This is the author accepted manuscript of Liise Lehtsalu, "Abandoning the Sacred Citadels? Women religious and urban space in early modern Bologna." Geschichte und Region/ Storia e regione 26.2 (2017), 115-134. https://storiaeregione.eu/de/zeitschrift/nummer/universitaet-und-region-universita-e-regione

Abandoning the Sacred Citadels? Women religious and urban space in early modern Bologna*

Liise Lehtsalu

Introduction

The archbishop of Milan, Carlo Borromeo, in a sermon delivered to the Angelics of S. Paolo Converso in Milan in 1583, explained to the nuns:

"[…] you, my dearest daughters, segregated from the world and enclosed in these sacred cloisters […] you discover God's benevolence, His mercy, compassion, and His other virtues that He bestowed upon you and that He enacted through you; having renounced your relatives, having rejected nobility and the riches of the world, you will enjoy the fruit of this holy segregation, you will exhibit the happiness arising from your particular status, which is the beginning of Paradise [on Earth][…]".[1]

Borromeo encouraged the nuns to renounce worldly concerns, relationships, and goods and to engage with God in their cloister, which he considered the imitation of Paradise on earth. The archbishop had envisioned how this cloister, and the cloisters of all female monastic communities, should look like in the "Rule for Nuns" (1565) that applied to all convents in the dioceses of Milan. The Rule focused on securing the entryways of convents to keep the secular world at bay. The ideal convent had only two entrances, one for carts and the other for pedestrians. The entrance for carts was fitted with double gates; the pedestrian gate included a turnstile and was attended by two gate-keeper nuns. The locks on all entrances had two sets of keys, one for the mother superior and the other for the most senior nun in the community. The two women both had to be present to open any of the gates. However, exchanges between the inside of the convent and the outside world occurred not only through the two entrances.

* I thank the delegates to the Bozner Gesprächen zur Regionalgeschichte in Bolzano in September 2016 and Urban Belonging: History and the Power of Place in London in January 2017 for their feedback on the earlier versions of this work as well as Margareth Lanzinger, Johanna Mitterhofer, and the two anonymous reviewers.

[1] Sermone quarto (1583). In: Sermoni familiari di S. Carlo Borromeo Cardinale di Santa Prassede, e arcivescovo di Milano, fatti alle monache dette Angeliche dell'insigne Monastero di S. Paolo in quella Città; raccolti fedelmente dalla viva voce del Santo per la Reverenda Madre Angelica Agata Sfondrata, e Pubblicati ora la prima volta da Codici Manuscritti per opera di D. Gaetano Volpi, Padova 1719, p. 26. For more on S. Paolo Converso, see P. Renee BAERNSTEIN, A Convent Tale: A Century of Sisterhood in Spanish Milan, New York 2002.

Borromeo paid equal attention to securing the windows and the walls of the convent. Low walls afforded neighbors visual access to the convent and thus had to be raised above any neighboring property. All windows had to be fixed with grilles in which no more than a finger's width separated the bars to prevent people, objects, or affections from passing through. The grilles in the parlor had to be also covered with black cloth to further limit any contact between the nuns and their visitors.[2] The sending of the sixteenth-century sermons to the nuns of S. Paolo in Milan to print in the early-eighteenth century highlights the continued importance of Borromeo's prescriptions of physical and mental segregation of women religious in the centuries after.

Bishops across Italy drew on Borromeo's example to reform women's monastic communities in the aftermath of the Council of Trent (1545–1563).[3] The last session of the Council had re-introduced pope Boniface VIII's bull *Periculoso* (1298), which sought to separate nuns from laity by banning women from leaving their convents and severely restricting visitors' access to convents; subsequent papal bulls, *Circa pastoralis* (1566) in particular, clarified the remit of the Tridentine decrees and extended them to all women religious who had taken religious vows.[4] The application of Tridentine enclosure initiated a process of rebuilding and restructuring of female monastic spaces. Women religious had to be segregated from the secular world. Such segregation did not mean, however, that convents were hidden from view. Post-Tridentine convents came to dominate early modern Italian townscapes. As Helen Hills, Gabriella Zarri, and others have argued, the architecture of early modern convents, in particular features such as high walls, turnstiles, grilles, and locks, distinguished the conventual space from its surroundings and emphasized the difference between the religious within and the laity without.[5] The conventual space reified the figure of the enclosed nun: she was denied an individual presence in the early modern city where she was nonetheless institutionalized in the spiritual and social construct of the enclosed convent.

---

[2] Regole appartenenti alle monache. In: Acta synodalia diocesana ecclesiae mediolanensis, vol. 2, Brixen 1603, p. 780–788.

[3] Gabriella ZARRI, Recinti: Donne, clausura e matrimonio nella prima età moderna, Bologna 2000, p. 119. See also BAERENSTEIN, A Convent Tale, p. 81–84; Paolo PRODI, Il cardinale Gabriele Paleotti (1522–1597), Rome 1959.

[4] Raimondo CREYTENS, La Riforma dei monasteri femminili dopo i Decreti Tridentini. In: Concilio di Trento e la Riforma Tridentina: Atti del convengno storico internazionale, Trento 2–6 settembre 1963, vol. 1, Rome 1965.

[5] Helen HILLS, Invisible City: The Architecture of Devotion in Seventeenth-Century Neapolitan Convents, New York 2004; Francesca MEDIOLI, Monache e monacazioni nel Seicento. In: Rivista di storia e letteratura religiosa 33 (1997), p. 670–693, in particular p. 679–680; ZARRI, Recinti, p. 117–121.

This is the author accepted manuscript of Liise Lehtsalu, "Abandoning the Sacred Citadels? Women religious and urban space in early modern Bologna." Geschichte und Region/ Storia e regione 26.2 (2017), 115-134. https://storiaeregione.eu/de/zeitschrift/nummer/universitaet-und-region-universita-e-regione

The early modern Italian society perceived convents as bulwarks: nuns produced intercessory prayer that saved the civic community from divine disgrace. This function of nuns was often expressed in highly symbolic ways. In early modern Bologna, convents formed a protective circle around the city as they dotted the inner perimeter of the city walls.[6] In Venice, a metaphorical marriage between the doge and the abbess of the convent of S. Maria delle Vergini was celebrated. The ceremony dated back to the twelfth century and underscored reciprocity between Venice and its nuns. As Mary Laven argues, "Just as the doge gave the abbess temporal authority with which to govern her community, so the abbess invested the ducal authority with sanctity."[7] The real or imagined spiritual labor of nuns within their cloisters granted them a political role in the early modern city.[8] Convents also served social and economic functions in early modern society. As the contemporary dictum *aut maritus aut murus* reflects, early modern Catholic society recognized two female life paths: the marriage or the convent.[9] Changing marriage and inheritance patterns in the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, including the rise of primogeniture and the related attempts to conserve family patrimonies by dowering only one or two daughters, limited women's chances of marriage, in particular among the socio-economic elites. A significant percentage of elite women entered convents to become nuns, their monacization often forced by family strategies.[10] Convents emerged as important nodes in the social and economic lives of the early modern elites who found in monastic institutions a safeguard to the respectability of their unmarried daughters,

---

[6] Gabriella ZARRI, I monasteri femminili a Bologna tra il XIII e il XVII secolo. In: Atti e memorie: Deputazione di Storia Patria per le Province di Romagna 24 (1973), p. 133–224.

