

‘*Sancte fidei omnino deiciat*’: Ugolino dei Conti di Segni’s Doubts and Jacques de Vitry’s Intervention

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Thomas de Cantimpré, in his Supplementum to Jacques de Vitry’s Vita of Marie d’Oignies, provides us with an account of how Cardinal Ugolino dei Conti di Segni, the future Pope Gregory IX, was struggling with his faith. At this decisive moment in Ugolino’s career, the illustrious preacher and Bishop of Acre, Jacques de Vitry, made an appearance at the curia while away from his episcopal see. To combat Ugolino’s doubt with a saintly intercession, Jacques presented him with the relic of Marie d’Oignies’s finger, which he kept around his neck and had protected him on several occasions. This well-known anecdote has not yet received any comprehensive attention and this essay seeks to analyze as well as contextualize the account of Jacques de Vitry’s intervention. By shedding light on the role of Marie d’Oignies and her finger relic and on the meaning of the ‘spirit of blasphemy’ plaguing Ugolino, I will argue that the anecdote not only gives us a glimpse of the nature of the cardinal’s spiritual concerns but also reflects Thomas de Cantimpré’s efforts to promote both Jacques de Vitry’s influence on Gregory IX and the reputation of Marie d’Oignies.

In Gregory IX’s decretals we find the well-known dictum *dubius in fide infidelis est*.¹ Interestingly, in a contemporary gloss by the Dominican Guillaume de Rennes (c.1240/5) in

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¹ *Decretales Gregorii IX*, Bk 5, 7: ‘De Haereticis’, ch. 1 (*CICan*, 2: 749).

the *Summa de Poenitentia* of Raymundus de Peñafort (d. 1275), that same dictum was nuanced.² Guillaume argued that if one's faith is tempted by the 'spirit of blasphemy' with sorrow and anxiety, and the person eventually succumbs to the growing temptation despite fighting against it, then such doubt is not to be considered a sin.³ According to the Dominican preacher Thomas de Cantimpré (d. 1272), Ugolino dei Conti di Segni, soon to become Pope Gregory IX (r. 1227–41), was confronted with this particular spirit. Thomas, in his *Supplementum* to the *Vita* of Marie d'Oignies (d. 1213), described how Jacques de Vitry (d. 1240) gave Ugolino, then Cardinal-bishop of Ostia, the finger-relic of Marie to help him in his fight against the *spiritus blasphemiae* and the doubts he was facing regarding his faith.⁴

The anecdote has often been mentioned by scholars, but has not yet received any comprehensive attention. This essay seeks to contextualize the account of Jacques de Vitry's intervention, which is found only in Thomas de Cantimpré's writings and which raises a number of questions: What is the role of Marie d'Oignies and her finger relic? What did

² Guillaume de Rennes was a Dominican canonist whose apparatus was copied with Peñafort's *Summa* in most manuscripts and considered to be of almost equal importance. See also Stephan Kuttner, 'Zur Entstehungsgeschichte der *Summa de casibus poenitentiae* des hl. Raymund von Penyafort', *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte: Kanonistische Abteilung* 39 (1953), 419–34.

³ '[Q]ui per spiritum blasphemiae temptatur de fide cum dolore cordis et anxietate; cui, si bene pugnaverit, cedit ad profectum huius temptationis; cum nulla ei sit libido, id est, improba voluntas delectandi in creatura, sine qua nullum est actuale peccatum': Raymundus de Peñafort, *Summa de Poenitentia et Matrimonio* in Jena, Thüringer Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek, MS El. f. 59, fol. 36^r.

⁴ I use the Latin text of the most recent edition of the *Vita* of Marie d'Oignies: R. B. C. Huygens, ed., *Iacobus de Vitriaco, Vita Marie de Oegnies & Thomas Cantipratensis, Supplementum*, CChr.CM 252. The meeting between Jacques and Ugolino at 186–9. Translations of the *Vita* and the *Supplementum* by Margot H. King and Hugh B. Feiss respectively were published in Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker, ed., *Mary of Oignies: Mother of Salvation* (Turnhout, 2006), 39–165. In 2014 a German translation of the *Vita* and the *Supplementum* was published: *Das Leben der Maria von Oignies*, transl. Iris Geyer, CChr.T 18.

Thomas mean by this ‘spirit of blasphemy’ that plagued Ugolino, and can we find traces of the origins of Ugolino’s doubts in other source material? And finally, what was Thomas’s intention behind the story? I will show that doubt is the *leitmotiv* connecting the stories of Jacques, Ugolino and Thomas, and argue that the anecdote not only gives us a glimpse of the nature of Ugolino’s spiritual concerns but also reflects Thomas’s efforts to promote both Jacques’s influence on Gregory IX and the reputation of Marie d’Oignies. This contribution serves as a case study for the nature of the doubts faced by medieval churchmen as well as the role of doubt in the hagiographical rhetoric surrounding the movement of the *mulieres sanctae* in the southern Low Countries in the thirteenth century.⁵

Before looking into Ugolino’s doubts, let me shed some light on the relation between Jacques de Vitry and Marie d’Oignies, specifically with regard to the relic finger.⁶ Jacques’s admiration for this *mulier sancta* and the spiritual influence they had on each other are unquestionable. Their close friendship and Jacques’s role as her confessor ensured his lasting

⁵ See Brenda M. Bolton, ‘Mulieres Sanctae’, in Derek Baker, ed., *Sanctity and Secularity: The Church and the World*, SCH 10 (Oxford, 1973), 77–93.

