Lezlie S. Knox, *Creating Clare of Assisi. Female Franciscan Identities in Later Medieval Italy* [The Medieval Franciscans 5]. Brill, Leiden / Boston 2008, xvi + 228 pp. isbn 9789004166516. € 89; us$ 142.

This study, based on Lezlie S. Knox’s dissertation directed by John van Engen, re-examines the tensions between the Friars Minor and the Clarisses with a focus on communal reinterpretations of St. Clare’s legacy and image between the thirteenth and fifteenth century. Identifying St. Clare’s leadership as spiritually rather than institutionally successful, despite her enormous labors to secure permanent ties between the Friars and the Clarisses, Knox explores the political strategies employed by the Clarisses to protect their status as members of the Franciscan order from the death of St. Clare to the Observant Reform of the fifteenth century. The sisters’ evocation of St. Clare as their founder and author of one of the earliest Clarissan rules with an emphasis on evangelical poverty waxed and waned in the effort to retain and strengthen ties to the Friars Minor. Knox argues that St. Clare’s image as founder of the Clarisses *sui generis* stabilized only during the Observant Reform in the middle of the fifteenth century. Knox re-opens “The Clarian Question” with the support of new archival research in Italy, especially Maria Pia Alberzoni’s work, which in turn built on the theses of a long forgotten German scholar, Lilly Zarncke, who published a study on papal contributions to the creation of the Franciscan orders in 1930. Knox underscores the centrality of communal negotiations in shaping female Franciscan identity, thus moving beyond earlier scholarly approaches with their almost exclusive focus on the figure of St. Clare as founder of the Second Order. *Creating Clare of Assisi* is divided into five chapters with an introduction and conclusion. Chapter One offers an overview of current scholarship on the relationship between St. Francis, St. Clare, and their respective communities. Chapter Two maps the course of the Second Order after St. Clare’s death, now renamed “Order of St. Clare,” as the sisters struggled to cement their ties with the Friars Minor during the decade between 1253 and 1263. This period of instability came to an end when the sisters received a new constitution from Pope Urban IV. Knox re-examines in particular the decisions and attitudes of Bonaventure, then Minister General of the Franciscan Order, and Urban IV as they renegotiated the Friars’ pastoral responsibility for the Clarisses. She concludes that both Pope and Friars adjusted St. Clare’s image to the prevailing normative model of female sainthood, highlighting humility, prayer, and asceticism while neglecting her emphasis on evangelical poverty. Chapter Three examines aspects of an emerging Clarian genealogy of extraordinarily gifted women. Four women’s lives and legacies form the core of her genealogi-
cal study: Elena Enselmini of Padua (d. 1241), Filippa Mareri of the Rieti Valley (d. 1236), Margharita Colonna of Rome (d. 1280), and Queen Sancia of Naples (d. 1345). Knox traces how the cult and religious lives of these women, paradigmatic of numerous others, became eventually aligned with the Clarisses and thus (re-)defined by a distinctly Franciscan identity despite their regional spiritual distinctiveness. The remaining two chapters offer a re-evaluation of the Observant Reform’s rediscovery of St. Clare’s insistence on evangelical poverty through an analysis of John of Capistrano writings on the Rule of St. Clare, followed by an analysis of Mariano of Florence’s chronicle of Clarissan history (Chapter Four). The final chapter contrasts the fifteenth-century delineation of St. Clare’s image by Clarissan authors Caterina Vigri and Battista Alfani with that of contemporary male authors.

To make her case for the early eclipse of St. Clare and the gradual process of re-affirming her as the true founder of the Clarisses, Knox identifies three discursive strands that allowed Clarisses to hold their own as an order yet remain flexible in the difficult negotiations with the Franciscan order and the papacy: an oral tradition of stories about St. Clare and her own writings as preserved by the nuns on one hand and normative descriptions of female sanctity on the other. Replacing a single strand hagiographic narrative of St. Clare as the institutional founder of the Clarisses with a detailed account of 200 years of women’s collective strategies of accommodation and resistance to secure a stable institutional relationship with the Friars Minor is no small feat. Furthermore, Creating Clare of Assisi seeks to remedy the disturbing lack of attention to the Clarisses in general histories of the Franciscan Order up to this decade. Lezlie S. Knox offers thoughtful and carefully argued theses about the formation of the Clarisses and St. Clare’s legacy that will stimulate discussions among medievalists in several fields. Her analysis emphasizes institutional negotiations and collective bargaining; what seems to me to be somewhat missing, however, is the Second Order’s late medieval context as cultural and religious landscape of the mind. Following Knox in her portrayal of key players and pivotal developments throughout 200 years of female Franciscan religious history, one comes across accounts of well-received and widely noted visionary experiences and exemplary spiritual lives to such an extent that their importance in shaping St. Clare’s image and the future of the Clarisses appears to be at least as persuasive as communal strategies and rhetorical eloquence. Examining in greater depth the pre-modern impact of the genealogy and public regard for Franciscan women’s visionary and lived spiritual authority vis-à-vis the controversies surrounding evangelical poverty and pastoral care would, I suspect, add explanatory force to Knox’s historiographical narrative.