

# Exorcism and Religious Politics in Fifteenth-Century Florence

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*This article examines a series of messages concerning politics and geography that the religious order of the Vallombrosans embedded within a series of exorcism manuscripts and addressed to Lorenzo de' Medici in the late fifteenth century. The Vallombrosans crafted their manuscripts to negotiate a host of troubles: schism over reform, friction with Lorenzo, diminishing social status, increased marginality, competition with rival religious orders, new definitions of orthodoxy, and alternate forms of religious devotion. I frame Vallombrosan troubles and their turn to exorcism as symptomatic of the increased predominance of Mendicant Observants over older orders, and link this shift to a newly active and politicized demonology.*

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## INTRODUCTION

IN 1483, LORENZO DE' MEDICI (1449–92) dispatched 3,000 Florentine troops to descend upon the Vallombrosan monastery of Passignano.<sup>1</sup> Sixtus IV (r. 1471–84) had promised Lorenzo the abbey in commenda in 1481,<sup>2</sup> and when its ab-

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<sup>1</sup> A rigorous branch of reformed Benedictines, the Vallombrosans were founded in 1038 by the charismatic San Giovanni Gualberto (985–1073). The order was especially powerful in its first three centuries, a period well documented by Salvestrini across his career, and had a strong presence in North Central Italy with additional foundations in Rome, France, and Sardinia. By the mid-fifteenth century, there were about thirty primary Vallombrosan abbeys with a large array of dependent monasteries, churches, and hospitals in Tuscany, located mostly in the dioceses of Fiesole, Arezzo, and Pistoia. For important outlines of Vallombrosan history and hagiography, see Degl'Innocenti; Boesch-Gajano; Benvenuti-Papi; Villoresi.

<sup>2</sup> In canon law, giving a monastery in commenda meant entrusting it to the care of a patron, usually a layperson, who did not usually assume residence and was entitled to the institution's revenue. By the fifteenth century, commenda came to function as benefice for the sustenance of the commendatory. Berman, 216–19; Otto, 4:156, 7:719, 41; Bizzocchi, 102–07.

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bot died in 1483 Lorenzo moved quickly to install his son Giovanni (1475–1521), later Pope Leo X (r. 1513–21) but at the time only seven years old, as its head. A contemporary Vallombrosan source noted that several monks were wounded in the abbey's defense and that its abbot was humiliated, forced to walk to Florence "almost naked." The Vallombrosans were unsuccessful in appealing this infringement to the pope. When abbot general Don Biagio Milanese (1480–1514) complained to Vallombrosa's protector at the Roman curia, who took the issue to Innocent VII (r. 1484–92), the pope dismissed it, telling Biagio to "go his own way."<sup>3</sup>

This paper situates Lorenzo's actions and the Vallombrosan response to it, as well as other changes and challenges that assailed this order in the fifteenth century, within the framework of another, broader fifteenth-century shift, namely, the ascendance in numbers and prestige of the Mendicant Observant orders over older contemplative ones like the Vallombrosans.<sup>4</sup> As a consequence of the greater harmony of interests between secular powers and Mendicant Observants, older orders were sometimes forced to adapt to survive. The Vallombrosans faced the changed political and religious landscape with determination and resolve, crafting a series of texts that asserted the order's spiritual prowess through the miraculous exorcizing of demons. At the same time, they advanced a more temporal and arguably more complex agenda, that of updating their order's image and redefining its relevance. For in tandem with emotionally wrenching accounts of heinous demons and anguished communities, the Vallombrosan accounts worked to supplant older areas of focus with new ones, to trumpet the order's pastoral dedication, and to assert their thaumaturgic power and unflinching orthodoxy. The Vallombrosans also used their texts to critique the more successful Mendicant orders. Yet at the same time, they emulated Mendicant strategy by appealing to urban citizen classes and secular leaders by insisting upon the order's political utility. The results of increased Mendicant Observant dominance were myriad. Mendicant dominance resulted in a sharper divide between laity and clerics, closer coordination between religious orders and centralizing state and papal powers, clearer definitions of orthodoxy, greater liturgical uniformity, a shriller and more public style of religious practice, and the development of a strident and aggressive demonology closely wedded to affairs of state. This article examines a small subset of Vallombrosa's efforts, namely, the manner in which the order used descriptions about exorcism to reframe its political utility to Florence and Lorenzo.

<sup>3</sup> Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Florence (BNC), Magliabechiana (Magl.) 37 325, fol. 60<sup>r</sup>. All translations are the author's except where otherwise noted.

<sup>4</sup> Brucker, 52.

## VALLOMBROSAN TROUBLES

Vallombrosan problems with the Medici were not altogether new. The order had clashed with the Medici under Cosimo (“il Vecchio,” 1389–1464). Upon his return from exile in 1434, Cosimo deposed Vallombrosan abbot general Riccardo (1422–34) for his support of the anti-Medicean Albizzi faction.<sup>5</sup> And the twin problems of Lorenzo and commenda were recurring ones for the Vallombrosans. Monks had discussed the problem of removing Vallombrosan monasteries from commenda at San Salvi in 1459,<sup>6</sup> and Lorenzo had sought control of Vallombrosan monasteries from at least 1469, when he appealed to Donato Acciaiuoli (1429–78), Florence’s ambassador to Rome, to “obtain” for him the Vallombrosan abbey of Coltibuono. He made a bid for Vallombrosan lands again in 1472, announcing his “desire” for the monastery of Caprilia to the Vallombrosan abbot general Altoviti (1454–79) via letter. Altoviti’s gentle refusal and explanation that he could not confer benefices “to those who are not of age” suggest that Lorenzo’s aims were again on behalf of Giovanni, whom he was then grooming for the cardinalate.<sup>7</sup>

Historians have attributed to Lorenzo a variety of motives for wishing to obtain Vallombrosan lands: e.g., the desire for a defensive military outpost and the wish to build a new villa.<sup>8</sup> In all, his aims seem to have been dictated by prudence rather than principle or abiding hostility, for when in 1479 two Vallombrosan abbots general were elected, one from Vallombrosa’s mother, or central, house and the other from the schismatic Vallombrosan branch monastery of San Salvi, Lorenzo made a surprise switch. Though until now he had favored the monks from San Salvi, now he supported the Vallombrosans, probably because the older, decentralized organizational model the Vallombrosans then espoused was more likely to secure him commendal benefits.<sup>9</sup>

Lorenzo’s attempts to control Vallombrosan monasteries were just one portion of a larger, interconnected web of difficulties that plagued the Vallombrosans in the fifteenth century. Another persistent problem was disputes over Observant reform—or over the proper observance of the founding rule—that

<sup>5</sup> Bizzocchi, 163; Villoresi, 115; Salvestrini, 1998, 122–24; Tabani and Vadala, 30; Lucchesi, 19, 23; Gombrich, 22; Degl’Innocenti, 2003, 88.

<sup>6</sup> Archivio Generale della Congregazione di Vallombrosa, Florence, Sezione Storica, DIII 22, fols. 62<sup>r</sup>–64<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> Archivio di Stato Firenze (ASF) Archivio Mediceo Avanti il Principato, Filza XXIII, no. 493. 11 Sep. 1472.

<sup>8</sup> ASF Corporazioni Religiose Soppresse dal Governo Francese, 1004–1881 (CS) Santa Maria di Vallombrosa (SMV) 260 260, fols. 37<sup>r</sup>–39<sup>r</sup>; Salvestrini, 1998, 122–24; Gombrich.

<sup>9</sup> BNC Magl. 37 280, fol. 7<sup>r</sup>; Tabani and Vadala, 110–15; Vasaturo, 129; Lucchesi, 22–49.

divided the order from the 1430s. A younger group within the order known as the Salvini, for their residence at the monastery of San Salvi just outside of Florence, reformed their house after the model of the Observant Paduan congregation of Santa Giustina that had been brought to Florence when the Portuguese monk Don Gomezio was dispatched from Santa Giustina to reform the Badia Fiorentina, or abbey of Florentine Benedictines, in 1419.<sup>10</sup>

The Santa Giustina / Badia Fiorentina model of Observance—which, notably, had been developed with the express aim of blocking commendal takeovers—borrowed much from Mendicants. It adopted their centralized and more hierarchical form of organization and initiated the radical Mendicant policy of transferring brothers between houses—radical since in traditional monastic practice monks were wedded to their house of ordination for life. Following the Santa Giustina model of Observance, the Salvini model minimized the power of abbots, replacing the Vallombrosan tradition of lifetime tenure with yearly elections. In keeping with their diminution of abbatial power, the Salvini sought to downplay veneration for the Vallombrosan founding abbot and patron saint, San Giovanni Gualberto. Later, the Vallombrosan abbot general Don Biagio Milanese (1480–1513/14) reported that the schismatic Salvini held San Giovanni Gualberto “in little account and ceased observing his feast day,” and declared that in consequence, San Salvi was infested by demons.<sup>11</sup> The circulation of a rumor that Gualberto had not been canonized was likely yet another Salvini ploy in their sustained campaign to undermine abbatial power.<sup>12</sup>

It should be noted that the Vallombrosans considered themselves just as reformed or Observant as the Paduan Giustinians, Badia Fiorentina, and the Salvini. Traditionally, Vallombrosans had been known for their rigor, and in the fifteenth century they referred to themselves as “good Observant monks.” Trumpeting their founder’s success as a reformer, they wrote that Gualberto “not only reformed Tuscany, but . . . we can with truth say, reformed the entire religion of Christ and especially in Italy.”<sup>13</sup> Implicit in the declaration was the notion that Gualberto’s reforms had been both sufficient and lasting, and that new models of Observance were both superfluous and destructive of long-held tradition. Thus, even with a single order, more than one model of Observance competed for primacy, and both camps vied for the title.

<sup>10</sup> Several Vallombrosan monks trained at the Badia. See Leader, 86.

<sup>11</sup> ASF CS SMV 260 260, fol. 6<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> Girolamo of Raggiolo, the monk-author of the Latin *Book of Miracles*, wrote that he had heard rumors to this effect. Biblioteca Moreniana (BM) MS 383, fols. 68<sup>v</sup>–71<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> BNC Magl. 35 239, 2.17, fol. 130<sup>v</sup>; 1.0, fol. 1<sup>r</sup>. As this manuscript lacks chapters 5 and 55, I have imposed my own chapter numbering scheme and employ a convention in which “1.22,” for example, refers to book 1, chapter 22.