⁶ Some of the most significant recent contributions that deal with Jacques de Vitry and (the *Vita* of) Marie d’Oignies are Monica Sandor, ‘Jacques de Vitry and the Spirituality of the “Mulieres sanctae”’, *Vox Benedictina* 5 (1988), 289–312; Maria Grazia Calzà, *Die Begine Maria von Oignies (†1213) in der hagiographischen Darstellung Jakobs von Vitry (†1240)* (Würzburg, 2000); Brenda M. Bolton, ‘Mary of Oignies: A Friend to the Saints’, in Mulder-Bakker, ed., *Mary of Oignies*, 199–220; Jean Donnadieu, ‘Entre Sentiment et ambition: Les Réseaux de Jacques de Vitry au miroir du *Supplementum ad Vitam Mariae Oignacensis* de Thomas de Cantimpré’, in C. Carozzi et al., eds, *Vivre en société au Moyen Âge* (Aix-en-Provence, 2008), 133–50; Vera von der Osten-Sacken, *Jakob von Vitrys ‘Vita Mariae Oigniacensis’. Zu Herkunft und Eigenart der ersten Beginen* (Göttingen, 2010); Anne-Laure Méril-Bellini delle Stelle, ‘L’Ecriture de l’amitié spirituelle dans l’œuvre hagiographique de Thomas de Cantimpré (1200–ca.1265/1270)’, *Médiévales* 64 (2013), 135–51. See also Ernest W. McDonnell’s seminal *The Beguines and Beghards in Medieval Culture, with Special Emphasis on the Belgian Scene* (New York, 1969), at 20–39.

ties to the diocese of Liège and to the community of canons regular of St Nicholas at Oignies in particular. After a decade in the Holy Land as Bishop of Acre (1216–26), Jacques returned to Oignies on several occasions and acted as a patron to the community, bestowing on the canons relics and gifts from the East. Through his *Vita* of Marie (c.1215), Jacques contributed greatly to the spread of Marie’s reputation as well as to the development of the early Beguine movement.⁷ In the *Vita* Jacques emphasized Marie’s devoutness, contrition, and spiritual strength, but also the extreme asceticism that would eventually lead to her death. As much as the sanctity of her body was central during Marie’s lifetime, so her relics continued to play a crucial role after her death, further contributing to the construction of her memory and cult.⁸ Marie, however, had firmly rebuked Gilles d’Oignies, prior and founder of the community, for mutilating corpses in order to obtain relics, and had forbidden him to do any such thing to her body after her death.⁹ Nonetheless, several of Marie’s body parts were kept as separate relics. Aside from the seven teeth which her dead body miraculously spat out into the hands of prior Gilles,¹⁰ it appears that at least one finger was removed shortly after 1213.¹¹ Both Thomas de Cantimpré and Jacques de Vitry tell us that the latter wore a silver reliquary case containing one of Marie’s fingers as a pendant. In a letter of 1216, Jacques recounted the miraculous rescue of his books and belongings from a turbulent river in Lombardy, as the

⁷ Michel Lauwers, ‘Expérience béguinale et récit hagiographique: À Propos de la *Vita Mariae Oigniacensis* de Jacques de Vitry (vers 1215)’, *Journal des savants* (1989), 61–104.

⁸ Bolton, ‘Mary of Oignies’, 203; see also Jennifer N. Brown, ‘The Chaste Erotics of Marie d’Oignies and Jacques de Vitry’, *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 19/1 (2010), 74–93.

⁹ Thomas de Cantimpré, *Supplementum*, ch. 13 (CChr.CM 252, 184).

¹⁰ Ibid. 185–6.

¹¹ The only extant finger relic of Marie d’Oignies is held in a phylactery crafted by Hugo d’Oignies’s workshop (c.1230): Brussels, Musées Royaux d’Art et d’Histoire, inv. no. 3673; Robert Didier and Jacques Toussaint, ‘Le Trésor des soeurs de Notre-Dame à Namur’, in eadem, eds, *Autour de Hugo d’Oignies* (Namur, 2003), 191–304, at 295–6.

basket in which he had stored the relic of Marie kept his mule afloat.¹² Thomas de Cantimpré wrote that during the journey from Acre to Rome, Jacques's ship was caught in a storm and, while the rest of the crew prayed to their respective saints, Jacques invoked the help of Marie through his reliquary pendant. In a vision, Marie promised she would pray for his salvation and showed her friend five new altars in the church of Oignies and told him to consecrate them. After the vision, the sea became calm.¹³

It is shortly after this miraculous rescue that one must date the meeting between Jacques and Ugolino, in the early months of 1226, upon Jacques's second and final return to Europe. Thomas de Cantimpré, however, implied that the friendship between Ugolino and Jacques originated earlier.¹⁴ Indeed, both Jacques's first encounter with the Franciscans and Ugolino's first encounter with the reputation of Marie and the early Beguines seem to have taken place around the same time, when Jacques, as Bishop-elect of Acre, was received by Honorius III (r. 1216–27) at Perugia in 1216.¹⁵ Ugolino, who would be appointed Cardinal-protector of the Franciscans at some point during 1217 or 1218, was a strong supporter of female (semi-)religious¹⁶ communities and certainly sympathetic to Jacques's emphasis on

¹² Jacques de Vitry, *Epistolae*, ep. 1 (CChr.CM 171, 550).

