

FRANCISCAN MANUSCRIPTS RECONSIDERED: HISTORIOGRAPHY, DEFINITIONS, AND NEW DIRECTIONS

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Despite the abundant literature devoted to Franciscan art, no study has yet placed Franciscan manuscripts as a corpus at the very heart of the inquiry.¹ Altarpieces and frescoes dominate scholarly attention, while important individual, richly-illustrated manuscripts are typically examined in monographic studies, and are seldom considered *collectively*. Even less studied is the large body of what I have termed “scattered,” non-cyclical images of Francis and the Franciscans that appear in early manuscripts (ca. 1230–1350), including but not limited to liturgical, biblical, and lay-owned devotional books as well as travel texts.² This lacuna is all the more striking given the Order’s own textual culture and the wealth of surviving Franciscan books.³

¹ This essay originated from the first two chapters of my honors thesis at New York University, *Imaging and Imagining Saint Francis in Medieval Manuscripts, ca. 1230–1350*, advised by Professor Kathryn A. Smith. I am deeply grateful for her guidance and support. I also wish to acknowledge the multiple Dean’s Undergraduate Research Funds awarded by New York University’s College of Arts and Science, which made this research possible. The third, fourth, and fifth chapters of the thesis consist of case studies that apply the definition proposed in Part II of this essay and seek to address the scholarly gap identified in Part I. For the third chapter, see Yunji Li, “Missionary, Martyrdom, and Moral Geography: Visualizing Medieval Orientalism, ca. 1250–1350,” forthcoming in the *Journal of Undergraduate Research in Humanities* (Summer 2026). I also thank my editor, Rouen Nelson, for their help with editing.

² For the purpose of this essay, “scattered manuscripts” refers to manuscripts that contain Franciscan images incidentally or intermittently; as well as manuscripts that include some illustrations but are not fully illustrated and that remain relatively understudied, with no dedicated monographic analyses.

³ René Hernández Vera notes that “‘book’ and ‘manuscript,’ as individual words and as nouns both in the singular and the plural—book/books, manuscript/manuscripts—are practically interchangeable in his work and refer to a

The Franciscan engagement with manuscripts began early. As Franciscan historian Neslihan Şenocak notes, the 1230 papal bull *Quo elongati* categorized books as necessary items and permitted the friars to keep them without assuming ownership, thereby revising the 1220 prohibition on book ownership.⁴ In the years that followed, books within the Order steadily multiplied through three main channels: donations and bequests, purchase, and the copying of texts.⁵ Şenocak's scholarship shows that the Franciscans' engagement with books, through the evidence of both their acquisitions and their cataloguing system, was profound, shedding new light on the manuscripts' contexts. Nonetheless, the implications of these manuscripts for understanding Franciscan visuality, self-representation, and imaginative worlds remain largely unexplored.

This essay argues that the scattered manuscript images of Francis and the Franciscans, precisely because they are dispersed across diverse genres and contexts, offer an important and largely overlooked contribution to understanding Franciscan visuality. Taken together, these images illuminate not only Franciscan modes of seeing but also Franciscan modes of “doing” and of “being in the world,” as well as Franciscan forms of self-fashioning, expressions of institutional ideologies, and even contemporary critical receptions of Franciscanism.⁶ By analyzing how some less-studied manuscript images portray Francis, his miracles, his followers, his missionary activities, and his broader persona, this study aims to demonstrate that early Franciscan manuscripts participated actively in shaping Franciscan identities and imaginaries. Reframing these manuscripts not as peripheral witnesses to monumental cycles but as formative, polyvalent sites of Franciscan representation, I propose that the corpus of scattered imagery contributes essential evidence for how Franciscans saw themselves, how they wished to be seen, and how others responded to them. My first chapter surveys the historiography of Franciscan art to reveal *how* and *why* scattered manuscripts, and the imagery within them, remain understudied. The discussion is organized around three trajectories: the dominance of monumental cycles; monographic studies of single manuscripts with full visual programs; and the scattered manuscripts in the margins of scholarship.

material object in a specific time and place that serves as a written recipient of information in the form of a codex” (28). I follow this convention and use “Franciscan book” and “Franciscan manuscript” interchangeably throughout this essay, since nearly all books in Francis's time were manuscripts. See also Hernández Vera, 178, where he contrasts the theoretical notion of the “Franciscan book” with the concrete reality of “Franciscan manuscripts,” though I find this distinction less significant for my purpose here. René Hernández Vera, *Franciscan Books and Their Readers: Friars and Manuscripts in Late Medieval Italy* (Amsterdam University Press, 2022).

⁴ Neslihan Şenocak, “Early Fourteenth-Century Franciscan Library Catalogues: The Case of the Gubbio Catalogue (c. 1300),” *Scriptorium* 59, no. 1 (2005): 30.

⁵ Neslihan Şenocak, “Book Acquisition in the Medieval Franciscan Order,” *Journal of Religious History* 27, no. 1 (February 2003): 14–16.

⁶ I thank Professor Kathryn A. Smith for her help in devising some of this language.

1.1 *The Dominance of the Monumental in Franciscan Art Historical Scholarship*

From the late twentieth into the early twenty-first century, scholarship on Franciscan imagery focused principally on the monumental. Rona Goffen's important *Spirituality in Conflict* (1988) confines itself to study of the Bardi dossal (ca. 1250s) and Giotto di Bondone's frescoes in the Bardi Chapel (ca. 1310–16), without so much as a glance at manuscripts.⁷ Anne Derbes's groundbreaking study *Picturing the Passion in Late Medieval Italy: Narrative Paintings, Franciscan Ideologies, and the Levant* (1996) establishes the Franciscans' role in transforming Italian thirteenth-century monumental depictions of the Passion through their contact with Byzantine sources, but does not consider Italian illuminated manuscripts in this connection.⁸ Similarly, Louise Bourdua's *The Franciscans and Art Patronage in Late Medieval Italy* (2004) expanded the field, concentrating on Franciscan churches in the Veneto, and focusing on questions of funding and administration.⁹ Manuscripts are, however, conspicuously absent from Bourdua's study. William R. Cook's edited collection, *The Art of the Franciscan Order in Italy* (2005), consolidated decades of scholarship, but even this "veritable industry" concentrates almost wholly upon Assisi and its monumental fresco cycles.¹⁰ Rosalind B. Brooke's sweeping *The Image of St. Francis* (2006) encompassed Franciscan imagery with unmatched breadth.¹¹ Her chapters focus on the frescoes of Assisi and related panel paintings, however, and consider only two manuscripts and their themes, including the English Benedictine chronicler and artist Matthew Paris's (d. 1259) depictions of the *Sermon to the Birds* and the *Vision of the Seraph*; and the image of Francis in an early thirteenth-century Umbrian Bible (discussed below). Donal Cooper and Janet Robson's *The Making of Assisi: The Pope, the Franciscans and the Painting of the Basilica*

⁷Rona Goffen, *Spirituality in Conflict: Saint Francis and Giotto's Bardi Chapel* (Penn State University Press, 1990). Sonia Chiodo dates the dossal to the 1250s in "Libri miniati per la preghiera e lo studio e una pagina della storia duecentesca di Santa Croce," in *Ad usum fratris...: Miniature nei manoscritti laurenziani di Santa Croce (secoli XI–XIII)*, ed. Sonia Chiodo (Edizioni della Normale, 2016), 100; Judith E. Stein dates it to ca. 1254–57 in "Dating the Bardi St. Francis Master Dossal: Text and Image," *Franciscan Studies* 36 (1976): 294.

Art historians almost universally date Giotto's Bardi Chapel frescoes to ca. 1310–16.

⁸Anne Derbes, *Picturing the Passion in Late Medieval Italy: Narrative Painting, Franciscan Ideologies, and the Levant* (Cambridge, 1996).

