urban communities.

It is important not to forget that relics played a major role in the nuns' devotional lives and were often an integral part of their liturgical practices.³⁸ Pilgrimage to holy sites and graves was forbidden because of enclosure and relics often represented one of the only points of contact nuns could have with the earthly presence of the holy. However, in addition to cherishing the role these objects played in their spiritual lives, nuns were also aware of the economic potential of relics and the benefits their promotion could bring to their convents.³⁹ As will be shown through examining the Portuguese scenario, by prescribing strict enclosure for nuns and, in some cases, an austere view of evangelical poverty, late medieval reforms laid the groundwork for female religious communities to capitalize on their relics. Particularly in the case of recently reformed branches of traditional religious orders, like the Colettines, the promotion of relics and the miracles associated with them were important means for the nuns to establish and maintain their religious legitimacy within their cities, communities from which the nuns were physically segregated. Beyond merely using the promotion of relics to attract devotees to their churches, these nuns deployed relics and miraculous images by sending them into people's homes, thereby overcoming enclosure and constructing for themselves an absent presence in their cities.⁴⁰

The *Tratado da Fundação* is filled with examples of the nuns using this strategy since the community's earliest days.⁴¹ According to the *Tratado*, the convent's first relics were gifted to the community by their founder, Justa Rodrigues Pereira, who received some of them from the Catholic monarchs, Isabel I (d. 1504) and Ferdinand II (d. 1516).⁴² These comprised a fragment of the Crown of Thorns and two pieces of the True Cross.⁴³ Their former keepers, two figures of authority within the Christian world, provided these relics with legitimacy, which was rapidly demonstrated through the miracles they performed. High status individuals were also connected to the miracles themselves. The most significant miracle was witnessed by King Manuel and the convent's confessor when the king, in an attempt to cut

a piece from one of the fragments of the True Cross for himself, caused the relic to bleed. The main piece was then returned to the golden cross-reliquary, where it was originally kept, while the little fragments that came off it were placed in water within the silver vial that contained the Crown of Thorns's fragment.⁴⁴

Following this event, veneration of these relics, which were held by the community in a chapel in the nuns' dormitory, extended outside the convent. Requests for samples of the water contained in the vial, believed to have healing powers, came from "kings, queens, princes, lords and all kinds of people in the realm."⁴⁵ The cross containing the main piece could be directly venerated by the laity on some occasions, such as the feasts connected with the Passion and the celebration of the Cross, when it left the nuns' enclosure. This happened on Good Friday, when it was presented in the convent's church and then carried in procession through Setúbal's streets and also during the celebration of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross.⁴⁶ After the relic ended a long drought in response to the supplications of the convent's confessor, the local population began to request regular processions with the cross either to end further droughts or to halt excessive rains. Although the nuns were absent from the processions themselves because of their enclosure, and therefore it was the convent's confessors who processed the miraculous objects through the city's streets, the Colettine women were symbolically represented and made present to the wider urban community through the processions and their relics. The convent's confessors, who mediated this indirect contact between the nuns and their local community, appear to have played a major role in the dissemination of these cults, demonstrated by a sermon which the confessor gave after the miracle that called on the laity to appreciate the relic's powers.⁴⁷

The exhibition and deployment of relics held in the convent as a means to overcome the segregation of enclosure can also be documented in other communities, especially after Trent, as can be seen in the case of the Tertiary Franciscans of the Püttrlichkloster in Munich.⁴⁸ The imposition of enclosure for all religious women demanded by the Tridentine directives prevented tertiary communities that had been deeply connected to their cities from their traditional means of supporting themselves. Deprived from the active ministry of caring for the urban sick and dying, the nuns acquired the body of St. Dorothea, a martyr whose corpse had been allegedly found in the Roman catacombs, with the intention of displaying it in their public church and thus attracting the donations of the faithful. Other religious communities deployed similar strategies by processing relics through their city's streets, as can be seen in the case of the nuns of Santa Patrizia in Naples, who adopted this tradition to overcome their segregation from the public space in the post-Tridentine period.⁴⁹

In addition to the objects and liquids that had come into contact with relics, Setúbal's nuns also sent some of their relics to people's homes. These were often requested by the sick and transported to their homes from the nuns' enclosure, where they were normally kept. The requests came mostly from Setúbal's nobility, denoted by the information registered in the *Tratado da Fundação*. Inês Mouzinha de Vasconcelos, a noblewoman of Setúbal, requested from the nuns a relic of St. Blaise, believed to be effective in curing throat illnesses, which indeed

cured her of such an affliction.⁵⁰ Similarly, António Lobo, also a nobleman of Setúbal, requested a relic of St. John the Baptist to help his wife during childbirth.⁵¹ The same happened with the relic of St. Louis of Toulouse, which the town's nobles also requested to help women during childbirth.⁵²