The Vallombrosan approach to Observance differed from that of the Salvini in many specifics. While some points of contention concerned ritual and religious practice, as in a disagreement over the degree of self-mortification sanctioned by the rule, others had a starkly political cast, such as the dispute over the electoral eligibility and status of lay brethren (*conversi*). In keeping with the Paduan / Badia Fiorentina model's tendency to emphasize a clear separation between laypeople and religious, the Salvini derogated the status of *conversi*, excluding them from voting in abbatial elections. The Vallombrosans at the motherhouse opposed this change, in part because to diminish *converso* status disregarded Vallombrosan tradition, in which *conversi* had long played prominent roles in monastery life both temporal and spiritual.<sup>14</sup> Yet they also bridled because to exclude *conversi* from voting altered the numbers of eligible voters in chapter meetings to Vallombrosan disadvantage and thus threatened Vallombrosan hegemony.<sup>15</sup>

In short, within the Vallombrosan order, power was a question of numerical predominance. San Salvi had long been smaller in size than Vallombrosa, but Eugenius IV (r. 1431–47) had enlarged it by uniting other foundations to it and granting it the ability to accept novices—another profound departure from Vallombrosan tradition, which had long granted such powers only to the Vallombrosan abbot general.<sup>16</sup> Historians have offered diverse figures for numbers of monks and *conversi* at Vallombrosa and San Salvi, but in the 1480s, about sixty to seventy monks probably resided at Vallombrosa flanked by an equal number of *conversi*. Smaller foundations such as Passignano and San Salvi typically housed about twenty-five monks and smaller numbers of *conversi*. However, the Salvini's newfound ability to accept novices without mediation and their adoption of the new and perhaps more fashionable model of Santa-Giustina style of Observance made them particularly successful in recruiting new monks. According to a Vallombrosan historian, in the 1430s Don Niccoli, the abbot of San Salvi, began to recruit “many youths, and he raised them in such a manner that they were completely alienated from living in the ancient manner of our religion.”<sup>17</sup> San Salvi's powers continued to increase thereafter, for it ordained forty-nine monks between 1441 and 1480 as against only twenty-three ordinations at Val-

<sup>14</sup> For example, Vallombrosans termed Beato Orlando, an uncanonized *converso*, a saint and attributed after-death miracles to him. BNC Magl. 35 239, 1.8, fol. 17<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>15</sup> For numbers of *conversi*, see, for example, ASF Notarile Antecosmiano (NA) 10403, Griso Griselli (GG), G678; Brucker, 51; Salvestrini, 1998, 282.

<sup>16</sup> In 1435, for example, Eugenius IV enlarged San Salvi by transferring to it a group of Aretine monks from the convent of Santa Flora e Lucilla. BNC II IV 486, fol. 106<sup>r</sup>, citing Archivio di Ripoli, *Sacre Religionis*, lib. X, fols. 4–5.

<sup>17</sup> Locatelli, 273.

lombrosa.<sup>18</sup> In 1463, the Salvini formally seceded to form the Congregation of San Salvi, and by 1477, six other Vallombrosan monasteries had seceded to join their cause.<sup>19</sup>

Enmity between the rival factions boiled on for decades and grew so bitter that both groups “refused to speak each other’s name.”<sup>20</sup> In the end, the congregation was forcibly reunited by papal mandate in 1485 as Santa Maria di Vallombrosa, but union did not end internal struggles for dominance. The order faced fierce divides over adherence to the doctrines of Dominican Observant Girolamo Savonarola (1452–98),<sup>21</sup> and remained divided well into the late sixteenth century. Importantly, debates over Observant reform had the tendency to circle back to the problem of commenda, since commendal assignments were often justified, as they had been in the case of the Badia Fiorentina and Santa Giustina, by assessments that an order was lax or not Observant of their founding rule.<sup>22</sup> Other common reasons cited for giving monasteries in commenda were the death of an abbot, plague, and military devastation.<sup>23</sup>

Added to the problems of Lorenzo de’ Medici, commenda, and schism, the Vallombrosans faced diminished social standing and tenuous political support by the late fifteenth century. While the order was wealthy on account of its vast landholdings,<sup>24</sup> its ancient ties with the landed patriciate had withered, and it had never enjoyed particularly strong ties with Florentine citizens: lay patronage

<sup>18</sup> BNC CS A VIII 1399, fols. 10<sup>r</sup>–11<sup>v</sup>. The contents of this manuscript are also found in BNC Magl. 37 325 and ASF CS SMV 260 260.

<sup>19</sup> These were San Michele in Forcole near Pistoia, San Michele in San Donato in Poggio, San Fedele di Poppi, San Cassiano of Montescalari, the Priorate of Cavriglia, and San Pancrazio of Florence. Tabani and Vadala, 110–11.

<sup>20</sup> BNC CS A VIII 1399, fols. 10<sup>r</sup>–11<sup>v</sup>; Locatelli, 273. The two factions also battled over many other questions, including asceticism. The Vallombrosans characterized the Salvini’s tendency to mortify themselves to the point of bloodletting as contrary to Gualberto’s wishes and an example of the excessive zeal of youthful neophytes.

<sup>21</sup> De Maio.

<sup>22</sup> The “crisis of the Benedictines” that involved perennially recycled charges of “laxity” and “decadence” was a repeated refrain in nineteenth-century scholarship. Recent scholars have noted that such charges were sometimes politically motivated. Zarri, 238n88; Osheim, 217n57.

<sup>23</sup> Innocent, for example, justified his award of Passignano to Lorenzo by its position in a militarily strategic zone, and the Florentine signoria justified giving Lorenzo the abbey of Coltibuono for similar reasons.

<sup>24</sup> Though decades’ worth of *entrati* and *usciti* (or account books) survive, the Vallombrosan economy rested upon the active exchange of small, unmeasured plots for which the categories of sale, rental, and donation were frequently and easily masked. Thus even extant wealth assessments must be considered with skepticism. Brucker, 51; Salvestrini, 1998, 282.

of Vallombrosan abbeys had mostly ended in the fourteenth century, and the merger of the abbey of Ripoli with Vallombrosa in 1451–52 marked the end of the last vestige of *iusspatronato*, or citizen oversight of Vallombrosan churches. By contrast San Salvi, founded by the emerging social classes of Florence and located just outside its urban hub, had stronger ties with citizens.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, as one gathers from the scorn heaped upon seculars, prelates, and parish priests in their texts, the Vallombrosans saw themselves in conflict with the established or diocesan church at Florence.<sup>26</sup> Then, despite having a cardinal protector at the curia, the Vallombrosans were routinely passed over by popes in favor of the Salvini: during his residence at Florence in the 1440s, Eugenius IV liberally showered privileges upon the latter.<sup>27</sup>

Declines in social status and weak political support were exacerbated by Vallombrosa's geographic remoteness. The Salvini reportedly called the Vallombrosan motherhouse "a house in the woods inhabited by, or rather kept by, some little peasants [*contadinelli*],"<sup>28</sup> and a group of unnamed detractors "ornamented of the religious habit" and with "serpentine tongues"<sup>29</sup>—and so probably again the Salvini—had charged the Vallombrosans with using their most precious relic, the arm of San Giovanni Gualberto, to exorcise a donkey.<sup>30</sup> The charge of the *contadinelli* and the donkey related to the Vallombrosans' privileging of *conversi* in monastery life and the rural location of its motherhouse some twenty miles northeast of Florence. But for charges concerning peasants and donkeys to carry any weight rested upon urban-rural antagonisms that had deepened in Tuscany since the thirteenth century and the aristocratization in Florentine social life that grew more pronounced in the fifteenth century.

Perhaps as a result of their myriad political troubles, the Vallombrosans understood the religious landscape in agonistic terms: a field in which alternate forms of religious power competed for prominence. To this end they lambasted spiritually weak and corrupt secular priests, illegitimate necromancers, hypocritical *pinzochere* (devout laywomen), misguided lay healers, ineffectual confraternities, and superstitious and blasphemous peasants, to name just some of their targets. They reserved their most vehement spleen, however, for Mendi-

<sup>25</sup> BNC II IV 486, fol. 108<sup>r</sup>; Salvestrini, 2008, 213.

<sup>26</sup> For the Vallombrosans' clash with Antoninus and defenses of their autonomy, see Salvestrini, 2012.

<sup>27</sup> BNC II IV 486, fol. 106<sup>r</sup>, citing Archivio di Ripoli, *Sacre Religionis*, lib. X, fols. 4–5; ASF CS SMV 260 39, fols. 98<sup>r</sup>, 135<sup>v</sup>; Walden, 98; Tabani and Vadala, 23, 102.

<sup>28</sup> BNC CS A VIII 1399, fol. 16<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>29</sup> ASF CS SMV 260 244, fol. 63<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>30</sup> BNC Magl. 35 239, 2.1, fol. 101<sup>r</sup>.



cants, and most particularly the Friars Minor, or Observant Franciscans. The Vallombrosans announced that the font of holiness at LaVerna, the site where Francis had received the stigmata, resided in a Benedictine church that predated the Franciscan miracle. They described pilgrimages to the tomb of the Franciscan Observant Bernardino of Siena (1380–1444) at Aquila as spiritually useless, and they depicted Franciscan Observant friars as unscrupulous interlopers. Practiced in the unorthodox arts of necromancy, the Friars Minor were haughty, arrogant, and given to whispering obscenities into the ears of demons.<sup>31</sup>

Yet as the social profile of Vallombrosans dipped, that of Mendicants, and especially Observants, was on the rise. This shift did not happen overnight but was rather the outcome of cumulative and interlocking social, political, and religious changes that would ultimately occur across Europe more broadly but that Florence saw about a century earlier. Such changes included a move toward an active spirituality focusing on this-worldly forms of memorialization such as magnificent tombs instead of masses for the dead, the founding of urban-based charitable institutions and hospitals by Observant houses in concert with civic leaders, the movement of confraternities into monkish activities such as prayer cycles and after-death assistance, the diminished interest in eremitism, and the rise of civic religion<sup>32</sup>—all developments to which the Vallombrosan manuscripts made reference in one way or another.

As noted, lay elite support for Mendicant Observants began to outstrip that for Benedictines in fifteenth-century Florence, so much so that while traditional/contemplative religious orders outnumbered Mendicant groups at the beginning of the fifteenth century, Mendicant Observants came to predominate in numbers and prestige by the century's end.<sup>33</sup> The Vallombrosan perception of embattled competition with other forms of religious life was therefore predicated upon very real changes in the religious landscape. This is not to say that there were no instances of inter-order cooperation and mutual assistance: the Vallombrosans had close ties with the Camaldolese and Dominican conventuals at the hospital of Santa Maria Nuova. But it is the order's vitriol for perceived competitors that surfaces most strongly, and it is an area that few scholars have examined in depth, perhaps because little evidence survives to document it.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.34, fol. 52<sup>r</sup>; 1.29, fol. 48<sup>r</sup>; 1.34, fol. 53<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>32</sup> For a recent attempt to define this multivalent term, see Brown.

<sup>33</sup> See Rubinstein, 64, 68; Bizzocchi, 28–29.

<sup>34</sup> With the exception of Herzig's examination of Carmelite-Dominican rivalry at Bologna, the topic of inter-order rivalry has been treated only summarily and more often than not is restricted to conflicts between Mendicants.



The full panoply of reasons for the preference of secular Florentine elites and leaders for Mendicant Observants over Benedictines is not entirely clear, but the choice was likely political or linked to a desire to eliminate an older regime and instantiate a new one.<sup>35</sup> Zarri hypothesized that Florence was lackluster in its support for Benedictine reform because of its Venetian origins and because reform tended to keep monasteries from being given in commendata. Certainly, a critical reason for Mendicant Observant ascendance was their preaching mandate. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Mendicant Observant preachers, especially Franciscans, had gained vast public influence in Italian urban centers and among citizen classes through their deft wielding of the medium of the sermon. The spirituality of traditional monastic orders focused upon otherworldly concerns such as eremitism, contemplation, prayer, and masses for the dead. By contrast, Mendicants, who had been tasked since the thirteenth century with eliminating immorality and uprooting heresy via both preaching and Inquisition, came to embody an effective force for social order conveniently germane to the worldly objectives of civic leaders. So useful were Observant preachers in establishing order that Observant preaching often accompanied political restorations.<sup>36</sup> The ban on Mendicant property ownership meant that they settled in urban centers and made inroads with urban elites, while older orders were more likely to be situated farther afield of the city, distant and aloof. Then the emphasis on self-governance within traditional monasticism made orders like the Vallombrosans strongly defensive of incursions on their autonomy by secular or other powers,<sup>37</sup> which by the late fifteenth century brought with it increased marginalization from city life.<sup>38</sup>

### THE EXORCISM TEXTS

Thus by the late fifteenth century, the Vallombrosan motherhouse was in trouble on multiple fronts. Its brothers sought to manage these difficulties by writing a series of lively manuscripts between about 1479 and 1489, each of which focused upon the Vallombrosan order's newfound specialty in exorcism.<sup>39</sup> In their *Miracles*, written by 1479 and vernacularized twice by about 1485, they re-

<sup>35</sup> Zarri, 239–41, 243, 245–46. See also Osheim, 217n57; Fois, 46.