⁹Louise Bourdua, *The Franciscans and Art Patronage in Late Medieval Italy* (Cambridge University Press, 2004). See also Anne Derbes, review of *The Franciscans and Art Patronage in Late Medieval Italy*, by Louise Bourdua, and *The Art of the Franciscan Order in Italy*, by William R. Cook, *Speculum* 82, no. 2 (April 2007): 416–18; Joanna Cannon, review of *The Franciscans and Art Patronage in Late Medieval Italy*, by Louise Bourdua, *The Burlington Magazine* 148, no. 1241 (August 2006): 550–51; Michael Robson, review of *The Franciscans and Art Patronage in Late Medieval Italy*, by Louise Bourdua, *Heythrop Journal* 54, no. 3 (May 2013): 467–68.

¹⁰William R. Cook, ed., *The Art of the Franciscan Order in Italy* (Brill, 2005); Derbes, review of *The Franciscans and Art Patronage in Late Medieval Italy* and *The Art of the Franciscan Order in Italy*, 416–18.

¹¹Rosalind B. Brooke, *The Image of St Francis: Responses to Sainthood in the Thirteenth Century* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), esp. 160–202 and color plate 2 (between pp. 304–05); her description for the plate is based on Giovanni Morello and Laurence B. Kanter, eds., *The Treasury of Saint Francis of Assisi* (Electa, 1999), 134–35. Anne Derbes, review of *The Image of St. Francis: Responses to Sainthood in the Thirteenth Century*, by Rosalind B. Brooke, *Speculum* 83, no. 4 (October 2008): 960–61.

(2013) constitutes a major contribution, by relating the theological core of Franciscanism to mural imagery and spatial programs.¹² Yet as its very title signals, manuscripts are not its principal focus: while their texts and images are offered as comparative evidence for the frescoes, these images and the manuscripts themselves are not engaged with in a sustained, systematic way.¹³

Holly Flora's *Cimabue and the Franciscans* (2018) and her essay "Sensory Engagement and Contemplative Transformation in Cimabue's Assisi Transepts" (2019) also focus principally on monumental works.¹⁴ Notably, however, in her book's first and final chapters, Flora brings illuminated manuscripts into the larger conversation around Franciscan visuality. In Chapter 1, "New Light on Cimabue's Lead White," Flora cites an anonymous artist's use of lead white to render the rays of light in an image of *Francis Receiving the Stigmata* in a ca. 1270 antiphonary, as a precedent for Cimabue's intentional, meaningful use of this pigment in his Assisi frescoes.¹⁵ In Chapter 6, "Pictures, Words, and the Imagination in Cimabue's *Vita Christi*," Flora discusses two richly-illustrated fourteenth-century manuscripts of the Franciscan text known as the *Meditationes vitae Christi* in order to analyze the surviving panels of a now-dismembered, ca. 1280 *vita Christi* by Cimabue.¹⁶ Together, these landmark publications attest to the maturity and vitality of the field. With the exception of Flora's monograph, however, they also perpetuate its most telling blind spot: manuscripts are relegated to the margins, and sometimes to invisibility itself.

1.2 Single, Coherent Franciscan Manuscripts in Monographic Studies

If monumental art dominated twentieth-century scholarship, the twenty-first has seen a flowering of studies devoted to fully illustrated Franciscan manuscripts whose imagery constitutes coherent programs. These studies provide essential groundwork for understanding the contributions of manuscript imagery to the formation of Franciscan visuality.

Flora's work on the important Franciscan text, the *Meditationes Vitae Christi* (MVC)¹⁷—and

¹² Donal Cooper and Janet Robson, *The Making of Assisi: The Pope, the Franciscans and the Painting of the Basilica* (Yale University Press, 2013); Marilyn Aronberg Lavin, review of *The Making of Assisi: The Pope, the Franciscans and the Painting of the Basilica*, by Donal Cooper and Janet Robson, *Studies in Iconography* 36 (2015): 175–78.

¹³ Among the manuscripts and/or images that Robson and Cooper's *The Making of Assisi* discusses as comparanda are the manuscripts of *Legenda maior*, valued as a hagiographical text (99); sixteen Saint Francis sermons manuscripts, with the verse that describes the creation of Adam (165); illuminations of the *Miracle of the Spring* and *Stigmatization and Preaching to the Birds* (190; 194–5); and two miniatures from Cortona graduals displaying Ascentio iconography (195–7).

¹⁴ Holly Flora, *Cimabue and the Franciscans* (Brepols, 2018); eadem, "Sensory Engagement and Contemplative Transformation in Cimabue's Assisi Transepts," in *Aesthetic Theology and the Franciscan Tradition: The Senses and the Experience of God in Art*, ed. Oleg Bychkov and Xavier Seubert (Routledge, 2020), 49–71.

¹⁵ Flora, *Cimabue and the Franciscans*, 40–41.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 199–213.

¹⁷ Sarah McNamer controversially gave priority to the "short," Italian version of the text, which she dated to ca. 1336–64 and assigned to female authorship. "The Origins of the *Meditationes vitae Christi*," *Speculum* 84, no. 4

especially on MS. Ital. 115 (ca. 1340–50),¹⁸—is a crucial contribution. Her 2009 monograph, *The Devout Belief of the Imagination*, the first major study devoted to the illustrated copies of *MVC*, demonstrates that Ital. 115 was designed as a pedagogical tool for Poor Clares, integrating image and reading practices to cultivate imaginative presence and affective participation.¹⁹ Flora later extended this manuscript-based methodology beyond Ital. 115. Her 2017 essay reconstructs the Clarissan context of Oxford, CCC MS 410 (ca. 1350 or earlier) and demonstrates how the illustrated long Latin *MVC* version that it contains structured meditative seeing.²⁰ Flora returns to Ital. 115 in the 2021 scholarly commentary edition and in a complementary 2021 Italian essay, both of which refine her earlier analyses of its codicology, iconographic planning, and Franciscan pedagogical aims.²¹ That same year, Flora co-edited with Peter Tóth the volume *The Meditationes Vitae Christi Reconsidered*, which contains essays by both editors and other scholars on numerous works in the *MVC* manuscript family.²² Flora’s 2024 monograph, *Sensory Experience and Franciscan Devotion in the Paris Meditationes Vitae Christi*, reframes the codex as a somatic, multisensory devotional environment; and a 2025 essay offers a focused study of how Ital. 115 visualizes Franciscan poverty as an embodied spiritual practice.²³ Taken together, Flora’s monographs, essays, and editorial work provide a sustained

(October 2009): 905. For further discussion of the debate surrounding its dating, as well as arguments for the priority of the ca. 1300 “long” Latin version of the text, see several essays in Holly Flora and Peter Tóth, eds., *The Meditationes Vitae Christi Reconsidered: New Perspectives on Text and Image* (Brepols, 2021), 8–10. Flora and Tóth’s volume and many other works build on the foundational work of Isa Ragusa and Rosalie B. Green, eds., *Meditations on the Life of Christ: An Illustrated Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century*, trans. Isa Ragusa (Princeton University Press, 1961).

¹⁸ Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, MS Ital. 115; dated by Holly Flora to ca. 1340–50 in *The Devout Belief of the Imagination: The Paris ‘Meditationes Vitae Christi’ and Female Franciscan Spirituality in Trecento Italy* (Brepols 2009), 18.

¹⁹ Flora, *The Devout Belief of the Imagination*; Anne Derbes, review of *The Devout Belief of the Imagination: The Paris Meditationes Vitae Christi and Female Franciscan Spirituality in Trecento Italy*, by Holly Flora, *Speculum* 86, no. 2 (April 2011): 489.

²⁰ Holly Flora, “Fashioning the Passion: The Poor Clares and the Clothing of Christ,” *Art History* 40, no. 3 (June 2017): 464–95. Renana Bartal dates it to 1300 and briefly discusses the debate on the dating in “Reading the *Meditationes Vitae Christi* on the Mount of Light, Perugia,” *The Meditationes Vitae Christi Reconsidered*, 111–12.

²¹ Holly Flora, “L’illustrazione delle *MVC* nel manoscritto Paris, BnF, It. 115,” and “Commento alle illustrazioni,” in *Le Meditationes vitae Christi in volgare secondo il codice Paris, BnF, It. 115: Edizione, commentario e riproduzione del corredo iconografico*, ed. Diego Dotto, Dávid Falvay, and Antonio Montefusco (Edizioni Ca’ Foscari, 2021), 89–92, 291–493.