Miraculous images also played an important role in the spirituality, religious identity, and economy of the Colettines of Setúbal, and were certainly favoured by the noble devotees with whom these devotional items were shared. As with the convent's relics, some of the images venerated by the nuns are described in the *Tratado da Fundação* as miraculous, granting them further fame that went beyond the enclosure walls. This was the case with the so-called "Miraculous Infant Jesus," an image of the infant Jesus known for its many wonders.⁵³ The fame of this image went beyond the town of Setúbal and was requested by Martinho Soares, described as a well-known nobleman of the realm, who was on his deathbed in Lisbon, and Luís de Lencastre (d. 1613), commander of Avis and grandson of Duke Jorge de Lencastre of Coimbra (d. 1550), who requested it to heal his daughter.⁵⁴ These images and relics were thus often requested by the local nobility, who sent their confessors to collect them at the convent and had masses celebrated at their private altars.⁵⁵ Functioning as true ambassadors for the nuns, these sacred objects represented them outside the enclosure, where they could, in this way, have an active role in assisting their local communities and helped them secure the laity's favours.

A Spectacle for the People: St. Auta's Relics and the Shroud of Christ in the Convent of Madre de Deus of Lisbon

After promoting the foundation of the second convent of Colettine Clarisses in Portugal in 1509, the queen dowager Leonor de Viseu turned once again to her cousin, Maximilian I of Habsburg, whom she asked to send her relics of the 11,000 virgins of Cologne. Following his cousin's wishes, the emperor sent her the earthly remains of St. Auta, the daughter of Queen Gerasina of Sicily, which he took from his father's treasure and which Leonor then gave to the nuns.⁵⁶ Leonor's case is not unique. Since the early Middle Ages, queens and noblewomen have appeared as collectors of relics, often aided by their families and political networks who helped them acquire these sacred objects not only for their private use but also for the spiritual benefit, prestige, and profit of the convents they supported.⁵⁷ The cult of the 11,000 virgins was one of the most widespread cults in medieval Europe, made possible by the eleventh-century discovery of a vast number of bones in Cologne that allegedly belonged to these martyrs and soon spread across Europe.⁵⁸ Relics of the 11,000 virgins have been documented in Iberia since the early thirteenth century.⁵⁹ As Montgomery has noted, this group of virgin martyrs was understood as a collective entity, which provided an attractive model of communal identity to female convents.⁶⁰ The popularity of this cult is attested by the fact that Leonor had previously offered three bones of these virgins to the Colettine nuns of Setúbal.⁶¹ Additionally, the Franciscan friars of São Francisco de Xabregas, responsible for the spiritual care of the Madre de Deus community, also venerated the skull of one of these martyrs, St. Benigna.⁶² Indeed, devotion to the cult was present in other

Portuguese religious orders, demonstrated by the presence of the feast of the 11,000 virgins in a 1488 liturgical book from the Dominican nunnery of Jesus of Aveiro.⁶³

As Peter Brown has asserted, the arrival of a relic was also an occasion to highlight the merits of its recipient.⁶⁴ Thus, the translation of relics was usually associated with a public spectacle—the first step of its promotion among the people, laying the roots for a new cult that was later ratified by miracles.⁶⁵ Such was the case with the translation of St. Auta's relics to Madre de Deus in 1517, as is described by Damião de Góis in his account of King Manuel's life.⁶⁶ The ship transporting the relics arrived at a beach near the convent with great solemnity, escorted by other ships and barges carrying banners.⁶⁷ The translation gathered representatives of the many social groups of Lisbon, including figures whose authority helped legitimize the relics. Cathedral canons collected the relics from the ship, after which they joined the queen dowager and Prince João (d. 1557) at the beach. The relics were then carried in a solemn public procession to the convent's church, where the Archbishop of Lisbon, Martinho da Costa, placed the reliquary at an altar made for the purpose. The miracles started immediately during the translation ceremony, in which a diseased boy whose shirt was placed near the reliquary was cured of his illness.⁶⁸ This appears to have originated another form of collaboration between the convent and the city. The convent's chronicle, written in the early seventeenth century, records an old tradition in which the sick sent their shirts to the convent so they could be brought to touch the reliquary.⁶⁹

