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CHARISMATIC PHENOMENA IN EUROPE IN THE 17TH CENTURY: FEMALE POLITICAL PROPHETISM IN FRANCE, SPAIN AND ITALY

Historical interpretation of the charismatic phenomenon

Presently the term *prophetism* refers to a religious sphere and mystical phenomena that are closely related to a spiritual dimension and, in a more widespread sense, it is used to describe facts and people connected to a charismatic, sacred nature. However, the concept of prophetism and the related concept of charisma appear to have been developed recently, having made no significant appearance in ancient scriptures.¹ In the biblical tradition, the prophet mostly appears as the one who speaks on behalf of God to the people, while in Jewish culture the prophet was an institutional figure – a priest or a levite. As for the etymology of the word, the Greek term² – formed of the prefix Pro and the verb Femi (to speak) – refers above all to the one who speaks to the following or in place of and less so to the one who anticipates (the future). In fact, the perspective of the future does not prevail over the role of the prophet, who sets his prophetic announcement in the present, even though his words refer to future events such as Revelation or Salvation. It is also important to highlight that the predominant role attributed to the prophet in the Old Testament is that of the “sentinel”³ who can warn the people of imminent dangers and protect them. The prophet represents a guide, a social pillar, because his gift of clairvoyance helps not only to predict upcoming future events but also to manage current actions with wis-

¹ The term charismatic does not appear in Biblical Greek, classical Greek or the Hellenistic mystery religions. Except Sir 7, 33 Sinaiticus; 38-30 Vaticanus, its only significant appearance in the scriptures can be found in the New Testament, where the term Charisma is used sixteen times by Paul and only once by Peter in the First letter (Peter 4,10). The term, frequent in the Pauline epistolary, is Paul's invention, and it designates the strong faith of the communities he founded.

² The term “prophet” appears in the Greek version of Bible: the Septuagint. The term “prophet” is rendered, by the classical Greek, as the one who anticipates and speaks by means of. The meaning of Prophet as a premonitory priest, for which translators used the term “mantis” (soothsayer), is absent. The term “pseudoprophet” translated as fake prophet, also appears in the Septuagint (Jeremiah 6:13; 33:8; 11-34:7; 36: 1; 8).

³ The first reference to the role of Sentinel appears in Israeli prophetic writings under the term “Zofeh” (Isaiah 21,6-9; 62: 6-7 and Ezekiel 3,17-21;33,7-20). The first reference to the role of the watchman appears in the Book of Ezekiel, the prophet ordered by God to watch over the House of Israel.

dom and in a concrete manner. As time passed, numerous gifts of divine origin, such as knowing how to predict the future or being endowed with healing powers, came to be attributed to the prophet.

In this regard, thanks to the versatility of this figure, we can understand that in the Islamic tradition there is a substantial difference between the prophet – the Nabi⁴, sent directly from God, and the Rasul – a simple expression of divine inspiration. The current interpretation of the figure of the prophet, to which we are accustomed to refer, is the one given to us by the science of the modern religions during the 19th and 20th centuries, which places the prophet as a “fortune teller” and depository of God’s message on Earth. The concept of charisma and therefore of charismatic prophetism will only become widespread later. The prophet was assigned a wider field of action and the meaning of the term became more flexible thanks to the contribution of Max Weber, a German sociologist and expert on the history of religions.

During the 20th century, the science of religion investigated the role of the prophet as leader – an active member of society who continuously contributes to affirming the history and development of his community or even civilization.⁵ The new anthropological and sociological discourse sees the prophet as an individual able to influence, with his socially dominant attitude, the historical course of events. According to this sense of the term, the prophet represents the mediator between the divine and human; the driving element able to connect people to God through the power of action, through his charisma. Although the word charisma, from the Greek *Karis*⁶ (gift) alludes to the exercise of a divine capacity and to the social use of a “holy power” bestowed by God, with time, this meaning acquired new undertones. The recognition of an active role in the social context brings focus to on a new dimension of communication of the prophet, who, in virtue of his gift – or charism – becomes a political tool.

⁴ In the Islamic tradition, the Nabi is chosen by God to show men the way to salvation. The Rasul is a simple propagator of the Nabi’s work to the community. The Nabi is also a Rasul, but a Rasul does not play the role of the Nabi. On the differences between Rasul and Nabi, see John Esposito, *Islam: the straight Path*, Oxford University Press, New York 2005, p. 20. In Jewish culture, the Nabi is Moses, the greatest prophet. However, in the Exodus, Moses confesses to God that he is unable to accept the mission that has been ordained for him, and God replies that his brother Aaron will be the intermediary. In this case, God refers to the prophet as an instrument: *Aaron shall be your mouth, and you shall be God’s for him. I have set you, Moses, as God for Pharaoh: Aaron your brother will be your prophet*, Exodus 4, 16; 7-1.

⁵ Weber uses the term “Charism” in reference to “a certain quality of an individual’s personality, in virtue of which he rises from ordinary men and at the same time he is treated as one with the powers, or supernatural qualities, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional. These requirements are such because they are not accessible to normal people, but are considered of divine origin or exemplary, and on their basis the address in question, he is treated as a leader”. Cit. M. Weber, *Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, Chapter “The nature of Charismatic Authority and its routinization”, The falcon’s wing press, Glencoe, Illinois 1947, p. 89.

⁶ From ecclesiastic Latin, Charisma; from the Greek *Karis* “gift of grace”.

This new perspective combines a dimension of concrete and earthly activism with the holy sphere; actually the charismatic appears as a new social figure, the only direct interpreter of a society that wants communicate with God. The combination of the divine and politico-social power of the charismatic is reflected in the Weberian figure of charismatic authority. The German sociologist's theory identifies some distinctive traits in the figure of charismatic Authority: first of all, the charismatic seems above others; to possess gifts of a varied nature not common to other men; and his work is recognised by those who follow him. The criterion of legitimacy is absolutely necessary and essential for the recognition of power. Weber, then, focuses intensely on the relationship between the charismatic and the followers more than on the special abilities of the individual leader. In this report, Weber introduces the concept of the psychology of the crowd⁷ and he articulates his speech on the identification of the crowd in the charismatic figure that guides it. Following this line of reasoning, Weber's theory includes the possibility that the charismatic is not necessarily a positive figure but is merely perceived as such by the crowd. This is the case of many statesmen of the 20th century, who enrich the definition of "charismatic domination".⁸ There is no formal distinction or real hierarchy of types of charism in Weber's theory; we cannot be sure that a leader has more political power than a shaman of some remote tribe. The evolution of the Weberian theory represents a crucial point in the evaluation of the phenomenon, because it focuses on a new topic: the formalization of the phenomenon.