²² Flora and Tóth, *The Meditationes Vitae Christi Reconsidered*: contributions include Renana Bartal on Oxford, Corpus Christi College, MS 410 (the only known, fully illuminated copy of the long Latin *MVC*), a manuscript that she dates to the early fourteenth century; Dávid Falvay on Paris, BnF, MS Ital. 115; Dianne Phillips on Notre Dame University Snite Museum’s *MVC* (ca. 1350); and Lisandra S. Costiner on Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica, MS Reg. Lat. 478 (the sixth illuminated *MVC* manuscript that has been identified). For the fifth illuminated *MVC* manuscript that has been identified (Biblioteca Trivulziana, Milan, MS 543), see Lisandra S. Costiner, “An Illuminated Fifteenth-Century Milanese Manuscript of the *Meditationes Vitae Christi*,” *The Burlington Magazine* 163, no. 1417 (April 2021): 324–31.

²³ Holly Flora, *Sensory Experience and Franciscan Devotion in the Paris Meditationes Vitae Christi* (Ultreia, 2024); Holly Flora, “Feeling Franciscan Poverty in the Paris *Meditationes Vitae Christi*,” *Specula* no. 12 (2025): 125–67.

model for interpreting manuscripts as primary sites of Franciscan devotional formation.²⁴

Amy Neff has produced the most sustained and multifaceted body of scholarship on the *Supplicationes variae* (1293),²⁵ treating this Franciscan-influenced manuscript across nearly four decades through complementary studies of its structure, image program, and devotional aims. Her early essay in a volume edited by Hans Belting (1982) identified the manuscript's hybrid pictorial language, characterized by an eclectic fusion of Romanesque and Byzantine models, and framed it as a site where Western picture-book formats encountered Palaeologan iconography.²⁶ Across essays published in 1999, 2002, and 2007, Neff explores the *Supplicationes*'s unusual Western adaptations of Byzantine iconography, its interesting imagery of God's hand, and its previously overlooked excerpts from the late thirteenth-century Franciscan text, the *Stimulus amoris*—studies that collectively illuminated the manuscript's complex cultural, visual, and textual dimensions.²⁷ Her 2019 monograph, *A Soul's Journey: Franciscan Art, Theology, and Devotion in the Supplicationes variae*, offers the first and most comprehensive study of the manuscript, synthesizing and deepening her earlier arguments while reconstructing the reader's devotional path and beyond, and reveals how profoundly a manuscript could draw upon Franciscan sources.²⁸ More recently, Neff's article in Xavier Seubert and Oleg Bychkov's edited volume (2020) distills her masterful monograph.²⁹ In the aggregate, Neff's scholarship on *Supplicationes* sheds new light on the ways that Franciscan spirituality "permeated the world of lay devotion and paved the way for artistic invention in the late medieval period."³⁰

²⁴ See Flora's study of Rome, BNV, Vitt. Em. 411, a *Legenda maior* codex—not part of the MVC tradition addressed above but further underscoring my point that fully illustrated, coherent manuscripts, not scattered ones, have been the primary focus of sustained study; Holly Flora, "Passion, Charisma, and Gender in an Illuminated Manuscript of Bonaventure's Life of St Francis," *Specula* 1, no. 1 (2021): 123–51.

²⁵ Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, MS Plut. 25.3. Despite its abundance in Franciscan imagery, Amy Neff does not consider it a "Franciscan manuscript." I discuss this in my next chapter.

²⁶ Amy Neff, "A New Interpretation of the *Supplicationes variae* Miniatures," in *Il Medio Oriente e l'Occidente nell'arte del XIII secolo*, ed. Hans Belting, *Atti del XXIV Congresso internazionale di storia dell'arte* 2 (CLUEB, 1982), 173–79.

²⁷ Amy Neff, "Byzantium Westernized, Byzantium Marginalized: Two Icons in the *Supplicationes variae*," *Gesta* 38, no. 1 (1999): 81–102; Amy Neff, "'Palma Dabit Palmam': Franciscan Themes in a Devotional Manuscript," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 65 (2002): 22–66; Amy Neff, "An Aristocratic Copy of a Mendicant Text: James of Milan's *Stimulus amoris* in 1293," *Franciscan Studies* 65, no. 1 (2007): 235–50. Neff points out that while art historians have studied the decoration of this manuscript, few have paid attention to its textual contents, which include two chapters of *Stimulus amoris*; this even escaped Falk Eisermann's impressive scholarship on *Stimulus amoris* (2001).

²⁸ Amy Neff, *A Soul's Journey: Franciscan Art, Theology, and Devotion in the Supplicationes variae* (Brepols, 2019); eadem, "The Senses and the Soul's Re-Formation in the *Supplicationes variae*," in *Aesthetic Theology in the Franciscan Tradition: The Senses and the Experience of God in Art*, ed. Xavier Seubert and Oleg Bychkov (Routledge, 2021), 94–125; and see Rebecca W. Corrie, review of *A Soul's Journey: Franciscan Art, Theology, and Devotion in the "Supplicationes variae"*, by Amy Neff, *Studies in Iconography* 42 (2021): 194–98.

²⁹ Neff, "The Senses and the Soul's Re-Formation in the *Supplicationes variae*," in *Aesthetic Theology in the Franciscan Tradition*, 94–125.

³⁰ Holly Flora, review of *A Soul's Journey: Franciscan Art, Theology, and Devotion in the "Supplicationes variae"*, by Amy Neff, *Speculum* 95, no. 4 (2020): 1214.

Building on foundational scholarship by Lucy Freeman Sandler, Lynn Ransom has produced the most sustained scholarship on a late thirteenth-century North French manuscript of the *Verger de soulas*, or “Orchard of Solace” (MS fr. 9220; ca. 1290–1300), establishing the manuscript as expressing a sophisticated Franciscan devotional program.³¹ Her dissertation, “Cultivating the Orchard” (University of Texas at Austin, 2001), which remains the most comprehensive study of the manuscript, reconstructs the volume’s production, identifies a Franciscan designer, and demonstrates how its hybrid structure transforms the *Speculum theologiae* tradition into a pastoral tool for lay penitents.³² Ransom developed these findings across a series of focused essays. Her 2002 chapter articulated the manuscript’s innovative visual logic and argued for a Franciscan designer whose pedagogical aims shaped both iconography and vernacular glossing.³³ In 2008, she turned to the *Lignum vitae*, tracing Bonaventure’s dependence on Bernard of Clairvaux and addressing two central problems: why a Cistercian saint appears in a distinctly Franciscan diagram, and how a theologian renowned for his critique of images comes to be shown venerating the Crucified Christ.³⁴ Her 2013 essay framed the manuscript as a site for cultivating “redemptive vision,” demonstrating how its diagrams and images guide viewers from corporeal sight to imaginative and intellectual contemplation in a characteristically Franciscan mode.³⁵

Across their respective studies, Flora, Neff, and Ransom demonstrate how Franciscan manuscripts cultivate what may be described as Franciscan “modes of seeing”: an affective and imaginative visual practice grounded in Bonaventure’s theology, in which beholding Christ’s suffering with the bodily eyes initiates compassionate participation, interior visualization, and ultimately spiritual transformation.³⁶ Their work establishes the essential methodological

³¹ Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fr. 9220. In her 2008 essay, Lynn Ransom dates the manuscript to “ca. 1290,” likely for the sake of simplicity. In her dissertation, however, she explains that the manuscript has been dated as early as 1260–70 by Patrick M de Winter, to around 1290 by Jean Porcher, and as late as the early years of the fourteenth-century by Lucy Freeman Sandler, so 1290–1300 might be the most feasible dating. Lynn Ransom, “The Bernardian Roots of Bonaventure’s *Lignum vitae*: Visual Evidence from the *Verger de soulas*,” *Ikon* 1 (2008): 133; eadem, “Cultivating the Orchard: A Franciscan Program of Devotion and Penance in the *Verger de soulas* (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fr. 9220)” (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2001), 23. For Sandler’s foundational work on the now-fragmentary early fourteenth-century English Psalter of Robert de Lisle (London, BL Arundel MS 83 II) and the Franciscan elements of its visual program, see Lucy Freeman Sandler, *The Psalter of Robert de Lisle in the British Library* (Harvey Miller Publishers, 1983; rev. ed. 1999).

