

Giunta Bevegnati. *The Life and Miracles of Saint Margaret of Cortona (1247–1297)*.

Trans. Thomas Renna. Ed. Shannon Larson. Saint Bonaventure: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2012. 344 pp. \$29.95. ISBN: 978-1-57659-301-1.

The church where St. Margaret of Cortona's body rests attracted numerous medieval pilgrims, and still interests the modern tourist. Canonized in 1728, Margaret appears to have been celebrated for her heroic virtue and seen as a candidate for sainthood even while still alive. Around 1275, she officially took the habit of the lay order of the Franciscans, devoting herself to a life of austerity, visions, charity, and the Eucharist. After Margaret's death in 1297, fellow Franciscan Giunta of Bevegnati composed the narrative, based on notes that he took while both were together as well as information gathered from friars and clergy.

Overall, this much-needed English translation is recommended because of its contribution to hagiographical studies and women's spirituality.

In a forty-page introduction, Thomas Renna situates Giunta of Bevegneti's narrative within the context of the mission and debate over the Franciscans, the city of Cortona, and medieval society. Renna provides a short introduction to Margaret, and then turns toward analyzing the motivations behind the authorship of the text. Renna finds eleven possible reasons, including the rehabilitation of the Franciscans, Margaret, or the author. One of the more unusual elements of the text, according to Renna, is how Fra Giunta injected himself into the text to produce a triad of Margaret, Christ, and the author (40). Unfortunately, the bibliography does not extend past 2001, and has not been updated to include literature relating to women's studies, mysticism, or male-female collaboration. Placing Margaret within the context of other female saints who sought to disfigure their faces, critique the Church or society, engage in self-criticism, and converse with God would have added to the historical complexity of the text. More direct historical explication of the text in the introduction would have made it better suited to classroom use.

Most of the book offers an English translation of Fra Giunta's remarkable *Legenda* based on Fortunato Iozzelli's 1997 Latin transcription of extant texts. Rather than providing a narrative biography, Fra Giunta approached the life of Margaret thematically, interweaving details about her life when relevant. Although Fra Giunta remarked that he was embarrassed because of its poor organization, the text addresses major themes in her life such as her conversion, humility, visions, and desire for death. Margaret, once a sinner, is presented as having been redeemed by God's mercy. Numerous conversations between Christ and Margaret are reported as direct speech, including several animated discussions that involve yelling. And the Franciscans receive frequent praise from God who lauds them as "my chosen ones, whom I love most dearly" (58). The last chapter includes the many miracles associated with Margaret, almost all related to healing. The translation would make a compelling account to use in an upper-level undergraduate or graduate course as controversies emerge related to authorship and intent, God's supposed affirmation of the Franciscans, and Margaret's visions.

Unfortunately, insufficient attention has been given to editing. It was not clear who served as translator and editor. The title page lists Renna as the translator and Shannon Larson as the editor. Yet the book cover indicates it was translated by Renna and Larson. The back cover suggests that Renna provided the original translation that was edited by Larson. In addition, the back cover contains a book review that states that Margaret died in 1293. In the footnotes, Margaret is usually referred to as "M," leading to an informality that does not lend itself to an academic study. Poor printing produced a few ink smudges but cannot excuse that the book arrived with a missing page (27–28). The appendix contains a text labeled "Document of Authenticity," yet there is no date or introductory remark related to the text. This edition lacks many of the scholarly features of an authoritative English edition; however, those desiring only a translation will appreciate having an

accessible edition that brings to light the complex history of Margaret, her confessors, and the Franciscans.

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