<sup>36</sup> Pellegrini, 514–19.

<sup>37</sup> In addition, the Benedictine rule's requirement that an order's land be productive meant economic self-sufficiency for institutions like Vallombrosa.

<sup>38</sup> Gualberto had forbidden his disciples to engage in mercantile activities of any sort, further alienating Vallombrosa from a commercial city such as Florence. Zarri, 232.

<sup>39</sup> Gualberto had conducted a few foundational exorcisms, but the order seems to have begun to exorcise more frequently only after 1400.

counted dozens of posthumous miracles performed by their founding saint,<sup>40</sup> the majority of which described how people afflicted by demons in Florence and its dominions had come to Vallombrosa to be healed, often quite recently. I offer a few typical excerpts:

A certain *piovano* [parish priest] of San Giovanni di Valdarno di Sopra, being possessed, was brought to the monastery of Santa Maria di Vallombrosa with great effort. And all the monks who were exorcising him, marveling at him, commanded him in the name of God to say whence it was that [the devil] had dared enter into the body of a priest of Christ. And the devil<sup>41</sup> answered, "He who does not live like a priest does not deserve to be called a priest, for does it seem to you that the office of a priest is to steal sacred things? And if he does not return what he stole to the sacristy of Santa Maria Nuova in Florence, we will not leave from here." Then the priest who was heading the exorcism said, "Ah, so there are more of you." The devil stayed quiet. And since it was late, they decided to show him the arm of San Giovanni Gualberto the following day, and in this way, having to himself that possessed *piovano*, [the Vallombrosan priest] asked him in confession if he had stolen anything. And learning that [the *piovano*] had chalices and other sacred things from the ospedale of Santa Maria Nuova, [the priest] chastised [the *piovano*] harshly. Promising to return everything, the devil, without waiting for any more torments, departed. But to be completely sure, early the following day they showed him the arm of San Giovanni Gualberto. And knowing that he was entirely healed, thanking God and San Giovanni Gualberto, they left. According to what they say, it is true that those who saw him after this while he lived, that the color in his face never returned, but he was forever pale and colorless.

. . .

A miller from Incisa, it being a day in summer and sleeping outside the mill, was affected [and] began to raise a ruckus [*incomincio a far pazzie*] and run and throw stones, which, seeing this and fearing the worst, those of the Borgo of Incisa with great effort seized and bound his hands and brought him to the monastery of Santa Maria Vallombrosa. And there being exorcised, [the

<sup>40</sup> The bulk of possessions and datable events recounted in the Vallombrosan texts took place in the late 1460s through the 1480s. On dating the Vallombrosan texts, see Degl'Innocenti, 98; Walden, 54–60.

<sup>41</sup> The Vallombrosans did not make consistent or meaningful distinctions within or across their translations between the terms *demon*, *devil*, and *spirit*. For an analysis of these and other key terms, see Walden, 396n71.

devil, speaking through the miller] spoke in the following manner: “You who call yourselves monks, you should have some compassion and mercy, but from what I know through experience you are merciless [*spietati*] and cruel, not having any discretion toward me, but always tormenting me to leave you. And I would like you to understand that I did not enter into [the miller] without the will of God, because he was always a thief and a liar and a blasphemer of God and the saints.” And the monk who was exorcising, fearing that the devil, as he usually did, was telling a lie. [But] some of those present affirmed it to be true what the devil had said, especially the blaspheming. And the priest and those who were watching, admonishing him to abstain from similar errors and to give back, or return by God as much as he had unjustly taken. [The miller] promised to do all he had said. Nevertheless, the devil then tormented him very cruelly for three days. And at the end of the three days [the devil] gave a great sign, that is: he broke a part of the glass window in the sacristy and departed. And that miller, recognizing such a gift, thanking God and the Virgin Mary and San Giovanni, returned to Incisa completely mute for the rest of his life.<sup>42</sup>

The *Miracles* also described other activities relating to the order’s specialization in exorcism, hospitality, and healing. For example, at Vallombrosa one might often find

two or three spirits together [i.e., multiple demoniacs] such that between their cries and howls and the sounds and the clang of the bells, and the singing of the monks, it seems as if the valley completely echoes, and especially when from the devoted priest they take the holy relic from the altar and place it on the head of the possessed person, the infernal beasts make at that moment such a commotion that given that the natures of these spirits are very unusual [*molto diverse*], it would be easier to confuse oneself and others in seeking to explain it with the pen.<sup>43</sup>

A different and anonymously authored Vallombrosan manuscript from 1489 recounted the serial exorcisms of a girl known as Antonia of San Godenzo at various churches in the city of Florence in the years after 1466. These episodes

<sup>42</sup> BNC Magl. 35 239, 1.20, fols. 36<sup>r-v</sup>; 1.33, fols. 51<sup>r-v</sup>.

<sup>43</sup> This version was by Taddeo Adimari (1445–ca. 1517), a Servite exiled for opposing Observant reform at the Santissima Annunziata in Florence in 1478. A Vallombrosan perhaps enabled Adimari’s return to Florence, for in the early 1480s he shed the Servite habit for a Vallombrosan one. ASF CS SMV 260 244, fol. 9<sup>r</sup>; Serra, 9, 49.

were more digressive than those of the *Miracles* and more varied in form. They were sometimes maddeningly brief and often quite cryptic:

22. Of the sign that they heard in the air from the Foundations of Santa Reparata.

When they had come to the fundament of Santa Reparata, they heard in the air above them at a distance of about 103 braccia very loud screams for which, completely disturbed, they had not a small amount of fear and fright. Then they followed the road with great difficulty. Then having returned to the house, the girl remained quiet until the day of Santa Croce in May.

23. Of the event in Santa Reparata which happened with the wood of the cross.

Another notable case occurred when, going with one of her sisters to Vespers at Santa Reparata on the day of Santa Croce, the spirit threw the girl to the ground, making a great and enormous commotion [*grandi et enormi pazzie*], crying loudly with lamentations from the pain it received from the blessing of the holy wood of the cross. The priests, hearing this, asked about the nature of the case. Their answer was that a spirit inhabited this afflicted body.

24. The signs [the spirit] made in the exorcism.

Fruosino [Antonia's cousin] was immediately sent for and, joined by some of the priests, they took her and brought her into the Chapel of the Cross and fervently began to exorcise her. It then happened that through the violence of the spirit, the girl's throat swelled so as almost to suffocate her. One of the priests was so moved to compassion that he exerted himself prodigiously with the wood of the cross, [exorcising her] until three in the morning. Finally they gave the priest leave due to his fatigue. He said he would return the following morning.

25. The words that [the spirit] said after the girl returned home.

Having returned home, the spirit said that if the faith of these priests [at Santa Reparata] had not been lacking, then it would perforce have needed to exit from the girl's body, and that some of the priests present were gossiping and that some had said that she was crazy. But know, [the spirit] said, that it would have received no greater pleasure in the world than to have it thought that the girl was crazy or considered out of her mind. Then the girl was quiet for some time and made them think that they should not bring her outside any more.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana (BML) Antinori (Antin.) 130, fols 16<sup>v</sup>–17<sup>v</sup>.

At first glance, these texts appear relatively formulaic. But their simplicity is deceptive, for they contained a broad array of messages—nonchalant comments and digressions tucked in and around the fringes of vignettes about exorcism that were calculated to improve the Vallombrosan situation. In addition to portraying the currency of San Giovanni Gualberto's thaumaturgic powers, the texts presented details that portrayed the divided Vallombrosan order as unified; elevated Vallombrosan social status; updated the order's identity and focus; lobbed critiques at other religious orders and their rivals the Salvini; vaunted the respectability of *conversi*, presumably in a bid to defend their voting rights; asserted their order's orthodoxy; and set Vallombrosan practices apart from those of folkish peasants.<sup>45</sup>

The Vallombrosan texts also contained a host of overtly political messages aimed at Lorenzo de' Medici—messages that demonstrated partisan allegiance to the Medici, showed Vallombrosan utility as peacekeepers in Florence's sprawling dominions, and intimated the disorder that would ensue should Vallombrosan activities be curtailed. This study will focus only on these latter messages; that is, the sometimes overt and sometimes veiled ways in which the Vallombrosans sought to manage their relationship with Lorenzo.<sup>46</sup>

### MESSAGES PLAIN AND VEILED

In some respects, the Vallombrosans were utterly forthright in their aim to curry favor with the *de facto* leader of Florence, dedicating their *Miracles* to the "magnificent Lorenzo di Medici, the noblest of Florentine citizens," in a flowery *proemio* and describing Lorenzo's authority as "commandments and good which I have always obeyed."<sup>47</sup> The Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana manuscript

<sup>45</sup> The *Miracles* contains over eighty episodes, the BML Antin. 130 over ninety. Episodes varied widely, involving complicated backstories of bewitchment and priestly concupiscence, supposedly comic moments such as the hanging of an ass, and digressions about protagonists such as rogue preachers who affect the costume of John the Baptist.

<sup>46</sup> To say that the Vallombrosans included various themes in their texts is not to instrumentalize demonic possession. Like the demoniacs who traveled to Vallombrosa, the Vallombrosans likely believed in the reality of demonic possession. However, they were also politically savvy, and spiritual concerns could comfortably coexist with political prudence in fifteenth-century Florence. The Vallombrosan texts are thus best considered using Newman's hermeneutic of both/and. Newman, 5.

<sup>47</sup> This was from the *Book of Miracles* (BML Pluteo 18.21), the Latin version of the miracles by the monk Girolamo of Raggiolo (b. 1435–40, d. 1500 or 1515). Lorenzo, wrote Raggiolo, had encouraged him to publish Vallombrosan miracles, saying they "were sufficient to resuscitate the faith in the hearts of those who were doubtful in some things": BNC Magl. 35 239, 1.0, fol. 1<sup>v</sup>.

Antinori 130 lacks a dedication and its author is unknown, but its preservation at the Biblioteca means that it entered the Medici library at some point—its date of 1489 suggesting that perhaps it was presented in honor of Giovanni de' Medici's promotion to the cardinalate that year.<sup>48</sup>

Other Vallombrosan protestations of political obeisance were more circuitous, ventriloquized through demoniacs who as a rule spoke in enigmatic ways. In one episode, a demoniac's possessing spirit elliptically likens Luca Pitti (1398–1472), the anti-Medicean conspirator, to Lucifer:

Once Fruosino [the cousin of Antonia of San Godenzo] was speaking and conversing with the spirit [i.e., the demonic spirit that inhabited Antonia's body] about many and various things, among which he asked in what manner and why [the spirit] had fallen from heaven to the earth rather than into the deep abyss of immense misery and tearful ruin. To which the spirit answered, "Oh vulgar, unlettered, and inexpert man, don't you see what an enormous thing you are asking? If what you want to know in whatever way, I can explain it to you only through a similitude: it really happened like the hills and the plains, that is, the controversy between the Magnificent Piero di Cosimo and Messer Luca. You would certainly have been safer in a low and humble place at that time, because it is a better thing and more secure to have one's house on a plain than on a hill."<sup>49</sup>

In other words, demonic spirits fell to earth and not into hell for the same reasons as Lucifer—they were angels cast out of heaven for their overweening pride. Pitti's spectacular fall, too, was of the same ilk: in building a palace to rival the Medici and seeking to restore collective rule, Pitti raised himself too high. Marrying theological and political counsel to the proverbial advice of the humble, the spirit recommends laying low—"it is better to have one's house on a plain than on a hill"—while obliquely alluding both to Pitti's ill-fated building project and the anti-Medicean faction known as "Il Poggio," or "the Hill."<sup>50</sup> In

<sup>48</sup> The vernacular *Miracles* (BNC Magl. 37 325), whose translator is not known, simply replicated Raggiolo's dedication. Adimari tellingly replaced the Laurentian overture with a dedication to abbot general Don Biagio Milanese. ASF CS SMV 260 244, fol. 1'.