After remaining in the church for five years, in 1522, St. Auta's relics were translated to their own chapel, located in the nuns' enclosure. The ceremony was described as another great public spectacle, with King João III (d. 1557), his brothers, and the high clergy all present.⁷⁰ The characteristics of this reliquary chapel (which no longer stands) reflect the nuns' concern in keeping Auta's remains accessible to the laity as, according to the convent's chronicle, the relics appear to have communicated with the public church through a shared wall. The anonymous writer reports that St. Auta's chapel in the cloister shared a wall and an altarpiece with a side chapel dedicated to St. Auta in the public church.⁷¹ Two of the convent's three surviving early-sixteenth century panels that narrate the martyrdom of St. Ursula and the 11,000 virgins depict, on the reverse, the departure of the relics of St. Auta from Cologne and their arrival in Lisbon (Figures 3.3 and 3.4). This suggests that the altarpiece was used in a double-faced, twinned altar, sharing the same wall: with one side facing the enclosure, towards the nuns, and another facing the church, towards those who visited the space.⁷²

Although it is not possible to know with certainty which side each audience saw, it is clear that this altarpiece was intended to be shared with the local community which, despite no longer having direct access to the relics, knew that they were kept in that same wall—absently present, like the nuns who kept them. It is tempting to suggest that the side composed by the reverse of the two smaller panels and depicting the departure and arrival of the relics with the nuns watching over the procession, was destined for the church, reminding those who visited the temple not only of the relics' authenticity and origin but also of their invisible keepers (see Figure 3.4). The convent chronicler's note that only half of the altarpiece was



Figure 3.3 Departure of Saint Auta's relics from Cologne - Saint Auta's altarpiece, Mestre do Retábulo de Santa Auta, 16th cent.

Source: Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga. Photo: Sónia Costa.

shown in the church also suggests that it was the reverse of the two smaller panels that faced this space.⁷³ In addition, the main side, themed around the martyrdom of the 11,000 virgins and composed of a bigger panel depicting the martyrdom and the obverse of the two smaller panels, which picture the virgins' blessing by Pope Cyriacus and the marriage of St. Ursula, was probably aimed towards the enclosure since it portrays a theme that the nuns could use for their own spiritual edification and meditation.

The miracles of the virgin martyr were also shared with the laity through the water of St. Auta's fountain, which contained a relic of the saint and was situated in the cloister, closer to the saint's chapel.⁷⁴ Samples of this water, believed to have healing powers, were sent outside the enclosure to those who requested it.⁷⁵ The healing powers of St. Auta's relics were also shared with the people through the nuns' deployment of an image of the saint containing a little piece of bone. They not only sent the image to people's homes but also to other convents in the city.⁷⁶



Figure 3.4 Arrival of Saint Auta's relics to the church of Madre de Deus – Saint Auta's altarpiece, Mestre do Retábulo de Santa Auta, 16th cent.

Source: Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga. Photo: Sónia Costa.

New miracles were also useful in restoring forgotten cults. The chronicle describes the annual celebration of St. Auta's translation as fading after the deaths of the feast's sponsors in 1557, King João III and his wife, Catarina of Austria. Writing about declining lay support for the celebration in the early seventeenth century, the anonymous chronicler noted the community's inability to celebrate the feast with the same solemnity as before because of lack of funds.⁷⁷ A later source reveals that a miracle witnessed by the nuns in 1668 solved the problem, returning the attention of Lisbon elites to the relics of St. Auta.⁷⁸ While admiring the saint's relics in the cloister, during the translation feast, the nuns noticed a mark in the form of a cross on one of the bones which was accompanied by the formation of blood spots in the smaller bones. News of this miracle reached the court and piqued the interest of Queen Maria Francisca of Savoy (d. 1683) and her courtiers, who became great devotees of the relics and sponsored celebrations in the following years.

Equally important for this convent was a copy of the shroud of Turin, also acquired by the queen dowager Leonor de Viseu through Maximilian I of Habsburg to enrich the newly founded convent in the early 1500s.⁷⁹ The shroud, said to be indistinguishable from the original, was a source of great devotion for Lisbon's inhabitants. Playing an important part in the liturgy of the Passion, this piece is testimony to a shared liturgical tradition between this convent and its urban community.⁸⁰ As with the above-described relics, the nuns shared the shroud, which was usually stored in the nuns' choir, with the local community, to whom it was shown twice in Holy Week—first on Maundy Thursday and then on Good Friday.⁸¹