The charismatic and his group of followers represent a minority, and his ability to survive as a leading figure is connected to the ability of regulate his activities through institutional norms. Here we see a phenomenon called the "routinisation of the charism",⁹ a process through which the power of the charismatic authority is reduced by bureaucratic control. A fitting example of routinisation is that of the charismatic prophet Muhammad, whose successors were chosen by traditional authorities.¹⁰ In the case of Christianity, the charismatic phenomenon in a certain sense grew together with the role of the Church as an Institution and served to affirm its position. This means that the power of the charismatic is not suddenly supplanted by the ecclesiastical institution but managed and regulated according to parameters imposed by the laws of the Church.

⁷ G. Le Bon, *Psychologie des foules*, Alcan 1895, p. 191.

⁸ M. Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of interpretative Sociology*, Bedminster Press, New York 1968.

⁹ The Routinization represents the process of regulation of power through rules established by the laws of the community. See S. Kalberg, *Read Max Weber*, Il Mulino, Milano 2008, p. 72.

¹⁰ E. Pace, *Sociologia dell'Islam: fenomeni religiosi e logiche sociali*, Carocci, Roma 1999, p. 55.

Perception of the female charismatic phenomenon between the 15th and 16th centuries

The relationship between charismatic authority and traditional authority evolved significantly in the course of centuries, and the perception of the charismatic phenomenon changed depending on phases of intensification and subsequent downsizing that took place, respectively, between 1400 and 1500 and between 1500 and 1600. During the second half of the 15th century, there was lively spiritual activity in Italian northern renaissance courts, including the emergence of virtuous prophetesses who were very close to princes and powerful men. They were described as “living saints” because they were venerated in the full of their religious activity and gradually assumed a dominant political role of pacificators and bearers of concord in urban struggles. The blessed women, endowed with charismatic gifts such as visionary prophecies and dreams, became the “pious advisors of the Princes”, guiding the political and administrative lives of their cities.¹¹ They would form an intrinsic bond with the citizens and aristocracy of their territories, supported by the wealth and power of the Lords. The strong link between the women and their territorial context was useful in the context of the turbulent and fragmented political sphere internal struggles and feuds within cities. The presence of charismatics inside the court gave the lords a strong backing, while the blessing of “living saints” helped to sacralise the figure of the prince. In this regard, it is important point out that living saints, besides being a reason for the prestige of powerful nobility, often acted as ambassadors and negotiators for their princes. Therefore, the living saints fully contributed to the construction of lords’ power, because the cult of the prince was strengthened along with the cult of the saint through her pious and virtuous religious work. Moreover, the dual role of “patron saint of the city”, which most living saints enjoyed, further confirmed and testified to the strong territorial dimension of the phenomenon.¹² Despite being a phenomenon characteristic of the early modern period, the emergence of political prophetesses on Renaissance courts was not entirely innovative – consider the recurrent figure of the “prophet monk” in the long tradition of eastern Christianity¹³ or, better still,

¹¹ O. Niccoli, *I tramiti dell’immaginario. Racconti di visioni e di prodigi nell’Italia del primo Cinquecento* in *Per una storia dell’Emilia Romagna*, Ancona, Il lavoro editoriale, 1985, pp. 7-19.

¹² About the correlation between charismatic power and political power see G. Zarri, *Profeti di corte nell’Italia del Rinascimento*, in *Mistiche e devote nell’Italia Tardo – medievale*, edited by D. Bornstein, R. Rusconi, Napoli 1992, pp. 209-237.

¹³ For an in-depth account of the relationship between Kings and prophets in late ancient Christianity see: G. Filoramo, *Veggenti, profeti, gnostici ed Identità e conflitti nel cristianesimo antico*, Morcelliana Editore and Boespflug, F. Dunand, *Le comparatisme en histoire des religions*, Cerf, Paris 1997, pp. 73-87.

the idolised saint of the 14th century, Catherine of Siena, a model of virtue and an inspiration for the next generations of saints.¹⁴

The fruitful relational exchange between living saints and princes sanctioned the strengthening of stately power, laying the foundations for the deep network between the Church and the State that continued in the following centuries. The phenomenon of the living saints began to spread, reaching its paroxysm between the 15th and 16th Century and assuming a certain continuity despite its undeniable resizing of its expansion during the council of Trent¹⁵. Bearing in mind this historical point of view, it is wrong to think of the Saints as a religious phenomenon that ended in the 16th century, since intense charismatic activity of a large fringe of charismatic councilors continued all the way up to the 18th century.¹⁶ Therefore, we are faced with a phenomenon that is not limited to the Renaissance context but that succeeds in demonstrating its plasticity, adapting to historical events and being modulated by them. Among the causes of the downsizing of the phenomenon during the 16th century, we can certainly identify the previously discussed “citizen dimension”.¹⁷

The evolution of socio-administrative organisations and above all the conception of the management of the power model on the basis of new social rules imposed by the centralization of the Post-Tridentine Church contributed in a fundamental way to setting the new parameters of the charismatic spirituality.

The activities of the prophetesses of the 16th century developed in a more ecclesiastic and less aristocratic context in which the private dimension of direct contact with the prince was filtered through a system of self-promotion and management of the reformed religious Orders. Female spirituality during this historical moment began to be viewed with suspicion, and even biographies of prophetesses had the task

¹⁴ T. Herzig, *Le ‘sante vive’ italiane tra propaganda antiereticale, appello alla crociata e critica luterana*, *Genesis: Rivista della Società Italiana delle Storie* 2011, 10:1, pp. 125-146; G. Parsons, *The cult of Saint Catherine of Siena. A study in civil religion*, Aldershot 2008, pp. 20-21.

¹⁵ M. Caffiero, *Santità, territorio e istituzioni. Le Maestre Pie tra centro e periferia (secoli XVII-XVIII)*, in *Id, Religione e modernità in Italia (secoli XVII-XIX)*, Pisa-Roma 2000, pp. 113-119.

¹⁶ This topic is a current object of discussion and interest in women's studies. The cultural formation of mystical women in the renaissance court appears substantially different from women of the Tridentine generation guided by their monasteries. Another important change occurred at the end of the 1600s, when a cultural shift of a scientific character transformed the conception of the role of women. As a result of this change, the slow process of decline of female monasteries came to full realisation in the 18th century. For more information on these issues, we recommend the following texts: J. Burckhardt, *Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, Florence 1968, pp. 361-362; E. Di Rienzo, *Sguardi sul Settecento*, Napoli, Guida 2006, pp. 26-29.

