The Doubting Augustine: The Deletion of Monica from Fourteenth-Century *Vitae Augustini* in the Augustinian Order of Hermits

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This study examines the erasure of Monica in five hagiographies of Augustine written by the Order of Hermits of St Augustine in the fourteenth century. It investigates how the character of Monica functions as a foil to Augustine's religious doubt in his Confessions *and why that emphasis was problematic for the Augustinian Hermits. The essay will demonstrate that the presence of Monica was incompatible with the hermits' desire to showcase Augustine's eremitism as the cornerstone of his religious practice. In order to emphasize Augustine's devotion to the eremitical life, the hermits denied any substantial presence to Monica, who was a problematic reminder both of Augustine's doubt about monasticism and of the hermits' doubts about the legitimacy of their parentage. This study explores the hermits' doubt about the role of Monica in Augustine's religious formation, and how that doubt was indicative of their institutionalized way of looking at their faith.*

During a span of twenty years in the early fourteenth century, five hermits of the *Ordo Eremitarum Sancti Augustini* [hereafter: OESA] produced five hagiographical texts detailing the life of their putative founder, St Augustine of Hippo, in order to demonstrate their order's foundation by the North African Church Father. While these texts display familiarity with Augustine's *Confessions*, his own autobiographical reflection on his life, they present a character strikingly different in religious expression from Augustine's portrayal of himself. In particular, the hermits' utter disregard for the presence and significance of his mother Monica in the tale of his life is conspicuous, flattening the story and removing the gendered complexity found in Augustine's original words. Monica, the only woman to be referred to by name in the *Confessions*, appears in Augustine's own account at every important stage in his life, featuring as a constant source of

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Studies in Church History 52 (2016) 150–163
doi: 10.1017/stc.2015.9

spiritual guidance. Although her portrayal in the *Confessions* is fraught with ambiguity and her actions have often been interpreted as intrusive, his acclamation of her religious goodness, equated with virtue, paints a complex image of a woman who held a significant role in his religious formation.

This essay will argue that the Augustinian Hermits eliminated Monica from their depictions of the life of Augustine because they viewed her as a problematic reminder not only of Augustine's religious doubt but also of their own doubt regarding the validity of their Augustinian parentage. The fourteenth-century texts were created at a time when the OESA's own connection to Augustine was in question, and thus represented Augustine as the perfect example of the monastic life to which the hermits aspired, legitimizing their claims to be the *true* and *only* sons of Augustine.[1]

The hermits' deletion of Monica reflects a concern about the presence of Augustine's religious doubt within the narrative of the *Confessions* and stresses the importance of constancy in commitment to the eremitical life. Whereas in the *Confessions* Monica offers spiritual guidance to Augustine when he finds himself lacking faith, in the late medieval texts her absence is accompanied by the absence of his doubt. Instead, the constancy of his monastic vocation is asserted. I argue that the possibility that Augustine doubted his religious and monastic vocation carried with it implications for the hermits' own religious lineage, for it would implicitly have cast doubt upon their interpretation of the Augustinian lifestyle. It was in an effort to depict Augustine as the archetypal hermit that these hermit writers extinguished the colourful, enigmatic, but always supportive character of Monica. While she appears in texts written by other members of the order and in works of art painted for their churches in this period, in this series of texts, designed for the purpose of explicating the life of Augustine, she disappears, suggesting that this omission was a conscious choice.

[1] An example of this kind of language can be found in Verdun, Bibliothèque publique, MS 41, Henry of Friemar, 'Tractatus de origine et progressu Ordinis Fratrum Eremitarum S. Augustini', saec. XIV, fols 144^{r}–150^{r}. This text is also found in an edition by Rudolph Arbesmann: Henricus de Frimaria, *Tractatus de origine et progressu Ordinis Fratrum Heremitarum Sancti Augustini*, ed. Rudolph Arbesmann as 'Henry of Friemar's *Treatise on the Origin and Development of the Order of the Hermit Friars and its True and Real Title*', *Augustiniana* 6 (1956), 37–145.

https://doi.org/10.1017/stc.2015.9 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Previous Scholarship and the Augustinian Order

The Augustinian Hermits found prominence in the late Middle Ages, transforming themselves from an eremitical to a mendicant order,[2] achieving distinction in the universities and maintaining involvement in active preaching in the cities.[3] While they were to maintain that their order was descended from eremitical communities founded directly by Augustine of Hippo, they were institutionalized as a single order only in 1256 by a papal fiat of Alexander IV, who united several eremitical groups under the Ordo Eremitarum Sancti Augustini.[4] Since the creation of any new religious orders had been restricted by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, Alexander's fiat, *Licet ecclesiae catholicae*, authenticated their origins as predating the council, which would prove useful again when the Second Council of Lyon (1274) sought to minimize further the proliferation of religious orders.