The location of the convent near the Tagus River favoured the development of a peculiar tradition in which people went to see the shroud showcased from a balcony on boats that, according to surviving testimonies, filled the river on Maundy Thursday.⁸² During this ritual, described as taking around half an hour, a priest would slowly reveal the shroud on the balcony while reflecting on the suffering of Christ to a devout crowd.⁸³ On the following day, the shroud was showcased once again in the convent's church for the Good Friday celebrations.⁸⁴ The public filled the church to witness the piece and listen to the Sermon of Our Lady of Solitude.⁸⁵ This sermon reflected on the grief and solitude of Mary after losing her son, and was delivered in the presence of the shroud, representing Christ's dead body.⁸⁶

Conclusion

The examples provided above have shown how the establishment of shared devotions provided important links between these nuns and their urban communities from which they were physically segregated. Beyond conveying messages of religious authority that helped in legitimizing a new branch of a traditional religious order, the implementation and promotion of these cults and shared liturgies enabled the nuns to have an active role in their urban communities that went beyond praying for the salvation of their souls inside their convents. This indirect ministry allowed the nuns to construct an absent presence in their cities, keeping them relevant in people's spiritual lives and attracting financial support to their convents. An essential part of this appears to have been the deployment of relics, miraculous images and materials associated with them, not only to the city's streets, where they could be seen by the people in general, but also to elite homes, where these objects were used for the laity's private devotion.

However, nuns were not alone in these endeavours. Their patrons, as seen through the case of Leonor de Viseu, made efforts to equip their convents with relics that brought them not only prestige but also donations from devotees. This was accompanied by promotion of the relics through public spectacles that reinforced the sacrality of the object and, at the same time, the prestige of both the donor and the recipient. The convent's confessors also played an important part in the promotion of these cults outside the enclosure, carrying the objects in public processions and preaching to the people about their meaning and wonders, as seen in the case of the cross-reliquary in Setúbal and the shroud of Madre de Deus. In particular, these cases have shown that, despite the restrictions on professed nuns,

reinforced by late medieval reform movements, mendicant nunneries were actively engaged with their urban communities, occupying an important space in their religious lives.

Notes

- 1 For an overview of Observant reforms see James Mixon and Bert Roest, eds., *A Companion to Observant Reform in the Late Middle Ages and Beyond* (Leiden: Brill, 2015); Sylvie Duval, Haude Morvan, and Ludovic Viallet, eds., “Les observances régulières: historiographies,” in *Mélanges de l’École française de Rome – Moyen Âge* 130, no. 2 (2018). The research for this chapter was supported by the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie IF grant agreement No 101030153.
- 2 See Vitor Teixeira, *O movimento da Observância Franciscana em Portugal, 1392–1517* (Porto: Centro de Estudos Franciscanos, 2010); Maria de Lurdes Rosa, “A Religião no século: Vivências e devoções dos leigos,” in *História religiosa de Portugal* 1, ed. Ana Maria Jorge and Ana Maria Rodrigues (Lisbon: Temas e Debates, 2000), 423–508.
- 3 Maria de Lurdes Rosa, “D. Jaime, Duque de Bragança: Entre a cortina e a vidraça,” in *O tempo de Vasco da Gama*, ed. Diogo Ramada Curto (Lisbon: CNCDP, 1998), 325. See also: Paula Cardoso, “Unveiling female observance: Reform, regulation and the rise of Dominican nunneries in late medieval Portugal,” *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies* 12, no. 3 (2020): 365–382. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17546559.2020.1802654>.
- 4 João Luís Fontes, “Em torno de uma experiência religiosa feminina: As mulheres da pobre vida de Évora,” *Lusitania Sacra*, 31 (2015): 51–72. <https://doi.org/10.34632/lusitaniasacra.2015.5640>; Ana Maria Rodrigues, João Luís Inglês Fontes, and Maria Filomena Andrade, “La(s) reforma(s) en el franciscanismo portugués en la Edad Media,” *Hispania Sacra* 72, no. 145 (2020): 51–63.
- 5 Rosa, “A religião no século,” 497.
- 6 The enclosure of nuns is a complex topic. Even though the decree *Periculoso*, issued in 1298 by Boniface VIII, required full enclosure for all professed nuns, this measure found several challenges that prevented its full implementation. It was not until the late Middle Ages, with the rise of the Observant movements, that efforts towards nuns’ enclosure achieved broader success, reinforced by the Counter Reformation in the late sixteenth century. See: Elizabeth Makowski, *Canon Law and Cloistered Women: Periculoso and its Commentators 1298–1545* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1997); Penelope D. Johnson, *Equal in Monastic Profession: Religious Women in Medieval France* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1991), 150–163.
- 7 Anne L. Clark, “Guardians of the sacred: The Nuns of Soissons and the Slipper of the Virgin Mary,” *Church History* 76, no. 4 (December 2007): 724–725.
- 8 See Sylvie Duval, “*Mulieres religiosae* and *Sorores clausae*: The Dominican Observant Movement and the Diffusion of Strict Enclosure in Italy from the Thirteenth to the Sixteenth Century,” in *Mulieres Religiosae: Shaping Female Spiritual Authority in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods*, ed. Veerle Fraeters and Imke de Gier (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), 193–218.
- 9 On the Colettine reforms see, for instance: Ludovic Viallet, “Colette of Corbie and the Franciscan Reforms: The *Observantia* in the First Half of the Fifteenth Century,” in *A Companion to Colette of Corbie*, ed. Joan Mueller and Nancy Warren (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 76–100. On the Privilege of Poverty see Joan Mueller, *The Privilege of Poverty Clare of Assisi, Agnes of Prague, and the Struggle for a Franciscan Rule for Women* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2006).
- 10 The First Rule of Saint Clare and the Urbanist Rule were not the only rules followed by the Clarisses, which were far from having legislative uniformity. See Bert Roest, “Rules, Customs, and Constitutions within the Medieval Order of Poor Clares,” in