³² Ransom, “Cultivating the Orchard.”

³³ Lynn Ransom, “Innovation and Identity: A Franciscan Program of Illumination in the *Verger de soulas* (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS fr. 9220),” in *Insights and Interpretations: Studies in Celebration of the Eighty-fifth Anniversary of the Index of Christian Art*, ed. Colum Hourihane (Princeton University Press, 2002).

³⁴ Ransom, “The Bernardian Roots of Bonaventure’s *Lignum vitae*,” 133–42.

³⁵ Lynn Ransom, “The Eyes Have It: The Question of Redemptive Vision in the *Verger de Soulas* (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS fr. 9220),” in *Beyond the Text: Franciscan Art and the Construction of Religion*, ed. Xavier Seubert and Oleg Bychkov (Franciscan Institute, 2013), 177–95.

³⁶ Oleg Bychkov’s work greatly contributed to my understanding of “Franciscan modes of seeing.” See Oleg Bychkov, “The Place of Aesthetics and the Arts in Medieval Franciscan Theology,” in *Beyond the Text: Franciscan*

foundations for understanding Franciscan visuality, showing how carefully designed, coherent, richly-illustrated manuscripts function as pedagogical environments for cultivating devotional beholding. Yet the very coherence and elaboration of these codices point to a wider field that remains largely unexamined: as noted above, such studies concentrate on manuscripts whose programs were conceived as unified devotional architectures. Far less attention has been devoted to the numerous “scattered” or non-cyclical images of Francis and the Franciscans that were not part of a single, purpose-built program, but that nonetheless contributed to the formation, circulation, and contestation of Franciscan identities.

1.3 Scattered Manuscripts in the Margins of Scholarship

In the early twentieth century, A. G. Little did, in some measure, recognize scattered manuscript images as important sources for Franciscan studies, granting them a full chapter in his 1937 edited volume, which focuses on the English context in particular.³⁷ Yet this gesture never coalesced into a sustained tradition. Little’s enterprise, though pioneering, remained largely descriptive rather than interpretive; manuscripts figured as one among six media, set beside wall and screen paintings, embroidery, stained glass, seals, and sculpture. He noted that the Psalters of Queen Isabella (ca. 1303–1308),³⁸ Queen Philippa (ca. 1340),³⁹ and the Beauchamps (ca. 1382–1403),⁴⁰ important patrons of the Franciscans, yielded little or no Franciscan imagery, and where such imagery did appear, it surfaced unpredictably in books of hours or manuscripts of canon law.⁴¹ Later attempts to assemble the Franciscan visual tradition across media, most notably the volume edited by Giovanni Morello and Laurence B. Kanter, *The Treasury of Saint Francis of Assisi* (1999), likewise includes a section on

Art and the Construction of Religion, ed. Xavier Seubert and Oleg Bychkov (Franciscan Institute, 2013), 196–209. For a parallel “Franciscan mode of hearing,” see Roberto Cobiainchi’s discussion of the *cithara angelica* episode, built around the striking question: How do you depict a sound that only Francis hears? Cobiainchi’s study demonstrates the indispensability of illuminated copies of Bonaventure’s *Legenda maior* (1263) for tracing the theme of Francis’s consolation by angelic music; nevertheless, he uses manuscript images chiefly to exemplify a theological topos rather than to situate the books and their imagery within the broader trajectory of Franciscan visual culture. Roberto Cobiainchi, “Cithara Angelica: Experiencing God through Music in Franciscan Imagery (with New Observations on Botticelli’s Saint Francis Flanked by Music-Making Angels and an Initial G by the Master of the Budapest Antiphony),” in *Aesthetic Theology in the Franciscan Tradition*, 163–85.

³⁷ A. G. Little, ed., *Franciscan History and Legend in English Mediaeval Art* (Manchester University Press, 1937), esp. “Illuminated Manuscripts,” 35–53.

³⁸ Munich, Bavarian State Library, Cod. Gall. 16, see Lucy Freeman Sandler, *Gothic Manuscripts, 1285–1385*, 2 vols, A Survey of Manuscripts Illuminated in the British Isles V, gen. ed. J.J.G. Alexander (Harvey Miller Publications, 1986), 2:33–4, no. 27; Anne Rudloff Stanton, “The Psalter of Isabelle, Queen of England, 1308–1330: Isabelle as the Audience,” *Word & Image* 18, no. 4 (2002): 1–27.

³⁹ London, British Library, Harley MS 2899; Sandler, *Gothic Manuscripts* 2: 122–3, no. 110; and most recently Laura Slater, “Seeing the Music in the *Psalter of Queen Philippa*,” *Gesta* 64, no. 1 (2025): 71–102.

⁴⁰ Oxford, Trinity College MS. 8; Sandler, *Gothic Manuscripts* 2:166–7, no. 144; dated by Richard Gameson, *The Medieval Manuscripts of Trinity College, Oxford: A Descriptive Catalogue* (The Oxford Bibliographical Society, 2018), 117.

⁴¹ Little, *Franciscan History and Legend in English Mediaeval Art*, 51–52.

illuminated manuscripts.⁴² That section brings together twelve important Assisi codices, including an Umbrian Bible (ca. 1230–57; see above, p. 4) whose Genesis initial contains one of the earliest surviving images of Francis.⁴³ The Bible, described in a 1381 inventory as the first volume of the Sacro Convento library and as used for refectory readings, demonstrates that Franciscan imagery did appear in manuscripts from an early date—and indeed, roughly contemporaneously with the earliest panel paintings.⁴⁴ Yet the Bible’s very singularity only underscores how fragmentary and unsystematically studied the manuscript evidence remained.

As previously noted, the neglect of scattered manuscripts has been compounded by their uneven visibility. As late as 1960, S. J. P. van Dijk and J. Hazelden Walker professed to know of no surviving thirteenth-century Franciscan antiphonaries.⁴⁵ Only with the 1982 exhibition *Francesco d’Assisi: documenti e archivi, codici e biblioteche, miniature* were such scattered liturgical manuscripts brought to scholarly attention. Nonetheless, even this invaluable catalog, extending across hundreds of pages, made no attempt to situate manuscripts collectively and systematically within Franciscan visual culture.⁴⁶ The 2016 exhibition catalog *Ad usum fratris* juxtaposed the Bible of Enrico de’ Cerchi (1285) with the *Crucifix* by Cimabue (ca. 1280) and the Bardi dossal,⁴⁷ hinting at cross-media connections, but its interpretive frame remained tethered to the issue of the patronage of the Cerchi family.⁴⁸ Trinita Kennedy’s groundbreaking exhibition *Sanctity Pictured* (2014) juxtaposed Dominican and Franciscan artworks, bringing to light many valuable artworks from both traditions.⁴⁹ It is undoubtedly significant for understanding how the two mendicant orders engaged with art and sanctity. Only five of the fifty-six objects it treats are Franciscan-related manuscripts, however, a proportion similar to the material in Little and Morello/Kanter.⁵⁰ These scattered manuscripts were included and described but were considered primarily as individual artifacts, not as integral

⁴² Morello and Kanter, *The Treasury of Saint Francis of Assisi*, 130–49.

⁴³ Biblioteca Comunale, Assisi, MS 17: Morello and Kanter, *The Treasury of Saint Francis of Assisi*, 134–35. Trinita Kennedy and Rosalind B. Brooke also discussed this manuscript: Trinita Kennedy, ed., *Sanctity Pictured: The Art of the Dominican and Franciscan Orders in Renaissance Italy*, exh. cat. (I. B. Tauris, 2014), 7–8; Brooke, *The Image of St Francis*, color plate 2 (between pp. 304–5).

⁴⁴ Morello and Kanter, *The Treasury of Saint Francis of Assisi*, 134–35.