[7] Mary LAVEN, Virgins of Venice: Enclosed Lives and Broken Vows in the Renaissance Convent, New York 2003, p. 76.

[8] HILLS, Invisible City, chap. 2; Ulrike STRASSER, Early Modern Nuns and the Feminist Politics of Religion. In: The Journal of Religion 84 (2004), p. 529–554; Ulrike STRASSER, State of Virginity: Gender, Religion, and Politics in an Early Modern Catholic State, Ann Arbor, MI 2004.

[9] Olwen HUFTON, The Prospect Before Her: A History of Women in Western Europe, New York 1996; Kate LOWE, Secular Brides and Convent Brides: Wedding Ceremonies in Italy during the Renaissance and Counter-Reformation. In: Trevor DEAN/K. J. P. LOWE (eds.), Marriage in Italy, 1300–1650, Cambridge 1998; ZARRI, Recinti, p. 46–56.

[10] Fifty to seventy-five present of daughters of elite families became nuns in early modern Milan, Florence, and Venice. Baernstein, A Convent Tale, p. 10–15; Richard B. LITCHFIELD, Demographic Characteristics of Florentine Patrician Families, Sixteenth to Nineteenth Centuries. In: The Journal of Economic History 29 (1969), p. 191–205; D. E. ZANETTI/ B. MALTBY, The Patriziato of Milan from the Domination of Spain to the Unification of Italy: An Outline of the Social and Demographic History. In: Social History 2 (1977), p. 745–760. On forced monacizations, see Francesca MEDIOLI, L'inferno monacale di Arcangela Tarabotti, Turin 1990; Anne Jacobson SCHUTTE, By Force and Fear: Taking and Breaking Monastic Vows in Early Modern Europe, Ithaca, NY 2011.

sisters, and aunts.[11] To fulfill the spiritual, political, social, and economic expectations put on convents, conventual spaces were distinct from the secular society around them, scholars argue.

Theorizing space, we understand that space is a social product that is located in place and time. Spaces are defined through relationships of production and reproduction and they can only be studied by examining these relationships and how they are put into practice. In other words, space is an experience. It is distinct from, but closely related to, a physical location and the meanings associated to this location when creating place. Space connects locations and places and has both material as well as immaterial qualities. Space is the result of how people engage with their surroundings and such engagement, in turn, shapes the uses of a place and endows it with meaning.[12] If monastic enclosure rendered convents into 'sacred citadels', to use Helen Hills's words, then only the convent as an institution acquired meaning in early modern urban space. [13] Individual women religious who inhabited the convent were removed from early modern urban space because enclosure deprived them of relationships to the people and experiences of the places that constituted this urban space.

The proposed dichotomy between conventual and urban spaces reflects the wider scholarship on gender in early modern urban space: scholars have argued that Renaissance and early modern Italian towns were divided into male and female spaces. Men dominated the public spaces such as streets, piazzas, guild halls, and taverns, while women were associated with "enclosed and bounded" spaces such as the home, the parish-neighborhood, convents and churches.[14] However, in this scholarship, urban space is "a silent background", a locational coulisse against which gendered social and economic relationships of Renaissance and early modern Italy play out.[15] More recently, Elizabeth Cohen has challenged such characterizations of early modern Italian urban space. Cohen argues that "an image of generalized female

---

[11] Silvia EVANGELISTI, Nuns: A History of Convent Life 1450–1700, Oxford 2007; Elisa NOVI CHAVARRIA, Monache e gentildonne: Un labile confine: Poteri politici e identità religiose nei monasteri napoletani: secoli XVI–XVII, Milan 2001; Juta Gisela SPERLING, Convents and the Body Politic in Late Renaissance Venice, Chicago 1999; ZARRI, Recinti.

[12] Michel DE CERTEAU, The Practice of Everyday Life, trans. Steven Rendell, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1984 [1980]; Leif JERRAM, Space: A Useless Category for Historical Analysis? In: History and Theory 52 (2013), p. 400–419; Henri LEFEBVRE, The Production of Space, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, Malden, MA 1991 [1974]; DOREEN MASSEY, Space, Place and Gender, Cambridge 1994.

[13] HILLS, Invisible City, chap. 1.

[14] Dennis ROMANO, Gender and the Urban Geography of Renaissance Venice. In: Journal of Social History 23 (1989), p. 339–353, cit. on p. 347.

[15] Robert C. DAVIS, The Geography of Gender in the Renaissance. In: Judith C. BROWN/Robert C. DAVIS (eds.), Gender and Society in Renaissance Italy, London and New York 1998, p. 19-38, cit. on p. 20.

seclusion misrepresents the urban life of early modern Italy"; age, rank, status, and location all influenced how women engaged with urban space, which functioned not as a silent background but enabled and shaped social relationships.[16] Women actively shaped houses, convents, and parish-neighborhoods through their relationships with other women and men who also occupied these spaces. And these spaces, in turn, shaped the activities of early modern women and how they related to the people around them.

In this article, I examine the place of women religious in the urban space of late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Bologna. I consider both enclosed nuns, who were recognized as *moniales* in canon law, as well as third order women religious who were recognized as monastic women by their contemporaries but rarely professed all three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience and adopted monastic enclosure.[17] There were twenty-eight enclosed convents and thirteen third order communities in Bologna in the eighteenth century.[18] In my analysis, I draw on two case studies: the enclosed Dominican nuns of S. Agnese and the Franciscan third order women religious of S. Maria della Carità, who observed voluntary enclosure. By studying a variety of women religious, and not only enclosed nuns, this study moves beyond the elite convents that dominate current scholarship. Moreover, seeking a broader understanding of women religious in the urban space of early modern Bologna, the article considers evidence from the late-seventeenth to the eighteenth century, thus expanding the chronology of most current scholarship on women religious in early modern Italy. In 1705, the local senate asked the archbishop of Bologna to intercede with the Pope to prevent any new enclosed convents from being founded in the city; at the time, monastic communities occupied approximately one-sixth of the urban territory and the senate argued that the religious took up too much of the existing building stock.[19] The contemporaries felt the presence of convents and religious in their urban space. This article explores the intersections between conventual spaces and urban space in Bologna. Both early modern monastic reformers and later scholars of this period focus on monastic enclosure as determining the place of women religious in early modern urban space.