¹³ Thomas de Cantimpré, *Supplementum*, ch. 18 (CChr.CM 252, 191–3).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, ch. 15 (186).

¹⁵ McDonnell, *Beguines*, 34–6, 313–14; Herbert Grundmann, *Religiöse Bewegungen im Mittelalter* (Berlin, 1935), 172. See also Alcantara Mens, 'L'Ombrie italienne et l'Ombrie brabançonne: Deux courants religieux parallèles d'inspiration commune', *Études Franciscaines* 17 (1968), 44–7.

¹⁶ Since Kaspar Elm coined the term 'semi-religious', the debate regarding the terminology for lay religious movements has been ongoing: K. Elm, 'Vita regularis sine regula. Bedeutung, Rechtsstellung und Selbstverständnis des mittelalterlichen und frühneuzeitlichen Semireligiosentums', in F. Smahel, ed., *Häresie und vorzeitige Reformation im Spätmittelalter* (Oldenbourg, 1998), 239–73. For the *status quaestionis* of the debate with regard to Marie d'Oignies and the Beguines, see Mulder-Bakker, 'General Introduction', in eadem, ed., *Mary of Oignies*, 18–24.

preaching, pastoral care and voluntary poverty, and to his efforts for the early Beguines.¹⁷ Moreover, like Jacques, Ugolino was heavily involved in the preaching of the Fifth Crusade.¹⁸ At the time of the meeting between Ugolino and Jacques in Rome in 1226, the latter was struggling with his own doubts regarding his mission in the East. After the failure of the Fifth Crusade, Jacques realized that neither the reform of the Christian communities in the Holy Land nor the fight against Islam was the easy undertaking that he had anticipated.¹⁹ Seeking spiritual support and guidance, he appears to have visited Oignies to pray at Marie's tomb, before relinquishing his episcopal duties in Acre.²⁰ Jacques's definitive return to Europe may have indeed prompted him to give the relic of Marie to his good friend, who seemed to need it more than he did. In Thomas de Cantimpré's *Supplementum* we read that Jacques presented Ugolino with a heavy silver cup filled with nutmeg. Ugolino accepted the nutmeg as it was the 'fruit of the East', but turned down the cup, saying that it was 'the fruit of the city of

¹⁷ Rosalind B. Brooke, *Early Franciscan Government: Elias to Bonaventure* (Cambridge, 1959), 59–76; see also Pia Gemelli, 'Giacomo da Vitry e le origini del movimento francescano', *Aevum* 39 (1965), 474–95; Kurt Victor Selge, 'Franz von Assisi und Hugolino von Ostia', in *San Francesco nella ricerca storica degli ultimi ottanta anni. Convegni del Centro di Studi sulla Spiritualità Medievale, 13–16 ottobre 1968* (Todi, 1971), 157–222.

¹⁸ P. Pressutti, ed., *Regesta Honorii Papae III* (Rome, 1888–95), no. 272.

¹⁹ Honorius III addressed a letter to Jacques on 6 March 1224, encouraging him not to give up the battle against Christ's enemies and to keep on preaching: Rome, ASV, Vat. Reg. 12, vol. 8, no. 322, fols 168^r–^v. On Jacques's doubts, see Jan Vandeburie, 'The Preacher and the Pope: Jacques de Vitry and Honorius III', in J. Bird, ed., *The Papacy, Religious Life, and the Crusade in the Early Thirteenth Century* (Ashgate, forthcoming 2016).

²⁰ Jacques did not resign as Bishop of Acre in 1226, but only seems to have asked Honorius III to be released from his episcopal duties in the Holy Land, as he acted as auxiliary bishop in Liège (1226–9) and continued to be referred to as *episcopo acconensis* until he became Cardinal-bishop of Tusculum in 1229: see Vandeburie, 'The Preacher and the Pope'.

Rome'. Instead, the cardinal asked for Jacques's help as he was facing a spiritual crisis.²¹

Jacques told Ugolino to read his *Vita* of Marie d'Oignies and, upon Ugolino's request, gave him her finger-relic.

In what seems to have been a very personal and private conversation between Jacques and Ugolino, or at least in what Thomas claimed he knew of this encounter, the cardinal confessed that his soul was troubled by a 'spirit of blasphemy' and overwhelmed by waves of temptation, driving him to desperation.²² Ugolino noted how his suffering was eased when he was sitting with his brothers the cardinals, assembled in consistory, but succumbed to despair again as soon as he was alone. He feared that his worn spirit and exhausted body would not be able to bear the burden and was afraid that he would be disheartened from the holy faith (*sancte fidei omnino deiciat*).²³ Likewise, in his *Vita* of Saint Lutgardis (Lutgarde d'Aywières, d. 1246), Thomas noted that Ugolino was savagely tempted (*atrociter tentabatur*) by the 'spirit of blasphemy'.²⁴ Arguably, Thomas de Cantimpré's account merely sketches a vague idea of the nature of Ugolino's predicament.

The notion of the *spiritus blasphemiae* is, however, rather interesting. Although *blasphemia* was generally understood as saying things unworthy of God, Alexander Murray has pointed out that 'there is a specifically monastic tradition, going back to the *Vitae patrum*, of understanding the term to indicate mere wrong *thinking* about God'. Murray added that 'when so used it is often in compounds like *blasphemia cordis* or *spiritus blasphemiae*'.²⁵ The

²¹ Thomas de Cantimpré, *Supplementum*, ch. 15 (CChr.CM 252, 186–9).