Recent work by Eric Saak has reinvigorated study of the OESA by examining the Augustinian myth characterized by the five hagiographical texts which form the basis for this essay.[5] Saak has focused primarily on the religio-political context in which the hermits developed their concept of Augustinianism, arguing that the order was modelled on a newly developed hagiographical image of Augustine, but otherwise neglecting the devotional and religious importance of the saint for the OESA. This essay's focus on the exemplarity of Augustine and on the hermits' seeming reluctance to associate doubt with Augustine goes some way towards redressing this balance.

[2] Frances Andrews, *The Other Friars: The Carmelites, Augustinians, Sack and Pied Friars in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2006), 69.

[3] William J. Courtenay, *Schools and Scholars in Fourteenth-Century England* (Princeton, NJ, 1987), 72.

[4] Eric L. Saak, *High Way to Heaven: The Augustinian Platform between Reform and Reformation, 1292–1524*, Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought 89 (Leiden, 2002), 5.

[5] See E[ric]. L. Saak, *Creating Augustine: Interpreting Augustine and Augustinianism in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2012); idem, 'Religio Augustini: Jordan of Quedlinburg and the Augustinian Tradition in Late Medieval Germany' (PhD dissertation, University of Arizona, 1993); idem, 'Quilibet Christianus: Saints in Society in the Sermons of Jordan of Quedlinburg, OESA', in Beverly Mayne Kienzle et al., eds, *Models of Holiness in Medieval Sermons: Proceedings of the International Symposium, Kalamazoo, 4–7 May 1995*, Textes et études du Moyen Âge 5 (Louvain-la-Neuve, 1996), 317–38; idem, 'The Reception of Augustine in the Later Middle Ages', in Irena Backus, ed., *The Reception of the Church Fathers in the West: From the Carolingians to the Maurists*, 2 vols (Leiden, 1997), 1: 367–404; idem, 'The Creation of an Augustinian Identity in the Later Middle Ages', *Augustiniana* 49 (1999), 109–64, 251–86; idem, 'Milleloquium Sancti Augustini', in Allan D. Fitzgerald, ed., *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, MI: 1999), 563; idem, *High Way to Heaven*.

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Apart from Saak's seminal studies, the five hagiographical texts considered here have not received extensive analysis. Articles by Rudolph Arbesmann and Balbino Rano remain, to date, the authoritative studies of these fourteenth-century texts,[6] along with scanty references in the work of Winfridus Hümpfner, Marjorie Reeves and Katherine Walsh.[7] However, while these texts have received little theological or literary examination, they have found prominence in art historical studies,[8] particularly those of Louise Bourdua and Diane Cole Ahl,[9] which have remarked upon the hermits' depiction of Augustine in eremitical garb and the scenes describing his composition of the monastic rule. While this scholarship has fruitfully examined

[6] Arbesmann, ed., 'Henry of Friemar's *Treatise*'; idem, 'Jordanus of Saxony's *Vita S. Augustini*: The Source for John Capgrave's *Life of St Augustine*', *Traditio* 1 (1943), 341–53; idem, 'A Legendary of Early Augustinian Saints', *Analecta Augustiniana* 29 (1966), 5–58; idem, 'The *Vita Aurelii Augustini Hipponensis episcopi* in Cod. Laurent. Plut. 90 Sup. 48', *Traditio* 18 (1962), 319–55; Balbino Rano, 'Las dos primeras obras conocidas sobre el origen de la Orden Augustiniana', *Analecta Augustiniana* 45 (1982), 331–76; idem, 'San Agustín y los orígenes de su orden. Reglo, monasterio de Tagaste y *Sermones ad fratres in eremo*', *La Ciudad de Dios* 200 (1987), 649–727.]

[7] Winfridus Hümpfner, 'Introduction' to *Jordani de Saxonia Liber vitasfratrum*, ed. idem and Rudolph Arbesmann, Cassiciacum 1 (New York, 1943), lxxvi–lxxviii; Marjorie Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages: A Study in Joachimism* (Oxford, 1969); Katherine J. Walsh, 'Wie ein Bettelorden zu (s)einem Gründer kam. Fingierte Traditionen um die Entstehung der Augustiner-Eremiten', in *Fälschungen in Mittelalter. Internationaler Kongreß der Monumenta Germaniae Historica München, 16.–19. September 1986*, MGH Schriften 33/v, 585–610.