---

[16] Elizabeth S. COHEN, To Pray, To Work, To Hear, To Speak: Women in Roman Streets C. 1600. In: Journal of Early Modern History 12 (2008), p. 289–311, cit. on p. 294.

[17] Giancarlo ROCCA, Voto. In: Dizionario degli Istituti di perfezione, Rome 2003, p. 548-570.

[18] ZARRI, I monasteri femminili a Bologna; Mario FANTI, Abiti e lavori delle monache di Bologna in una serie di disegni del secolo XVIII, Bologna 1972.

[19] M. Giovanna CAMBRIA, Il monastero domenicano di S. Agnese in Bologna: Storia e documenti, Bologna 1973, p. 21–22.

This is the author accepted manuscript of Liise Lehtsalu, "Abandoning the Sacred Citadels? Women religious and urban space in early modern Bologna." Geschichte und Region/ Storia e regione 26.2 (2017), 115-134. https://storiaeregione.eu/de/zeitschrift/nummer/universitaet-und-region-universita-e-regione

I do not examine monastic enclosure, or the reactions to it by women religious. Rather, I pursue a close reading of space. Focusing on space leads to a better understanding of the place of convents and women religious in early modern cities and begins to break down the image of early modern convents as sacred citadels.

The nuns of S. Agnese in the parish of S. Maria delle Muratelle

In 1796, the Cardinal Legate of Bologna ordered a new census of the city to survey the economic standing of all urban households.[20] The census remained incomplete in the aftermath of the social and administrative changes caused by the advancing Army of Italy and the subsequent French take-over of Bologna in summer 1796. Nonetheless, moving from house to house, from household to household, the census-takers successfully recorded about 10 percent of the c. 70,000 population in Bologna at the time.[21] One of the parishes for which data exists is S. Maria delle Muratelle in the southeast of the city.[22] The census of S. Maria delle Muratelle was spearheaded by three men from the parish: captain Francesco Beccadelli Senesi, Pietro Paolo Folesani Riviera, and Giuseppe Rodolfi.[23] When moving about the parish to complete their work, the men frequently described houses and activities of people in relation to near-by noble houses, churches, and monastic communities. Such buildings served as physical landmarks but also as central nodes of activity in the parish. The census represents local knowledge of the parish of S. Maria delle Muratelle and sheds light onto the contemporaries' experience of the urban space in late-eighteenth century Bologna. Part of this urban space and a central node in the parish of S. Maria delle Muratelle was the Dominican convent of S. Agnese.

---

[20] Aldino MONTI, Alle origini della borghesia urbana: La proprietà immobiliare a Bologna 1797–1810, Bologna 1985. For scholarship using this census, see the work of Maura Palazzi, in particular Maura PALAZZI, 'Tessitrici, serve, treccole' Donne, lavoro, e famiglia a Bologna nel Settecento. In: Simonetta CAVACIOCCHI (ed.), La donna nell'economia secc. XIII–XVIII. Atti della "Ventunesima Settimana di Studi" 10–15 aprile 1989, Florence 1990, p. 359-376.

[21] Athos BELLETTINI, La popolazione di Bologna dal secolo XV all'unificazione italiana, Bologna 1961, p. 27.

[22] The census of S. Maria delle Muratelle includes 44 folios. Fol. 18 and fol. 38–39 are missing; fol. 44 is incomplete, indicating that data is also missing from the end of this series. The signatures of the census deputes date the census of S. Maria delle Muratelle to July 13, 1796, when the information was also confirmed by the parish priest (fol. 24). Archivio di Stato di Bologna [ASBO], Legato, Censimento di famiglie [Censimento], S. Maria delle Muratelle.

[23] The head of the deputies, Francesco Beccadelli Senesi, who was the Captain of the urban militia, lived with his family at Strada Saragozza 224 (fol. 25); Pietro Paolo Folesani Rivera, lived with his family at Strada Saragozza 146 (fol. 24); Giuseppe Rodolfi lived with his family at Strada Saragozza 252 (fol. 27). ASBO, Legato, Censimento, S. Maria delle Muratelle.

The convent complex of S. Agnese lay south of S. Maria delle Muratelle; the convent's northern walls ran along the present-day via Capramozza that marked the southern perimeter of the parish. The first Dominican convent in Bologna, S. Agnese was founded in 1223. The nuns moved to the Bagno Marino area between the second and the third circle of city walls, near the S. Mamolo gate, in the 1250s.[24] After the Council of Trent, the vicinity of the nuns to the city walls troubled local ecclesiastical authorities who sought to ensure proper observation of monastic enclosure in this prestigious convent. The third circle of Bolognese city walls included a system of ramparts and open spaces in addition to the wall. Throughout the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, the pastoral visitors to S. Agnese were concerned that people walking on top of the ramparts could see the south-facing parts of the convent, including cloisters and some cells. To ensure proper observance of monastic enclosure, such visual access had to be obstructed. First the pastoral visitors demanded that passers-by be forbidden from halting on the ramparts. Then they sought the demolition of a section of the ramparts immediately behind S. Agnese. Neither of the measures worked, however, because the visitors finally ordered the nuns to close off all south-facing windows and raise the convent walls above the height of the ramparts. The pastoral visitors also forbade the nuns of S. Agnese to sneak views of the surrounding city from the convent's imposing bell tower. The windows of the bell tower were to be closed.[25] The episcopal authorities sought to isolate the nuns of S. Agnese from the city around them, just as Carlo Borromeo had sought to segregate nuns in Milan over a century before. The recurring nature of the pastoral visitors' decrees in Bologna indicates, however, that the nuns of S. Agnese were in no hurry to raise the walls of their convent or to shut its windows. Moreover, in their attempts to seal off S. Agnese, the pastoral visitors seem to have overlooked that the nuns engaged with the urban space around the convent also without any direct exchanges over the low convent walls or from the bell tower. The census of the parish of S. Maria delle Muratelle reveals recurring interactions between the inhabitants of the

[24] CAMBRIA, Il monastero domenicano, p. 40–58. On the foundation of S. Agnese and the history of women religious in medieval Bologna, see Sherri FRANKS JOHNSON, Monastic Women and Religious Orders in Late Medieval Bologna, Cambridge 2014. S. Agnese is best-known for its rich literary and musical traditions, Elisabetta GRAZIOSI, Scrivere in convento: Devozione, enomio, persuasione nelle rime delle monache fra Cinque e Seicento. In: Gabriella ZARRI (ed.), Donna, disciplina, creanza cristiana dal XV al XVII secolo: studi e testi a stampa, Rome 1996; Craig A. MONSON, Elena Malvezzi's Keyboard Manuscript: A New Sixteenth-Century Source. In: Early Music History 9 (1990), p. 73–128.