²² 'Spiritus blasphemie adeo animam meam vexat et variis temptationum fluctibus obruit, et usque in desperationem cotidie fere detrudor': *ibid.* 187.

²³ *Ibid.* 187–9.

²⁴ Thomas de Cantimpré, *Vita Lutgardis*, in Barbara Newman, ed., *Thomas of Cantimpré: The Collected Saints' Lives*, Medieval Women, Texts and Contexts 19 (Turnhout, 2008), 211–96, at 291.

²⁵ Alexander C. Murray, 'The Temptation of St Hugh of Grenoble', in *Intellectual Life in the Middle Ages: Essays Presented to Margaret Gibson*, ed. L. J. Smith and B. Ward (London, 1991), 81–101, at 97.

notion of the ‘spirit of blasphemy’ as an evil entity which tempts its victim into sin, as suggested in Guillaume de Rennes’s gloss mentioned above, is shown more imaginatively in the *Vita* of the Dominican friar Henry Suso (d. 1366). In his chapter on ‘interior sufferings’, Suso told the story of his encounter with the ‘spirit of blasphemy’ and described it as a ‘hideous Moor, with eyes of fire and a terrific hellish look’ who tried to shoot fiery arrows through his heart.²⁶ Upon invoking the help of the Virgin, the devil vanished.²⁷ The encounter between Henry and the evil spirit is similar to the account of Thomas de Cantimpré in which he reported the effect of Marie’s finger. Thomas wrote that one night, when Ugolino was secretly praying before his altar, a lethargy (*torpor*) began to flood his mind. The cardinal stood up and clasped Marie’s finger tightly against his chest while asking for her intercession. Without delay, the ‘spirit of blasphemy’ was put to flight and the numbness of the mind disappeared.²⁸

Thomas de Cantimpré’s use of the word *torpor* seems to further identify the nature of Ugolino’s struggles. Ugolino’s symptoms, a state of lethargy, despair, blasphemy in the form of distrusting God, and an impending dejection of his faith, point towards *acedia*, a spiritual depression.²⁹ When relating Ugolino’s predicament to *acedia*, the *spiritus blasphemiae* can be

²⁶ Such imagery is found, for instance, in: Strasbourg, Bibliothèque nationale et universitaire, MS 2929, fol. 119^r, which shows the ‘spirit of blasphemy’ shooting a fiery arrow at Henry Suso.

²⁷ Thomas F. Knox, ed., *The Life of Blessed Henry Suso by Himself* (London, 1865), 214–15.

²⁸ Thomas de Cantimpré, *Supplementum*, ch. 15 (CChr.CM 252, 188–9).

²⁹ Jeffery J. Tyler, ‘The Misery of Monks and the Laziness of the Laity: Overcoming the Sin of Acedia’, in *Frömmigkeit – Theologie – Frömmigkeitstheologie: Contributions to European Church History*. ed. Gudrun Litz, Heidrun Munzert and Rland Liebenberg (Leiden, 2005), 119–30; Rubén A. Peretó Rivas, ‘Acedia y depresión. Entre pecado capital y desorden psiquiátrico’, in *In umbra intelligentiae*, ed. Ángel Luis González and María Idoya Zorroza (Pamplona, 2011), 655–66. Ineke van ‘t Spijker, ‘Saints and Despair: Twelfth-Century Hagiography as “Intimate Biography”’, in Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker, ed., *The Invention of Saintliness* (London, 2002), 185–205, at 198–9, discusses the idea of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12: 31), a concept distinctly different from the ‘spirit

identified with the *daemonium meridianum*,³⁰ the noonday demon, the personification of depression.³¹ The use of Marie's finger relic to dealing with this 'possession', or to ward off an evil spirit or demon, is evident.³² With his story of the successful repelling of the evil spirit or demon, Thomas de Cantimpré thus provided evidence for the authenticity of the relic and for the sanctity of Marie d'Oignies.³³

Marie's reputation in dealing with doubt was well established by this time. Doubt features often in her *Vita* and Jacques noted that after her death Marie did not abandon those she loved and continued to guide and protect them from danger by providing secret signs that removed any doubt from the heart (*a cordibus eorum dubitationem removens*).³⁴ In the *Supplementum*, Thomas de Cantimpré emphasized that Marie never doubted Christ, and was 'never once deceived by the enemy of man'.³⁵ Moreover, he wrote how Jacques told Ugolino that God had granted Marie a 'special grace of expelling blasphemous spirits' (*in effugandis*

of blasphemy'. Twelfth-century theologians saw blasphemy against the Holy Spirit as impenitence leading to despair: see Odo of Tournai, *De Blasphemia in Spiritum Sanctum* (PL 160, 1111–18); Richard of St Victor, *De Spiritu Blasphemie* (PL 196, 1185–92).

³⁰ Ps. 90: 6 (Vulgate).

³¹ See also Barbara Newman, 'Possessed by the Spirit: Devout Women, Demoniacs, and the Apostolic Life in the Thirteenth Century', *Speculum* 73 (1998), 733–70, at 740–1.

³² Ibid. 752. The shape of some reliquary pendants suggests they were 'designed for intimate inspection in the palm of the hand and required the physical interaction of the owner to release [their] spiritual value': James Robinson, 'From Altar to Amulet: Relics, Portability, and Devotion', in Martina Bagnoli et al., eds, *Treasures of Heaven: Saints, Relics, and Devotion in Medieval Europe* (Baltimore, MD, 2011), 111–16, at 114–15.