[8] Examples include J. Courcelle and P. Courcelle, *Iconographie de Saint Augustin. Les Cycles du XIV^e siècle* (Paris, 1965); eidem, *Iconographie de Saint Augustin. Les Cycles du XV^e siècle* (Paris, 1969); S. Bettini and L. Puppi, *La chiesa degli Eremitani di Padova* (Vicenza, 1970); D. Blume and D. Hansen, 'Agostino pater e praeceptor di un nuovo ordine religioso (considerazioni sulla propaganda illustrata degli eremiti agostiniani)', in *Arte e spiritualità negli ordini mendicanti. Gli Agostiniani e il cappellone di S. Nicola a Tolentino* (Rome, 1992), 79–91; Cordelia Warr, 'Hermits, Habits and History: The Dress of the Augustinian Hermits', Janis Elliott, 'Augustine and the New Augustinianism in the Choir Frescoes of the Eremitani, Padua', Donal Cooper, 'St Augustine's Ecstasy before the Trinity in the Art of the Hermits, *c.*1360–1440', in Louise Bourdua and Anne Dunlop, eds, *Art and the Augustinian Order in Early Renaissance Italy* (Aldershot, 2007), 17–28, 99–126, 183–204 respectively. Important works of Augustinian iconography have been published by the contemporary Augustinian Order, notably in the volumes *Per corporalia ad incorporalia. Spiritualità, agiografia, iconografia e architettura nel medioevo agostiniano* (Tolentino, 2000); *Arte e spiritualità negli ordini mendicanti*.

[9] Louise Bourdua, '*De origine et progressu ordinis fratrum heremitarum*: Guariento and the Eremitani in Padua', *Papers of the British School at Rome* 66 (1998), 177–92; eadem, 'Entombing the Founder St Augustine of Hippo', in eadem and Dunlop, eds, *Art and the Augustinian Order*, 29–50; D. Cole Ahl, 'Benozzo Gozzoli's Frescoes of the Life of Saint Augustine in San Gimignano: Their Meaning in Context', *Artibus et Historiae* 7 (1986), 35–53.

https://doi.org/10.1017/stc.2015.9 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the visual depiction of the origins of the OESA, there has been no discussion of the use of Augustine as a religious exemplar. Specifically, the absence of Monica within these late medieval accounts of Augustine's life has hitherto gone unnoticed.

The Augustinian Hermits' claim to descend from Augustine was challenged publicly in a conflict triggered by John XXII's bull *Veneranda Sanctorum* of 1327.[10] John had granted the hermits privileges, allowing them to share the Pavian church of San Pietro Ciel d'Oro, the home of Augustine's alleged relics, with the Augustinian Canons Regular, who had previously held exclusive rights to it.[11] In the ensuing conflict, both orders petitioned the pope directly, denigrating the other's Augustinianism in the process. In 1331 Cardinal Bertrand del Poggetto, who had been appointed by the pope to execute the bull, formally gave custody of Augustine's relics to the hermits, who had successfully defended their claim to unique and exclusive Augustinianism.[12]

The hermits who wrote these five hagiographies of Augustine each sought to establish Augustine's foundation of the OESA and thus, according to Louise Bourdua, 'gradually intensified their order's corporate identity as the "true" descendants of St Augustine'.[13] This reveals both the wider intention and the anticipated readership of these hagiographies: against the backdrop of the conflict surrounding the legitimacy of their descent from Augustine, the motivation for writing can only have been to demonstrate their Augustinianism. The texts display antagonism to other Augustinian orders, specifically the canons, casting doubts on the latter's claim to the legacy of Augustine and exalting the status of the hermits as unique and privileged. They were intended to demonstrate that Augustine had observed a pattern of the monastic life which the hermits had precisely and accurately maintained.

[10] This conflict is examined thoroughly in Kaspar Elm, 'Augustinus canonicus – Augustinus Eremita. A Quattrocento cause célèbre', in Timothy Verdon and John Henderson, eds, *Christianity and the Renaissance: Image and Religious Imagination in the Quattrocento* (Syracuse, NY, 1990), 84–107. See also Sharon Dale, 'A House Divided: San Pietro in Ciel d'Oro in Pavia and the Politics of Pope John XXII', *JMedH* 27 (2001), 55–77, at 56; Saak, *High Way to Heaven*, 164.