⁴⁵ Stephan Joseph Peter van Dijk and Joan Hazelden Walker, *The Origins of the Modern Roman Liturgy: The Liturgy of the Papal Court and the Franciscan Order in the Thirteenth Century* (Newman Press, 1960), 340, as noted by Trinita Kennedy, “Activating the Senses, Preparing the Soul: Illuminated Antiphonaries for Franciscan Use in Late Medieval Italy,” in *Aesthetic Theology in the Franciscan Tradition*, 188. Kennedy, “Activating the Senses, Preparing the Soul,” 188.

⁴⁶ Francesco Porzio, ed., *Francesco d’Assisi: documenti e archivi; codici e biblioteche; miniature* (Electa, 1982), 93–152, 295–390.

⁴⁷ Chiodo, “Libri miniati per la preghiera e lo studio e una pagina della storia duecentesca di Santa Croce,” in *Ad usum fratris*, 100.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 61–69.

⁴⁹ Kennedy, *Sanctity Pictured*.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, cat. 3 (Christine Sciacca, Dominican manuscript featuring Franciscans); cat. 7 (Martina Bagnoli); cat. 30 (Xavier Seubert); cats. 10 and 41 (Janet Robson).

constituents of Franciscan art, and were not studied in depth as a corpus.

1.4 Structural and Historical Causes of the Gap

The marginalization of Franciscan manuscripts is not accidental. It arises from a confluence of historical, institutional, and aesthetic factors. First, as Emanuela Sesti (2002) notes, the Assisi library lacks illuminated manuscripts containing full narrative cycles of the saint's life.⁵¹ This conveys the impression that the only officially recognized visual narrative of Saint Francis's life in Assisi was the fresco cycle in the basilica. Second, as Şenocak demonstrates, the friars' itinerant lifestyle and the practice of using books as personal assets, whether to repay debts or cover medical expenses, made convent collections unusually vulnerable to dispersal and loss.⁵² This internal instability within Franciscan institutions prefigured the broader cultural and material neglect that followed. Jeffrey F. Hamburger (1998) observes that the suppression of monasteries and convents in the early modern period weakened the preservation of their books, while Renaissance theorists entrenched an aesthetic hierarchy that exalted painting, sculpture, and architecture, consigning manuscripts to the status of the so-called "minor arts."⁵³ Most importantly, the lack of a centralized identity or clear definition of Franciscan manuscripts might have contributed to their marginalization the most—the second part of this essay will explore this topic in depth and propose a new definition.

Having identified the gap, it remains to consider why filling it matters. First, bringing scattered manuscript images into fuller view dismantles the aesthetic hierarchy that privileges the monumental over the portable and the intimate. Second, it challenges the intellectual hierarchy—a Renaissance-born bias that elevated certain media as more artistically or theologically important than others, thereby obscuring a crucial arena through which Franciscans visualized their spirituality. Third, as Cesare Vasoli (1982) observes, the rise of the mendicant orders coincided with the "civilization of the book," when textual and visual media reshaped Western modes of thought.⁵⁴ Studying Franciscan manuscripts thus situates the friars within this larger transformation. Fourth, as Sesti demonstrates, the manuscripts of Assisi were central to the diffusion of the Giottesque style, revealing the friars as active creators of artistic tradition.⁵⁵ To study Franciscan imagery in scattered manuscripts is thus to recover a fuller spectrum of Franciscan visuality: that is, not only modes of seeing but also modes of doing, of being in the world, of institutional self-fashioning, and even of critical reception. Addressing this gap

⁵¹ Emanuela Sesti, "La miniatura ad Assisi tra Duecento e Trecento," in *Assisi Anno 1300*, ed. Stefano Brufani and Enrico Menestò (Fondazione Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, 2002), 447.

⁵² Şenocak, "Early Fourteenth-Century Franciscan Library Catalogues," 31; eadem, "Book Acquisition in the Medieval Franciscan Order," 20. Sesti, "La miniatura ad Assisi tra Duecento e Trecento," 437: "È evidente che la dispersione di molti codici non ha contribuito al tentativo di ricostruzione del fondo manoscritto del Sacro Convento di Assisi...."

⁵³ Hamburger, "Introduction: Texts Versus Images," in *The Visual and the Visionary*, 14.

⁵⁴ Cesare Vasoli, "Introduzione" for "Codici e Biblioteche," in *Francesco d'Assisi*, 96.

⁵⁵ Sesti, "La miniatura ad Assisi tra Duecento e Trecento," 436, 454.

restores balance to the field, reframes the canon, and illuminates how medieval Franciscans imagined and represented themselves across diverse textual and visual environments.

While this essay aims to foreground the visual and material dimensions of scattered manuscript images, it also builds upon broader efforts to articulate distinctively Franciscan patterns of spirituality and perception. Caroline Walker Bynum's early review, "Franciscan Spirituality: Two Approaches" (1976), drew attention to David L. Jeffrey's *The Early English Lyric and Franciscan Spirituality* (1975).⁵⁶ By arguing that the Middle English lyric must be understood through Franciscan preaching, Jeffrey relocated vernacular lyric into the ambit of Franciscan spirituality.⁵⁷ Hamburger's *The Visual and the Visionary* (1998) offers a similar model, insisting that the so-called minor arts and manuscripts were central for female spirituality in late medieval Germany.⁵⁸ What has been accomplished for lyric poetry and German female monastic imagery has yet to be accomplished for Franciscan manuscripts.

Part 2: (Re)defining Franciscan Manuscripts

So, what exactly is a Franciscan manuscript? Or, what makes a manuscript "Franciscan"? The question seems simple, yet no consensus exists. This chapter surveys how modern Italian and Anglophone scholars have engaged with the problem, whether explicitly or implicitly, and identifies two main approaches: the institutional-provenance model, which defines Franciscan manuscripts by their production, use, or preservation within Franciscan contexts; and the iconographic-expansive model, which understands the manuscripts through their subject matter, imagery, and religious function. After reviewing these two trajectories, I propose a new definition that reconciles Franciscan spirituality's boundaryless nature with the material realities of manuscript culture.

2.1 The Institutional-Provenance Tradition

Neff's book on the *Supplicationes variae* (1293), a large manuscript that came into Medici ownership,⁵⁹ first prompted my inquiry into how we define Franciscan manuscripts. In the *Supplicationes*, Saint Francis receives singular veneration: he is the only contemporary saint whose

⁵⁶ Caroline Walker Bynum, "Franciscan Spirituality: Two Approaches," review of *The Franciscan Concept of Mission in the High Middle Ages*, by E. Randolph Daniel, and *The Early English Lyric and Franciscan Spirituality*, by David L. Jeffrey, *Medievalia et Humanistica* 7 (1976): 195–97.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 196–97.

⁵⁸ Hamburger, "Introduction: Texts Versus Images," in *The Visual and the Visionary*, 13–34; and see also Joanna E. Ziegler, review of *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany*, by Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *Speculum* 77, no. 1 (January 2002): 184–86.

⁵⁹ *Supplicationes variae* is made for use in Genoa consisting of 388 folios, a collection of prayers, didactic poems, lists, calendar, two abbreviated psalters, three offices, sermons, hymns, meditational texts, and numerous miniatures and forty-eight full page tinted drawings unparalleled in Italian manuscripts of the period. Many of these texts and images indicate the owner's devotion to Francis. Neff, "The Senses and the Soul's Re-Formation in the *Supplicationes variae*," 93.

name appears in red in the calendar and the only saint besides the Virgin Mary invoked by name in the *Confiteor*.⁶⁰ The manuscript's contents and organization reflect a distinctly Franciscan conceptual framework, grounded in the spirituality of Saint Bonaventure, minister general of the Franciscan Order from 1257 to 1274. In addition, Franciscan imagery can be seen throughout the manuscript.⁶¹ Yet Neff classifies the volume as non-Franciscan, reasoning that first, depictions of Saint Francis alone cannot prove Franciscan origin, since his cult spread so rapidly that many non-Franciscan communities adopted his imagery; second, that commissioning such a luxurious personal manuscript would contradict the Franciscan ideal of poverty, as only communal liturgical books could be sumptuous; third, there is no precedent for a friar owning a deluxe copy of a devotional compendium like this; and finally, the manuscript features too many images of laymen to be for friar-use.⁶²