³³ On the notion of Marie's sanctity and canonisation processes of the *mulieres sanctae*, see Michel Lauwers, 'Entre béguinisme et mysticisme. La *Vie de Marie d'Oignies* († 1213) de Jacques de Vitry, ou la définition d'une sainteté féminine au XIIIe siècle', *Ons geestelijk erf* 66 (1992), 46–70.

³⁴ Jacques de Vitry, *Vita*, bk. 2, ch. 13 (CChr.CM 252, 163).

³⁵ Thomas de Cantimpré, *Supplementum*, ch. 10 (CChr.CM 252, 180).

blasphemie spiritibus). In the *Vita*, Jacques often portrayed Marie as the ideal intercessor when confronted with the ‘spirit of blasphemy’, which he saw as the most evil spirit of all temptations (*contra spiritum blasphemie et desperationis preminebat*).³⁶ Jacques wrote how Marie helped a young Cistercian nun whom the devil attacked with ‘blasphemies and unclean thoughts’.³⁷ Similarly, Thomas included the story of a pilgrim who, after joining the Cistercian order, was ‘troubled and stung by the spirit of blasphemy’.³⁸

The hagiographical character of the source material relating the predicament of Ugolino demands a search for corroborating evidence. Aside from Thomas’s account, are there any traces of the origins and nature of Ugolino’s doubts in other documents? Ugolino had been a member of the College of Cardinals for almost three decades before ascending the papal throne in March 1227.³⁹ Between 1207 and 1209, he was put in charge of the crucial legation to protect the papacy’s interests in the conflict between Otto IV and Philip of Swabia.⁴⁰ The murder of Philip on 21 June 1208, and the consequent setback of the papal legation, seems to have coincided with the death of Ugolino’s mentor and spiritual father Raniero da Ponza, a monk at the Cistercian abbey of Fossanova who was himself involved in papal diplomacy with Germany.⁴¹ A letter from Ugolino to the Cistercians of the abbeys of Fossanova, Casamari and Salem, written sometime between 1207 and 1209, testified to

³⁶ Jacques de Vitry, *Vita*, bk. 2, ch. 3 (CChr.CM 252, 113–14).

³⁷ *Ibid.*, bk. 1, ch. 9 (76–9).

³⁸ Thomas de Cantimpré, *Supplementum*, ch. 16 (CChr.CM 252, 189–90).

³⁹ See also Maria Pia Alberzoni, ‘Dalla domus del cardinale d’Ostia alla curia di Gregorio IX’, in *Gregorio IX e gli ordini mendicanti (Assisi, 07–09 ottobre 2010)*, Fondazione Centro italiano di studi sull’alto medioevo (Spoleto, 2011), 73–122; Ovidio Capitani, ‘Gregorio IX’, in *Enciclopedia dei Papi*, 3 vols (Rome, 2000), 2: 363–80.

⁴⁰ Friedrich Kempf, *Regestum Innocentii III papae super negotio Romani imperii* (Rome, 1947), no. 141, at 334–5; Werner Maleczek, *Papst und Kardinalskolleg von 1191 bis 1216. Die Kardinäle unter Coelestin III. und Innocenz III* (Vienna, 1984), 126–33.

⁴¹ Maria Pia Alberzoni, ‘Raniero da Ponza e la curia romana’, *Florentia* 11 (1997), 83–112.

Ugolino's profound grief at Raniero's death. The cardinal referred to the monk as his spiritual father and doubted whether he was worthy of his father's virtue because of the multitude of sins piled up over his own head. At the end of the letter, Ugolino noted that his many worries and difficulties, especially regarding his spirit, were hindering his activities in Germany.⁴² Nevertheless, Ugolino's doubts do not seem to have affected his reputation. In March 1221 Honorius III appointed him as legate to the court of Frederick II and both the pope and the emperor were full of praise for the cardinal. Honorius praised Ugolino for his zeal and virtuous life, calling him incorruptible and a pillar and ornament of the Church.⁴³ Frederick II, in turn, rejoiced at Ugolino's appointment and described the cardinal as honest, clear-sighted in religion, pure in life, resourceful, eloquent, knowledgeable and cautious.⁴⁴

After the legation of 1221, Ugolino seems to have been less active, and Guido Levi has suggested that the cardinal was gathering strength for his expected pontificate. Since the cardinals had chosen Honorius over Ugolino in 1216, the latter may have been anticipating the papal throne in the next papal election. Levi also alludes to a conflict between the pope and Ugolino's nephew, Riccardo Conti, over control over the city of Ostia. Levi suggests that there had been a possible cooling on the pope's part towards his cardinal because of this.⁴⁵ Ernst Brem, however, is not convinced that the actions of members of the Conti family would

⁴² '... consolationes invenire non possum. ... nisi quia ex multitudine iniquitatum mearum, que supergressae sunt caput meum ...': Eduard Winkelmann, 'Analecta Heidelbergensia', *Archivio della Società Romana di storia patria* 2 (1879), 363–7, at 363–4. Maleczek also linked the spirituality of Ugolino to the influence of Raniero: *Papst und Kardinalskolleg*, 128.

⁴³ Heinrich Zimmermann, *Die päpstliche Legation in der ersten Hälfte des 13. Jahrhunderts* (Paderborn, 1913), 230.