[25] CAMBRIA, Il monastero domenicano, p. 129–130.

densely-populated parish and the convent that bring our attention to quotidian, mundane exchanges between the conventual space and the urban space.

The nuns of S. Agnese employed lawyers, accountants, sacristans, bakers, gardeners, servants, stable boys, as well as other workers to manage their affairs and ensure the good functioning of the monastic community.[26] Many of these employees lived in the parish of S. Maria delle Muratelle. Moving from house to house in 1796, the census-takers recorded men and women whose daily lives intertwined with S. Agnese. Five households on strada Capra Mozza (the present-day via Capramozza), five households on strada Bocca di Lupo (the present-day via Bocca di Lupo), and one household on via de' Mussolini (the present-day via dei Tessitori) included at least one person who worked for the nuns.[27] For example, in strada Capra Mozza 298 lived the 40-year-old widow Rosalia Mignani with her nephew; Mignani was a servant (*servente*) in S. Agnese while the 15-year old nephew donned the clerical habit. Next door to Mignani, in strada Capra Mozza 299, lived Luigi Mazzoli, the 28-year old sacristan of S. Agnese; Mazzoli lived with his wife, who worked as a bonnet-maker.[28] Further down the street, in strada Capra Mozza 302, lived two male servants (*serventi*) of S. Agnese: the 32-year old Angelo Sanguettoli lived with his wife, who was a spinner; the 43-year old Antonio Mazzarenti lived with his wife, also a spinner, and their two young children.[29] Finally, in strada Capra Mozza 351, which was also described as the garden of S. Agnese (*Orto di S. Agnese*), lived two gardeners (*ortolani*) of the nuns; the father and son Giuseppe and Vincenzo Ortolani lived with their wives, both of who also worked in convent gardens.[30] Many of these men and women would have entered and exited S. Agnese daily, some would have reached beyond the external areas of the convent and entered enclosure. Together with the servant nuns (*converse*)

---

[26] Ibidem, p. 92.

[27] In strada Bocca di Lupo 995, lived the 32-year old Luigi Piccirani with his wife and two young children; Piccirani was a servant (*servente*) in S. Agnese while his wife undertook 'domestic work'. In the apartment next to the Piccirani lived the 46-year old Rosa Corticelli, who also worked as a servant (*servente*) in S. Agnese. Corticelli lived with her ailing parents and two middle-aged sisters, both of who were spinners. Further down the street, in strada Bocca di Lupo 294, lived the oven-master of S. Agnese (*fornaro delle Madri di S.ta Agnese)*, Domenico Calori with his wife and three teenage children; Calori's wife and children were engaged in his workshop and as spinners. In strada Bocca di Lupo 292 lived the 35-year old widow Maria Salmi with her 12-year old daughter Giulia; Salmi was a manager (*fattora*) in S. Agnese. Finally, in strada Bocca di Lupo 287 lived the 50-year old Maria Bertonelli who worked as a gardener (*ortolana*) in S. Agnese. Around the corner, in via de' Mussolini 349, lived the 52-year old Domenico Chiarini with his wife; Chiarini was the manager (*fattore*) of S. Agnese while his wife worked as a spinner. ASBO, Legato, Censimento, fol. 3–5, 10.

[28] Ibidem, fol. 6.

[29] Ibidem, fol. 7.

[30] Ibidem, fol. 9.

who lived in the convent, they contributed to the growing number of servants in enclosed convents in early modern Italy. The Church remained suspicious of servants in convents, seeking to limit the number of servant nuns and requiring special episcopal permissions for laypeople to enter convents and enclosure. The presence of servants ran counter to the ideals of religious poverty and humility, and threatened enclosure, which, as we saw above, sought to segregate women religious from the secular world. On the other hand, servant nuns as well as lay servants and managers were necessary to sustain monastic enclosure and to manage the daily domestic, economic, and legal affairs of convents.[31] If we consider exchanges between the conventual and the urban space, the movement of lay servants and managers who worked in S. Agnese but lived in the parish of S. Maria delle Muratelle blurred the boundaries between the convent and the city beyond. For the laypeople, the convent and at least some of its inhabitants would have been part of their everyday experience of work and life in eighteenth-century Bologna.

S. Maria delle Muratelle was a densely-populated outer parish of Bologna. The houses here included small apartments that shared wells and outhouses, which were located in common courtyards. The instance of poverty was high, particularly on the more remote streets of the parish such as the strada Capra Mozza that were located far from the main urban thoroughfares.[32] Here streets were an extension of homes and neighbors developed close relationships to one another.[33] With the exception of the extended Ortolani family who lived

---

[31] On servants and managers in post-Tridentine convents, see Kathryn BURNS, Colonial Habits: Convents and the Spiritual Economy of Cuzco, Peru, Durham, NC 1999, p. 119–120; Sandra CAVALLO, Charity and Power in Early Modern Italy: Benefactors and Their Motives in Turin, 1541–1789, Cambridge 1995, chap. 3; Silvia EVANGELISTI, To Find God in Work? Female Social Stratification in Early Modern Italian Convents. In: European History Quarterly 38 (2008), p. 398–416; Lucia FERRANTE, Fare il bene per il proprio bene: attività assistenziali e vantaggi personali a Bologna tra Seicento e Settecento. In: Gian Paolo BRIZZI/Giuseppe OLMI (eds.), Dai cantieri della storia: Liber amicorum per Paolo Prodi, Bologna 2007, p. 445–453; Elizabeth A. LEHFELDT, Religious Women in Golden Age Spain: The Permeable Cloister, Burlington, VT 2005, p. 57–61; Liise LEHTSALU, Changing Perceptions of Women's Religious Institutions in Eighteenth-Century Bologna. In: The Historical Journal 55 (2012), p. 939–959.