[11] John XXII's grants to the OESA are documented in *Codex Diplomaticus Ordinis Eremitarum Sancti Augustini Papiae*, ed. Rodolfo Maiocchi and Naz Casacca, 3 vols (Pavia, 1905–7), especially 1: 15. See also Saak, *High Way to Heaven*, 160.

[12] *Codex Diplomaticus*, ed. Maiocchi and Casacca, 1: 14.

[13] Bourdua, '*De origine et progressu ordinis fratrum heremitarum*', 178.

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This polemical purpose excludes one possibility for the hermits' deletion of Monica, namely, that she might have been removed out of a concern for female spirituality and that her erasure served to discourage those who sought a female exemplar in her. The intended readership of these texts is implied by this function: the texts were directed to the hermits themselves, to help in defending the legitimacy of their order, or to the Canons Regular, in order to attack the canons' claims that they, and not the hermits, were the order genuinely founded by Augustine. While the removal of Monica may indicate some degree of dismissal of the validity of female spirituality, the readership was exclusively male and the texts were not aimed at female monastics. Monica's exclusion is much more convincingly read as buttressing the hermits' narrowed definition of Augustine's religious experiences, excluding doubt.

Monica and Augustine's Doubt in the *Confessions*

Earlier interpreters of the *Confessions* generally adopted an unflattering view of Monica, taking their cues from the passages in which Augustine finds her to have been interfering and overbearing.[14] Recently, however, scholars including Rosemary Radford Ruether, Anne-Marie Bowery, Leo Ferrari, Elizabeth Clark, Virginia Burrus, Catherine Keller, Rosemary Rader and Silvia Benso have sought to rehabilitate Monica and imbue her character with religious significance.[15] In response to their work, there have been discussions of the analogy made by Augustine between his mother Monica and

[14] Examples include Robert Ottley, *Studies in the Confessions of St Augustine* (London, 1919), 5; Muriel Spark, 'St Monica', *The Month* 17 (1957), 309–20, at 310; Carl Levenson, 'Distance and Presence in Augustine's Confessions', *Journal of Religion* 65 (1985), 500–12, at 505; Eric J. Ziolkowski, 'St Augustine: Aeneas' Antitype, Monica's Boy', *Literature and Theology* 9 (1995), 1–23, at 3.

[15] Rosemary Radford Ruether, 'Augustine: Sexuality, Gender and Women', Anne-Marie Bowery, 'Monica: The Feminine Face of Christ', Virginia Burrus and Catherine Keller, 'Confessing Monica', in Judith Chelius Stark, ed., *Feminist Interpretations of Augustine* (University Park, PA, 2007), 47–67, 69–95, 119–45 respectively; Leo Ferrari, 'Monica on the Wooden Ruler', *Augustinian Studies* 6 (1975), 193–205; Elizabeth A. Clark, 'Holy Women, Holy Words: Early Christian Women, Social History, and the "Linguistic Turn"', *JECS* 6 (1998), 413–30; Rosemary Rader, *Breaking Boundaries: Male/Female Friendship in Early Christian Communities* (New York, 1983); Silvia Benso, 'Monica's Grin of Tension', in Carl G. Vaught, ed., *Contemporary Themes in Augustine's Confessions: Part II, Contemporary Philosophy* 15/2 (1993), 5–10.

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the Mother Church,[16] the redemptive powers associated with Monica's tears,[17] and her mediating function, as she becomes Christlike in her faith.[18]

The wealth of discussion surrounding the religious function of Monica has alerted readers to the significance of her presence in Augustine's religious journey. Anne-Marie Bowery reads Augustine's portrayal of his passage to Christianity as one in which he becomes increasingly like Monica,[19] while Monica symbolically becomes male, 'in the clothing of a woman but with a virile faith' (*Matre adhaerente nobis mulieris habitu, virile fide*).[20] Her role as Augustine's biological mother is overtaken by her role as his spiritual mother: she remains the constant force exhorting him to place his faith in God. As Colin Starnes observes, 'Augustine always speaks of his baptism as a rebirth and … refers to Ambrose and Monica, respectively, as the father and mother of his second birth.'[21]