⁴⁴ Guido Levi, *Registri dei cardinali Ugolino d'Ostia e Ottaviani degli Ubaldini* (Rome, 1890), 150–2.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* xvii, 126–7, 141.

have impinged on Ugolino.⁴⁶ Nonetheless, tensions between the cardinal's family and Pope Honorius may have indeed contributed to the doubts Ugolino was facing after the loss of his spiritual mentor.

It is clear that Ugolino's wish for Marie's support in 1226 was not his first invocation of a religious woman to provide spiritual help. In 1220, in a letter to Clare of Assisi, Ugolino wrote that he was weighed down by so many sins, that he had offended the Lord, and would no longer be worthy to be among his elect unless Clare's tears and prayers were to obtain him mercy.⁴⁷

The cardinal's letter to Clare is reminiscent of his earlier letter mourning the death of Raniero da Ponza. Furthermore, Maria Pia Alberzoni, discussing Gregory IX's involvement in the new female religious movements, points to a later letter from July 1227 that Ugolino, by then Gregory IX, addressed to the Poor Clares of Sant'Apollinare at Milan.⁴⁹ In this letter, too, Ugolino expressed his fear that he was not worthy to be among the elect of the Lord, for his many temporal concerns, especially since he had become pope, had kept him from spiritual

⁴⁶ Ernst Brem, *Papst Gregor IX bis zum Beginn seines Pontifikats* (Heidelberg, 1911), 60; Salvatore Sibilio, *Gregorio IX* (Milan, 1961), 51.

⁴⁷ '... quod tot peccatorum sum sarcina praegravatus et in tantum universae terrae Dominatorem offendi, quod non sum dignus electorum eius consortio aggregari et ab occupationibus terrenis avelli, nisi lacrymae et orationes tuae mihi veniam impetrent pro peccatis'. *Analecta Franciscana*, 3: *Chronica XXIV generalium Ordinis Minorum cum pluribus appendicibus inter quas excellit hucusque ineditus Liber de laudibus S. Francisci Fr. Bernardi a Bessa* (Quaracchi, 1897), 183; see also Kajetan Esser, 'Die Briefe Gregors IX. an die hl. Klara von Assisi', *Franziskanische Studien* 35 (1953), 274–95, at 274.

⁴⁹ Maria Pia Alberzoni, *Francescanesimo a Milano nel Duecento* (Milan, 1991), 209.

contemplation. Ugolino's words in these letters leave little doubt regarding his uncertainties about his faith.⁵⁰

However, while the source material may support Thomas de Cantimpré's account of Ugolino's crisis, we must also consider that Ugolino was elected pope only a year later, and the severity of the cardinal's doubts must therefore be nuanced. Neither his plea for spiritual support from Clare of Assisi and for her special prayers nor the emphasis on his sins was unusual: indeed, such language was common in the writings of faithful people concerned with their souls. Given Ugolino's support for the Franciscans and the Poor Clares, his letter to Clare perhaps testifies more to the cardinal's admiration for her devotion and religious life. The admiration Ugolino showed for Clare was part of a wider appreciation of the new order in the curia. Similarly, in a letter of 1216, Jacques de Vitry observed that Honorius III and the cardinals greatly admired the Franciscans and the Poor Clares.⁵¹

Besides the perspective of Ugolino, Thomas de Cantimpré's intentions in reporting the anecdote and (perhaps more importantly) the genre-specific characteristics of these hagiographic accounts also need to be considered. Thomas, born in 1201, grew up in Brabant and Liège. As a young boy, he heard Jacques preaching and was so impressed that he vowed to love and venerate the preacher.⁵² Like Jacques, Thomas studied theology and became a successful preacher and a prolific writer. Inspired by Jacques's *Vita* of Marie d'Oignies, Thomas not only added a supplement to it, but also wrote hagiographies for other *mulieres sanctae* from Liège and Brabant, showing his admiration for these holy women.⁵³ And just as

⁵⁰ Maria Pia Alberzoni also noted that the letters reveal that the cardinal was often plagued by a profound spiritual despair: '*Servus Vestrum et Ancillarum Christi Omnium: Gregorio IX e la vita religiosa femminile*', *Franciscan Studies* 64 (2006), 145–78, at 164–5.

⁵¹ Jacques de Vitry, *Epistolae*, ep. 1 (CChr.CM 171, 553).

⁵² Thomas de Cantimpré, *Supplementum*, ch. 23 (CChr.CM 252, 201).

⁵³ See also Barbara Newman, 'Devout Women and Demoniacs in the World of Thomas of Cantimpré', in *New Trends in Feminine Spirituality. The Holy Women of Liège and their Impact*, ed. J.

Jacques's *Vita* of Marie d'Oignies, dedicated to the ardent anti-Cathar bishop Foulques de Toulouse (d. 1231), was also intended to provide an alternative to Cathar women in the South of France,⁵⁴ so too Thomas's *Supplementum* was more than a biographical account.