¹⁷ G. Zarri, *Le sante vive. Profezie di corte e devozione femminile tra '400 e '500*, Rosenberg & Sellier, Torino 1990.

to extol their virtues emphasizing their faithful observance of the rules imposed by religious Orders.¹⁸

According to a new outlook on the female mystical phenomenon, the Tridentine phase was an important historical watershed. Adriano Prosperi, in an essay about the spirituality in the age of the Counter-Reformation, defined this change as the transition from the era of “divine mothers” to that of “spiritual fathers” to underline that prophetesses’ activity was guided by male figures such as theologians or spiritual directors.¹⁹ To express this concept using Weber’s vocabulary, the Tridentine phase represented an important moment of “routinisation of charisma”, because the charisma became rigidly managed and regulated by the Church. We do not assist, then, to private relationships between saints and lords of the renaissance court, but to a new and broader discourse of the role of religious institutions that use prophetesses to increase their influence in the political sphere. Therefore, it is clear that the second half of the 16th century was a crucial juncture in the evolution of women’s political function.²⁰ The Council of Trent contributed to the strengthening of the Catholic Church through a comprehensive reform of its institutions, focused on the Papacy and curia of Rome, and attempted to fix the defective and weak organisation of organic doctrines in matters of faith.²¹ Specifically, the twenty-fifth and final session of the third phase of Council discussed the doctrine on the worship of Saints, sacred icons and relics.²² As for types of charisma, the “gifts” were classified in 1564 into three categories corresponding only to the types of charisms that appeared in the Pauline letters.

To one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another, by means of the same Spirit, the language of science; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gift of healings in the one²³.

In a more general sense, the gift of faith itself was considered to be a type of charisma, along with the miracle of healing and the gift of infused Science.

The charisms that were considered valid by the Church and regarded as such for the whole 16th century until the end of the 17th century were those of Knowledge (the gift of wisdom and discernment of spirits), Inspiration (prophecy – ability to

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 60-74.

¹⁹ A. Prosperi, *Dalle “divine madri” ai “padri spirituali”*, [In:] *Women and Men in Spiritual Culture*, ed. E. Kessel, The Hague 1986, pp. 71-90.

²⁰ On the function of holiness in the Post Tridentine phase see G. Sodano, *Il nuovo modello di santità nell’epoca post-tridentina*, I tempi del Concilio. Religione, cultura e società nell’Europa tridentina, a cura di Mozzarelli C. e D. Zardin, Bulzoni editore, Roma 1997; G. Sodano, *Modelli e selezione del santo Moderno*, Liguori Editore, Napoli 2002.

²¹ A. Prosperi, *Il Concilio di Trento: una introduzione storica*, Torino, Einaudi, 2001.

²² For an analysis of the third Tridentine phase: H. Jedin, *The Council of Trent. The third period and the conclusion*, “Morcelliana Editore” 2010, pp. 218-256.

²³ Corinthians 12:8.

speak and translate languages unknown to the subject,²⁴ and Power (miracles and healing). The classification of types of charisms was later extended to include types of charisma linked to the proclamation of the word of God, for instance to exhortation to conversion. In this historical period, the Church began to manage cults through its institutional figures.²⁵ For the first time it was the sacred scripts that, along with social recognition, legitimised the goodness of the charismatic gifts.

According to Paul in the letter to Corinthians 12: 4-7, the charisms represented the epiphany of the spirit for the sake of collective utility:

There are different gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different ministries, but the same Lord. And there are different activities, but it is the same God who works all in all, but the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all.

It is precisely the recognition of its social function that gave new strength to charisma within the political landscape, ushering a collective dimension of the mystical phenomenon: a gift given by God to a figure capable of communicating with the whole community and of making the divine message universal via the rules of the Church.

Political charisms of XVII Century: the case of Marguerite Marie Alacoque in France

The 17th century was, from a religious point of view, a century of affirmation of the norms chosen by the Council of 1563. The religious scene was marked by the main religious orders that tirelessly preached the rediscovered doctrine of faith throughout Europe.

One of the most influential political charisms was recorded in France with the figure of Marguerite Marie Alacoque (1647-1690).

Marguerite, born in Verosvres, Burgundy, was the fifth daughter of Filiberta Lamyne and the lawyer Claude Alacoque, the notary of Louis XIV. At the age of twenty-four, after a turbulent adolescence, Marguerite entered the Order of the Visitation, founded by St. Francis de Sales²⁶, against the wishes of her family. Suffering from mockery from

²⁴ "I will speak to my own people through strange languages and through the lips of foreigners. But even then, they will not listen to me", says the Lord (Corinthians 14,18-22). This kind of charism is also significant in Acts (10,44-46) and Acts (19,1-7). Glossolalia is the ability to know and practice an unknown language.

²⁵ Regarding the relationship between the monastic and citizen dimension see E. Novi Chavarria, *Monache e gentildonne. Un labile confine. Poteri politici e identità religiose nei monasteri napoletani, secoli XVI-XVII*, Milano 2001.

²⁶ St. Francis de Sales was one of the most important religious figures of the Counter-Reformation and French Catholic mysticism. Numerous congregations, such as the Salesian sisters of Don Bosco or the Order of the Visitation of Holy Mary, were dedicated to him for his tireless struggle against Calvinism.

her spiritual sisters, a crucial point for her was a meeting with her spiritual director, the Jesuit Claude de la Colombière, who spurred her to write an autobiography that would report her ascetic experiences.

Claude de la Colombière strongly believed in Marguerite and the potential for fighting Jansenist heresy through her holy figure. As a tireless Jesuit preacher, de la Colombière fought against Jansenism,²⁷ which had been defined as a heretical practice by the Church. Jansenism, though born as a purely theological inclination with negative anthropological traits, had assumed alarming dimensions in France by acquiring protestant expressions. Moreover, de la Colombière had political interests resulting from his involvement in the French political context as the guardian of the Sons of Colbert, the Finance Minister of Louis XIV. France appeared more faltering and vulnerable than other European countries (the Tridentine agreements were not accepted until 1615). The main goal of the French Church was to fortify its power through the renewal of religious orders, the rise of biblical studies, and newly established secular congregations (the Congregation of the mission of St. Vincent de Paul, the secular company of the Cardinal Pierre de Bérulle).²⁸ Marguerite, along with written testimonies of her sacred activity, was useful in achieving this goal. Her first vision of Christ was recorded in 1673 and she continued to experience them until 1690. In these intense years of private revelations, Marguerite declared that she had been infused with the science of God's love and that she had received the secrets "of the heart of Christ". According to Marguerite's writings, Jesus had shown her his sacred heart and asked for it to be honoured with a special worship on the Friday after the octave of Corpus Christi (the cult was adopted later thanks to the commitment of de la Colombière and John Eudes).²⁹ In honour of this cult, the Basilica of the Sacred Heart was built in the Parisian district of Montmartre as a reference point of French religiosity. In her autobiography, Marguerite meticulously described the bodily and moral practices of mortification, which she followed to get closer to the suffering of Christ. She repeatedly punished herself with a whip and metal chains and, to fight her sense of disgust, she kissed the wounds of sick people by coming into contact with their bodily fluids.³⁰ The most important revelation that gave Marguerite a vivid

²⁷ Jansenism was born essentially as a religious movement, articulating its own theological system around the concept of salvific predestination. To be faithful is useless for those who are not predestined. The doctrine elaborated by the Dutch theologian Cornelius Otto Jansen, in contrast with the Jesuit conception, claimed that salvation is always possible for the man of faith.