Having acknowledged the importance of Monica in Augustine's religious journey, it is possible to trace parallels between his physical distance from Monica and his spiritual distance from, and doubt of, God. In Book 1 of the *Confessions*, it is Monica who insists that God is Augustine's true father, and who is the first means by which he is introduced to God.[22] She is aware of the temptations that await him,[23] and banishes him from her home when he becomes a Manichee.[24] In Book 5, when Augustine becomes disillusioned with Faustus, he attributes this change not only to God but also to the blood of Monica's heart, recalling the redemptive power of the blood of Christ.[25] When he abandons his mother for Rome, he realizes retrospectively that he experienced there a false felicity.[26] After the miraculous conversion in Valerius's garden and his entrance into the

[16] Bowery, 'Monica: The Feminine Face of Christ', 75.
[17] Ferrari, 'Monica on the Wooden Ruler'; see also, in this volume, Kimberley-Joy Knight, 'Lachrymose Holiness and the Problem of Doubt in Thirteenth- and Fourteenth-Century Hagiographies', 122–38.
[18] Benso, 'Monica's Grin of Tension', 8.
[19] Bowery, 'Monica: The Feminine Face of Christ', 80.
[20] Augustine, *Confessions* 9.4.8 (ed. and transl. by Henry Chadwick [Oxford, 1991], 160).
[21] Colin Starnes, *Augustine's Conversion: A Guide to the Argument of Confessions I–IX* (Kitchener, ON, 1990), 129.
[22] Augustine, *Confessions* 1.11.17.
[23] Ibid. 1.11.18.
[24] Ibid. 3.11.19.
[25] Ibid. 5.7.13.
[26] Ibid. 5.8.14–15.

https://doi.org/10.1017/stc.2015.9 Published online by Cambridge University Press

house of God, Augustine physically enters a house that he connects only to Monica. Overlooking the garden, she has symbolically overseen the entire event.[27] Augustine's description of Lady Continence in Book 8 as a serene, cheerful and fruitful mother, with the Lord as her husband, also bears noteworthy similarity to his descriptions of Monica.[28] His account of his grief at her death is perhaps the most striking, as he weeps uncontrollably once he finds some solitude.[29]

Monica features as a figure of spiritual guidance and reassurance for Augustine. She is a woman who experiences holiness without the philosophical education enjoyed by her son. Thus, as Kim Power argues, Monica represents an alternative model of spirituality that causes Augustine to reconsider the place and value of philosophy.[30] In Valerius's garden, Augustine laments to Alypius that 'uneducated people are rising up and capturing heaven and we with our high culture without any heart – see where we roll in the mud of flesh and blood!'[31] The unlettered form a counterpoint to Augustine's intellectualization of God, demonstrating to the reader that the way to God is one of faith, and not necessarily one of understanding. Monica is the best exemplar of this, remaining faithful in her devotion to God throughout her life, even though she does not understand the philosophical difficulties Augustine encounters on his road to conversion. Ultimately, it is an emotional and mystical religious experience that converts him and not a rational argument, and this culminates at Ostia, where Augustine and Monica share a vision of God.[32]

While Monica differs starkly from the well-educated Augustine, she also offers an example of constancy, never doubting her faith in God. She is essential to Augustine's account of his spiritual peregrinations, as it is through her censures and lamentations that the reader becomes acquainted with Augustine's distance from God. When Augustine steals fruit as a child, maintains inappropriate sexual relationships, finds spiritual solace in classical philosophy or Manichaeism, leaves for Rome in search of temporal success, and is unable to overcome his difficulties in accepting Christianity, it is Monica who

[27] Bowery, 'Monica: The Feminine Face of Christ', 85; cf. Augustine, *Confessions* 8.12.30.
[28] Bowery, 'Monica: The Feminine Face of Christ', 85; cf. Augustine, *Confessions* 8.11.27.
[29] Augustine, *Confessions* 9.12.30.
[30] Kim Power, *Veiled Desire: Augustine's Writing on Women* (London, 1995), 71–93.
[31] 'Surgunt indocti et caelum rapiunt, et nos cum doctrinis nostris sine corde, ecce ubi voluntamur in carne et sanguine!': Augustine, *Confessions* 8.8.19.
[32] Ibid. 9.10.23–6.

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reproaches him for his doubt and sinful behaviour.[33] When he embraces faith, it is Monica whom he tells of his conversion and she with whom he experiences a vision of God at Ostia.[34] Through her example, Augustine is led to Christ and overcomes his doubt.