[32] The 1796 census assessed the poverty of the households: 40 percent of the households on strada Capra Mozza, 17 percent of households on via de' Mussolini, 43 percent of the households on strada Belvedere, 31 percent of the households of strada Altaseta, and 50 percent of the households on via Bocca di Lupo were recorded as poor (the latter four streets connected strada Capra Mozza to the strada Saragozza, the main thoroughfare of the parish). ASBO, Legato, Censimento, S. Maria delle Muratelle. See also Fabio GUISBERTI, Elementi di topografia sociale in una grande città: il caso di Bologna in età moderna. In: Società Italiana di Demografia Storica (ed.), La demografia storica delle città italiane, Bologna 1982, p. 321-332.

[33] Maura PALAZZI, Donne sole: Storia dell'altra faccia dell'Italia tra antico regime e società contemporanea, Milan 1997, p. 196. Elizabeth Cohen and Thomas Cohen have argued the same for early modern Rome, Elizabeth S. COHEN/Thomas V. COHEN, Open and Shut: The Social Meanings of the Cinquecento Roman House. In: Studies in the Decorative Arts 9 (2001-2002), p. 61–84.

in the garden of S. Agnese, all the servants of S. Agnese who were recorded as living on strada Capra Mozza shared houses with other households. Rosalia Mingani and her nephew lived next door to a priest as well as a widowed seamstress and her four young children.[34] Luigi Mazzoli and his wife lived in a house that was home also to six other households: twenty-seven men, women, and children in total.[35] The families of Angelo Sangueottili and Antonio Mazzarenti lived next door to two never-married sisters who worked as spinners and an elderly, sickly married couple.[36] In such cramped conditions, it is hard to imagine that the servants of the nuns did not share some of their experiences in S. Agnese with their neighbors when meeting at a common well, in a stairway, or on the street. Through such encounters, the barriers between the conventual space and the urban space would have blurred further as the relationships created in the convent became part of the urban space beyond the convent. The nuns of S. Agnese employed some parishioners and thus occupied a central place in the household finances of these parishioners through who the convent also affected the people connected to these employees. To these parishioners, S. Agnese would not have been just a sacred community hidden behind high walls and closed windows but rather a community of women religious who shaped the daily lives of these men and women.

The financial and productive activities of the nuns also engaged them in the parish life. Fifty years prior to the census, in 1748, S. Agnese owned two houses on strada Capra Mozza and two houses of via de' Mussolini.[37] The nuns probably still owned some of this property in 1796, renting it out to local parishioners and establishing economic relationships with them in the process. The women religious were also active in manufacturing. In the eighteenth century, the Dominican superiors of the convent repeatedly forbade the nuns from preparing sweets and manufacturing other, unspecified items and selling them to laypeople.[38] Neighborhood societies occupied a central role in the social, economic, ritual, and emotional lives of early

[34] ASBO, Legato, Censimento, fol. 6.

[35] Ibidem, fol. 6–7.

[36] Ibidem, fol. 7.

[37] CAMBRIA, Il monastero domenicano, p. 138.

[38] Ibidem, p. 135. One of the unspecified items may have been black soap that the nuns produced according to a set of eighteenth-century watercolors that depict the activities of women religious in Bologna, FANTI, Abiti e lavori, p. 84–85.

modern urban dwellers.[39] The conventual space of S. Agnese was intertwined with the urban space of S. Maria delle Muratelle. Examining the interactions between these two spaces highlights spatial practices that problematize notions of strict separation between the convent and the city. Rather than a sacred citadel at the edge of the parish of S. Maria delle Muratelle, S. Agnese and its nuns entered in productive relationships and social networks in the neighborhood next to the convent through their servants and managers, and through their own financial and productive activities.

The tertiaries of S. Maria della Carità in the parish of S. Maria della Carità

Economic activities also engaged the Franciscan tertiaries of S. Maria della Carità in the urban space in Bologna. S. Maria della Carità was founded in the early-seventeenth century.[40] Referred to interchangeably as a *casa* and a *congregazione* in the archival records, the tertiary community benefitted from the support of the Franciscan friars of the monastery also called S. Maria della Carità and was recognized by the archbishops of Bologna, who also visited the community in a number of pastoral visitations in the eighteenth century.[41] The women religious settled in the homonymous parish in the eastern outskirts of Bologna. They purchased their first house on strada S. Felice in 1622.[42] Over the next hundred and thirty years, the community established itself firmly near the corner of strada S. Felice and via della Madonna della Grada, east of where strada S. Felice crossed the Reno channel. This section of strada S. Felice was lined by a tight row of houses with vast garden spaces to the back. Unlike old and wealthy enclosed convents like S. Agnese that had large, custom-built monastic complexes with high walls, multiple cloisters, courtyards, churches, and gardens, the more modest and usually younger third order communities like S. Maria della Carità depended on piecemeal purchases

[39] Jeremy BOULTON, Neighbourhood and Society: A London Suburb in the Seventeenth Century, Cambridge 1987; Monica CHOJNACKA, Working Women of Early Modern Venice, Baltimore 2001, chaps. 3–5; Robert C. DAVIS, The War of the Fists: Popular Culture and Public Violence in Late Renaissance Venice, New York 1994; David GARRIOCH, Neighbourhood and Community in Paris, 1740–1790, Cambridge 1986; David GARRIOCH, Lay-Religious Associations, Urban Identities, and Urban Space in Eighteenth-Century Milan. In: The Journal of Religious History 28 (2004), p. 35–49; Edward MUIR, Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice, Princeton 1981.

[40] Giuseppe GUIDICINI, Cose notabili della città di Bologna: ossia Storia cronologica de' suoi stabili sacri, pubblici e privati, vol. 2, Bologna 1869, p. 97. Guidicini dates S. Maria della Carità to 1602. The earliest records in the archives of S. Maria della Carità date to the 1610s. ASBO, Demaniale [Dem.], 1/4837, num. 10.

[41] Archivio Arcivescovile di Bologna [AAB], Visite Pastorali [VP], 53, 57, 86.