A first and rather subtle message in the *Supplementum* is Thomas's disappointment with Jacques's rise in the ecclesiastical hierarchy. This moralizing character is evident in Ugolino's refusal to accept Jacques's gift of a silver cup mentioned above. Saying it was not a gift from the East, but from Rome, the cardinal implied that the cup represented temporal wealth. Through this anecdote, Thomas de Cantimpré criticised Jacques's rise to power and wealth, accusing him of betraying the ideals of poverty and humility propagated by Marie d'Oignies. While it is clear, considering other parts of the *Supplementum*, that Thomas was trying to convince Jacques that his rightful place was with the community of Oignies rather than at the curia, these comments also reflect a broader contemporary criticism of the Roman prelates. Elsewhere in the *Supplementum*, Thomas claimed that 'all of France with its abundance scarcely suffices for the annual taxes of cardinals'.⁵⁵ Indeed, in the spirit of the reforms of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), and before his rise through the ranks of the Roman hierarchy, Jacques himself had expressed his dismay at the cardinals' temporal concerns. Just as Ugolino lamented his lack of time for spiritual contemplation, so Jacques noted that '[at the curia] they are really absorbed by concerns for secular or temporal matters, ... so much that it is hardly permitted to speak about spiritual matters'.⁵⁶ Ironically, when Jacques became cardinal, he was accused of the temporal concerns he himself had accused the cardinals of.

Dor, L. P. Johnson and J. Wogan-Browne, *Medieval Women, Texts and Contexts* 2 (Turnhout, 1999), 35–60.

⁵⁴ André Vauchez, 'Prosélytisme et action antihérétique en milieu féminin au XIIIe siècle: La "Vie de Marie d'Oignies" (†1213) par Jacques de Vitry', *Problèmes d'histoire du christianisme* 17 (1987), 95–110.

⁵⁵ Thomas de Cantimpré, *Supplementum*, ch. 22 (CChr.CM 252, 197).

⁵⁶ Jacques de Vitry, *Epistolae*, ep. 1 (CChr.CM 171, 553).

Moreover, the fact that in Thomas's account we encounter the 'spirit of blasphemy' predominantly in a Dominican context is surely no coincidence, and the story of Ugolino's triumph over his doubts should also be regarded as an *exemplum*.⁵⁷ Thomas presented the story of Ugolino as a lesson for readers who found themselves in a similar predicament: as Pope Gregory IX, Ugolino could be compassionate about their weaknesses because he had been tempted as they were.⁵⁸ The more important message, however, was Marie's exemplary devout life. Thomas noted that Jacques not only gave Ugolino Marie's finger to help him combat his doubts, but above all urged him to read the *Vita* to help him deal with his uncertainties. Elsewhere, Jacques referred to his books as the means by which he was able to subdue the devil;⁵⁹ here he recommended that Ugolino read Marie's *Vita* to bring him back onto the right path. Similarly, through his *Supplementum*, Thomas de Cantimpré also advertised the use of the *Vita* of Marie d'Oignies as an example for a devotional life.⁶⁰ Marie was the paradigm of a *mulier sancta* and the embodiment of the *vita apostolica*: living a poor, humble, penitential and deeply spiritual life, concerned with the *cura animarum* of the

⁵⁷ Thomas himself noted that he had selected some *exempla* among many cases of encounters with the *spiritus blasphemiae*. Thomas de Cantimpré, *Supplementum*, ch. 16 (CChr.CM 252, 190).

⁵⁸ Ibid. Thomas paraphrases Heb. 4: 15. A few lines earlier, he compared Ugolino to Saint Peter, who also wrestled with doubts and temptation.

⁵⁹ Jacques de Vitry, *Epistolae*, ep. 1 (CChr.CM 171, 550).

⁶⁰ Jacques urged the reader to imitate the virtues of Marie, but did not commend her physical excesses. It is important to note that while Jacques used the subjunctive '*eius virtutes imitemur*' ('we should imitate'), his subsequent use of the infinitive '*imitari non possumus*' ('we cannot / are unable to imitate') is in line with his emphasis on her special fervour: 'Nec hoc dixerim ut excessum commendem, sed ut fervorem ostendam. ... eius virtutes imitemur, opera vero virtutum eius sine privato privilegio imitari non possumus'. Jacques de Vitry, *Vita*, bk. 1, ch. 2 (CChr.CM 252, 58).

faithful.⁶¹ Thomas's emphasis on the power of Marie's relics emulated Jacques's efforts to advance the reputation of his spiritual mother.⁶² Jacques's *Vita* of Marie included most characteristics of a typical saint's life: her virtuous childhood, the renunciation of temporal possessions, persecution, and testimonies of her devotion and asceticism. However, Jacques did not include the necessary *miracula* that would help to promote Marie to sainthood. Rather, the *Vita* echoed the focus on practical theology amongst his fellow preachers and theologians in the circle of Paris masters around Peter the Chanter. In the *Vita* Jacques emphasized the concern for pastoral care and the apostolic lifestyle demonstrated by Marie, and by extension other *mulieres sanctae*, providing his readers with an example to imitate. While he showed some appreciation for the burgeoning lay religious movements, Jacques seems to have been reluctant to go too far in endorsing asceticism and devotion outside the walls of the cloisters. In contrast, Thomas de Cantimpré, writing in the context of the rise of the friars, was more eager to elevate the *mulieres sanctae* to sainthood and added a number of *miracula* to Marie's *Vita*.