<sup>49</sup> BML Antin. 130, fol. 44': "O huomo volgare idiota et imperito, non vedi di che gram cosa dimandi? Se quel pur vuoi in ogni modo sapere bisogna che per una sola similitudine ti dichiari & apra. Fu proprio adunque come del poggio et del piano advenne, cioe la controversia tra Il Magnifico Piero di Cosimo et Messer Luca. Sarei certamente stato in luogo decline & humile piu allora sicuro. Perche e miglior cosa & piu sicura in piano havere sua casa, che in poggio."

<sup>50</sup> Pampaloni, 14n5.

explaining Pitti's fall as spurred by diabolic pride, the Vallombrosans presented it as merited, necessary, and part of the cosmic order, and thereby broadcast their political allegiance to Lorenzo de' Medici.

A recurring theme in the Vallombrosan texts was conspiracy and treason, and another episode described how Antonia's possessing spirit prophesied the so-called Pazzi Conspiracy, the assassination attempt of 1478 in which Lorenzo's brother Giuliano was killed:

Before the case of seventy-eight occurred, the spirit predicted it, saying that he was blowing upon a huge and immense bonfire [*che in uno grande & ampio fuoco soffiava*], and as the time of the events neared, he said it had grown much larger, but he never wanted to reveal how far along it was. But when the awful and miserable affair came to light, [the spirit] said, "Now the fire upon which I was blowing has been revealed. Know truly that not only Florence, but the entire world will be turned upside down [*rivolto sotto sopra*] for the undeserved death of such a man [*la immerita morte di tale huomo*]." Which, as we saw, is what happened.<sup>51</sup>

Here again was a dense and jumbled array of messages. The Vallombrosans expressed sympathy and support for Lorenzo (Giuliano's death was "undeserved"), assigned demonic antecedents to very real political events such as sedition and conspiracy, and conveyed the Vallombrosan order's privileged ability to access demonic intelligence pertaining to such events.

The Vallombrosans also used their texts to portray themselves as dispensers of helpful political counsel. When the citizen and miniaturist Zanobi Strozzi (1412–68) discussed Florentine leadership (*governo*) and the "vicissitudes of *fortuna*" with the Vallombrosan abbot Bartolommeo at the monastery of Santa Trinita,<sup>52</sup> Strozzi declared, "I would find it easy to tolerate anything, Messer Abbot, both concerning *fortuna* and the government [*di stato*], if I could only have a son who would be my successor. Because in the state [*lo stato*] today, one cannot succeed except with duplicity and falsity, and one cannot maintain

<sup>51</sup> BML Antin. 130, fols. 37<sup>v</sup>–38<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>52</sup> Don Bartolomeo di Giovanni D'Andrea (di Lapini) da San Gaudenzio (d. 1471) is present in many Vallombrosan documents. In a twist that cannot be examined here, he was likely Antonia of San Godenzo's uncle: ASF CS 89 135 fol. 81<sup>r</sup>, fol. 111<sup>v</sup>; ASF NA 10411.12 GG G680, fol. 34<sup>v</sup>; ASF NA 10405 GG G678, fol. 4<sup>r</sup>, fol. 244<sup>r</sup>, fol. 253<sup>r</sup>; ASF NA 10403, fol. 3<sup>v</sup>.



this if not with continuous detriment to both body and soul.”<sup>53</sup> Abbot Bartolommeo responded by counseling Strozzi to place his faith in San Giovanni Gualberto: “That which you say about not having sons sorrows me very greatly, but also it seems to me that where human assistance is lacking, one should seek divine assistance.”<sup>54</sup> Strozzi complied, and in nine months his wife bore a male child. The anecdote drew upon popular legends of miraculous conception and saintly intervention, while simultaneously demonstrating support for distinctly Florentine values such as patrilineage and concerns about the vagaries of fortune. But of particular interest are Strozzi’s remarks upon the duplicity of the state. By the late fifteenth century, it was common for Florentines dissatisfied with the Medici regime to express deep cynicism about the government.<sup>55</sup> In the Strozzi vignette, Abbot Bartolommeo actively reroutes dissent into devotion, offering a demonstration of Vallombrosan servitude as well as a valuable object lesson: one might best manage political discontent by diverting citizen energies toward ritual and religious concerns. There is no way of knowing whether Lorenzo de’ Medici heeded such advice, but it is well known that beginning in the late 1480s, he began to divert citizens toward spectacles of civic and religious devotion in earnest.<sup>56</sup>

The Vallombrosans were not the only exorcists on the market, for they named several others who performed the ritual: a layperson, a necromancer, the seculars at Santa Reparata, a Franciscan, a Camaldolese, various parish priests.<sup>57</sup> Nor were they the only order ever to specialize in exorcism: monks at Silos had done so in the tenth century.<sup>58</sup> Exorcism was routinely used to revivify saints’ cults in the early modern era,<sup>59</sup> and both hagiography and sanctity had been di-

<sup>53</sup> BNC Magl. 35 239, 2.5, fols. 108<sup>v</sup>–109<sup>r</sup>: “Ogni cosa, Messer l’Abbate, mi farebbe facile a comportare, sia di fortuna e sia di stato, pur ch’io avessi al manco un figliuolo il quale rimanessi mio successore. Perche lo stato al di d’oggi non si puo aquistare se non con duplicita e falsita, e non si puo mantenere se non con continuo detrimento sia dell’anima sia del corpo.” Zenobio di Benedetto di Caroccio Strozzi was an artist of illuminated manuscripts affiliated with Fra Angelico. BM MS 383 provides an interesting version of this conversation, noting that “per cagione di parti, non era nello stato” (“for party reasons, he was not in the government”)—which seems to mean that Strozzi could not hold public office because he opposed the Medici (ibid., fols. 80<sup>v</sup>–81<sup>r</sup>). In this instance, *lo stato* refers to Lorenzo’s regime.

<sup>54</sup> BNC Magl. 35 239, 2.5, fol. 109<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>55</sup> Martines, 126.

<sup>56</sup> Ciappelli, 162; Plaisance, 10, 19, 21.

<sup>57</sup> The Vallombrosans did, however, present their exorcisms as more efficacious than those of any other group.

<sup>58</sup> Significantly, like San Giovanni Gualberto, this group’s patron saint came of age during the period of Gregorian reform: Lappin, xvi.

<sup>59</sup> For the resuscitation of the cult of San Joachim Piccolomini in the fourteenth century, see Goodich, 75.

rected toward worldly ends on more than one occasion: monks at the abbey of Micy in Orleans refashioned founding legends to gain autonomy from predatory bishops, and in fifteenth-century Brittany, Saint Vincent Ferrer's holiness was manipulated so as to restore unity to a divided polity.<sup>60</sup> One can also locate multiple instances of what appear to be competitive markets for religious services, as when healers of equal status competed for predominance in sixteenth-century Hungary, or when Ferrer's cult was launched in response to the canonization of Bernardino of Siena in 1450.<sup>61</sup>

But the Vallombrosan accounts may be accounted unique for several reasons. For one, they insisted on their own currency—a novelty for hagiographic texts—citing events and figures from recent memory, or *al nostro tempo*.<sup>62</sup> They also harnessed a wide range of contemporary discourses, combining hagiography with tropes from popular literature—the latter a genre favored by Lorenzo at this time—and allusions to literary humanism. In keeping with humanist conceits, the Vallombrosans presented their works as both history and, as described below, as chorography. Thus the Vallombrosans used their texts to reframe their situation on an unusually broad number of fronts, of which I describe here only one—namely, the bold manner in which the Vallombrosans brought their works to bear upon political reality.

### REBINDING THE BODY SOCIAL: FLORENTINE TERRITORIES

The Vallombrosans used their texts to play upon Lorenzo's vulnerabilities, providing a portrait—a mirror image, as it were—of what the order perceived as his greatest concerns, one of which was conflict in Florence's farthest dominions.

<sup>60</sup> Head, 214, 281; Smoller, 42.

<sup>61</sup> Kristóf, 350; Smoller, 17, 285. Saint Dominic's saintliness was crafted for political reasons, as Ames has shown. Some contemporary religious figures entered directly into political affairs via letter or prophecy, as did Catherine of Siena and Savonarola. In their time, Vallombrosans had enjoyed popularity on this front through the epistles of the abbot-hermit Giovanni dalle Celle (1310–96), though perhaps on account of their troubles with the Medici, they were not so favored by historians as these Mendicant figures. On the importance of examining the records of marginalized groups, see Walden, 439, 446–47.

<sup>62</sup> Notable contemporary historical figures in the Vallombrosan accounts include Giovanni Ser Bucco di Spoleto (ca. 1370–1445), humanist and teacher of Bernardo of Siena; Piero Bernardo della Rena, international merchant and demoniac (on whom see Prajda, 125); Antonio degli Agli (1400–77), humanist bishop; Battista Mantovani (1448–1516), poet and pastor (on whom see Mustard and Baptista, 11); Gentile Becchi (1425–97), tutor to Lorenzo and bishop of Arezzo; and Piero di Giuliano Vespucci, a relative of Amerigo (on whom see Fubini, 285n103).

Florence nearly tripled in size between 1430 and 1490 via its annexation of new towns, many of which resisted Florentine rule by revolting against newly imposed officials, regulations, or taxes. By the 1480s, Lorenzo's political base had grown increasingly narrow and he lacked a standing army to enforce order. The Vallombrosans positioned themselves as bringers of peace to Florence's sprawling territory by elaborating how possessing demons caused emotional distress to engulf families and entire communities, then presenting their exorcisms as antidote.

The sufferings of the demoniac Antonia of San Godenzo, for example, caused her relatives to be "in great troubles, not knowing which way they should choose to seek her health," and it was only because Antonia's family was "dying of melancholy" that they decided to journey to Vallombrosa.<sup>63</sup> In the case of the nameless daughter of Ser Borrromei of San Miniato al Tedesco, "It was a terrible thing to see and hear the devil and [the girl] fighting [*el diavolo e lei combattere insieme*] and also to see the mother and the other sisters in disarray [*scapigliate*], crying, and cruelly beating themselves such that all the people from the *castello* ran to see this atrocious and horrendous spectacle."<sup>64</sup>

Successful exorcisms, however, provided speedy resolution to family trauma, as countless vignettes depicting the restoration of ruptured families made clear. Most common were reunions between estranged males. Having been healed of demonically induced paralysis via exorcism at Vallombrosa, the Perugian youth (and nephew of a papal legate) "throws himself around the neck" of his father, and cries, "my dearest father!" His father "burst into tears for fondness, which invited all the others who were there to do the same."<sup>65</sup> Similarly, the brothers from Arezzo, reunited with their third brother who had just been liberated from his demons, "threw themselves at each other's necks and kiss[ed] him for their great joy."<sup>66</sup> Successful exorcisms transformed estrangement and distress into jubilation and unity.