[42] ASBO, Dem., 1/4837, num. 12.

of the existing urban building stock to establish their communal dwelling.[43] After the purchase of the first house on strada S. Felice in 1622, the tertiaries of S. Maria della Carità bought two further properties along the street in 1666 and 1667 and received a third as a dowry payment in 1674.[44] In 1728, the women received in legacy a house on via della Madonna della Grada, which probably abutted the gardens of the tertiaries' other properties on strada S. Felice.[45] A decade later, in 1739, the women religious bought another house on strada S. Felice and, together with the house, received access rights to a bridge on the Reno channel (via della Madonna della Grada). The women financed this last purchase by signing over multiple credit agreements drawn upon smaller properties on via della Nosadella (parish of S. Barbariano) and Borgo S. Lorenzo (parish of S. Lorenzo di Porta Stiera).[46] They thus consolidated their urban property – ridding themselves of property located outside the women's immediate neighborhood to expand the communal dwelling on strada S. Felice. Finally, in 1752, the women religious received in donation another house on strada S. Felice that reached all the way back to via della Madonna della Grada.[47] Over the course of hundred and thirty years, the tertiaries of S. Maria della Carità thus established themselves on the crossing of strada S. Felice and the Reno channel. They did not construct a new convent complex but rather bought existing building stock. Such piecemeal purchases could have troubled Bolognese civic authorities, who had complained about monastic communities taking over the city's available building stock in 1705, as I discuss above. However, examining the interactions of the women religious of S. Maria della Carità with the city around them, we see that they did not segregate themselves from the urban space. The women religious operated within the existing urban fabric and established multilayered relationships to their neighbors.

The institutional character of S. Maria della Carità helped the women religious to establish these multilayered relationships. When the women purchased their first house on strada S. Felice in 1622, they used a legacy left by one Lucrezia Calzolari Guidotti in 1615. Guidotti had left 4,000 lire to the "tertiaries of S. Maria della Carità […] to buy a house in the city of Bologna, which would be suitable and in which the *suore* must live and pray for the

[43] Liise LEHTSALU, Negotiated Lives: Third Order Women Religious and Their Communities in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Italy. PhD Dissertation, Brown University 2017.
[44] ASBO, Dem., 1/4837, num. 12, 25-27, 35, 38.
[45] ASBO, Dem., 3/4839, num. 12.
[46] ASBO, Dem., 4/4840, num. 13.
[47] ASBO, Dem., 5/4841, num. 6, 9.

soul of the testatrix."[48] The twenty-four women religious who signed the purchase deed already donned the third order Franciscan habit, bestowed upon them by the Franciscan friars of S. Maria della Carità. Before 1622, they appear to have lived separately form one another in the parish of S. Maria della Carità.[49] After the purchase of the common dwelling, some women religious continued to live separately. The first surviving archival document to state explicitly that the tertiaries of S. Maria della Carità lived in one community only dates to 1644, when the bequest of one Cecilia Belloni Gualandi specified that she left 400 lire "for the construction and edification of their [the tertiaries'] house on strada San Felice, where these *suore* live communally."[50] However, the community did not adopt *vita communis* until the late 1710s, and even then not all women shared in *vita communis*.[51] Women religious thus continued to enter the local neighborhood to buy food, clothing, and other daily essentials. Pastoral visitors sought to regulate how the tertiaries entered the local neighborhood throughout the eighteenth century. In 1737, the visitors demanded that that the women religious only exit their dwellings when accompanied by another tertiary, and expressly forbade leaving in the company of laywomen; moreover, the visitors decreed that the women religious had to return by the evening Ave Maria and could stay away overnight only in houses of parents, and only with the permission of their mother superior and the prior of the Franciscans.[52] Pope Benedict XIV decree to tertiaries in Bologna in 1744 sought to curtail tertiaries' freedom of movement, but did not forbade it. The women religious were still able to exit their community during the day with permission of mothers superior. S. Maria della Carità complied with this papal decree according to the pastoral visitation in the same year.[53] Many of the women religious of S. Maria della Carità hailed from the local parish, or the neighboring parishes. They were of middling

[48] ASBO, Dem., 1/4837, num. 10.

[49] Ibidem, num. 11.

[50] Ibidem, num. 17.

[51] The first dowry contract from S. Maria della Carità that obliged the community to provide a woman religious with food dates to 1718 (ASBO, Dem., 2/4838, num. 43). A year earlier, in 1717, a dowry contract had included a six-fold increase of the dowry asked by S. Maria della Carità: throughout the seventeenth century and in the early-eighteenth century, the dowry in the community had been 300 lire, now the dowry was 1800 lire and it increased to 2000 lire in the 1730s (ASBO, Dem., 1/4837-5/4841). This suggest a link between the dowry increase and the adoption of common life in the community and highlights a continued institutional development of S. Maria della Carità in the eighteenth century.

[52] AAB, VP, 53, p. 1.

[53] AAB, VP, 57, Regole, ed ordini della Santità di Nostro Signore Benedetto Papa XIV per le Terziarie che sono in Bologna, e nella Diocesi; ibidem, June 6, 1744.

rank backgrounds and their families often struggled to piece together the necessary dowry to enter S. Maria della Carità.[54] Coupled with the institutional character of S. Maria della Carità, the familiar ties of many women religious to the local parish would have further facilitated interactions between the tertiaries and the local neighborhood. As they led their daily lives, procured food and clothing or visited family, the women religious would have been a common sight on the streets of the parish of S. Maria della Carità.

The women religious entered the daily life of the neighborhood also through the parish church. In the seventeenth century, the women religious did not have their own church and attended the parish church that was situated west of the convent on strada S. Felice, across the Reno channel. Around 1704, the women received episcopal permission to celebrate Mass in their own "church, or oratory that functions as such" on strada S. Felice.[55] However, this small church did not distance the tertiaries from the parish church. The women religious remained part of the parish community, sharing the pews of the parish church with their neighbors on the most important Church holidays. The women had to attend the parish church to receive the Holy Sacrament until 1739, when they finally received the permission to preserve the Holy Eucharist and the Holy Oil in their church.[56] The women remained part of the parish community also after they could receive the sacraments in their own church, however. It seems that the tertiaries were buried in the parish church, where they had had a dedicated sepulcher since 1685. [57] The accords between S. Maria della Carità and the parish priest in 1739 also specified that when a woman religious died, the bell of the parish church would toll.[58] Marked by the tolling of parish bells, the death of a tertiary was an aural event in the parish, signifying

[54] ASBO, Dem., 1/4847–5/4841. In the seventeenth century, two daughters of Giacomo Capra, a merchant from the local parish, entered S. Maria della Carità (ASBO, Dem., 1/4837, num. 35; ASBO, Dem., 3/4839, num. 12). In the eighteenth century, four daughters of Pietro Collina, a cobbler in the parish of S. Maria Maggiore, and a daughter of Angelo Cattani, a hemp merchant, entered S. Maria della Carità (ASBO, Dem., 2/4838, num. 12; ASBO, Dem., 4/4840, num. 18, 19; ASBO, Dem., 5/4841, num. 9, 28). Twenty-five of the surviving twenty-eight dowries contracts from the eighteenth century included *Monte del Matrimonio* credits, dowry subsidies, legacies, and credit agreements with the tertiaries as a payment method; only three dowries were paid in full by the time the woman professed in the community. On *Monte del Matrimonio* and dowry charity in Bologna, see Mauro CARBONI, Le doti della "povertà". Famiglia, risparmio, previdenza: il Monte del Matrimonio di Bologna (1583–1796), Bologna 1999; Isabelle CHABOT/Massimo FORNASARI, L'economia della carità: Le doti del Monte di Pietà di Bologna (XVI–XX), Bologna 1997.