- Consuetudines et Regulae: Sources for Monastic Life in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period*, ed. Carolyn Marino Malone and Clark Maines (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), 305–330. On the introduction of Colettine reform in the Iberian Peninsula see: Andres Ivars, “Origen y Propagación de las Clarisas Coletinas o Descalzas en España,” *Archivo Ibero-Americano* 61 (1924): 390–410; Araceli Rosillo-Luque, “La reforma coletina en tierras catalanas (XV–XVII): fuentes, presencia y memoria,” *Vox Antiqua* 12/13 (2018): 267–297; Ivo Carneiro de Sousa, *A Rainha D. Leonor (1458–1525): Poder, misericórdia, religiosidade e espiritualidade no Portugal do Renascimento* (Lisbon: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 2002), 474–513; Maria Filomena Andrade, “Uma espiritualidade renovada: A reforma Coletina em Portugal nos finais da Idade Média,” in *In memoriam: estudos de homenagem a António Augusto Tavares*, ed. João Luís Cardoso and José das Candeias Sales (Lisbon: Universidade Aberta, 2018), 159–168; Paula Cardoso, “Reviving the *Forma Vitae*: Identity, Authority and Material Culture in the First Portuguese Convents of Colettine Clarisses,” *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies* (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1080/17546559.2023.2299812>.
- 11 The adoption of the *First Rule of St. Clare* was encouraged by the Observants in other territories. Giovanni Capistrano, Vicar General of the Observant Franciscans of the Cis-montane Province, encouraged the adoption of this rule in his Province in the early fifteenth century. On the reform of Clarissan houses in Italy see Lezlie Knox, *Creating Clare of Assisi: Female Franciscan Identities in Later Medieval Italy* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 125–156.
 - 12 Maria de Lurdes Rosa, “A fundação do Mosteiro da Conceição de Beja pela Duquesa Dona Beatriz,” in *O tempo de Vasco da Gama*, ed. Diogo Ramada Curto (Lisbon: CNCDP, 1998), 268.
 - 13 Rosa, “A fundação do Mosteiro,” 268.
 - 14 Also known as Leonor de Lencastre and Leonor de Avis.
 - 15 As well as several fiscal benefits, the king ordered the construction of a water main to serve Setúbal in 1487. *Casas e ruas na história de Setúbal – Exposição do Museu de Arqueologia e Etnografia* (Setúbal: Junta Distrital de Setúbal, 1977–1978), 10; *D. João II*, Arquivo Distrital de Setúbal (PT/ADSTB/PSS/APAC/L/2051).
 - 16 Issued by Alexander VI, the brief stated that the convent should be under the Observants’ jurisdiction and that these friars should provide the nuns with a confessor, a chaplain, and a lay friar. The content of this brief is summarized in a 1636 document from the Colettine convent of Madre de Deus of Lisbon (*Sumário das Graças e Privilégios*, 1636, Arquivo Nacional Torre do Tombo (ANTT), Convento da Madre de Deus de Lisboa, mç. 1, doc. 45).
 - 17 The Colettine movement had its origin in France, within the Franciscan Conventual faction. The Colettines of Gandia wished to remain under Conventual jurisdiction despite being under the care of the Observants (León Pyá Amorós, “El monasterio de Santa Clara de Gandia y la familia ducal de los Borjas,” *Archivo Ibero-Americano* 20, no. 80 (1960), 480); On the quarrels between Conventuals and Observants over the Colettines’ jurisdiction in France and Flanders see Anna Campbell, “St Colette of Corbie and the ‘Friars of the Bull’: Franciscan Reform in Fifteenth-century France,” in *Rules and Observance: Devising Forms of Communal Life*, ed. Mirko Breitenstein, Julia Burkhardt, Stefan Burkhardt, and Jens Rohrkasten (Berlin: Lit, 2014.), 43–66. Setúbal’s community, however, was founded within the Franciscans’ Observant faction which might have facilitated Justa’s endeavour.
 - 18 Edited in Ivars, “Origen y Propagacion,” 100–101.
 - 19 José Maria Pou y Martí, *Bullarium Franciscanum continens constitutiones, epistolas et diplomata Romanorum Pontificum* Nova Series (Quaracchi: Ex Typographia Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1949), 3:601.
 - 20 Belém (OFM), *Chronica Serafica*, 2, 587–588, 611; Demonstrated by a brief issued by Alexander VI in April 1495 at the request of Queen Leonor de Viseu (*Sumário das Graças*).