The Vallombrosans underscored how their exorcisms addressed broader communal fracture when the violent acts of demoniacs radiated outward, as they typically did, to disrupt entire communities. The Borrromei episode is particularly illustrative of the manner in which possession invokes communal disorder. Be-

<sup>63</sup> BNC Magl. 35 239, 1.57, fols. 80<sup>v</sup>, 78<sup>r</sup>: "i parenti erano in grande affano, non sappiendo che via si dovessino pigliare a cercare la sanita sua."

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 1.58, fol. 87<sup>v</sup>. Among the few accounts assigned Gregorian dates, these events were said to have occurred in 1474.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 1.3, fol. 9<sup>v</sup>-r: "si gitto al collo del padre e disse, mio carissimo"; "per tenerezza si diruppe in pianto, per modo che invitava tutti gli altri ch'erano qui a fare il simile."

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 1.21, fol. 38<sup>r</sup>.

cause the devil “always seeks to inaugurate discord,” he inspired the girl to throw rocks from her window at a band of youths. The boys reported the event to their parents, and when the girl threw a stone so hard so as to “break” another girl’s head, the town erupted in violence and community members took up arms and seek vendetta.<sup>67</sup> Images of exorcisms causing social disarray can be multiplied, as when another possession caused tumult, panic, and terror in the streets of Arezzo: “So they flock there from everywhere, first men, then women; even children of both sexes and ages, so that the tumult could not contain itself to the quarter, but spread throughout the entire city.”<sup>68</sup> Yet, though demons disrupted entire towns, successful exorcisms offered unproblematic social reintegration, reorientation, and a vanquishing of dissent. The ritual of exorcism put disorder to right and returned the world to a harmonious and meaningful moral place. In such a scheme, pilgrimages to Vallombrosa, the merits of San Giovanni Gualberto, and the prayers of Gualberto’s disciples were the direct agents of social accord and community cohesion.

The Vallombrosans positioned themselves as peacemakers in Florentine territories in a yet more literal sense by detailing how they effected reconciliations between warring factions. At the exorcism of Caterina from Cetica, the Vallombrosan officiant asked the girl’s father if he had stolen anything, needed to return anything, or was involved in any *briga* (dispute, feud). The man blushed profusely and revealed that he was at odds with someone. Caterina’s possessing spirit departed only after the priest upbraided the man and sent him on a mission of peace.<sup>69</sup> Details like this show the Vallombrosans asserting equivalent powers to Mendicants, particularly Observant preachers like Bernardo of Siena, who had been known for staging showy rituals of reconciliation.<sup>70</sup> By this time, however, peacemaking was the official duty of Florentine territorial authorities, or the Capitani di Popolo, so effecting reconciliations also gestured to fulfilling a juridical function directly linked with communal objectives.

The Vallombrosans seem to have intended their rituals to function in an explicitly judicial sense, for they detailed how exorcisms addressed communal in-

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 1.58, fols. 84<sup>r</sup>–88<sup>v</sup>: “E il diavolo, il quale sempre mai cerca di seminar discordie, trovato il tempo, gitto una pietra sopra quelle fanciulli da quella parte onde era la mia figliuola. . . . Per questo molti suo parenti armati corsono a casa mia col l’arme, volendosi vendicare. Ma io feci serrare la porta di casa.”

<sup>68</sup> Migne, 75: “Advolant igitur undique, cum viri, tum mulieres; pueri etiam utriusque sexus et aetatis, ita ut se tumultus per vicos non sustineret, sed passim urbem totam pervaderet.” Migne is an edited and amplified transcription of BML Plut. 18 21.

<sup>69</sup> ASF CS SMV 260 244, fol. 106<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>70</sup> Polecritti.

fractions such as theft and fraud and, in combination with Vallombrosan counsel, delivered a rough justice. When a fraternal collective of four brothers from Arezzo was demonically possessed for defrauding a neighbor, the devil demanded the restitution of property: “all four are in collusion, and through fraud and trickery they have taken a possession from a poor man from the countryside of Arezzo. And they know well he of whom I speak. Since they promise to return it to him and to restore the profit that they have stolen from him, we will leave from all four immediately.”<sup>71</sup> The approach worked on several levels. In practice, restitution tangibly righted past wrongs and prevented future retaliatory violence. The written account of the event worked both didactically and in a pastoral vein. Politically, the anecdote positioned the Vallombrosans as active arbiters and enforcers of the justice of the realm.

Vallombrosan exorcisms even addressed violent offenses such as homicide and intricate legal matters such as the distribution of patrimony. Two brothers from Porciano fell “into discord” over partitioning their inheritance and the older murdered the younger. The boy’s uncles concealed the *divisa* designating the division of the father’s property, and as a result, the devil entered “into the daughter of he who had kept the contract [*la scritta*].” Through exorcism, the benign interventions of the Vallombrosan abbot general, and the tendency of demons to reveal suppressed secrets, the man’s donations were properly allocated.<sup>72</sup> Demons were expressly credited with both triggering and authoring such violence, for the homicide occurred “through diabolic intervention.”<sup>73</sup> But Vallombrosan exorcisms expelled demons, exposed truths, reallocated goods, and vindicated the innocent. Such anecdotes surely asserted Vallombrosan fortitude in a spiritual sense, but they also depicted the Vallombrosans as capable of resolving the sorts of disputes that engendered communal violence in Lorenzo’s territories.<sup>74</sup> The Vallombrosans thus made claims to allegiance and obeisance, but also to power, declaring themselves prepared to regulate serious legal problems such

<sup>71</sup> BNC Magl. 35 239, 1.14, fols. 24<sup>r</sup>–25<sup>v</sup>: “Perche tutti e quattro si sono accordati, e per fraude e inganno hanno tolto una possessione da un povero huomo del contado d’Arezzo. E ben sanno loro che egli e come io dico. Sicche se promettono di rendergliene, e di ristituigli il frutto che ne hanno cavato, di subito tutti a quattro ci partiremmo.” In ASF CS SMV 260 244, fol. 83<sup>v</sup>, the brothers have instead defrauded a hapless widow.

<sup>72</sup> BNC Magl. 35 239, 1.60, fols. 92<sup>v</sup>–94<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, fol. 92<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>74</sup> In the 1470s, the signoria had focused on the problems of patrimony distribution, and in the 1480s Medici cousins were embroiled in inheritance disputes. The Vallombrosans thus showed themselves willing to address the specific types and forms of justice that preoccupied Lorenzo and the signoria.

as theft and homicide and to bring political peace and stability to Florence's outlying territories.<sup>75</sup>

### CHOROGRAPHY AND VULNERABILITY

The Vallombrosans presented yet more coded assertions of power to Lorenzo by framing their exorcisms as gatekeepers to public order. They did so in a fairly novel way, by making a series of specific geographical claims regarding the military vulnerability of Florentine border territories. In short, the sixty-two-odd hometowns from which demoniacs hailed—places such as Romena, Porciano, San Miniato, San Godenzo, and Arezzo—were neither casual nor accidental. To be sure, there were overlaps between the locations of Vallombrosan monasteries and the towns cited in their accounts, but the two were far from identical (fig. 1).<sup>76</sup> Instead, drawing on a sophisticated series of analogies concerning exorcism and the body social, the Vallombrosans used place-names to map a compass of diabolic unrest that highlighted Florentine border weaknesses and areas of military vulnerability.

That the Vallombrosans intended to make a series of geographic claims was proclaimed at the outset by the monk-author Raggiolo when he presented the *Miracles* as a species of chorography, a history written “not in the custom of the historians but as those who write the chronicles—or rather, those who write of the regions of the earth.”<sup>77</sup> Chorography was a form of descriptive mapping, and the meanings of the *Miracles*'s geographical subtext are made plain upon an examination of the character of demoniac hometowns, which shared a set of overlapping characteristics. They were invariably strategic military points in Florence's dominion—that is, situated along a key thoroughfare or occupying a key vantage point—and they usually possessed or consisted entirely of a *castello*, or walled fortress. Of the forty-four distinct toponymics associated with demoniacs in the Vallombrosan exorcism texts (several appear in duplicate),

<sup>75</sup> In the Greek of the Septuagint, *exorcism* (ἐξορκισμός, found in Genesis 24:3, Kings 22:16, and Acts 19:13) meant adjuration, and thus carried specifically juridical overtones. For parallels between exorcism and judicial procedures both earlier and later, see Komornicka; Dall'Olio, 212.

<sup>76</sup> For example, no demoniacs hailed from Sardinia, France, or Rome, where there were Vallombrosan monasteries.

<sup>77</sup> Chorography was inaugurated in fifteenth-century Italy by Flavio Biondo's *Italia illustrata* (1447), by the rediscovery and publication of Tacitus's *Germania*, and by Enea Silvio Piccolomini's geohistorical works *Historia Bohemica*, *Historia Australis*, and *Europa*, starting from about 1458.



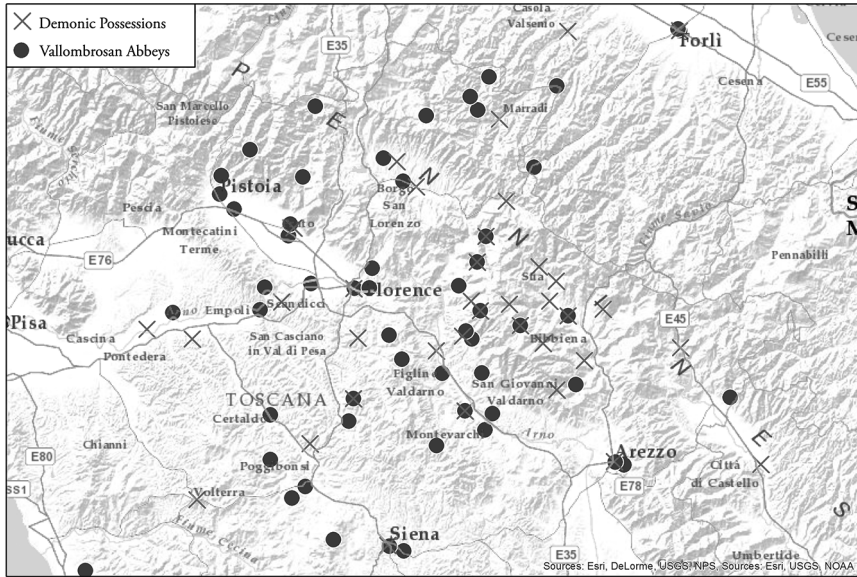


Figure 1. Vallombrosan Monasteries and miracles, fifteenth century. Sources: Walden; ESRI ArcMap; BNC Magl. 35 239. Image created by author.

thirty-nine were, or were partially, *castelli*—fortified cities or fortresses. The remaining five were areas that contained or possessed more than one *castello*.

At the same time, the towns from which demoniacs hailed were distinctly vulnerable. They tended to be of relatively recent entry to the Florentine dominion and were often towns that had resisted Florentine domination within recent memory. A striking number of these towns had sided with Milanese forces against Florence in the 1430s and 1440s.<sup>78</sup> The towns and cities enumerated in the exorcism accounts thus represented both areas of strategic military importance and weak areas susceptible to demonic influence, which might take the form of either internal rebellion or enemy incursion.

The Vallombrosans declared influence in Arezzo, the Casentino, and the Valdarno, noting that their monastery was “a refuge of all who pass through [the town of Raggiolo] and especially in these two provinces [of Vald’Arno and Casentino]”; that so many “possessed and sick people from the countryside of Casentino” came to Vallombrosa “that he who wanted to tell it would sooner lack the time than words”; and that “not only those from the city but also those of the countryside of Arezzo [had] a great devotion to San Giovanni Gualberto.”<sup>79</sup>

<sup>78</sup> For space as ideologically structured in fifteenth-century Florence, see Najemy, 2006a.