[55] ASBO, Dem., 3/4839, num. 40.

[56] Ibidem, num. 13; ASBO, Dem., 4/4840, num. 14; ASBO, Dem., 46/4698, Scritture spettanti agli altari.

[57] ASBO, Dem., 2/4838, num. 6.

[58] ASBO, Dem., 4/4840, num. 14.

the women's continued belonging in the parish community.[59] Even if the presence of the women religious in the parish church became less frequent in the second half of the eighteenth century, they were still part of the spiritual space of the parish.

Some parishioners also had more direct access to S. Maria della Carità. The houses the women religious bought on the corner of strada S. Felice and via della Madonna della Grada were not empty. A widow and her maidservant continued to inhabit part of the house the tertiaries bought in 1667 also after the house became the property of S. Maria della Carità.[60] The two-apartment house the community received as a dowry payment in 1674 neighbored the other three properties of S. Maria della Carità on strada S. Felice and included an entryway to one of these properties, which had been closed provisionally. The privately-written dowry contract made provisions both for Francesca and Anna Capra, whose dowry it was, as well as their mother. The house remained the private property of the Capra sisters until their death and the mother could continue to inhabit one of the apartments until her death.[61] Finally, the house bequeathed to S. Maria della Carità in 1752 by the Collina sisters, who were also tertiaries in the community, included a number of apartments; the Collina sisters specified in the donation deed that these apartments should be let and the income used to pay the confessor, the servants, the managers, and the porter of the tertiaries.[62] S. Maria della Carità was not a sacred citadel. The tertiaries occupied a conventual space that was shared, at least partially, with lay neighbors and that was used deliberately to afford lay help in the community.

The conventual space of S. Maria della Carità merged with the surrounding urban space as fifty-seven rental contracts between the tertiaries and their tenants from 1677 to 1803 evidence.[63] Until the mid-eighteenth century, the tertiaries regularly rented out three or four small properties on strada de'Morelli, a remote street in the parish of S. Maria Maggiore in the northern part of Bologna, as well as an apartment on via del Paradiso, a transverse of strada S.

---

[59] On sound and urban spaces in premodern Europe, see Niall ATKINSON, The Republic of Sound: Listening to Florence at the Threshold of the Renaissance. In: I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance 16 (2013), p. 57–84; Jacques LE GOFF, Time, Work, And Culture in the Middle Ages, Chicago 1980.

[60] ASBO, Dem., 1/4837, num. 28. In the same year, the countess Isabella Zambeccari together with two maidservants were allowed to take up residence in a small apartment in one of the houses purchased by S. Maria della Carità. ASBO, Dem., 1/4837, num. 29.

[61] ASBO, Dem., 1/4837, num. 35, 38.

[62] ASBO, Dem., 5/4841, num. 9.

[63] Ibidem, "Scritture moderne delle case"; ASBO, Dem., 2/4838, num. 24, 28.

Vitale in the parish of S. Vitale e Agricola in the center of Bologna.[64] Most of the rental contracts surviving from the second half of the eighteenth century concern apartments, stalls, and bridges on strada S. Felice and via della Madonna della Grada.[65] The temporary division may result from a source bias; however, it also reflects the consolidation of the tertiaries' property on strada S. Felice in the eighteenth century. Among the tenants of the tertiaries were weavers, brick burners, tailors, bottle-makers, porters, and many others whose activities were not recorded in the contracts. They rented their dwellings on yearly-basis, paying between 20 and 60 lire a year. These sums represented a considerable burden to people of the working classes, which the quick turnover of the tenants also underscores.[66] The ever-changing tenants came into close contact with the women religious, especially when they occupied apartments, stalls, and bridges on strada S. Felice and via della Madonna della Grada. The rental contracts describe property in the "*casa che confina con il monastero* (house that neighbors the convent)" as well as the stables "*a fronte della clausura delle Terziarie* (in front of the enclosure of the tertiaries)", two bridges "*a fronte della clausura delle Terziarie* (in front of the enclosure)", and an apartment "*che resta in faccia al Portone della Carra* [sic!] *delle sud.e suore* (in front of the carriage gate to the convent)".[67] The tenants shared space with the women religious, who based on the recurring references to *monastero* and *clausura* were socially recognized as nuns, even if they did not meet the canon law definition of *moniales*.[68] The rental contracts for the stables specified that tenants had to permit the passage of carriages entering the convent. The contracts for a bridge on the Reno specified that the women religious maintained their right to use the bridge. The tenants were, however, permitted to extend wash lines and canopies between the convent and the bridge, meaning that any woman religious accessing the bridge had to pass through the wash of the tenants. The conventual space and the urban space blended on the corner of strada S. Felice and via della Madonna della Grada.

---

[64] The properties on via de' Morelli and via del Paradiso seem to have come to the tertiaries as dowries. ASBO, Dem., 1/4837, num. 23; ASBO, Dem., 2/4838, num. 6, 21, 24, 42, 43; ASBO, Dem., 3/4839, num. 1, 15).

[65] In addition to the properties purchased here by the women religious in the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, they also received rental income from another house of S. Felice as part of the dowry contract for Maria Catterina Cattani in 1739 (ASBO, Dem., 5/4841, num. 28).

[66] The annual salaries of artisans were between 100 and 200 lire in Bologna in the eighteenth century. Laborers earned less and between 50 and 75 percent of the Bolognese urban population were respectable poor. CARBONI, Le doti della "povertà", chap. 2; PALAZZI, Donne sole, p. 194–196.

[67] ASBO, Dem., 5/4841, "Scritture moderne delle case".

[68] On social vs. legal personhood in early modern Italy, see Thomas KUEHN, Person and Gender in the Laws. In: BROWN/DAVIS (eds.), Gender and Society in Renaissance Italy, p.87-106 .