- 21 *Alvará para se dar à abadessa do Mosteiro de Jesus de Setúbal*, 1517, ANTT, Corpo Cronológico, Parte I, maço 22, n.º 45; *Alvará do rei D. Manuel I*, 1514, ANTT, Corpo Cronológico, Parte I, maço 15, n.º 92.
- 22 *Tratado da Antiga e Curiosa Fundação do Conu[ento] d[e] Jesu de Setuual por Leonor de São João*, Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal (BNP), Cod. 7686, part 1, cap. XV, f. 40r.
- 23 See, for instance, the following charters: *Carta de privilégio para o mamposreiro*, 1499, ANTT, Corpo Cronológico, Parte II, Maço 2, doc. 103; *Privilégio de ser escuso*, 1500, ANTT, Chancelaria de D. Manuel I, liv. 3, f. 33v. See also: *Tratado da Antiga*, part 1, cap. XV, ff. 39v.–40r.
- 24 *Tratado da Antiga*, part 1, cap. XVII, f. 45r. This unedited chronicle was written in 1630.
- 25 *Alvará de mercê da esmola anual*, 1579, ANTT, Registo Geral de Mercês, Mercês de vários reis, liv. I, ff. 15r.–16r.
- 26 Anna Campbell, “Colette of Corbie: Cult and Canonization,” in *A Companion to Colette of Corbie*, ed. Joan Mueller and Nancy Warren (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 172–206.
- 27 See Andrea Pearson, “Imaging and imagining Colette of Corbie: An illuminated version of Pierre de Vaux’s *Vie de Colette*,” in *A Companion to Colette of Corbie*, 130–172.
- 28 For an overview of Colette’s limited representation in art, see Bénédicte Gaulard, “Images du charisme: Sainte Colette dans l’iconographie religieuse,” in *Sainte Colette et sa postérité*, ed. André Vauchez (Paris: Editions Franciscaines, 2016), 331–343.
- 29 I was only able to find one other similar depiction of Colette before the authorisation of her cult in the early seventeenth century; she is labelled as *beata* in the *Firmamenta trium ordinum*, printed in Paris in 1512 (Bonifacio da Ceva, *Firmamentum trium ordinum beati Francisci* (Paris: printed by Nicolas de la Barre, for Jean Frellon, Jean Petit and François Regnault, 1512), part V: I and XVIII^v).
- 30 *Tratado da Antiga*, part 1, cap. VII, ff. 16v.–17r. Luís Reis Santos claimed that the panel has a Flemish origin, attributing it to Quentin Metsys (1466–1530). According to this scholar, the panel was probably made between 1491 and 1507: Fernando António Baptista Pereira, Maria João Cândido, and Paulo Anjos, eds., *Retábulo do Convento de Jesus de Setúbal: ca. 1517/19–1530* (Setúbal: Museu de Setúbal, 2013), 33.
- 31 During cleaning in 1939, a fishing net with true-love knots – the emblem of Leonor de Viseu – was found in the panel depicting the three saints being crowned by an angel, which led scholars to attribute the commission of the altarpiece to the dowager queen (Pereira, Cândido, and Anjos, *Retábulo do Convento*, 33).
- 32 Now housed in the Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga in Lisbon.
- 33 For more on this subject see Cardoso, “Reviving the *Forma Vitae*,” 7–23.
- 34 A few studies have been devoted to the role of relics in female religious communities, both in the medieval and the early modern periods: Ulrike Strasser, “Bones of Contention: Cloistered Nuns, Decorated Relics, and the Contest over Women’s Place in the Public Sphere of Counter-Reformation Munich,” *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 90 (1999): 255–288; Helen Hills, “Nuns and Relics: Spiritual Authority in Post-Tridentine Naples,” in *Female Monasticism in Early Modern Europe: An Interdisciplinary View*, ed. Cordula van Wyhe (Aldershot–Burlington: Ashgate, 2008), 11–38; Jane Schulenburg, “Female Religious as Collectors of Relics: Finding Sacrality and Power in the ‘Ordinary’,” in *Where Heaven and Earth Meet: Essays on Medieval Europe in Honor of Daniel F. Callahan*, ed. Michael Frassetto, John Hosler, and Matthew Gabriele (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 152–177. Extensive literature has been produced on the role of relics in medieval society in general. See, for instance: Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1980); Peter Brown, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); Marika Räsänen, Gritje Hartmann, and Earl Jeffrey Richards, eds., *Relics, Identity, and Memory in Medieval Europe* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016).
- 35 Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 94–95; See also: Brown, *Society and the Holy*.

