

Antonella Degl'Innocenti, ed. *Vallombrosa: Memorie agiografiche e culto delle reliquie*.

I libri di Viella 140. Rome: Viella, 2012. 352 pp. €25.50. ISBN: 978-88-8334-928-7.

This collection of eight essays and three editions of somewhat brief texts sheds light on the reception of Vallombrosan monasticism in Renaissance Florence. It meets to some extent the expressed goals of the editor in bringing together a range of studies to reveal both the continuity and the development of the hagiographical tradition of Vallombrosa. Each of the articles is solid in its scholarly rigor. The collection includes works over the span of fifty years by Sofia Boesch Gajano, Antonella Degl'Innocenti, Adele Simonetti, and Caterina Giovanna Coda.

An arc of 300 years spans the beginning of the Vallombrosan Benedictine congregation of monasteries founded primarily as a lay rediscovery of the virtues of the Rule of Saint Benedict (allied in some respects to the reform efforts of the Milanese Patarines) to the congregation's denouement in the Renaissance as a spiritual (and financial) support and a beneficiary of the court of Lorenzo de' Medici. The merits of the work under review are best seen in the penultimate essay, Degl'Innocenti's "Treatment of the Girolamo da Raggiolo." He was a monk with close ties to Lorenzo, and wrote hagiographical works in his honor and read to him the lives of the Vallombrosan saints when the young Medici visited the abbey. Girolamo gave saintly *vitae* to names in the historical tradition of his congregation and dedicated an entire work to the miraculous powers of its founder, the Florentine Saint John Gualbert. He was an innovator in both these endeavors. We learn in Degl'Innocenti's essay that the founder, canonized in 1193, was all but forgotten in Petrarch's time and then rediscovered in the Quattrocento by Saint Antoninus of Florence. Girolamo's efforts, she contends, were aimed at showing the strength of the order at a time of crisis in governance and spiritual adumbration by new Benedictine reform movements. There are constant themes in the tradition of Vallombrosan sanctity that became ossified (Coda's essay on the *tesaurizzazione* of relics shows the reification of this development) and at the same time ceased being windows onto the historical moment of their origins. The original charisms of the congregation were reinterpreted for present needs.

Degl'Innocenti overstates the case for an uninterrupted tradition of the hagiography of John Gualbert given that there is nothing to report about the founder or any of his saintly followers in the entirety of the thirteenth century. That reservation aside, the collective efforts of the contributors give an insightful picture of how Vallombrosan sanctity was interpreted by monks and other writers for their contemporary civic and ecclesiastical milieus. There is real strength here in the writing. Boesch Gajano read the sources carefully enough to give insight to the lived experience of the community from the time of the charismatic founder to the period of institution building. Degl'Innocenti, in her several essays, describes with acuity several reinterpretations of sanctity, including, early on, the example of the monk as martyr in the cause of truth (the struggle against simony). This is followed by the model of the monk-bishop (Bernardo degli Uberti) as one who combined the role of defender of the city and peacemaker with the traditional virtues of prescience and spiritual guidance. The author well captures the argument about continuity and change with a passage from the introduction: "the vitality of Vallombrosan monasticism was always fed by its roots but not exhausted by them" (10). There is a discernible tension, understood variably through the centuries, between civic and cloistered sanctity.

Finally, Adele Simonetti finds in the lives of Abbesses Humility and Margherita of Faenza the rejection of family and culture and an exclusive desire for solitude and contemplation as part of the makeup of women who also left records of humble and obedient activity (*l'operosità*), and whose monasteries were storehouses of aid for urban populations in times of crisis.

The collection is well served by indices of ancient, medieval, and modern names. A synthetic analysis of the findings of the essays regarding the themes of sanctity in the Vallombrosan tradition is the only desideratum of note.

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