²⁸ P. Collet, *La vie de Saint Vincet de Paul, instituteur de la Congregation de la Missione et des Filles de la Charité*, 2 vol., 3 ediz, Nancy 1840.

²⁹ Jean Eudes was an anti-Jansenist preacher. Together with Margherita, he deserves the merit for having instituted and regularised the cult of the Sacred Heart with the celebration of First Friday Devotion. He was politically active at the court of the Sun King.

³⁰ *Life of Blessed Mary Margaret Alacoque*, chap. XL, P. 79.

role in the political context was one received in 1689, in which Christ asked the King of France to consecrate the Nation to his Sacred Heart.³¹ God, using Marguerite as a spiritual means, made some specific requests:

- The sovereign and the entire royal family should consecrate themselves to the Sacred Heart of Jesus by offering him public homage;
- France should enjoy perpetual protection from the Sacred Heart as long as it is represented on all the arms and banners of the Kingdom;
- The King should turn to the Holy See to make the cult of the Sacred Heart official;
- The King should order the construction of a Basilica in honour of the veneration of the Sacred Heart;
- The King should defend the rights of Christ to be worshipped as King of Kings, Sovereign of all kings all over Europe.

Although Louis of Bourbon shared Marguerite's and her spiritual director's hostility to Jansenism, he did not fulfill these requests.

Louis XIV, as an expression of absolutism also in religious life, refused any kind of intercession, believing himself to be a charismatic.³² Like his predecessors, he had the power to heal the sick of scrofula. Despite its longevity, the kingdom was plagued by wars and economic problems, and Saint Marguerite's prophecy appeared to fail in this difficult context.³³

The words of the Sacred Heart seemed to be a curse on his successor, Louis XVI. While he was prisoner of revolutionaries, remembering the prophecy, he promised to be faithful to the Sacred Heart forever.

It is emblematic that during the Feast of the Sacred Heart in 1789, exactly one hundred years after Christ's request to Louis XIV, the third State presented the self-proclaimed National Assembly.

³¹ About of the cult of the Sacred Heart see M. Rosa, *Settecento religioso, Politica della religione e politica del cuore*, Marisilio editore, Padova 1999.

³² There is a complex discourse on veneration and sacredness surrounding the figure of the Sun King. The Wonderworker King is an expression of the action of God who at the same time holds the high office of the Church. During religious celebrations the King is the first bishop. See A. Maral, *Le Roi-Soleil et Dieu: Essai sur la religion de Louis XIV*, ed. Perrin, 2012, pp. 99-100. Hereditary characteristic of the Kings of France. Practice initiated by Hugues Capet and transmitted to successors. For more on the figure of the King as thaumaturge see M. Bloch, *The Thaumaturgians kings, studies on the supernatural character attributed to the power of kings especially in France and England*, introduction of C. Ginzburg, Einaudi, Torino 1973.

³³ "Make known to the eldest son of my heart, speaking of our king. That ad his temporal birth was obtained through devotion to the merits of my holy childhood, in the same manner he will obtained his birth of grace and eternal glory by the consecration that the will make of himself to my adorable heart, which wishes to triumph over those of the great ones of the world. It wishes to reign in his palace, to be painted on his standards and engrave on his arms, in order to render him victorious over all his enemies". From *Life of Blessed Margaret Mary Alacoque*, pp. 267-269.

The story of St. Marguerite Marie Alacoque and her devotion to the Sacred Heart had a fully extrinsic social value and stands as a reminder to consider the policy of authority primarily as an example of sacrifice and obedience, love and discipline being the crucial foundations for the exercise of power. In other words, the case of Saint Marguerite became a warning for the people and especially for the men of power: no one, not even a King can disobey the will of God or escape the rules that Christ told him to follow.

Political charismas of 17th century: the case of Maria of Jesus of Agreda in Spain

The ascertained case of the charismatic Maria of Jesus of Agreda (1602-1665) in Spain in the first half of the 17th century was particularly significant.

Maria Coronel Arana Fernandez, better known as Maria of Jesus, was a mystic from the Order of the Immaculate Conception.

The ascetic life of the young mystic was marked by suffering and disease. Like Saint Marguerite, she punished herself to demonstrate her closeness to Christ.

Maria was the author of many written works, and the most famous – *La mística ciudad de Dios* – was ordered directly by the Virgin Mary. The book, rich in spiritual advice, was a kind of guide for other nuns of the Order. The final work, finished in 1650, was ordered by her spiritual confessor and also enriched with an account of graces received by Maria. *La mística ciudad de Dios* was actually written by Maria thirteen years earlier and delivered to King Philip IV of Habsburg before it was burned on the orders of another spiritual director. The text, which at first figured in the index of forbidden books, was finally approved by the Inquisition in 1686 after innumerable vicissitudes. From this perspective, the story of Maria of Agreda proceeds linearly towards formal approval, ending with recognition by the Spanish Inquisition and her truthfulness proven by representatives of other religions, Protestantism and Judaism included.

The work, rich in very detailed descriptions of apparitions and prophecies, recounts steps of the Via Crucis that were never told in the synoptic or apocryphal gospels, in particular the flagellation, crowning with thorns, and crucifixion of Christ.³⁴ The charisms attributed to Maria of Agreda were bilocation and the conversion of people.

³⁴ In *La Mística Ciudad de Dios*, particular importance is given to prophecies, especially those relating to the Apocalypse, the dark days and the role of Angels. In Maria de Jesus de Agreda, *Mística Ciudad de Dios*, Vida de la Virgen Maria.

The first half of the 17th century saw the beginning of a massive process of evangelization by Franciscan missionaries, led by Alonso de Benavides,³⁵ who sought to convert the indigenous tribes of the territories between California and present-day New Mexico. The tribes of the Comanche, the Navajo, and the Apache³⁶ were hostile and often in conflict with them. During a mission in 1662, the Franciscan missionaries came into contact with the most aggressive tribe in America to ever ask to be evangelised. The natives said they received this order from a “blue lady”.³⁷ The description of the “blue lady” corresponded fully to Maria, who had never left the convent’s rooms. Maria was questioned by the Inquisition Court and revealed that she had been to the American lands many times; the Archbishop of Mexico City judged Mary’s descriptions to be very realistic and familiar. A similar episode of bilocation had occurred a few decades earlier to the Dominican Saint Martin de Porres (1579-1639), who described his journeys to China and the Philippines. However, Maria was no doubt influenced by the writings of Jose de Acosta, the first Jesuit Father to go on a mission to the New World. Other Spanish prophetesses in the 17th century made similar reports of bilocation. One example is the case of Marina de Los Angeles, present at the battle of Lützen (1632); Juana Rodriguez and Ines de Jesus, women involved in the conversion of the Indian people; or even Jacinta de Navarra and Louise de la Ascension, who appeared alongside their armies in battles against the Turks and between Catholics and Protestants in 1620,³⁸ respectively. Mary’s fame was linked to her political leadership rather than to the importance of her charism. Her proximity to Philip IV, with whom she had come into contact after the first mystical episode, was absolutely crucial. The link with Philip IV of Habsburg and with the Spanish court began immediately, but not directly, through letters sent by Alonso Benavides to the king and to the “*Consejo de Indias*” between 1630 and 1634. She continued to correspond with other important political representatives, such as the ambassador of Spain, the future Pope Clement IX Rospigliosi, the wives of Philip IV, the Viceroy of Aragon Fernando de Borja, and the Duke of Híjar. This last friendship led to a further investigation from the Inquisition, which accused her of conspiring with the Duke against the crown of Spain. The political and diplomatic letters that Mary sent to Philip, called “*arbitrios*” in Spanish, consisted of warnings and advice given through religious anecdotes and stories of her mystical experiences. The correspondence lasted