- 36 Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 88. Relics were also used as means to reinforce power and political status among the laity. See, for instance, D.W. Rollason, “Relic-cults as an Instrument of Royal Policy c. 900–c. 1050,” *Anglo-Saxon England* 15 (1986): 91–103.
- 37 Schulenburg, “Female Religious as Collectors of Relics,” 177.
- 38 Particularly in the post-Tridentine period, when the popularity of relics enjoyed a major boost in response to reformist attacks on the legitimacy of these objects, female convents became centres for the collection of relics. This can be seen in the case of the *Descalzas reales* of Madrid, where the relics appear to have played an important role in the convent’s liturgical life. See Victoria Bosch Moreno, “‘Para que el pueblo vea y goce de este santo tesoro’: Una aproximación al relicario de las Descalzas Reales de Madrid durante los siglos XVI y XVII,” in *La Piedad de la Casa de Austriaarte, dinastía y devoción*, ed. Victor Mínguez and Inmaculada Rodríguez (Generalidad Valenciana: Trea, 2018), 185–202.
- 39 See footnote 34, especially Schulenburg, “Female Religious as Collectors of Relics,” 175.
- 40 The phenomenon of the relic’s deployment as a strategy to overcome the nuns’ enclosure was first analysed by Helen Hills (Hills, “*Nuns and Relics*”).
- 41 *Tratado da Antiga*.
- 42 *Tratado da Antiga*, part 3, chapter I, f. 2r.
- 43 *Tratado da Antiga*, part 3, chapter I, f. 2v.
- 44 *Tratado da Antiga*, part 3, chapter VII, f. 28v.
- 45 “... Reis, Rainhas e Príncipes, Senhores e todas as mais Pessoas do Reino...” (*Tratado da Antiga*, part 3, chapter VII, f. 29r).
- 46 *Tratado da Antiga*, part 3, chapter VII, f. 29v.
- 47 *Tratado da Antiga*, part 3, chapter VII, f. 29v.
- 48 See Strasser, “Bones of Contention.”
- 49 See Hills, “Nuns and Relics.”
- 50 *Tratado da Antiga*, part 3, chapter VIII, f. 31r.
- 51 *Tratado da Antiga*, part 3, chapter VIII, f. 31v.
- 52 *Tratado da Antiga*, part 3, chapter VIII, f. 32v.
- 53 “Menino Jesus dos Milagres” (*Tratado da Antiga*, part 3, chapter VIII, f. 33v.).
- 54 The name “Martinho Soares” possibly refers to Marinho Soares de Alarcão, Alcaide Mayor of Torres Vedras (c.1500–?); *Tratado da Antiga*, part 3, chapter VIII, ff. 33v. and 34v.
- 55 *Tratado da Antiga*, part 3, chapter IX, ff. 33v. and 34v.
- 56 She is also referred to as Aurea. Her mother, Gerasina, is referred to as the sister of Maurice the bishop and of Daria, mother of St Ursula in Jacobus de Voragine’s *Golden Legend* (1275). Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans. W.G. Ryan (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 642.
- 57 Jane Schulenburg, “Women’s Monasteries and Sacred Space: The Promotion of Saints’ Cults and Miracles,” in *Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe: New Perspectives*, ed. Lisa M. Bitel and Felice Lifshitz (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 69–70.
- 58 On the cult and relics of the 11,000 virgins in Medieval Europe see Scott Bradford Montgomery, *St. Ursula and the Eleven Thousand Virgins of Cologne: Relics, Reliquaries and the Visual Culture of Group Sanctity in Late Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010).
- 59 Jaime Ferreira Alemparte, *La leyenda de las once mil vírgenes: sus reliquias, culto e iconografía* (Murcia: Universidad de Murcia, 1991), 77.
- 60 Montgomery, *St Ursula and the Eleven Thousand Virgins of Cologne*, 130.
- 61 No further information is given about the origin of these relics (Jeronymo de Belém (OFM), *Chronica Serafica da Santa Provincia dos Algarves: da Regular Observancia do Nosso Serafico Padre S. Francisco* (Lisbon: Mosteiro de S. Vicente de Fora, 1753), 2:598. Filipe II of Spain (I of Portugal) also offered a skull of one of the virgins to Setubal’s convent (Belém (OFM), *Chronica Serafica*, 2:599–600).