Neff's reasoning rests upon the assumption that a "Franciscan manuscript" must have been produced for Franciscan friars. Within this framework, lay-owned manuscripts are excluded from the category, regardless of how profoundly Franciscan their texts or imagery may be. Her position was primarily informed by the Italian scholarly tradition as represented by Francesco Porzio (1982), Giordana Canova Mariani (1992), Sesti (2002), Nicoletta Giovè Marchioli (2005), Ada Labriola (2015), and Chiodo (2016).⁶³ In Porzio and Vasoli's conception, articulated through the curatorial logic of the 1982 exhibition, a Franciscan manuscript is defined by institutional provenance and use within the Order.⁶⁴ Manuscripts copied, owned, or read within Franciscan convents, libraries, and *studia* qualify as Franciscan, even when their texts are classical or philosophical, such as Boethius's *Liber divisionum* or Aristotle's *Organon*.⁶⁵ By implication, lay-owned manuscripts, however imbued with Franciscan texts or imagery, fall outside this definition, since the exhibition centers on the friars' libraries, not the wider diffusion of Franciscan piety among the laity.⁶⁶ For Mariani, Franciscan manuscripts are liturgical or devotional books, chiefly large antiphonaries and Bibles, produced for use within Franciscan communities and marked by communal and didactic purpose rather than luxury.⁶⁷

⁶⁰ The *Confiteor* is the prayer of confession recited twice daily: Neff, *A Soul's Journey*, 6.

⁶¹ Neff, *A Soul's Journey*, 7, and see Plates 31, 32, 48, 87, 88.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 6–7.

⁶³ I first learned about all these six Italian works of scholarship through Neff's footnote. Neff, *A Soul's Journey*, 271 n. 50; for full publication, see below.

⁶⁴ Vasoli, "Introduzione," 93–98.

⁶⁵ Vasoli, "Introduzione," 96.

⁶⁶ Throughout his introduction chapter, Vasoli consistently defines the manuscript's Franciscan identity through the institution of the Order, using institutional language almost exclusively: "studia particularia (94)," "conventi dei Mendicanti (94)," "biblioteche francescane (95, 98)," "Lettori (teachers of lower or intermediate rank, responsible for giving daily lectures to students in a Franciscan studium) (96)," "Magistri (high level master of theology in the Franciscan studia) (97)," and "provenienza francescana (97)." Nowhere does he mention manuscripts owned by laypeople, tertiaries, confraternities, or benefactors outside the friar wall.

⁶⁷ Giordana Canova Mariani, "La miniatura degli ordini mendicanti nell'arco adriatico all'inizio del Trecento," in *Arte e spiritualità negli ordini mendicanti: Gli Agostiniani e il Cappellone di S. Nicola a Tolentino*, ed. Centro studi Agostino Trapè (Argos, 1992), 165–69.

Conceived to aid collective worship and understanding, they translate Giotto's spiritual realism into the form of the book,⁶⁸ embodying the intersection of Franciscan spirituality, pedagogy, and early trecento artistic reform. Sesti, in "La miniatura ad Assisi tra Duecento e Trecento," offers no explicit definition, but her analysis makes clear that Franciscan manuscripts are best understood as liturgical or devotional codices produced within Franciscan institutional and spiritual contexts, and which thus remain firmly intra-conventual.⁶⁹

According to Giovè Marchioli (2005), most ideally, Franciscan manuscripts are those containing the text of a Franciscan author that were produced by Friars Minor, commissioned by Friars Minor, or intended for a Franciscan library.⁷⁰ Yet, this definition is too ideal to work, because as Marchioli and Stefano Zamponi (1997) have observed, manuscripts of this kind are exceptional and thus are of limited relevance to the broader nature and readership of Franciscan manuscripts.⁷¹ In a subsequent paper, Marchioli refines the definition, identifying Franciscan manuscripts as those that contain Franciscan texts linked to a Franciscan site of production, use, or preservation through the examinations of layout, script, decoration, textual content, and history;⁷² and which exhibit a *moda francescana* that prevails beyond individual scriptoria, whether active within or outside Franciscan loci.⁷³

Writing considerably earlier than Giovè Marchioli, Marino Bigaroni (1978) considered as "Franciscan" only humble, utilitarian compilations of spiritually edifying texts, produced and used by friars in *eremi*, or wilderness. They were usually executed in a simple or even "crude" manner, reflecting "*edificationem non pulchritudinem edocebat*": Francis taught them to seek in books the testimony of

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Sesti, "La miniatura ad Assisi tra Duecento e Trecento," 435–54.

⁷⁰ My translation from Nicoletta Giovè Marchioli, "Il codice francescano: L'invenzione di un'identità," in *Libri, biblioteche e letture dei frati mendicanti (secoli XIII–XIV)* (Fondazione Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, 2005), 383.

⁷¹ Hernández Vera, *Franciscan Books and Their Readers*, 24; Giovè Marchioli, "Il codice francescano," 383; and Stefano Zamponi and Nicoletta Giovè Marchioli, "Manoscritti in volgare nei conventi dei frati Minori: testi, tipologie librerie, scritture (secoli XIII–XIV)," in *Francescanesimo in volgare (secoli XIII–XIV)* (Fondazione Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, 1997), 301–336.

⁷² Hernández Vera summarizes this as "the 'physiognomy' of the Franciscan manuscript," or "the set of physical characteristics of the manuscripts used and produced by Franciscan friars," *Franciscan Books and Their Readers*, 23. For Giovè Marchioli's own use of the word "physiognomy" (fisonomia), see her "Il codice francescano," 377, 389, 392, 401, 416.

⁷³ My translation from Giovè Marchioli "Il codice francescano," 383–84. For more on this typology, see 381 and 382. Giovè Marchioli may also elaborate further on this in later chapters or other publications, which are not examined here owing to the present study's linguistic and temporal scope. Drawing on Giovè Marchioli's and Zamponi's scholarships, Hernández Vera summarizes this as "the production within a Franciscan center is not a necessary condition for a manuscript to be Franciscan," *Franciscan Books and Their Readers*, 24. Neff summarizes Giovè Marchioli's definition for Franciscan manuscript as "posit[ing] criteria of authorship, content, and ownership as ideals that were not often met in reality," *A Soul's Journey*, 271.

the Lord, not their price or beauty.⁷⁴ For Ada Labriola, Franciscan manuscripts are those produced for or within Franciscan institutions, especially for liturgical use, where text and image articulate the Order's ideology.⁷⁵ Although she acknowledges the role of later devotional manuscripts in disseminating Franciscan imagery, she refrains from calling them "Franciscan manuscripts," consciously limiting the term to the volumes rooted in communal Franciscan contexts, rather than encompassing privately owned devotional books.⁷⁶

Chiodo's 2016 exhibition and catalog comprise four principal sections: Biblical manuscripts, patristic and exegetical writings, university-style theological works, and legal and doctrinal texts for the inquisition and confessional use.⁷⁷ Despite their diversity, all of the manuscripts studied by Chiodo share a common provenance: the Franciscan convent of Santa Croce, where they were preserved and used until their 1766 transfer to the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana in Florence. For Chiodo, then, a manuscript could be deemed "Franciscan" because it was used by the Franciscans (as the title suggests) and kept in a Franciscan convent, even if its text itself wasn't written by or about the Franciscans. Similarly, Cobianchi contrasts "in-house" Franciscan manuscripts with "illustrious-patron" commissions.⁷⁸ While he never explicitly excludes the latter, he reserves the term "Franciscan" for manuscripts made within the Franciscan Order.

René Hernández Vera (2022) defines Franciscan manuscripts as "concrete handwritten volumes or books that were used by friars as the source of information for the practice of reading and study."⁷⁹ He accepts that "the production within a Franciscan center is not a necessary condition for a manuscript to be Franciscan."⁸⁰ Nonetheless, the criterion of use by friars remains central to his definition. Şenocak's essays (2003, 2004, 2005) construe "Franciscan books/manuscripts" as institutional, communal, and pedagogical objects created and used by the Order in pursuit of learning

⁷⁴ Marino Bigaroni, "Catalogo dei manoscritti della biblioteca storico-francescana di Chiesa Nuova di Assisi," *Atti dell'Accademia Proporziana del Subasio di Assisi*, 6th ser., 1 (Edizioni Porziuncola, 1978), 9–43, esp. 10–11; Giovè Marchioli "Il codice francescano," 382.

