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Marco Piana

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Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola (1469–1533): Faith, Antiquity, and the Witch Hunt

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[See table of contents](#)

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Article abstract

This article aims to provide an analysis of Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola's hymn Staurostichon in view of other examples of Savonarolan blood devotion. Staurostichon describes a supernatural event that took place in Germany between 1501 and 1503, when unusual rainfalls started to mark people's bodies and garments with shapes of red crosses and other symbols generally connected to Christ's Passion. Often interpreted as a rain of divine blood, the Kreuzwunder gave free rein to the imagination of many historians, astrologers, and prophets of the time. Deeply engrained with Savonarola's devotion to Christ's blood and wounds, Gianfrancesco Pico's Staurostichon seeks to provide a biblical and prophetic explanation of the event: an explanation that is soaked in the gory events of the sacred Scriptures and the lives of the saints.

Written in Blood: Blood Devotion in Gianfrancesco Pico's *Staurostichon*¹

MARCO PIANA

University of Toronto

This article aims to provide an analysis of Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola's hymn Staurostichon in view of other examples of Savonarolan blood devotion. Staurostichon describes a supernatural event that took place in Germany between 1501 and 1503, when unusual rainfalls started to mark people's bodies and garments with shapes of red crosses and other symbols generally connected to Christ's Passion. Often interpreted as a rain of divine blood, the Kreuzwunder gave free rein to the imagination of many historians, astrologers, and prophets of the time. Deeply engrained with Savonarola's devotion to Christ's blood and wounds, Gianfrancesco Pico's Staurostichon seeks to provide a biblical and prophetic explanation of the event: an explanation that is soaked in the gory events of the sacred Scriptures and the lives of the saints.

Cet article vise à fournir une analyse du Staurostichon, l'hymne de Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, à la lumière d'autres exemples de dévotion au Précieux Sang inspirés par Savonarole. Le Staurostichon décrit un événement surnaturel qui aurait eu lieu en Allemagne entre 1501 et 1503, lorsque des pluies inhabituelles entreprirent de couvrir le corps et les vêtements des gens de marques en forme de croix rouges et d'autres symboles habituellement liés à la passion du Christ. Souvent interprété comme une pluie de sang divin, le Kreuzwunder a enflammé l'imagination de nombreux historiens, astrologues et prophètes de l'époque. Profondément enraciné dans les pratiques dévotionnelles que voue Savonarole au sang et aux blessures du Christ, le Staurostichon de Gianfrancesco Pico cherche à fournir une explication biblique et prophétique de l'événement : une explication qui est imprégnée des événements sanglants qui ponctuent les Écritures sacrées et la vie des saints.

1. This article builds on a paper entitled "Raining Blood: Blood Devotion in Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola's *Staurostichon*," presented at the 2018 Renaissance Society of America Annual Conference in New Orleans, Louisiana. I am thankful for the generous support of the Early Modern Conversion Project which allowed me to participate. I am also grateful to Thomas Luongo, Laura Jacobus, Paul Chandler, Thomas Izbicki, Catherine Mooney, David R. Winter, Grover Zinn, Philip Feller, Rosemary Hayes, Robert Durk, and Mary Dzon for their precious feedback on the matters regarding medieval blood devotion in Italian lands. This article greatly benefited from the help and guidance of my doctoral supervisor, Matteo Soranzo, to whom I am eternally grateful. I am also thankful to Cassandra Marsillo and Marie-Claude Felton for their help in shaping the final version of this article. If not otherwise indicated, all translations provided are mine. *Staurostichon* has been translated under the supervision of Matteo Soranzo, as part of the SSHRC-funded research project "Self-Transformation in Early Modern Europe."

Magical, spiritual, and ritual beliefs about blood are among the most ancient ideas found in the history of humankind.² As a substance that overcomes the boundaries of the body, blood has always been capable of arousing powerful emotions, often harnessed by ritual.³ It is not surprising, therefore, that the word “blood” drenches and envelops the sacred Scripture in its entirety.⁴ In the Old Testament, blood echoes as a taboo worthy of the worst punishment, but it also functions as a form of protection against God’s wrath;⁵ most importantly, it acts as a sacred ink that binds the covenant between God and the Israelites.⁶ Due to this insistence on the thaumaturgical and ceremonial importance of the “waters of life,” it is fairly easy to understand why blood became so central to Jewish and Christian rituals.⁷ With the advent of Christianity, moreover, blood gained an even more important role, becoming a vessel of salvation for humanity, as represented by the blood shed by Jesus Christ and his sacrifice on the cross. In defiance of the biblical proscription against blood consumption, the Christian ritual of the Eucharist also quickly began to mandate the drinking of the—real