Monica and the Augustinian Hermits

Augustine's depiction of Monica is all the more noteworthy when compared to her treatment (or the lack of it) in the five medieval texts written by Augustinian Hermits. In the first, the anonymous *Vita Aurelii Augustini Hipponensis episcopi* written between 1322 and 1331,[35] Monica is conspicuously absent from the narrative. The *Vita*'s only reference to her is to affirm that many religious men and women gathered to mourn her at her death.[36]

The second text, the *Initium sive processus Ordinis heremitarum sancti Augustini* (1330),[37] contains the same observation – that many

[33] For the theft of the pears, see ibid. 2.4.9. This is contrasted with Augustine's many references to Monica in the section on his infancy and youth as having already found God, such as when he describes his mother as having nourished him in the womb when he was sinful (1.7.12), or his comparison of the piety of his mother to the Church, which he describes as the mother of us all: 2.11.17. Monica fears for Augustine when he reaches sexual maturity and implores him not to act upon that maturity; Augustine dismisses her concerns as 'womanish counsels' and endeavours to keep up with the sexual exploits of his adolescent friends: 2.3.6–7. Augustine discusses his concubine and initially unwanted son with her at the beginning of Book 4, and sends her away in order to prepare for marriage to a Roman girl: 6.15.25. This follows a discussion about the lengths to which Monica went in order to arrange his marriage, so as to offer him a legitimate place to express his sexuality: 6.13.23. Augustine recalls how he was attracted to the philosophy of Cicero, particularly in the *Hortensius*, in spite of his mother's attempts to nourish him with the love of Christ: 3.4.8. He becomes a Manichee in Book 4, and describes his mother's weeping for his soul at length: 3.11.19–20. Monica begs Augustine not to go to Rome, or at least to allow her to accompany him; he deceives her and leaves in the night while she is asleep: 5.8.15. For examples of Augustine struggling to accept Christianity in his heart even though he had already rationally accepted the truth of Christ, see 8.11.25–7. In particular, he has difficulty letting go of his lustful desires, in spite of Monica's continued counsels on the subject.

[34] Augustine experiences a mystical conversion under the fig tree in Valerius's garden in Book 8. He tells his mother of his '*tolle lege*' experience and she rejoices: 8.12.30. For Augustine's vision at Ostia with Monica, the experience which marks his full acceptance of Christ and commitment to his faith, see note 32 above.

[35] Florence, Biblioteca Laurenziana, MS Plut. 90. Sup. 48, fols 1^{r}–13^{r}; see Arbesmann, 'The *Vita*', 320.

[36] MS Plut. 90. Sup. 48, fol. 7^{r}.

[37] Rano, 'Las dos primeras obras', 337. This work appears in the same manuscript as the *Vita Aurelii Augustini Hipponensis episcopi*, MS Plut. 90, Sup. 48.

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religious men came to Monica's funeral[38] – but the author also comments that Evodius, one of Augustine's companions, sang at her death.[39] Moreover, the author remarks that '[Augustine's] mother rejoiced with him before the time of calm, because she saw him not only as a faithful Christian but even as a servant of God'.[40] In this use of the term *servus Dei*, generally adopted by Augustine to signify a monk,[41] the author seems to emphasize that Augustine converted not just to Christianity, but more specifically to a monastic – and by implication ascetic – form of Christianity, making a direct connection between Monica's rejoicing and Augustine's monasticism.

The third text, the *Sermo de beato Augustino* by Nicholas of Alessandria, from the mid-1330s,[42] was based upon the *Initium* and includes exactly the same references to Monica, supplemented by an additional reference to her as '[Augustine's] pious mother' (*pia matre*).[43] Nicholas gives no description or account of Monica's death except to say that Augustine was thirty-three at the time and that many hermits came to her funeral.[44] Similarly, Henry of Friemar, in his *Tractatus de origine et progressu Ordinis fratrum heremitarum sancti Augustini et vero ac proprio titulo eiusdem*, written in 1334 at the end of his career,[45] notes only the