³⁵ Portuguese Franciscan missionary first distinguished in Spain for the conversion of the Indians.

³⁶ North American tribes. The Spanish and the Navajo coexisted until 1805, when the Spanish Governor Chacon ordered peace treaties.

³⁷ B. Ferrus Anton, *La monja de Agreda, Historia y leyenda de la dama azul en Norteamérica*, Universitat de Valencia, Valencia 2008.

³⁸ For cases of bilocation, see G. Zarri, *Religious Orders, holiness and worship: perspectives of research between Europe and Latin America*, Workshop study, Rome, June 21-22, 2001.

for years, with more than six hundred letters sent between 1643 and 1665 – the year they both passed away, almost a prophetic sign in itself.

Maria lived through one of the darkest and most difficult phases in the history of Spain, which had been involved in the last phase of the Thirty Years' War and in other internal clashes between separatists and the French, incited by the latter. The French-Spanish war was one of the main reasons behind Spain's weakened economy. Even though the last significant uprising took place in 1651 (*guerra dels segaldors*³⁹), clashes kept occurring until the Peace of the Pyrenees eight years later. This difficult period changed Philip's political decisions. Philip proved to have a conscientious and democratic conception of his own politics, founded on the idea of a state supported by a trusted entourage of advisors and chosen ministers. Olivares' office as prime minister lasted for more than twenty years, proving the King's inclination to have long and lasting political relations.⁴⁰ Maria's religious mission consisted of reminding people of the righteous and beneficial role the King played in defeating the sins of Spain. The feverish internal situation of the Spanish kingdom was a sign of punishment from God with Mary as its only interpreter. Correspondence reveals Agreda's full awareness of diplomatic, military and political issues, highlighting strong involvement in State affairs.⁴¹

Despite the relationship between Maria of Agreda and Philip IV being based on private and direct correspondence, Mary belonged to a Franciscan group that had always attempted to maintain a special relationship with the court of Madrid. The link between the abbess and the king reveals the dual nature of Maria's role: on the one hand, her prophetic figure contains traces of the role of *divine mothers* who dominated the scene of spiritual phenomena between 15th and 16th century; on the other, Maria is the means through which religious groups led by with spiritual fathers reinforce their power. Maria of Agreda bridges two phenomena – the figure of the active female with male leadership.

It is precisely the complexity and, at the same time, the versatility of her figure that makes Maria very interesting in the context of *Gender Studies*,⁴² where she is seen as

³⁹ Catalan for "war of Reapers", it was fought by Catalan farmers tired of living in a territory occupied by Castilian troops engaged in guarding the French borders.

⁴⁰ F. Tomás, F. Valiente, *Gobierno e instituciones en la España del Antiguo Régimen*, Alianza Universidad, Madrid 1982.

⁴¹ Maria wrote in a letter to the King in 1652: "I was very relieved that the peasant uprisings in Cordoba had calmed down and I was alarmed that Seville had risen. There is nothing that I grieve most that the symptoms of discord and civil war between us [...]" from Maria de Jesus de Agreda, *Correspondencia con Felipe IV, religión y razón de Estado, Introducción de consolacion*, Baranda Editorial, Castolia, Instituto de la mujer, Madrid 1999.

⁴² A lot has been written about Maria of Agreda. Numerous works highlight the hagiographic profile and the analysis of her extensive written production. Among the significant contributions in the field of

one of the most important female charismatics of the 17th century, also for her written work. She wrote other books that were met with hostility from the Inquisition; for example the *Diccionario de Autoridades*, banned until the decree of Pope Innocent XI, and other controversial works focused on good behaviour and liturgical practices (*Ejercicio cotidiano para ocupazione bien las horas del dia and Ejercicio espirituales de retiro*). It is clear that Maria's preaching was inevitably linked to the precepts of her order, and her written works were inevitably influenced by the directives of her spiritual fathers. The blue lady was a means for Franciscan evangelization, and her religious mission was used by the Order to legitimise itself so as to increase its own political power. Maria of Agreda lived in a context in which political and religious spheres were strongly correlated. Philip IV was the main supporter of Maria's spiritual message, based on the exaltation of the mystery of the Immaculate Conception.⁴³ In fact, the King tried to increase recognition of the Marian cult professed by Maria during her lifetime. In 1650, the Immaculate Conception became the patroness of Spain, a title announced in 1661 with the papal bull of Alexander VII Chigi, which established December 8th as the liturgical day dedicated to the Virgin. This day became a precept feast in Spain and in all other European domains, the Kingdom of Naples included.⁴⁴ Revelations, prophecies, and above all the massive action of evangelization of the South of the world have contributed to make Mary one of the most significant figures of the Catholic culture of the 17th century (and beyond). In 1699 – thirty-four years after Maria's death – during an expedition through Colorado led by captain Juan Mateo Mange, the Spanish army came into contact with some tribes who reported having been catechised by a woman dressed in blue. The indigenous peoples began to worship the woman as if she were an extraordinary entity, because she was immune to the arrows that they had thrown. American studies report that the "lady in blue", or "the Blue Nun", became an element of adoration in the Indian reserves, where she was celebrated through fetishes and votive statuettes.⁴⁵

Gender studies: I. Poutrin, *Le voile et la plume. Autobiographie et sainteté féminine dans l'Espagne moderne*, Bibliothèque de la Casa de Velasquez, II, Madrid 1995; C. Colahan, *Maria de Jesús d'Agreda. The sweetheart of the Holy Office, in Women and Inquisition*, ed. M.E. Giles, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore-London 1999, pp. 155-170.

⁴³ R. Laurentin, *Maria nella storia della salvezza*, Torino, Marietti 1972, p. 139.

⁴⁴ P. Broggio, *Teologia, Ordini religiosi e rapporti politici: la questione dell'Immacolata Concezione di Maria tra Roma e Madrid*, "Hispania Sacra" Gennaio-Febbraio 2013, LXV, pp. 255-281.