A final element to consider is Thomas de Cantimpré's own doubt. Jacques only mentioned the silver reliquary pendant with Marie's finger once and did not claim explicitly that it was Marie who had saved his mule from drowning. Thomas, on the other hand, attributed two more miracles to Marie's finger-relic. These specific instances, however, need to be seen in the context of the author's love and admiration for another *mulier sancta*, St Lutgarde d'Aywières, and the *Vita* he wrote in her memory.⁶³ It is known that Thomas tried to

⁶¹ Some iconography depicts Marie as *magistra*, seemingly teaching the *vita apostolica*: e.g. Turin, Biblioteca Statale Universitaria, MS D.II.21, fol. 3^r; Leuven, Maurits Sabbebibliotheek, Coll. Mechelen, Bibliotheek van het Grootseminarie, MS 20, fol. 72^r.

⁶² On the relics of Marie, see also Brenda M. Bolton, 'Spiegels van vroomheid: Relieken van Maria van Oignies', in M. Monteiro et al., eds, *De dynamiek van religie en cultuur: Geschiedenis van het Nederlands katholicisme* (Kampen, 1993), 124–37.

⁶³ Thomas Merton, 'Saint Lutgarde: Nun of Aywières, Belgium', *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 35 (2000), 219–30.

convince the abbess of Aywières to give him Lutgard's hand after her death. We read in the *Vita Lutgardis* that, when she found out about his intentions, Lutgard asked her friend what he planned to do with her hand. Thomas replied that he believed her hand would be good for his body and soul. When Lutgard told him that one of her fingers would suffice, he answered that no part of her body would be enough for him, unless he had her hand or head to comfort him when she was gone.⁶⁴ In his *Vita Lutgardis* Thomas de Cantimpré revealed the intention behind his emphasis on Marie's relic, for he told those who berated him for venerating Lutgard's finger that Jacques had cut off Marie's finger even though she was not yet canonized.⁶⁵ Faced with the thought of losing Lutgard, and perhaps jealous of Jacques's possession of Marie's finger, Thomas seems to have used the account of the miracles attributed to the finger of Marie d'Oignies as a justification for his obsession with obtaining a relic of his own spiritual mother. As Marie's finger had protected and consoled Jacques and Ugolino, Thomas hoped that Lutgard's relic would not only protect his body and soul but would also help to console him.

Jacques's assistance in overcoming Ugolino's doubts provided the foundation for a lifelong friendship between the two prelates. Alberic de Trois-Fontaines noted that upon the election of Ugolino as the new pope in 1227 Jacques was called to travel to the papal see 'with haste' (*cum festinatione*); the new Pope Gregory IX appointed him as Cardinal-bishop of Tusculum, a high-ranking position in the Roman Church.⁶⁶ In so far as we can reconstruct these events from hagiographical texts, and taking into account Thomas de Cantimpré's agenda in the *Supplementum*, it would seem that Jacques and Ugolino encountered each other at a crossroads, at a time when both were struggling with doubts about their careers. Jacques's intervention seems to have given Ugolino the strength to overcome his doubts and move on to

⁶⁴ 'Nihil inquam, mihi ex tuo, Mater, corpore sufficere poterit, nisi manum aut caput habeam, quo tunc relevere toto orbatus': Thomas de Cantimpré, *Vita Lutgardis*, 290.

⁶⁵ Ibid. 291.

⁶⁶ Albrici monachi Triumfontium, *Chronicon* (MGH S 23, 919).

become pope. Ugolino, in turn, helped Jacques to continue his reform and his crusade efforts as his close advisor in the curia.⁶⁷

Thomas de Cantimpré's description of the temptation of Ugolino by the 'spirit of blasphemy' might be taken as a rhetorical device employed by the preacher to make his account of the cardinal's tribulations more dramatic. As in Jacques de Vitry's writings, the *spiritus blasphemiae* is used as an allegorical personification of doubt, much as it is in the story of Henry Suso mentioned above. Doubt in the form of an evil spirit also ties in with the seven gifts Marie receives from the Holy Spirit: she is given seven virtues which Jacques presents as seven spirits.⁶⁹ Nonetheless, while Thomas may have exaggerated the severity of the cardinal's crisis in order to emphasize the intercessory role and power of Marie, Ugolino's own writings do seem to testify to his doubts regarding his worthiness for his office. For the reader today, therefore, the story of Ugolino provides a glimpse into the doubts of a medieval prelate: his suffering upon the death of his mentor and his uncertainty about his worthiness for the office of cardinal, and later that of pope, would eventually lead him to the brink of *acedia*. The value of Thomas de Cantimpré's account, however, transcends its anecdotal biographical information. The story of Ugolino serves as an *exemplum* and has a clear didactic value. Through it, and despite the subtle criticism against Jacques's temporal concerns, Thomas had a chance to ascribe to two of the people he most admired, Jacques and Marie, a crucial role in Ugolino's ascent to the throne of St Peter. The *Vita* of Marie was portrayed as a model life for the reader to imitate and as the perfect tool for the overcoming of doubt. The intercessory powers of Marie d'Oignies against the temptations of doubt, despair and blasphemy were made clear. Through the relic of her finger, Marie's intercessory powers triumphed against

⁶⁷ The influence of Jacques on Gregory IX's decision-making certainly deserves further research. To date, the only research into Jacques's role as cardinal is a brief chapter in Philipp Funk, *Jakob von Vitry. Leben und Werke* (Leipzig, 1909), 60–7.

⁶⁹ Jacques de Vitry, *Vita*, bk. 2, chs 2–8 (CChr.CM 252, 94–145).

Jacques de Vitry's doubts, repelled the 'spirit of blasphemy' vexing Ugolino, and alleviated Thomas's despair when faced with the loss of his own personal saint Lutgardis.