<sup>79</sup> BNC Magl. 35 239, 1.36, fol. 55; 1.47, fol. 67; 1.17, fols. 29–29°.



Though much of what is today Tuscany had come under Florence's control by the latter half of the fifteenth century, much of the area in which the Vallombrosans claimed influence was still relatively untouched at the time they wrote their exorcism accounts. These areas had long been ruled by the Guidi and Ubertino counts or by Milan, and most of Casentino did not come under Florentine jurisdiction until the Battle of Anghiari in 1441. Once annexed, many of these areas resisted Florentine rule for many decades.<sup>80</sup>

The Casentino region was further distinct because many of its towns lay in the mountainous belts of the Apennines and the Pratomagno. Farming these steep and infertile slopes was more difficult than in the Tuscan plain, so these areas were not often purchased or farmed by Florentine citizens. These areas were also among the poorest in Tuscany, and thus likely to bear animus toward Florence on account of the disproportionately steep tax rates to which they were subject.<sup>81</sup> The towns named in the *Miracles*, therefore, comprised the frontiers of the Florentine dominion in more ways than one.<sup>82</sup> The city and region of Arezzo, too, bore specific hostility to Florence. When Florence first assimilated Arezzo in 1384, it radically overturned local customs, spurring determined resistance against Florentine rule for another hundred-plus years. In 1409, Arezzo mounted a large-scale rebellion, and then another in 1431. In 1502, it maintained an independent government for two months. Arezzo suffered especially heavy losses during the Pazzi War (1478–80), and was particularly disgruntled at the time that the *Miracles* was written.<sup>83</sup>

At the same time, both Casentino and Arezzo were important bulwarks of Florentine defense. Arezzo bordered Siena and the Papal States and was considered Florence's "fortress and citadel,"<sup>84</sup> while Casentino served as a buffer for Florence against the Papal States and Milan. The *castelli* in these regions, a vestige of signorial rule, were of particular military utility. Since many of the towns

<sup>80</sup> Florence gained a foothold in the Montagna Fiorentina—the mountain towns in today's Arezzo, Casentino, and parts of Romagna—around 1350. In 1403, it drove the Guidi counts from the area and established a vicariate in Casentino and *podesterie* at Poppi, Pratovecchio, and Romena, all towns cited in the *Miracles*. Several *Miracles* towns were stops on pilgrim routes to Rome and artisanal and market centers. Verde and Zaccaria, 16–17.

<sup>81</sup> Cohn, 1995, 1023.

<sup>82</sup> The Vallombrosan accounts feature both urban centers and mountain towns but, vis-à-vis the latter, contain important evidence pertaining to the debates about mountain religiosity initiated by Braudel. Wickham, 194; Cohn, 1996, 384; Hewlett, 56.

<sup>83</sup> It has been claimed that Arezzo was a preserve of Medici patronage by the mid-1480s. However, the situation was a bit more complicated: in 1478 Lorenzo was forced to withdraw his secretary as *podestà* due to Aretine animus. Black, 293–97, 300–04.

<sup>84</sup> Salutati quoted by Peterson, 134.

mentioned in the *Miracles* lay along the mountainous barrier that separated Florence from the north and east, they served as crucial gatekeepers between regions. From Romagna, Florence could only be approached across the Apennines through narrow passes at steep altitudes.<sup>85</sup> Hungary, too—the origin of several demoniacs—was the point through which it was feared that Ottoman Turks would descend into Italy. The need to guard these narrow access points was in part why urban Florentines debated so fiercely and for so many decades about whether peasants should be armed. Yet weak and turncoat defenders were a very real possibility, especially in Casentino, which had welcomed Milanese invaders in the 1440s.

A brief look at some demoniac hometowns helps illustrate these points. In 1426, Città di Castello, the home of a demoniac named Francesca, was of strategic interest both for its position at the southern border of Tuscany and as the nearest outpost to Sansepolcro, a town of great military and commercial importance. The condottiero Niccolò Vitelli (1414–86), backed by Lorenzo, clashed with popes to obtain the city from 1474 to 1486 but lost the town to Sixtus. The *castello* of Romena, home of the possessed Goretta daughter and long owned by the Goretta family, utterly resisted incorporation into Florence, remaining autonomous until 1768. San Miniato al Tedesco, home of the possessed Borromei girl, was of strategic import for its situation along the main road from Florence to the sea, yet it was also notably disloyal: its nobles, aided by the lords of Milan—and including the Borromei—rebelled against Florentine rule in 1432. San Miniato's ruling class had also rebelled in 1369–70, an event that Florence framed as a conspiracy. The town of Raggiolo, home of several demoniacs, was incorporated into the Florentine mountain territories in the 1350s but rebelled in 1391, to which Florence responded by burning the village, hanging the leaders of the revolt, and deporting over 200 rebels. The rebels were pardoned and the condottiero Piccinino destroyed the *castello* in the 1440s. San Godenzo, home of the infamous demoniac Antonia, contained several ancient *castelli* at Florence's northernmost border. Sold to the Florentine Republic in 1344, the town resisted Florentine domination so fiercely that Florence was unable to extend its power or successfully institute a *podestà* there until the beginning of the sixteenth century.<sup>86</sup> San Godenzo possessed rebellious affiliations from when exiled Ghibellines, Dante Alighieri among them, fled Florence to sign a pact there in 1302. It also possessed more recent Medici loyalist associations, for when Jacopo Pazzi escaped Florence in 1478, he was appre-

<sup>85</sup> Lerner, 161; Najemy, 2006b, 361.

<sup>86</sup> A *podestà* was a foreign official charged with upholding power in Florentine territories.

hended by the peasants of San Godenzo. For having twice supported the Visconti, the town of Pontenano, home of one anonymous female demoniac, was razed and a prohibition placed on its reconstruction. Proximity does not seem to have dictated *Miracles* towns, for several were quite distant. Nor was there only a limited number of *castelli* in the region, for in 1472 Ivan di Sarzana declared Italy's villages and *castelli* "immense in number."<sup>87</sup>

### BOUNDARY BREACHING

The Vallombrosans presented Arezzo and Casentino as distinctively unstable through a series of suggestive analogies, playing upon the metonymic resonances between vulnerable towns and the vulnerable bodies of demoniacs. The ancient and implicit understanding of macrocosm in microcosm lent itself to an understanding of demoniacs as representing their communities, as did the Vallombrosan model of possession.<sup>88</sup> They understood demonic possession as a question of breachable borders, with malign spirits attacking where they found an opening or where defenses were weak. They interpreted the metaphor of demonic entry quite literally, as did exorcists both before and after—as when the seventeenth-century exorcist Canali described the devil as entering through a person's mouth or ears "as if he were a mouse [*come se fusse un topo*]."<sup>89</sup>

The analogy of permeable boundaries held at several levels. The primary and overriding reason people became possessed by demons was, pace Jerome, "through desperation or for another sin"—as when, in the Vallombrosan accounts, the entire village of Cetica is punished with a rash of possessions for its tendency to blaspheme. This notion cohered with a model of breached boundaries since, classically considered, sin was a form of spiritual weakness or corruption. Demons took possession via entry into narrow apertures that had to be guarded. Jerome explained how states of fear or particular environments such as darkness or "scary places" helped create such openings, and the Vallombrosans echoed this conceptual model when Don Salvatore cites fear as the reason that the women from Cetica are susceptible to demonic possession: "these women, and especially the young ones, travel through these woods and Alps alone, and most of the time, they are returning late or at night, and every little thing frightens them."<sup>90</sup>

<sup>87</sup> Boutier, Landi, and Rouchon, 28.

<sup>88</sup> For other antique and Aristotelian ideas that bolstered the possibility of demonic possession, see Boureau, 1, 7.

<sup>89</sup> Canali, 2.

<sup>90</sup> BNC Magl. 35 239, 1.52, fol. 74<sup>r-v</sup>.

The youth from Poppi was initially susceptible to demons for reasons both emotional and moral: lovesick over a girl he cannot have, he blasphemed. But fear triggered demonic entry after he passed a criminal's corpse hanging from the gallows: "Going about as we have said acting crazy, [*pazzeggiando*] here and there, by chance [the young man from Poppi] passed under the gallows. And looking from underneath, he saw the body of that hanged man so horrible and ugly . . . that hanged man whistled, which sound, either by the means of the wind, or also by the devil, entered into his body and terrified him. Immediately, terrified by this, he fell to the ground as if dead. And things being as they were, he to whom he had recommended himself many times [i.e., the devil] entered into him."<sup>91</sup> A conception of demonic entry through narrow channels was further reinforced when demons exited from the orifices of possessed people at Vallombrosa and entered into those of others. Jerome had noted that the devil entered people while sleeping—when borders were effectively unguarded—and one Vallombrosan episode describes how a devil exits a possessed man and enters a man named Zanobi "while he slept" on a bench at the monastery hospital.<sup>92</sup>

Weak borders serving as points of entry for the demonic extended to the realm of the intellect. Three Aretine brothers effectively "catch" the possession of the first because "they are not mentally healthy."<sup>93</sup> Thus Vallombrosan possessions rested on the notion of a porous or permeable self. Given an opening, the devil would enter, and once a demon entered, he might hold a person's faculties hostage—as when Francesca from Città di Castello's will was declared captive—until his demands were met. The codes of Vallombrosan possession thus played upon associations between sin and bodily openness and permeability, utilizing symbols of sealed and open borders,<sup>94</sup> and their accounts understood demonic entry through military metaphors of defense, reinforcement, and attack.

The Vallombrosans reinforced an identity between civic formations and individual bodies when they described how the twenty-eight spirits in the demoniac

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 1.11, fol. 19<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 1.13, fol. 23<sup>v</sup>. ASF CS SMV 260 244, fol. 82<sup>r</sup>: in Adimari, these are "boisterous [*baliosi*] youth from LaMassa."

<sup>93</sup> BNC Magl. 35 239, 1.15, fol. 24<sup>r</sup>: "non erano molto sani della mente." The brothers are subject to "terrors" ("raccapricci") and "certain insane pains [*dolori maninconici*], so that it often happened that they could not do anything for an entire day." The brothers reveal to the priest "in secret," however, that their sickness "is closer to *malie* [sorcery or witchcraft] and *opera diabolica* [devilish work, or work of the devil]": ASF CS SMV 260 244, fol. 83<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>94</sup> ASF CS SMV 260 244, fol. 80<sup>r</sup>. BML Antin. 130 reiterates a model of porous selfhood through its references to sodomy and virginity under threat.

Bartolommeo sounded like “an entire people speaking through one man.”<sup>95</sup> One Hungarian merchant spoke in so many voices that it seemed “as if it was an entire population speaking, not just a single person.”<sup>96</sup> To thus describe individual demoniacs was to liken their torments to the struggles of collectives writ small. Collectives were elsewhere interpreted as single bodies when the youth from Siena and his retinue are described as a *corpo*. Extending the analogy, individual battles with demons were likened to the military skirmishes that occurred throughout the Tuscan *contado*. When spirits departed the man from Lombardy, they shrieked “in various ways as they do when they set about sacking a city or a *castello*,”<sup>97</sup> and another demoniac seemed to fight “not with diabolic spirits but with *fanterie validissime*—the strongest of troops.”<sup>98</sup>

Corollary to such ideas was the subtext that inhabitants of the outlying territories of Florence—whether because weak, fearful, irreverent, stupid, or disloyal—were particularly vulnerable to demonic infiltration. Their boundaries more frangible than most, they were more likely to betray Florence. Such fears had historical precedent in that Casentine peasants had aided Milanese forces in the 1440s, either through treachery or, as the humanist Poggio Bracciolini (1380–1459) claimed, cowardice.<sup>99</sup> But exorcism purged individuals and communities of malign presences and shored up weaknesses. Florence could be rendered impervious to outside infiltration and external manipulation by the banishing of demons. Exorcism, the power that the Vallombrosans so brilliantly commanded, was the means.