⁴⁵ B. Ferrus Anton, *La monja de Agreda, Historia y leyenda de la dama azul en Norteamérica*, Universitat de Valencia, Valencia 2008.

Political charismas of the XVII century: the case of Giulia Di Marco in Italy

In 17th century Naples, the story of Giulia Di Marco⁴⁶ (1575-1618?), nun of the Regular Third Order of Saint Francis of Penance, was particularly significant. The cult of this charismatic woman was not recognised, but her case reveals interesting reflections on the very concept of charism in a political context. From this perspective, the case of Giulia Di Marco not only reveals the details of a demeaned and demonised charisma but also marks the transition from mystical power to the spiritual fathers.⁴⁷ The story of Giulia is best understood in the light of a preliminary analysis of the historico-religious situation in which the Franciscan tertiary lived. The events unfold in baroque Naples of the early 1600'. Among clandestine groups formed around the doctrine of Valdés and other independent religious movements, the town was dominated by the strong imprint of the Church and the opposition of major orders: the Theatines and the Jesuits.

After a childhood lived in poverty in Molise, where she worked as a domestic servant, Giulia moved from Sepino to Naples, where, after many difficulties, she devoted her life to God by taking vows as a Franciscan tertiary.

The story of Sister Giulia began after she met Aniello Arciero di Gallipoli of the Congregation of Interior Ministers, known as "Crociferi" or "Fathers of the Crocelle", who had been chosen as her father confessor. Their spiritual relationship soon became an intimate bond they called "carnal charity",⁴⁸ a religious doctrine based on the practice of sex as an instrument of divine ascent and spiritual ecstasy. Giulia and her confessor began to practice a new religious belief in which Giulia's body, understood as a divine mean, soon became a real object of worship. Together with a cunning Neapolitan lawyer, Giuseppe De Vicaris, they founded a Congregation⁴⁹ that gathered many representatives of the nobility of the robe and of the nobility of the sword of the

⁴⁶ For a study of the case of Giulia Di Marco: P. Zito, *Giulia e l'inquisitore. Simulazione di santità e misticismo nella Napoli di primo Seicento*, Napoli, Arte Tipografica 2000.

⁴⁷ For an analysis of the roles between mystical figures and their spiritual directors: D. Solfaroli Camillocci, *The spiritual Direction of women in the modern age: courses in contemporary research*, "Annals of ISIG in Trent" 1998, XXIV, pp. 439-460.

⁴⁸ A. Vigilante, *La Carità Carnale. Istoria di suor Giulia Di Marco*, Raino editore, Bergamo 2006, p. 104.

⁴⁹ A. Arduino, *Le congreghe sessuali. Inquietante storia di uno scandalo nella Napoli del 1600*, E.C.G., Genova 1984, p. 23. The appendix (ms X. B. 56) makes reference to the manuscript of a Theatine, probably Father Valerio Pagano, thanks to which we have a lot of information about Giulia: The story of sister Giulia and the false doctrine taught by her, by the father Aniello Arciero, and by Giuseppe De Vicariis, n° 243 VIII, F. II-n° 263 VIII, B. 45-n°292 X B. 56 is now kept at the National Library of Naples.

Kingdom. Palace Orsini of Gravina in Monteoliveto Street became a meeting point for all its Neapolitan believers. Giulia Di Marco quickly became successful, and the Congregation, which closely resembled a sect, boasted continuous affiliations. The role of "Saint" attributed to Giulia was built through De Vicaris' dialectical ability with which he approached a large number of adepts, who came to treat Giulia as a "mother" figure.

Giulia's fame and her great following provided her with the opportunity to meet important people, just like Lucrezia de Leon had done in 1594. Lucrezia was a charismatic close to the entourage of Philip II who was very famous for her prophecies about the war and peace of the kingdom, which materialised in her dreams.⁵⁰ Giulia Di Marco cultivated a good friendship with the lieutenant of the Kingdom, Alfonso Suarez, who gave her hospitality in his apartment, and with the Cardinal Federico Borromeo, the great investigator of the mystical movements, who, in 1607, sent her some of the relics of his uncle Charles to which Giulia was very devoted. Her important contacts with Neapolitan nobility insured her help and hospitality, especially in difficult periods during her legal process; for example, Bernardino Montalvo, ruler of the Chamber of Summary, hid her in his house, and the magistrate Scipione Rovito followed her legal proceedings in Rome.

In addition to correspondence with Camillo de Lellis of the Congregation of the Ministers of the Sick, her most important political relationship was with the viceroy, Count of Lemos and with his wife, the countess Caterina de Sandoval.⁵¹ Giulia was claimed to be a holy and clairvoyant woman, and her figure became more and more prominent in the political context thanks to the favors she received. The presence of Giulia began to obscure the figure of another contemporary saint who lived in the hermitage of Castel S. Elmo in Naples, Orsola Benincasa (1547-1618), who was very close to Saint Catherine of Siena in both her family origins and professed religious doctrine. At that time, the Theatines occupied an important position for having attributed holiness to Orsola Benincasa, through which the convent of St. Paul received large sums of money in the form of offerings from her devotees. The Jesuits used the worship of Giulia in the same way – to build an important business. This opposition was, above all, an economic problem. The first process carried out to verify the holiness of Giulia took place in 1607; while Arciero was transferred to Rome, Giulia was

⁵⁰ R. Kegan, N. Grendi, *Lucrezia de Leon: per una valutazione dei sogni e delle visioni in Spagna del Cinquecento*, "Quaderni Storici, Nuova serie", Vol. 23, No. 68, Il Mulino, Milan 1988, pp. 595-607.

⁵¹ E. Novi Chavarria, *Una eretica alla corte del conte Lemos. Il caso di Suor Giulia di Marco*, "Archivio storico per le province napoletane" 1988, CXVI, pp. 77-118.

transferred twice, first to the monastery of S. Antonio of Padova, and then, by the will of the Bishop of Caserta, Diodato Gentile, to the monastery of Cerreto Sannita, near Benevento in the Region of Campania. In its second phase, Giuseppe De Vicaris was able to transfer Giulia again to the Monastery of Santa Chiara in Nocera of Pagani, which was under the protection of Stefano De Vicaris, the Commissioner of the Holy Office. At the peak of her fame, she was allowed to return to Naples, where the Theatines, who were in great opposition to the Jesuits, revealed their opposition to Giulia, openly accusing her of heresy. Orsola and Maria Villani⁵², two “living saints”, met Giulia and even they spoke very badly of her.