[38] Ibid., fol. 38^{v}.
[39] Ibid.
[40] 'Mater sua ante tempus quietationis eidem congratulabatur, quod non tantum fidelem christianum eum videbat, sed etiam Dei servum': ibid., fol. 58^{v}.
[41] Van der Lof remarks that there were three ways in which Augustine used the term *servus Dei*, the development of which mirrors ecclesiastical developments in Augustine's time. Initially, Augustine appears to have used the term simply to mean any member of Christendom. As the concept of eremitism and monasticism grew, it evolved to signify a brotherhood of a special few, who practised a genre of asceticism in the search of religious perfection. Finally, after having founded a monastery in Hippo, he used the term to mean specifically those living a monastic life: L. J. van der Lof, 'The Threefold Meaning of *Servi Dei* in the Writings of Saint Augustine', *Augustinian Studies* 12 (1981), 43–59, at 56. Zumkeller also argues that Augustine's usage of the words *servire Deo* implied the goals of the monastic life and that *servus Dei* was increasingly used to mean 'monk' over any previous connotations. He found over seventy-five instances in Augustine's writings of *servus Dei* or *servire Deo* being so used: Adolar Zumkeller, *Das Mönchtum des heiligen Augustinus*, Cassiciacum 11, 2nd edn (Würzburg, 1968), 158.
[42] Prague, Clementum, Metropolitan Chapter Library, MS Metr. Kap. 812, fols 35^{v}–40^{r}. This tentative dating is supplied by Saak (*High Way to Heaven*, 201), who uses Nicholas of Alessandria's involvement in the proceedings between the canons and the hermits as the motivation behind his authorship. An edition of this text appeared in Rano, 'Las dos primeras obras', 352–76.
[43] MS Metr. Kap. 812, fol. 38^{r}.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Saak, *High Way to Heaven*, 209.

https://doi.org/10.1017/stc.2015.9 Published online by Cambridge University Press

death – and nothing of the life – of Monica, and does so almost as an afterthought, not as an event integral to Augustine's story. The first mention of her by name states that she was buried in Ostia, rather than with her husband in Africa. Augustine's grief is not described, and Henry attributes no significance to her death except to say that thereafter Augustine went to live in Tuscany with the hermits of Simplicianus for two years.

Jordan of Quedlinburg's text, the *Vita sancti Augustini*, from the late 1330s,[46] treats Monica in a rather different way. Using the *Confessions* and the pseudo-Augustinian *Sermones ad fratres suos in heremo* as direct sources,[47] Jordan includes much more of Augustine's account of his mother's influence. Jordan's first reference to Monica is as 'the most Christian woman' (*christianissima*),[48] and he notes Monica's admonitions of Augustine for his behaviour, but also that Augustine did not obey her counsels. He includes many of the instances of Monica's appearances in the *Confessions*, such as the episode of the wooden ruler, in which Monica is told by a mysterious figure that wherever she is, so too will Augustine be. Jordan also includes her lament at her son's perdition, such as when he leaves for Rome without her; and the circumstances surrounding her death.[49] However, whilst Jordan portrays her positively overall, his characterization of Monica lacks the complexity of the woman described in the *Confessions*, not least because he does not reproduce Augustine's long reflections on her piety and goodness. His is a superficial depiction, exploring little of her emotional impact on Augustine and lacking the imagery associated with the Church, Christ or a model Christian.

With the reduction of the role of Monica within these texts, Augustine's early experiences with sin and doubt are also significantly diminished. What had been an essential part of Augustine's own narrative, namely, his struggle with sin before his conversion, replete with theft, heresy and lust, is ignored in all five fourteenth-century texts.

[46] Paris, Biblothèque de l'Arsenal, MS 251, fols 1^{rb}–104^{v}; cf. Arbesmann, 'Jordanus of Saxony's *Vita S. Augustini*'. There has been some debate regarding the date of authorship of this text, with Hümpfner assigning it a date of 1319–22: 'Introduction', xxiv; whereas Walsh has argued for the late 1330s, as it was at that time that Jordan was working with Henry of Friemar: 'Wie ein Bettelorden zu (s)einem Gründer kam', 593. The latter dating has generally found more acceptance.

[47] MS 251, fol. 54^{rb}.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Ibid., fol. 54^{vb}. For Augustine's departure for Rome and Monica's death, see ibid., fols 56^{ra}, 61^{rb} respectively.

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Moreover, only one – Jordan of Quedlinburg's *Vita sancti Augustini* – even mentions Augustine's miraculous conversion, the event that forms the apex of the *Confessions*. These hermits portrayed Augustine's life as one of religious constancy by eliminating those problematic episodes, which took place primarily in his younger years, and in which Monica was a prominent feature. Monica's absence is a corollary of their desire to contain Augustine's spiritual peregrinations and doubt about the ascetic life.

The Implications of Doubting Monica

It is possible that the lack of emphasis on Monica in these five texts is a result of reliance upon other medieval *Lives* of Augustine (Possidius, Philip of Harvengt or Jacobus of Voragine) which similarly mention Monica infrequently, rather than upon Augustine's *Confessions*. Several of the hermits' texts cite repeatedly from Possidius and Philip of Harvengt, whose work Jordan refers to as the *legenda famosa*.[50] Knowledge of these other *Lives* does not, however, preclude knowledge of the *Confessions*, which was widely available in late medieval Europe and is cited at length by all five authors.[51] Yet even Jordan of Quedlinburg, the most familiar of the five with the *Confessions*, still passes over Monica's part in the story.