In addition to the landlord-tenant relationships, labor relationships also shaped a shared urban space between the women religious and the local neighborhood. As discussed above, the Collina sisters donated house to S. Maria della Carità in 1752 so that it would produce the salaries of the community's priest as well as its servants. As the servants of S. Agnese, these lay people would have served as a link between the women religious and the neighborhood around S. Maria della Carità. The last will of *suor* Maria Geltrude Gnudi from 1741 testifies to the close relationships between the women religious and their servants. *Suor* Gnudi left a small legacy to a servant of S. Maria della Carità alongside legacies of the same size to all the tertiaries and the father confessor of the community.[69] Personal relationships between the tertiaries and their servants bridged divides between the conventual space and the urban space, divides that were already lower in S. Maria della Carità compared to S. Agnese because of the more open institutional character of the third order community.

The work that the women religious of S. Maria della Carità undertook also facilitated interactions between the conventual space and the urban space. The community took in needlework in the eighteenth century.[70] Individual women religious also engaged in various handicrafts. In 1743, the sisters *suor* Metilde and *suor* Girolama Collina bought a credit contract worth 4000 lire for which they paid with "their own and private money […] that they had accumulated through their own industry of embroidery and other such things."[71] The Collina sisters claimed that their dowries had never been paid in full to S. Maria della Carità and thus unable to share in *vita communis* they supported themselves with paid work and actively participated in credit markets. In 1735, *suor* Girolama Collina had signed a credit contract worth 500 lire with the Franciscan monastery of SS. Cosimo and Demanio, investing "her own and personal money."[72] Also in 1735, *suor* Metilde Collina loaned 200 lire to a local widow who was in urgent need.[73] The last will of another widow named Paola Lenzi from 1745 reveals that *suor* Girolama had housed Lenzi in her rooms in S. Maria della Carità to earn an extra income, and had perhaps also housed other secular women over the years.[74] The Collina

[69] ASBO, Dem., 4/4840, num. 30. On the symbolic value of testamentary bequests, see Renata AGO, Il gusto delle cose: Una storia degli oggetti nella Roma del Seicento, Rome 2006.
[70] FANTI, Abiti e lavori, p. 114–115.
[71] ASBO, Dem., 5/4453, num. 14.
[72] ASBO, Dem., 5/4841, num. 2.
[73] Ibidem, num. 26.
[74] Ibidem, num. 3.

sisters were integrated in the economic life of the parish-neighborhood, and beyond. They established long-lasting, and contractual, relationships with a number of individuals and institutions. They and their activities functioned as a link between the conventual space and the urban space. The sisters also brought laywomen into the conventual space when they hosted laywomen in their rooms in S. Maria della Carità.[75] Individual women religious interacted with the urban space around them and shaped this urban space for themselves and the people with whom they came into contact.

The neighbors of the tertiaries recognized this. In 1706, a number of people from the parish of S. Maria della Carità testified to the *buona fama* (good reputation) of the women religious. Honor was a key social construct in early modern Italy; a person's behavior and others' perception of it determined their reputation, which in turn shaped their social worth and relations and their ability to act within the early modern society and economy.[76] In his testimony, one neighbor of S. Maria della Carità claimed that he had lived next to the women religious for sixty years and two of his female relatives had donned the tertiary habit in the community; moreover, the man had also supported an orphan who had adopted the habit in S. Maria della Carità by delivering annual rations of "bread, wine, firewood and other things" to the community. To underline his close relationship with the women religious, this neighbor closed his testimony by stating that "in case of illness, and other cases of household distress," he always sought spiritual support from S. Maria della Carità. The local parish priest, who was also asked to testify at this time, talked to the good reputation of the community, stating that "in the twenty-two years that I have been the rector of this church, I have never heard a mean or a bad thing [about the women religious]." Finally, a neighbor who lived and operated a shop next to S. Maria della Carità, confirmed that the women religious "were on the best terms with everybody in the neighborhood (*vicinanza*)".[77] These testimonies highlight relationships of mutual support that existed between the women religious and their neighbors. The women

[75] Unlike in enclosed convents, secular boarders could enter third order communities without a special apostolic permission. Liise LEHTSALU, A Welcome Presence: The Custodial Activities of Third Order Women Religious in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Italy. In: Journal of Early Modern History 22 (2018), forthcoming; Francesca TERRACCIA, In attesa di una scelta: Destini femminili ed educandati monastici nella Diocesi di Milano in età moderna, Rome 2012, p. 14–16, 31–37.

[76] Elizabeth S. COHEN, Honor and Gender in the Streets of Early Modern Rome. In: The Journal of Interdisciplinary History 22 (1992), p. 597–625.

[77] ASBO, Dem., 2/4838, num. 29.

religious of S. Maria della Carità were well-received by their neighbors, who recognized the women's presence in the urban space around the convent.

Conclusions

Scholars often describe convents in early modern Italy as fortified spiritual islands that were segregated from the urban space around them. This even as they recognize political, cultural, and social exchanges between the enclosed nuns and their families beyond the cloister. This scholarship suggests that conventual spaces in early modern Italy was defined by monastic closure. Conventual space is a coulisse here, shaped by brick and mortar. Rather than focusing on monastic enclosure, this article has examined the conventual space together with the urban space around it. Defining space as a social construct, I have traced interactions, and the potential for interaction, between conventual and urban spaces. The densely-populated early modern urban fabric facilitated social, emotional, and economic connections. Despite living in an enclosed convent, the nuns of S. Agnese did not remain isolated from the urban space beyond the convent. The movement of people and goods and services between the convent and the city had the potential to involve enclosed nuns in urban space, even if most nuns would have lacked individual relationships to the laity. The women religious of S. Maria della Carità established long-lasting social and economic relationships with the people from their neighborhood, with whom they also came into regular contact and shaped a common urban space. Living in a convent that emerged from piecemeal purchases of existing building stock, the boundaries between the conventual space of the tertiaries and the urban space blurred. Space emerges as a powerful category of analysis. Focusing on space and the relationships and experiences that produced space problematizes the dichotomy between conventual space and urban space that has risen from close studies of monastic enclosure. Instead, we begin to see the intersections between the conventual and the urban spaces and find engagement of women religious in the world beyond the convent, and vice versa. Women religious were part of the early modern urban space, not segregated from it by high walls, closed widows, grilles, and turnstiles. As women religious exit from their sacred citadels, the functions of convents in early modern society and the activities of the women religious inside and outside their cloisters must also be re-examined.