This created a real religio-political divide in Naples: the Party of Theatines, who defended the cause of the nun Orsola Benincasa, empowered by the Holy Office, and the Party of Giulia Di Marco, supported by the Jesuits, the Viceroy of Naples, and other influential personalities. Giulia began to be accused of possessing no charismatic gifts other than heresy and organizing orgies. Aniello Ariciero, in fact, was said to have revealed confessions of the devotees to Giulia to simulate a false gift of clairvoyance, which underlined her evil, deceiving nature. Less than a year after the fateful meeting, in 1615, Deodato Gentile, nuncio of the Kingdom of Naples, ordered the arrest of Giuseppe De Vicaris and his subsequent transfer to Rome where, in front of the Holy Office, with Giulia and Aniello, he abjured⁵³ in the Church of Santa Maria Sopra Minerva. In the same year, the accusations of heresy became public, and Giulia came to be remembered as a scammer.⁵⁴

The religious position of the Theatines experienced an extraordinary increase, and a manuscript about the story of Giulia, written by Don Valerio Pagano, further idolised their order. The incisive action of the Theatines actually strengthened the leadership of the Catholic Church. In fact, the carnal doctrine preached by Giulia was not only condemned for its immorality, but also because it weakened the decisions of the Council of Trent. If the sexual freedom preached by Sister Giulia did not constitute sin, confession as a Sacrament chosen by the Church would automatically be useless. Moreover, Aniello Arciero, a priest of the Order of San Camillo, was very close to Socinianism, an anti-Trinitarian doctrine of Protestantism that sought to pursue

⁵² *Vita della serua di Dio Suor Maria Villani dell'Ordine de' Predicatori, fondatrice del Monastero di S. Maria del Diuino Amore di Napoli*. Composta dal molto reuerendo p. maestro fra Domenico Maria Marchese, rettore del Collegio di S. Tomaso dell'istessa citta & Ordine, Consacrata All'illustriss. et Eccellentiss. Sig. Co. Eugenia Chizzola Martinenga, 1674.

⁵³ *Relatione dell'abiura di Giulia de Marco*, pp. 344-345 del Ms. Branc. III D 5 in the National Library of Naples.

⁵⁴ Documentation from the process was published by L. Amabile in the *Holy Office of the Inquisition in Naples*, S. Lapi, Rubbettino 1892.

a form of rational Christianity, opposing the rule of the Holy Roman Office.⁵⁵ From this point of view, the condemnation of Giulia Di Marco helped to strengthen the internal stability of the Order and of the general organization of the whole Church as institution. Although most of the information about Giulia came from works written to idolise Orsola Benincasa, the Theatines' true intent was not to defend Orsola but rather discourage the worship of Giulia and destroy her powerful figure. Although she belonged to their order, the Theatines also adopted restrictive actions against Benedetta Carlini, a nun in the convent of Pescia, who was accused of false holiness and then sentenced to life imprisonment. The fake saint, accused of continuous hallucinations, reported having received mystical visions and stigmata. Sister Bartolomea, Carlini's cellmate, reported much more serious accusations, such as the crime of sodomy, punishable by death,⁵⁶ to the spiritual fathers. The choice of life imprisonment, for this reason, appeared the most sensible solution in terms of avoiding drawing attention on the Order. It is clear, therefore, that the protection of Benincasa was a necessary instrument for the legitimization of the Theatines' religious power.

Giulia Di Marco and Orsola Benincasa were two completely antithetical personalities. The nuns were characters emblematic of very distant social contexts; while Orsola seemed to claim the sanctity of Catherine of Siena – with whom she shared the origins and an exemplary religious and cultural formation – by right, Giulia was born and grew up in miserable conditions, the daughter of a peasant from Sepino and a Turkish slave. It is clear that the elements that demonised Giulia pre-existed the legal process, just like the half-“unfaithful” blood that flowed in her veins. All the conditions sufficient for the accusation of witchcraft and heresy were already in place in the figure of Giulia, just like they were a few decades before her in Eleonora Ruggiero,⁵⁷ nun of S. Maria Donna Regina of Naples, accused of heresy and witchcraft for having manufactured concoctions and invoked spirits by using formulas from prohibited books; or Eufrosia Guzman, protected by Pedro Telléz Giron, Duke of Osuna and

⁵⁵ The doctrine took its name from the Italian thinkers Lello and Fausto Sozzini. Socinianism considered true only those dogmas that could be demonstrated through the use of human reason. For example, it was not acceptable that Christ was born to a virgin mother.

⁵⁶ Carlini was a lesbian nun who lived in the age of the Counter-Reformation. There is an interesting historical discussion on the relationship between lesbianism, mysticism and heretical interpretation. One of the most significant work is: E. Ann Matter, *Discourses of Desire: Sexuality and Christian Women's Visionary Narratives*, “Journal of Homosexuality” 1989-1990, 18/89, pp. 119-132.

⁵⁷ G. Romeo, *Inquisitori, esorcisti e streghe in Italia nell'Età della Controriforma*, Sansoni, Florence, 1990, pp. 8-9.

Viceroy of Sicily from 1611 to 1616, with whom she had a relationship forced on him by her homemade love potions.⁵⁸

Giulia also ended up in the cauldron of scammers and fake prophetesses. Their viceroys' (Lemos for Giulia and Pedro Telléz Giron for Eufrasia) protection was not sufficient to defend the women from the massive action of the Rituum Congregation, a congregation of the Roman Curia erected by Pope Sixtus V in 1588 to punish the profusely rising cases of fake holiness.

Between the late 1500s and the beginning of the new century there were numerous cases of probable holiness in Naples, a baroque site of great cultural ferment. These were meticulously scrutinised on a daily basis by the Church.⁵⁹ The priest Filippo Neri, responsible for the recognition of the holy charism of Orsola Benincasa, worked in this context. Naples appeared divided into two large spheres: of true, holy and incorruptible saints; and of witches and fake prophetesses such as the popular and evil Marzia Basile, who was sentenced to death on 7th of May, 1603. We know Marzia's story thanks to a Neapolitan storyteller, John of Carrida, who popularised her story by reciting it in squares after her death.⁶⁰ The case of Marzia Basile, however, differs substantially from the others, since the charge that determined her death sentence was that of uxoricide. Marzia had been accused of murdering her husband with the complicity of her lover and a faithful servant, Desiata Conte. The accusation of witchcraft was only an aggravation, following the depositions of a neighbour to whom Marzia had confessed the crime in a moment of weakness. The brutal murder was judged a heretic abomination by the Holy Office, which ordered the beheading of the young woman.

Giulia Di Marco was judged by the Church without any particular special treatment for her friendships.⁶¹ She died having spent the rest of her days in the prison of

⁵⁸ A. González, A. Mayo, *Isabel de Valois, reina de España (1546-1568)*, vol. I, Gráficas Ultra, Madrid 1949.

⁵⁹ The growing presence of presumed cases of healing charisms required the regulation of the miracle and the use of reference models. Manipulators of holiness were thwarted by a system of inquisitorial persecution. We refer to Sodano G., *Il miracolo nel Mezzogiorno d'italia nell'età moderna tra santi, madonne, guaritrici e medici*, Guida, Napoli 2010.