## DANGER IN FLORENCE

The Vallombrosans made a bid to help Lorenzo, but also highlighted the havoc that demonic forces could wreak upon communal order as if to threaten what might ensue should their powers be curtailed. By 1489, they upped the ante, reminding Lorenzo that demonic danger threatened not only his remote domains but the urban heart of Florence. They established a climate of imminent peril, first by underscoring the power of exorcism to rouse unruly crowds. News of the demon inhabiting Antonia “spread through the city and through the countryside. And so many people came to see that one could not even make

<sup>95</sup> ASF CS SMV 260 244, fols. 104<sup>v</sup>–105<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>96</sup> BNC Magl. 35 239, 1.38, fol. 58<sup>r</sup>: “che chi non l’havessi veduto e avessi lo sentito aveva stimato che fussi stato un popolo quello che avessi parlato, non una persona sola.”

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.9, fol. 17<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>98</sup> ASF CS SMV 260 244, fol. 10<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>99</sup> Lerner, 159.

one's way through the streets, so great was the multitude which abounded the entire way."<sup>100</sup> The crowds of witnesses to Vallombrosan exorcisms were pointedly comprised of a wide range of social classes and genders—in Antonia's case, though the description may be duplicated, "many people of Florence, both noble and humble, both male and female."<sup>101</sup> If one recalls how Savonarola and other Mendicant Observant preachers segregated their listeners by gender, one begins to understand the sense of social chaos that such descriptions were meant to evoke.

The Vallombrosans foregrounded how exorcisms, already charged occasions at which preternatural power erupted, disrupted social hierarchy. At her exorcisms at the church of Santissima Annunziata, Antonia—or the spirit inhabiting her, for the boundaries were often ambiguous—subverted conventions of social rank by addressing senior abbots as *abbottozzo* (bad or wicked abbot) along with "other similarly insolent and ridiculous things."<sup>102</sup> She / her devil routinely chastised her social betters in public: "And as the devil saw some rich and powerful citizens that he knew well, he chided them harshly, calling one a usurer, another a thief, and some others sodomites."<sup>103</sup> A twenty-year-old peasant girl's castigation of her social betters was surely a shocking event, since strictures on women's public speaking, particularly in religious settings, had resounded loudly from Saint Paul onward.<sup>104</sup> At the same time, Antonia's tirade against usury, immorality, and sodomy channeled the rhetoric and behavior of, or perhaps even mocked, Observant preachers, who were known for their tirades against various triumvirates of sin, and particularly the vices of usury and sodomy.<sup>105</sup>

The Vallombrosans highlighted the disarray and unrest engendered by exorcisms, noting that throngs of people were particularly gratifying to the devil as fertile grounds for disorder: "the devil enjoyed [the gathering of the crowd at the

<sup>100</sup> The Vallombrosans framed the event as assuming the status of general news in Florence: "It was yet believed in Florence that the unclean spirit was not trapped but freed." BML Antin. 130, fol. 12'.

<sup>101</sup> BNC Magl. 35 239, 1.57, fol. 78': "molta gente di Firenze, e nobili e ignobili, cosi maschi, come femine."

<sup>102</sup> BML Antin. 130, fol. 26'.

<sup>103</sup> BNC Magl. 35 239, 1.57, fols. 79<sup>r-v</sup>: "qualche cittadino ricco e pote[n]te, che ben gli conosceva, lo riprendeva aspramente, chiamando l'uno usuraio, l'altro rubbatore, alcuno altro sodomita."

<sup>104</sup> See, e.g., 1 Corinthians 14:34–35, on why women should remain silent in churches.

<sup>105</sup> Elsewhere the Vallombrosans evoked Crusade preaching, another Observant specialty, and mimicked the Observant disparagement of peasant apotropaic practices. Mormando, 105, 109, 182; Walden, 188, 265–66; Cardini, 288–91; Montesano, 87.

exorcism], hoping that among the multitude some questions would arise.”<sup>106</sup> Given that by the 1480s *bandi*, or prohibitions issued by the Medici-run Otto di Guardia (Eight of Watch), had come to outlaw virtually every form of public assembly, it is clear that Lorenzo, too, feared public gatherings as dangerous sites of potential disorder. The Vallombrosans seemed intent upon conjuring images of chaotic crowds so as to unsettle Lorenzo and to position their interventions as central to Florence’s safety.<sup>107</sup>

The Vallombrosans made yet graver claims about the potentially dire political repercussions of exorcism when they described how “many gentlemen together with the Duke of Calabria” came to witness Antonia’s exorcisms at San Salvi just outside Florence.<sup>108</sup> The Duke of Calabria, Alfonso II (1448–95), commander of the forces of Naples and heir to its throne, was a bona fide celebrity at this time, but his attendance at Antonia’s exorcism ended in scandal, violence, and dishonor.<sup>109</sup> First, the visitors’ physical safety was threatened: “the church was so full of people that if they had not brought [Antonia of San Godenzo] into the sacristy . . . without doubt, on that day, great evil would have occurred, given that already, certain boys had thrown punches. And [the dignitaries] would have been wounded if [the youths] had not been held back by the crowd.”<sup>110</sup> In the Latin version of this episode, two youths drew swords and an unspecified conflict erupted.<sup>111</sup> During the exorcism, Antonia’s demon reproached the duke and his retinue to the point of offense: “And exorcising [Antonia] in the sacristy in the presence of the duke and the others who were in his company, the devil, as he usually did, met them and chastised them so that, greatly shamed and completely amazed, they left.”<sup>112</sup>

<sup>106</sup> BNC Magl. 35 239, 1.57, fol. 79<sup>r</sup>. Another version of this passage reads that the devil enjoyed public gatherings because in them he found it “easy to plot something of a quarrel”: Migne, 351.

<sup>107</sup> By the 1480s, *bandi* were explicit in their aim to quash anti-Medici dissent, prohibiting commerce with rebels who had been jailed since 1434—that is, anyone who had been punished by Cosimo. ASF Otto di Guardia 221 Epoca di Repubblica, Minute di Bandi emanati dagli’Otto 29 January 1478–27 March 1491, fols. 160, 182–83, 113, 179. For the Otto as an arm of the Medici, see Zorzi, 1988, 42–45, 50–53, 67–72, 83–89; Pampaloni, 14.

<sup>108</sup> BNC Magl. 35 239, 1.57, fols. 79<sup>r</sup>–81<sup>v</sup>, quote at 81<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>109</sup> He appeared fourteen times in Luca Landucci’s diary between 1460 and the 1480s. For and against Florence at different times, the duke was on consistently friendly terms with the Medici. Filarete and Manfredi, 95.

<sup>110</sup> BNC Magl. 35 239, 1.57, fols. 79<sup>r</sup>–81<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>111</sup> Migne, 75, 363.

<sup>112</sup> BNC Magl. 35 239, 1.57, fol. 81<sup>v</sup>: “E scongiurandolo in sacrestia in presenza del Duca e altri ch’erano in sua compagnia, il diavolo, com’era usato, gli ritrovo per modo che loro vergognandosi e maravigliandosi assai, si partirono.”



While the spirit's rebukes clearly went too far, the perils were not yet over. The abbot general of Vallombrosa, "learning of the scandal that had taken place in the church and fearing the worst,"<sup>113</sup> realized "how much danger was hanging over the heads of the people of Florence."<sup>114</sup> He sent for the Abbot of Santa Trinita, telling him that "it seems to me that it would be better that [Antonia] is brought to Vallombrosa. And perhaps there through the merits of San Giovanni, God [will] operate his *virtu* in her."<sup>115</sup> Antonia is summarily dispatched to Vallombrosa. As in their litany of unstable towns in Florentine border regions, the Vallombrosans tied demonic machinations to volatile behavior, social disorder,<sup>116</sup> and potential political upset. Here they suggested that they had averted terrible danger by sending Antonia away. Reminding Lorenzo of his unsteady regime, they positioned Vallombrosa as Florence's heroic savior: a remote yet indispensable satellite to which it ought to siphon its most difficult and dangerous cases.

The Vallombrosan vignettes were potent displays of power and expressions of political allegiance. Given the ability of demoniacs to disclose hidden information, they were also charged moments of parrhesiastic truth telling. Thus when Antonia's possessing spirit told a corpulent prelate sent by Piero de' Medici, "If I could, I would put your feet over your head so that it would make your lungs burst,"<sup>117</sup> the statement was intended to shock and amaze: a mere girl speaking such violent words and the image of an upended prelate representing an alarming reversal of social order. Yet the exchange revealed an important truth, for it framed the prelate, who on the basis of the description was probably Giovanni Neroni Dietisalvi, archbishop of Florence from 1463 to 1473 and Pitti conspirator, as a traitor. At Florence, inverted hangings were reserved for rebels, and in the *pittura infamante* (defamatory painting) tradition, Medici opponents were depicted upside down. Thus the demoniac's speech correctly marked the prelate as seditious—not to mention, by virtue of his corpulence, worldly.<sup>118</sup> Thus through the speech of a demoniac, the Vallombrosans sounded

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.: "intendendo . . . lo scandolo ch'era stato in chiesa e dubitando di peggio."

<sup>114</sup> Migne, 369: "intelligens quantum periculum populo Florentino impenderet."

<sup>115</sup> BNC Magl. 35 239, 1.57, fol. 81v: "e mi pare meglio che fussi menata a Vallombrosa. E forse quivi per meriti di San Giovanni Gualberto, iddio operare la virtu sua in lei."

<sup>116</sup> The Vallombrosans may have overplayed the element of social chaos associated with their exorcisms, for Zarri noted that by the late fifteenth century, monastic radicalism—with which the Vallombrosans had yet older associations—was come to be equated with social disorder. Zarri, 242, 213–14.

<sup>117</sup> BML Antin. 130, fol. 31r: "S'io potessi, ti metterei la piedi sopra cotesto tuo ventre tanto ti farei scoppiare."

<sup>118</sup> The image was also arguably anti-Jewish, for in late medieval Italy, Jews were subjected to inverted hangings. See Bayless.

the theme of political treachery and ritually denigrated an anti-Medici conspirator. Such vignettes worked on an array of levels, positioning the Vallombrosans as Medici supporters, as possessing greater wisdom and care for Florence than dissolute and disloyal diocesan clerics, and as a prophetically powerful and a potentially dangerous font of truth.