The key to understanding the motivations behind this downplaying of Monica's role lies in the context of the composition of these texts. Given their polemical and apologetic nature – both as a defence of the heritage of the OESA as directly founded by Augustine

[50] Ibid., fol. 64^{rb}. A phrase from Possidius's *Vita Augustini*, claiming that Augustine had lived in an eremitical way when overseas (i.e. when he was Italy) is used in the first four texts to prove that Augustine founded a monastic community while living in Italy: Possidius, *Vita Augustini* 5.52.7–8 (PL 32, 37). For the use made of this, see MS Plut. 90. Sup. 48, fol. 8^{r} (*Vita Augustini*); Rano, 'Las dos primeras obras', 339–40 (*Initium*), 368 (Nicholas of Alessandria, *Sermo de beato Augustino*); Arbesmann, ed., 'Henry of Friemar's *Treatise*', 97, 121–7.

[51] For example, Petrarch possessed a small copy of Augustine's *Confessions*, which he claimed to carry everywhere with him, specifically on his famous climb of Mont Ventoux; he was given it by his friend Dionigi da Borgo San Sepolcro, an Italian Augustinian Hermit: *The Essential Petrarch*, ed. and transl. Peter Hainsworth (Indianapolis, IN, 2010), 220–6, especially 224–5. Jordan of Quedlinburg stated explicitly at the beginning of his text that he was using the *Confessions*, along with the *Sermones ad fratres in heremo*, as his primary source material: MS 251, fol. 54^{rb}. Saak refers to the anonymous *Vita* as 'strung together portions of texts from Augustine's *Confessions*', and to the *Initium* as being based primarily on the *Confessions* and Possidius: *High Way to Heaven*, 190, 196.

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and as a means of showing the exclusivity of the Augustinian rule, which (at least in their own view) was exemplified in its entirety only by the Augustinian Hermits – these texts strive to portray Augustine's religious example as synonymous with the eremitical lifestyle of the OESA. The authors define Augustine's life according to their own understanding of their order as the fulfilment of his example, and their characterization of Augustine in this sense reflects their own religious practice.

In the *Confessions,* however, the presence of Monica makes Augustine's religious experiences decidedly different from the daily practice of the OESA. Monica witnesses to a non-intellectual and non-clerical path to God that ultimately proved more successful than that initially taken by Augustine. When a mystical, emotional connection with God eventually leads Augustine to the religious path, the reader of the *Confessions* is reminded of Monica's example. While a portrayal of Augustine overcoming doubt could have been a useful hagiographical topos, any notion that Augustine doubted the eremitical path, and the discipline and rule of life associated with that path, would weaken the OESA's claims to Augustinian parentage and the exclusivity of their Augustinian religious practice. For the hermits to prove their claims over those of the canons, they needed eremitism to be at the centre of Augustine's religious practice, favouring rational enquiry of God over an emotional faith such as Monica's. The presence of Monica would have made that emphasis impossible, since it was her genre of devotion that Augustine utilized once his rational and austere religious life had failed to overcome his doubt. Augustine's doubt in the *Confessions*, ultimately, was a painful reminder to the hermits of contemporary doubt regarding their Augustinian parentage and the similarity of their own religion to that of their putative founder. The only substantial references to Monica in these texts – to her death and her funeral – serve to contain her guidance of Augustine; by mentioning her only in the context of her death, they controlled her influence by metaphorically silencing her and rejecting her religious excellence.

As a regular order under attack not only from the Augustinian Canons but also from ecclesiastical councils, which sought to minimize monastic diversity, it was only natural that the OESA would seek to promote its own religious rule and discipline above all others. By mentioning Monica only in conjunction with the hermit Simplicianus or with praise of the eremitical life, these hermit authors discarded an element of Augustine's life-story which did not lend itself to

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championing the eremitical life to the exclusion of all else. For these hermits, Monica was a representation of Augustine's problematic doubt about the intellectual and regular path and of the ultimate failure of that path in his religious experience. In order to overcome their own self-doubt about their heritage and foundation and to connect their order unequivocally to the legacy of Augustine, the hermits sought to minimize Augustine's own doubt and, with that, wrote the complex character of Monica out of the story.

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