⁶⁰ The story of Marzia Basile reached us through the writings of John of the Carretòla: F. Novati, *Giovanni della Carretòla: un cantastorie del XVI secolo e i suoi contrsti*, "Il libro e la stampa" 1915, VIII, pp. 1-18; B. Croce, *Giovanni della carrida e la sua "storia su Marzia Basile"*, "Napoli nobilis-sima" 1921, N.S II, pp. 65-68; G. Panico, *Il carnefice e la piazza. Crudeltà di Stato e violenza popolare a Napoli in età moderna*, Napoli 1985, pp. 23-53.

⁶¹ Historians have often associated the case of Di Marco-Arciero – De Vicaris with another group of Italian mystics, inquisited in 1940 in Florence. The group was formed by the Jesuit Pandolfo Ricasoli, the widow Faustina Mainardi, the friar Serafino Lupi and the priest Jacopo Antoni. Ricasoli was spiritual director of some Florentine female monasteries, and in one of them the widow had established a sort of

Castel Sant'Angelo. The historical moment in which the story took place remained emblematic. Giulia was sentenced by the Inquisition – a step supported by Pope Paul V Borghese, who was also responsible for the beatification of St. Teresa of Avila, an example of true charisma and righteousness. The affair of Santa Teresa was a counter-weight that helped the College of Pope Paul V to avoid the label of cruel persecutors.⁶²

The mystical women presented in this short review, apart from the recognition and formalization of their worship, are connected to each other by a common element that marks their long and painful charismatic activity: their political leadership. Marguerite the “saint” as well as Maria the “visionary” or Giulia the “witch” are fully immersed in the political contexts of their Nations. They help sovereigns to make choices, predict the future through their visions, and automatically influence the course of the events.

Although the figures presented have distinct profiles, it is undeniable that there is a homogeneous structure of spiritual power management. Their political action is performed through ecclesiastical institutions that acquire greater political and social consideration thanks to their work. At the same time, European Sovereigns use these women to approach the most important religious orders, control them, manage them, and reduce their growing power. We can think of the relationship between temporal and spiritual institutions as a triangle, where the third summit is represented by women endowed with charismatic powers. In this perspective, women are a means, instruments of communication and union. The communicative power of the charismatic, their social role as divine mothers close to the people, their similarity with the Virgin Mary, and their status of incorruptible virgins give them greater credibility – much higher than that of men. It is also undeniable that kings preferred women as a matter of trust. While men could betray the King for personal ambitions, women had no social motives to betray them. Devotion is therefore one of the fundamental aspects that characterises these figures, earning them the title of “pious advisers”. Weber's concept of a leader followed by the people, but at the same time managed and regulated by laws imparted by institutions and society, is in perfect harmony with the profiles of the mystics presented in this short review. They are strong women, aware of their communicative power as well as the force of their spirituality, but they oper-

female College. The group members were charged with illicit sexual practices with the girls of the school, justified by false mystical theories. Also this case, which had many points of proximity with the story of Giulia, ended with abjuration in the Church of S. Croce on November 28, 1641. For further information on this case: C. Cantù, *Eretici d'Italia*, Unione topografica editrice, Vol. III, Turin 1866, pp. 397-406.

⁶² The parallelism between Saint Teresa of Avila and Giulia Di Marco derives from ecstatic experiences that both were reported to have undergone. For an overview of the charismatic activity of St. Teresa and her historical-political context: J.L. Olaizola, *S. Teresa en el Siglo de Oro*, Cinisello Balsamo, San Paolo 2002.

are within well-defined political limits. The choice to present the three charismatics in this order is far from accidental. Margaret is not listened to by the King and for this reason attracts a whole generation of worshippers who look to the past with fear and celebrate the woman with respect; Maria of Agreda is widely recognised and her charisma ascertained with great consensus by all; and finally there is Giulia Di Marco, who represents an uncertain case, oscillating between recognition and condemnation. Giulia Di Marco crosses that thin line to which all were accustomed in the 17th century – a boundary respected both by Marguerite and Maria. With Giulia, for better or for worse, we reach a paroxysm of what women can represent. Regardless of the truth of their charismas or their holiness, the substantial difference lies in the role that the three women unknowingly play. While Maria and Marguerite are active participants in political connection, Giulia is an unsuspecting victim.

It is in such a circumstance that we can fully understand the Weberian meaning of mystical authority: a sociological concept that combines political legitimacy and the social identification of a group in the long process of its civil evolution, through complex systems of power games.

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CHARISMATIC PHENOMENA IN EUROPE IN THE 17TH CENTURY: FEMALE POLITICAL PROPHETISM IN FRANCE, SPAIN AND ITALY

S u m m a r y

The purpose of the present article is to analyse the evolution of the political and social perception that mystical movements assumed during the Modern Age, in particular after spiritual changes settled by the Council of Trent. Three cases of charismatic women in 17th century Europe (Marguerite of Alacoque in France, Maria of Agreda in Spain, Giulia Di Marco in Italy) were analysed and closely linked to their own political context in order to underline the strong interdependence between the religious sphere and the civil sphere. The final goal of the work is to identify, in spite of the diversity of the stories and charisms of the three prophetesses, a point of similarity: the same networked method of use of political

power. The article aims to highlight a new concept of the role of the Saint in the Modern Era – not only as a venerable or incorruptible figure but a main character who is aware of their social function and conscious of the social utility of their mystical gift.

Keywords: Charism, political dimension, religious power, mysticism, spiritual authority, worship

FENOMEN CHARYZMATYCZNY W EUROPIE XVII WIEKU.
KOBIECY PROFETYZM POLITYCZNY WE FRANCJI, HISZPANII I WŁOSZECH

Streszczenie

Celem niniejszego artykułu jest analiza ewolucji politycznej i społecznej percepcji ruchów mistycznych w epoce nowożytnej, a zwłaszcza po zmianach duchowych wynikających z odnowy potrydenckiej. Przeanalizowano trzy przypadki charyzmatycznych kobiet w Europie XVII wieku (Małgorzata Alacoque we Francji, Maria z Agreda w Hiszpanii, Giulia Di Marco we Włoszech), ściśle związane z kontekstem politycznym, aby podkreślić silną współzależność sfery religijnej i obywatelskiej. Ostatecznym celem pracy jest zidentyfikowanie, pomimo różnorodności losów i charyzmatów trzech prorokiń, punktu podobieństwa: tej samej kapilarnej metody użycia władzy politycznej. W artykule podkreśla się nową koncepcję roli świętego w epoce nowożytnej. Nie była to jedynie czcigodna czy niezniszczalna postać, ale główny bohater, świadomy swojej funkcji społecznej i świadomy społecznej użyteczności mistycznego daru.

Słowa kluczowe: charyzmat, wymiar polityczny, władza religijna, mistycyzm, autorytet duchowy, kult