### EPILOGUES, CONCLUSIONS, HISTORIOGRAPHIES

The Vallombrosans used a formulaic genre in a scheherazadian gambit to address the challenges that beset their order. They portrayed themselves as loyal allies of the Medici, as dispensers of political wisdom, as peacemakers, as a judiciary force, and as distant yet necessary protectors of Florence. What were the consequences of their efforts? In fact, there are multiple epilogues. Their texts did not stave off commenda: Giovanni managed to obtain the monasteries of Coltibuono in 1488 and Vaiano in 1492,<sup>119</sup> though the diligent abbot general Don Biagio Milanese managed to purchase the monasteries back in 1500.<sup>120</sup> The Vallombrosans did not disappear into oblivion, but continued to battle over questions of reform into the sixteenth century, when one historian noted that animosities between the Vallombrosans and Salvini “lasted until our own times.”<sup>121</sup> The rise to influence of the Dominican friar Girolamo Savonarola by 1491 signaled the triumph of both Mendicants and Observance at Florence, and by the sixteenth century the Vallombrosans had given up on exorcisms, relinquishing ownership of this ministry to Franciscan Observants.<sup>122</sup> They opted instead to rebuild their relationship with the Medici and to retreat into an altogether more ancient and aristocratic mode, one with no room for peasants and shrieking demons.<sup>123</sup>

There are yet other, broader epilogues to the Vallombrosan story. The Vallombrosan attempt to reinsert their marginalized order back into the political center of things required the existence of a devil or malevolent demons who

<sup>119</sup> Bizzocchi, 163.

<sup>120</sup> The Vallombrosans bought these foundations back from the Florentine signoria in 1499 in return for an annual pension paid to Giovanni de' Medici, who was by now Pope Leo X.

<sup>121</sup> Locatelli, 273.

<sup>122</sup> A multitude of Franciscan clerics exorcised in the sixteenth century, and the best-known works on exorcism, *Compendio dell'arte essorcistica* (1572) and *Flagellum Daemonum* (1578), were written by the Franciscan Observant Girolamo Menghi (1529–1609). In the seventeenth century, the Piedmontese rural healer Giovan Battista Chiesa performed his rituals using a manual written by another Franciscan, Candido Brugnolo (1607–77). O'Neill, 125, 149, 204, 228, 230; Niccoli, 193.

<sup>123</sup> In brief, the order shed its rural and populist associations. Walden, 416.

lay at the center of, and tangibly influenced, current-day public affairs, and this assertion of an active and malevolent devil may represent an important consequence of fifteenth-century religious change. That is, only a devil linked to both broad and specific forces of political disarray and who was directly related to conspiracy and scandal enabled the Vallombrosans, as master exorcists, to craft a response that they thought would be compelling to a political leader such as Lorenzo. The Vallombrosans did not likely create the demand for exorcism:<sup>124</sup> demonic possession had long been widespread across Italy and the rest of Europe. It tended to erupt in tandem with social, political, and religious strain, in which Tuscany was certainly roiled in the late fifteenth century.<sup>125</sup> But the Vallombrosans were unique and prescient in their concrete insertion of malevolent demons into very real political problems such as factionalism and communal strife.

In their marshaling of an active, invasive, politicized devil to resuscitate Vallombrosan influence and political relevance, the Vallombrosan texts would seem to offer a preliminary answer to a particular historical conundrum: that of how and why an ordered demonology arose so abruptly at the end of the fifteenth century.<sup>126</sup> One can see the emergence of this demonology in early witchcraft persecutions in Italy and in the treatises of Observant Dominicans such as Institoris at this time and later, in France, in the shape of high demonological treatises such as that of Bodin, in which presumptions about the demonic were inextricably wedded to conceptions of the state.<sup>127</sup>

The Vallombrosans did not author the idea of the entry of the divine or the demonic into public affairs. Indeed, the failure of the Pazzi conspiracy against Medici lives and power was immediately interpreted providentially, and historians of political theology and of the late medieval and early modern eras generally agree that a stark separation between religion and politics is next to impossible during these periods. But the Vallombrosans were uniquely prescient in offering Lorenzo de' Medici a nuanced and compelling portrait of the demonic, activating several complex ideas about religion, society, and politics that were especially con-

<sup>124</sup> As with the monks at Silos, it seems that Vallombrosans came to their specialty in exorcism gradually and in response to demand: "It would not be correct to see the monks . . . as encouraging the laity in superstitious beliefs to increase their own power. At most one may speak of a coming together of the interests of the laity . . . and that of the representatives of institutional religion": Lappin, xvi.

<sup>125</sup> Christian, 77.

<sup>126</sup> Bailey, 2006, 404, characterizes the fifteenth century as a demonological watershed: "the growing fear of demons and the devil in the later Middle Ages . . . has never been fully explained."

<sup>127</sup> Clark, 551–674.

gruent with the times, and which extended well beyond the rhetorical. Against demonic disharmony, factionalism, and violence stood a clear hierarchy of relationships, namely the order enshrined in patriarchy: prince over state, husband over family, parents over children. Within this scheme, the Vallombrosans embodied selfless obedience: the antidote to the diabolic pride that man had inherited from the Fall.

Sluhovsky, Bailey, and Watt associated exorcistic activity with reform movements, theology, and religious dynamics but paid comparatively little attention to political context.<sup>128</sup> Both Pearl and Ferber linked demonic possession to turbulent political contexts in early modern France, and Wingens to political turmoil in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic.<sup>129</sup> Johnstone explored the intimate intertwining of demonism and politics during the English Civil War. Aside from these instances, exorcism has been contextualized in terms of secular politics relatively rarely, and never this early. While more research is needed to draw firm conclusions about the relationship between the rise of an active, organized, and malevolent devil with the struggles engendered by movements for religious Observance and the political and religious turmoil inherent in state-building and territorial consolidation, the links are surely suggestive.<sup>130</sup>

Not all of the myriad historiographies to which the story of Lorenzo and the Vallombrosans speaks can be addressed here.<sup>131</sup> But it seems important to note that Lorenzo de' Medici's predations represent a mere fraction of the large number of Benedictine and Vallombrosan abbeys given in commenda in fifteenth-century Europe, and especially in Italy and France.<sup>132</sup> If one combines this observation with Bizzocchi's insights into the increasing convergence of interests in late fifteenth-century Italy between popes, secular rulers, local diocesan church leaders, Mendicants, and civic elites—a situation that would be replicated with variations across Europe in the century that followed—and with the knowl-

<sup>128</sup> Bailey, 2003, 8; Sluhovsky, 98, 276; Watt, 119, 139.

<sup>129</sup> Johnstone, 175, 249; Ferber 3, 153; Pearl, 287, 290; Wingens, 250, 259.

<sup>130</sup> As Levack, 114, 133, pointed out, one must be cautious about comparing instances of exorcism and demonic possession too liberally across time and space.

<sup>131</sup> For the extent to which Vallombrosan exorcism was improvised or scripted, the decorum with which it proceeded, the relative power accorded to exorcists (cf. Caciola), the relationship of Vallombrosan exorcisms to *maleficia*, and the gendered aspect(s) of Vallombrosan exorcisms, see Walden, 16, 232, 44, 223, 237, 265. The Vallombrosan appeals to Lorenzo de' Medici also inform continuing debates about the nature of Lorenzo's power and the degree to which it was absolute. See Zorzi, 47–49.

<sup>132</sup> Even a partial list of Vallombrosan monasteries given in commenda in the fifteenth century is quite long. It includes Montescalari, Forcole, Fiumana, Serrafa, San Mercurial, Santa Trinita, Settimo, San Fabiano, Passignano, Coltibuono, Vaiano, and Vallombrosa itself. A list of monasteries given in commenda in Italy and France is far too long to include here.

edge that Mendicant Observants outstripped older orders by the end of the century, then one can begin to see the Vallombrosans as a casualty of these new power arrangements. In other words, the Vallombrosans represent a component of Bizzocchi's power constellation for which he failed to account: those at whose expense these alliances operated and who were forced to adapt to survive.

Lorenzo de' Medici's actions and the Vallombrosan response contribute to a newer historiography on state building that locates processes of state consolidation in unofficial channels of communication: subtler areas such as rhetoric, pacts, and language as against formal political norms such as constitutional statutes.<sup>133</sup> In relation to this focus, it is important to note that commendal arrangements, despite their foundation in canon law, occurred unofficially on the basis of backchannel agreements between secular leaders and popes.<sup>134</sup> The Vallombrosan responses to Lorenzo, too, were equally unofficial: a lively blend of patronage letter, hagiography, historical reportage, and geography that they invented in the absence of alternate modes of appeal.<sup>135</sup> Insofar as one sees the Vallombrosans as having invented an utterly new literary-religious language meant to redefine a political situation, their story may also be seen as belonging to that strand of historiography that has emphasized the creativity and vigor of late medieval religion.<sup>136</sup>

The story of the Vallombrosans' relationship with Lorenzo de' Medici and the eclipsing of traditional religious orders by Mendicant Observants was not simply a case of Florentine secular authority bypassing ecclesiastical authority, for Lorenzo had strong relations with the Florentine diocesan church.<sup>137</sup> Nor

<sup>133</sup> Gamberini, 412; Bullard 53, 57; Martoccio, 191. The Vallombrosan story also contributes to the long-lived swath of historiography concerned with how Florence annexed subject towns and related to its hinterlands as an example of strategies from the periphery. As a species of propitiatory letter, the Vallombrosan texts speak to the historiography on patronage dynamics. Walden, 136n13; Salvadori; McLean, 93.

<sup>134</sup> Bizzocchi, 102–07.

<sup>135</sup> By contrast, the inventive monks at Micy marshaled not only hagiography, but law and other public powers in their own defense. The Vallombrosans lacked recourse to these options. Head, 250.

<sup>136</sup> In Italy, this historiography has tended to focus on the contributions of female religious, as in Strocchia's emphasis on the contributions of cloistered women and Terpstra's emphasis on the innovative nature of Bolognese charity reform: Strocchia, 114; Terpstra, 2013, 84. For similar perspectives in a wider European context, see Swanson; Cameron.

<sup>137</sup> In addition to the Medici's strong relations with urban canons as described by Bizzocchi, Lorenzo's cousin Rinaldo Orsini was archbishop of Florence from 1474 to 1508, though was largely absent his post. Lorenzo's and his father's patronage of Mendicant Observants such as the Dominicans at San Marco and elsewhere has been well documented: Verde and Zaccaria, 21.

can one consider the case a mere instance of one man's zeal in pursuing territorial objectives, or as relating solely to shifts in lay patronage of religious orders. One cannot consider the Vallombrosan response a clear example of collaboration with Lorenzo, since the order arguably protested its allegiance under duress. Thus the Vallombrosan texts illustrate the layered complexity of the late fifteenth-century religiopolitical economy and help in teasing out some of its intricacies.

To date, Anglo-American scholarship on monasticism has been relatively *retardataire*. Studies of religious orders have focused almost exclusively on the winners of the historical contest in which the Vallombrosans were a part.<sup>138</sup> However, a new strand of scholarship focusing on Observant reform has recently arisen that has begun to examine its workings and consequences. James Mixson, for example, has outlined historiographical reasons for the scholarly oversight of Observance and underscored its importance, and Nicholas Terpstra has linked Observant calls for religious purity to the major migratory shifts of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.<sup>139</sup> The story of Lorenzo and the Vallombrosans provides important insights into the complex mechanics of Observant reform and fifteenth-century religious change and political dynamics by calling attention to many of the critically overlooked facets of the equation: questions of political allegiance, social prestige, lay support, urban-rural dynamics, inter-order religious competition, the use and abuse of commenda, links between commenda and reform, and the demonological consequences of the shift toward Observant dominance. The story of the broader implications of Observant reform—the important and manifold repercussions of the shift in the balance of power of organized religious life that occurred over the course of the fifteenth century—however, remains to be told.

<sup>138</sup> Rosenwein, 67, writes that North American historiography on European monasticism began in about 1980, focused primarily upon English and French orders, stopped “more or less . . . with the twelfth-century reformation” (84), and tended to look only at Mendicants.

<sup>139</sup> Mixson, 202; Mixson and Roest, 2, 60–84; Terpstra, 2015, 104.

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