- 62 Belém (OFM), *Chronica Serafica*, 2:163.
- 63 *Antifonário*, Museu de Aveiro, PT/MA/ANTF 26, f. 118v.
- 64 Brown, *Society and the Holy*, 240.
- 65 See Brown, *Society and the Holy*, 236–241; Martina Caroli, “Bringing Saints to Cities and Monasteries: ‘Translations’ in the Making of a Sacred Geography (Ninth–Tenth Centuries),” in *Towns and their Territories Between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. G.P. Brogiolo, N. Gauthier, and N. Christie (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 259–274.
- 66 Damião de Góis, *Crónica do felicissimo Rei D. Manuel composta por Damião de Góis*, ed. J.M. Teixeira de Carvalho and David Lopes, Part V (Coimbra: Imprensa da Universidade, 1926), 60–61.
- 67 This was facilitated by the convent’s location near the Tagus River.
- 68 Jeronymo de Belém (OFM), *Chronica Serafica da Santa Provincia dos Algarves: da Regular Observancia do Nosso Serafico Padre S. Francisco* (Lisbon: Mosteiro de S. Vicente de Fora, 1755), 3:37.
- 69 *Noticia da fundação do Convento da Madre de Deos das religiosas descalças de Lisboa, da primeira regra de nossa Madre Santa Clara...*, BNP, Cod.12979, fl. 19v.
- 70 Belém (OFM), *Chronica Serafica*, 3:34.
- 71 “Eufrasia: Esta capella que temos nas varandas em que estão suas reliquias responde à sua da igreja? Febronia: Si. Toda he hum a só parede em que está o retabulo de fora somente em meyo” (*Noticia da fundação*, f. 20r.).
- 72 Alexandre Pais and Alexandra Curvelo, “Memórias da fogueira: O primitivo mosteiro da Madre de Deus,” in *Casa Perfeitíssima: 500 anos da Fundação do Mosteiro da Madre de Deus*, ed. Alexandra Curvelo (Lisbon: Museu Nacional do Azulejo, 2009), 80.
- 73 See Note 71.
- 74 Pais and Curvelo, “Memórias da fogueira,” 80. The fountain bears the inscription “ACQVA DE SANTA AVTA.”
- 75 *Noticia da fundação*, f. 19v.; Belém (OFM), *Chronica Serafica*, 3:38.
- 76 Belém (OFM), *Chronica Serafica*, 3:38.
- 77 *Noticia da fundação*, f. 19v.
- 78 Belém (OFM), *Chronica Serafica*, 3:35–36.
- 79 *Noticia da fundação*, f. 14r.
- 80 *Noticia da fundação*, ff. 14r.-14v. and 11v.
- 81 Belém (OFM), *Chronica Serafica*, 3:28.
- 82 *Noticia da fundação*, f. 11v. The ritual is described in an early eighteenth-century source (Thomas Cox and Cox Macro, *Relação do Reino de Portugal 1701*, trans. Maria João da Rocha Afonso (Lisbon: Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal, 2007), 117–118).
- 83 Cox and Macro, *Relação do Reino de Portugal*, 118.
- 84 Belém (OFM), *Chronica Serafica*, 3:28; *Noticia da fundação*, f. 14v.
- 85 Belém (OFM), *Chronica Serafica*, 2, 159.
- 86 Passion sermons centred on the Virgin’s lament appear connected to the cult of the *Mater Dolorosa* present in Europe beginning in the eleventh century. In the thirteenth century, the Franciscans assumed an important role in the popularization of the cult of the mourning mother of Christ through their dramatic Passion sermons (Marina Warner, *Alone in Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson 1976), 213–214).