⁷⁵ Ada Labriola, "La miniatura nei libri francescani: devozione e ideologia," in *L'arte di Francesco: Capolavori d'arte italiana e terre d'Asia dal XIII al XV secolo*, ed. Angelo Tartuferi and Francesco D'Arelli (Giunti, 2015), 131–43.

⁷⁶ Labriola "La miniatura nei libri francescani," 140: she describes manuscripts that belong to or simply close to Franciscan or Poor Clares communities as "manoscritti destinati alla devozione personale," yet she never calls them "libri/manoscritti francescani," distinguishing them by function ("devozionali") rather than by institutional identity. Her lexical precision shows intentional hesitation and a conceptual boundary.

⁷⁷ Chiodo, "I. La Bibbia Schede 1-6, I-V" and "La Bibbia di frate Enrico de' Cerchi Schede 7a-o," *Ad usum fratris...*, 76–77, 100–01; "II. Auctoritates Schede 8-16, VI-VX, XVII," *Ad usum fratris...*, 132–33; "III. L'esegesi scolastica Schede 17-19, XVI," *Ad usum fratris...*, 162–63.

⁷⁸ Cobianchi, "Cithara Angelica," 168.

⁷⁹ This is Hernández Vera's definition for Franciscan manuscripts, as opposed to his definition for Franciscan books—used for "the conceptualization of an ideal unitary model for the books written, collected and used by Franciscan friars," *Franciscan Books and Their Readers*, 28.

⁸⁰ Hernández Vera, *Franciscan Books and Their Readers*, 24.

within the limits of evangelical poverty. They are Franciscan not through authorship or content, but through their place in the Order's educational and spiritual systems.⁸¹ Dominique Stutzmann (2014) proves that Morgan Library MS M.933 (ca. 1260–70) served Franciscan use, but nonetheless calls it merely an “early witness of the Franciscan liturgy” instead of a “Franciscan manuscript.” His linguistic precision, or restraint, exemplifies the wider scholarly hesitation to define what qualifies as “Franciscan” at the level of manuscript identity.⁸²

Taken together, this institutional-provenance tradition from Porzio to Stutzmann defines Franciscan manuscripts by their communal life within the Order, whether as liturgical codices, pedagogical tools, or materials of study. Even when they contain non-Franciscan texts, manuscripts are deemed “Franciscan” through their institutional setting and collective use, not through the specificity of content. In contrast to this long scholarly lineage, several Anglophone art historians, as the next section will entail, have addressed Franciscan materials in ways that implicitly challenge or expand these parameters, even if none has yet offered an explicit redefinition of Franciscan manuscripts.

2.2 Iconographic-Expansive Approaches

Little's chapter on illuminated manuscripts includes a total of twenty-four plates illustrating Franciscan themes. Of these manuscripts, only three were actually produced, owned, or used within Franciscan houses; thirteen belonged to lay owners, and eight to neither friars nor laity.⁸³ Although Little never explicitly designates any as “Franciscan manuscripts,” his inclusive corpus tacitly accords equal weight to diverse visual vehicles of the Franciscan legacy. Brooke likewise refrains from defining the term, yet her inclusion of drawings in Benedictine Matthew Paris's *Chronica Maiora* in her “Visual Images (of Francis)” chapter suggests that she admits manuscript imagery within the Franciscan visual tradition by virtue of iconography as opposed to provenance.⁸⁴

Flora, too, stops short of offering a formal definition of “Franciscan manuscripts,” but her essays suggest a similar openness in regard to this question. In “Fashioning the Passion,” she observes that the *MVC* manuscript was “readily adapted and edited via its visual exegesis for individual audiences whether male or female, lay or monastic.”⁸⁵ In “Passion, Charisma, and Gender,” Flora writes that “works of art were used in meaningful practices of devotion not only by

⁸¹ Şenocak “Book Acquisition in the Medieval Franciscan Order,” 2003, “Circulation of Books in the Medieval Franciscan Order: Attitude, Methods, and Critics,” 2004, and “Early Fourteenth-Century Franciscan Library Catalogues,” 2005.

⁸² Dominique Stutzmann, “An Early Witness of the Franciscan Liturgy: New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, Ms M.933” (Le Centre pour la Communication Scientifique Directe – HAL, Université de Nantes, 2014), accessed October 26, 2025, <https://www.academia.edu/91620126>.

⁸³ Little, *Franciscan History and Legend*, 35–53. For friars' manuscripts, see Plates 1, 21–22; lay manuscripts, see Plates 5–6, 8–14, 16–18, 20, 24; manuscripts that are neither friars' nor lay, see Plates 2–4, 7, 15, 19, 23.

⁸⁴ Brooke, *The Image of St Francis*, 192–202.

⁸⁵ Flora, “Fashioning the Passion,” 468.

friars and nuns but by ordinary citizens who were otherwise related to these orders.”⁸⁶ In both studies, she quietly de-institutionalizes the category of “Franciscan manuscripts.” By extending Franciscan devotion to “ordinary citizens,” she allows lay-commissioned or -owned manuscripts to embody Franciscan *charisma*.

Kennedy’s 2014 exhibition follows this iconographic logic. She includes a Franciscan-related manuscript plausibly from Saint Peter’s Basilica in Rome, non-Franciscan in provenance but thematically aligned through imagery.⁸⁷ Her rationale for its inclusion, like Little’s, Brooke’s, and Flora’s, appears to be iconographic rather than institutional. Taken together, these four scholars advance an iconographic-expansive approach, privileging affective resonance over corporate origin. I concur with this tendency, yet it has never been articulated as a clear definition. The next section therefore seeks to formalize its principles and propose a new, more encompassing framework for the material.

2.3 Toward Redefinition

As the foregoing analysis makes clear, a redefinition of what constitutes a Franciscan manuscript is necessary for three principal reasons. First, the institutional-provenance model is too narrow. In addition, Franciscan spirituality is inherently porous and vivid; and finally, lay-owned manuscripts preserve dimensions of Franciscan devotion absent from friary exemplars and monumental art.

The existing institutional-provenance tradition fails because it excludes the lay participation that both shaped and was shaped by Franciscan imagery. Brooke underscores how lay devotion shaped Franciscan imagery: “Pious lay people—women as well as men—were instrumental in spreading the cult in places of public worship.”⁸⁸ Francesca Manzari (2013) shows how the earliest Italian books of hours, most seemingly connected with highly-lettered lay patrons, were profoundly shaped by Franciscan models of devotion, and in turn shaped their owners’ spirituality.⁸⁹ The friars lived and preached among laity, sanctifying the streets and marketplaces of the city; their imagery, accordingly, was diffused far beyond convent walls. Lay men and women wore the Tau cross, commissioned images of Francis, sought burial in Franciscan churches, and propagated the

⁸⁶ Flora, “Passion, Charisma, and Gender,” 139.

⁸⁷ Robson, cat. 10 in *Sanctity Pictured*, ed. Kennedy. She notes, “Provenance unknown, but assumed to be Saint Peter’s Basilica, Rome.”

⁸⁸ Brooke, *The Image of St Francis*, 165: a miracle story shows that by the early 1250s, laypeople already possessed images of Francis. This discovery opened a new line of inquiry for me. If lay households owned Franciscan imagery, what visual forms, especially lay-owned/commissioned manuscripts, shaped their devotional lives?

⁸⁹ Francesca Manzari, “Italian Books of Hours and Prayer Books in the Fourteenth Century,” in *Books of Hours Reconsidered*, ed. Sandra Hindman and James H. Marrow (Harvey Miller Publishers, 2013), 155; Neff, “The Senses and the Soul’s Re-Formation in the *Supplicationes variae*,” 94.

cult within civic life. The Franciscan ideal thus became a shared language of urban piety.⁹⁰ Bourdua's study of Franciscan church decoration offers a material analog to this reciprocity. She demonstrates that the visual identity of Franciscan spaces emerged from "local consultation between the friars and their donors," a process that blurred the boundaries between institutional and lay agency.⁹¹ By stressing "the links between local Franciscan houses and the role of non-Franciscan works of art as sources for artistic ideas," Bourdua shows that Franciscan visual culture developed not in isolation but through civic and devotional exchanges between friars and lay people.⁹²

Many manuscripts, too, likely emerged from this collaborative matrix. Whether illuminated in urban workshops or copied in mendicant scriptoria, they participated in a continuum that stretched from the friary choir to the household altar. Their iconographic and devotional programs express the same Franciscan imagination that produced fresco cycles at Assisi and Padua. To limit the term "Franciscan manuscript" to institutional contexts is therefore to impose an artificial boundary upon a movement that sought to dissolve boundaries between sacred and ordinary life.

Second, ownership and provenance are an unstable basis for classification because the boundaries between friar and lay agency in the production, use and circulation of manuscripts were very much blurred.⁹³ As Şenocak notes, a friar didn't *own* a book, yet his intensive personal use made it part of the Franciscan intellectual enterprise,⁹⁴ proof that ownership is an unreliable marker of Franciscan identity. If manuscripts used by friars could be deemed Franciscan without friar ownership, then lay-owned manuscripts embedded in Franciscan devotional culture must likewise belong within its visual and intellectual orbit. Moreover, the Order's libraries expanded through a web of social, familial, and clerical exchanges: laypeople left books to their Franciscan relatives or friends; prelates donated collections to Franciscan convents; friars openly solicited funds

⁹⁰ Lawrence R. Poos observes that by the fourteenth century, lay literacy had expanded among nobles and the urban middle classes, creating a vast readership for devotional manuscripts such as books of hours. I think the same social conditions that fostered the popularity of the books of hours also enabled lay participation in Franciscan spirituality. Lawrence R. Poos, "Chapter II: Social History and the Book of Hours," in *Time Sanctified: The Books of Hours in Medieval Art and Life*, ed. Roger S. Wieck (George Braziller, 1988), 33.

⁹¹ See Bourdua, *The Franciscans and Art Patronage in Late Medieval Italy*, 33, 70, 115, 149; Robson, "Review of *The Franciscans and Art Patronage in Late Medieval Italy*," 468.

⁹² Cannon, "Review of *The Franciscans and Art Patronage in Late Medieval Italy*," 551.

⁹³ Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary*, 18: He similarly notes that monastic and lay piety should not be interpreted solely in terms of the contrast between sacred and secular. My use of expressions such as "across boundaries," "boundaries...blurred," and "web" was inspired by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's notion of interwoven cultural reading in "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)" in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 3–25.

⁹⁴ Neslihan Şenocak, "Circulation of Books in the Medieval Franciscan Order: Attitude, Methods, and Critics," *Journal of Religious History* 28, no. 2 (June 2004): 161: Şenocak notes that while some friars bought their own books from alms, "this solution had severe limitations" due to the high cost of manuscripts. This further speaks to Franciscan devotional material inevitably intersecting with lay markets and donors.

from relatives and seculars to purchase volumes.⁹⁵ Many friars entered the Order already owning books, and those who rose within the *studia* cultivated “noble libraries” that paralleled lay bibliophilia.⁹⁶ Franciscans were also fervent buyers of books at both the institutional and individual levels, sometimes even commissioning professional scribes when copies were unavailable on the market.⁹⁷

The fluid movement of manuscripts across social boundaries produced virtually infinite permutations. A manuscript might be commissioned by lay patrons for Franciscan kin, enter a convent library, and later be sold back into lay circulation by a friar in debt. Others were copied by lay scribes for lay patrons, donated to friaries, or brought into the convent by converts who had once been lay owners. Each trajectory, crossing repeatedly between the convent and the world, renders provenance an unstable and inadequate marker of identity. If ownership and location shift continually, how can “Franciscan” be defined by either? The answer lies instead in shared devotional content and function.

Third, and crucially, the inclusion of lay-owned manuscripts is indispensable, for they illuminate aspects of Franciscan spirituality absent from friary manuscripts or monumental painting. Their imagery can translate Franciscan ideals, such as the sanctification of ordinary life, into forms of household devotion. Kennedy’s comparison of Franciscan and Dominican manuscripts further underscores this point: whereas Dominican manuscripts emphasize collective preaching and doctrinal authority,⁹⁸ Franciscan volumes center on individual sanctity and affective imitation of Christ.⁹⁹ To restrict the category to institutional provenance is therefore to overlook its distinct devotional logic—one that elevates interiority and compassion over hierarchy and order.

Lay manuscripts, circulating in domestic settings, materialize this interiorized spirituality. They render the theology of immanence celebrated in the *Canticle of the Creatures* (1224) visible in the quotidian, through images of food blessings, fig trees, dolphins, and dancing, that sacralize the ordinary and invite the reader into contemplative intimacy. At the same time, these works register the tensions, curiosities, and critiques that defined late medieval Franciscanism: they visualize missionary outreach to the East, domesticate holy folly into meditative humility, and even absorb satirical

⁹⁵ Şenocak, “Book Acquisition in the Medieval Franciscan Order,” 17–19.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 20.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 21–24. Of course, this enthusiasm might have clashed with the rule and the *usus pauper*—the latter forbade the purchase of luxurious, illuminated manuscripts when a cheaper version was available.

⁹⁸ Kennedy ed., *Sanctity Pictured*, 96–97.

⁹⁹ For example, on the Genesis page in the Bible of John of Parma, Saint Francis is both a new Adam and a second Christ. By contrast, the Genesis page of thirteenth-century Dominican Bibles never gives such a significant role to Saint Dominic (*Sanctity Pictured* 8); in fact, only in the 14th and 15th centuries, Saint Dominic, who rarely appeared in early Dominican art, finally became a prominent figure in the art of the Dominican Observants (*Sanctity Pictured* 81). Interestingly, there are also instances where Francis has been made into a second Magdalene (*imitatio Magdalenae*), see Lester K. Little, “Imitatio Francisci: The Influence of Francis of Assisi on Late Medieval Religious Life,” in *Defenders and Critics of Franciscan Life: Essays in Honor of John V. Fleming*, ed. Michael F. Cusato and G. Geltner (Brill, 2009), 215; Katherine L. Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalene: Preaching and Popular Devotion in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton University Press, 2000), 79, 82, 90, 92.

reflections on the friars' moral influence. To study these lay-owned works alongside friary manuscripts is thus to recover a full spectrum of Franciscan spirituality—from ecstatic performance to domestic contemplation, from global vision to intimate devotion. Excluding them would mean excluding the very sphere in which Franciscan ideals most deeply transformed late medieval piety.

To summarize, these factors reveal that the Franciscan manuscript cannot be reduced to a fixed institutional artifact. It is instead a living conduit of devotion, its identity grounded in performance rather than provenance. For these reasons, I propose that any manuscript participating in the diffusion and internalization of Franciscan ideals—whether intended for friars or laypeople, visual or textual, conveying affirmations or critiques—should be considered a Franciscan manuscript.

Reconsidering what we mean by “Franciscan manuscript” requires more than adjusting the boundaries of an existing category; it demands rethinking how Franciscan visual culture itself operated. The historiography traced here reveals not only the dominance of monumental priorities but also the persistence of inherited assumptions that tie Franciscan identity too tightly to institutional provenance and communal liturgical use. When we widen our lens to encompass the full spectrum of manuscript production and devotional practice, from friary antiphonaries to lay-owned books of hours, we recover a visual world in which Franciscan spirituality circulated across social strata, media, and geographic spaces. Manuscripts are generative sites of Franciscan imagination, where modes of seeing, praying, teaching, and being in the world were negotiated and transformed. By defining Franciscan manuscripts through the devotional and conceptual work they perform rather than the places they were made or held, we restore them to the center of Franciscan visibility, and, more broadly, to the history of medieval art. This reframing clarifies the past and opens new paths for future research, inviting scholars to explore how portable images shaped mendicant identities, urban piety, and cross-cultural encounters in ways that monumental art alone cannot explain.

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