2. Blood-related symbols and ceremonies have been found in so many cultures and societies, throughout the world and in any given time period, that they can virtually be considered universal. See chapter 1 in Melissa Meyer, *Thicker Than Water: The Origins of Blood as Symbol and Ritual* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2014), 1–16. See also Bernard Seeman, *The River of Life: The Story of Man’s Blood from Magic to Science* (New York: Norton, 1961); Ashley Montague, *Man’s Most Dangerous Myth: The Fallacy of Race* (New York: Harper, 1953); Nancy B. Jay, *Throughout Your Generations Forever: Sacrifice, Religion, and Paternity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

3. Perceiving bodily orifices as vulnerable, marginal zones on the threshold between internal purity and external danger, humans have always invested bodily substances that transgressed these thresholds, such as blood, with magical—and symbolic—properties. See Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (New York: Praeger, 1966), 115.

4. A simple word search on the Latin Vulgate found 420 verses containing the term “blood,” or 430 if we include the term “bloody.” The term “love” has 558 occurrences. The term “salvation” appears in barely 167 verses. See latinvulgate.com/search.aspx?key=blood, accessed 6 June 2019. Further information on the primary importance that blood has in Scripture can be found in David Biale, *Blood and Belief: The Circulation of a Symbol between Jews and Christians* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007). For a thorough analysis of the role of blood in the Old Testament, see William K. Gilders, *Blood Ritual in the Hebrew Bible: Meaning and Power* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

5. Exodus 12:21–23.

6. Genesis 9:5, and Exodus 24:7–8.

7. From the role of blood in the sacrifices to the rituals of circumcision and the Passover meal, Judaism has always invested the greatest symbolic meaning in what was often seen as the essence of life. See Biale, ix.

or symbolic, according to the confessions—blood of Christ.⁸ This ceremony created scandal and disarray in the late ancient period among pagans, who often accused early Christians of cannibalism.⁹

Despite the numerous changes in ceremonial and theological orthodoxy, blood maintained its fundamental importance in Christian devotion throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.¹⁰ Often considered a key element of Western religion and culture by anthropologists, blood exerted a continuous fascination in Christian lands¹¹—a fascination that, at times, turned into fetishism, violence, and heresy. In her monograph *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond*, Caroline Walker Bynum argues that the blood piety characteristically found in poetry, visual media, and public forms of devotion was mainly a “northern European phenomenon,” in contrast with “less bloody” southern European narratives.¹² Although her point on the German visual imaginary regarding blood devotion is very convincing, her treatise takes only partially into account how the Italian imagination in medieval and early modern times saw blood as a major source of inspiration and devotion.¹³ Let us consider, for example,

8. Biale, 20.

9. See, for example, Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, ch. 9: “As for the initiation of new members, the details are as disgusting as they are well known. A child, covered in dough to deceive the unwary, is set before the would-be novice. The novice stabs the child to death with invisible blows; indeed he himself, deceived by the coating dough, thinks his stabs harmless. Then—it’s horrible!—they hungrily drink the child’s blood, and compete with one another as they divided his limbs.” The translation is by Norman Cohn and cited in Norman Cohn, *Europe’s Inner Demons: The Demonization of Christians in Medieval Christendom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1. For a modern edition of *Octavius*, see Tertullian, Marcus Minucius Felix, Rudolphus Arbesmann, Emily Joseph Daly, and Edwin A. Quain, *Apologetical Works and Minucius Felix Octavius* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2008).

10. On this subject, see, for example, Caroline Walker Bynum, “The Blood of Christ in the Later Middle Ages,” *Church History* 71.4 (2002): 685–714. See also Biale, *Blood and Belief*.

11. See Roy Wagner, *Symbols That Stand for Themselves* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 96–125.

12. Caroline Walker Bynum, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 5–7.

13. It is important to note that, although Bynum seems to build part of her argument on a divide between northern and southern blood devotion, the author herself agrees that there are, in fact, similarities between Italian and German forms of blood devotion. See Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, 266n39: “I do not intend to make an argument for northern particularism here, but only to be careful about evidence,

the numerous cases of blood piety present in early modern Italian lands. A clear instance of this trend is the enduring tradition of the *flagellanti*—which originated in Italy and reached German lands only later, bringing with it the fears, prophecies, and rituals of the Italian practice.¹⁴ Moreover, evident traces of blood devotion—going back to the Middle Ages and still living in the cults of St. Catherine of Siena (1347–80) and St. Catherine of Genoa (1447–1510)¹⁵—are found in the ritual miracle of the liquefaction of San Gennaro's blood in

since I have not studied Italy in any detail. Historians have tended to see north-south differences. But I would be the first to admit that some of what I discuss below, especially in Chapters 5, 7, and 8, shows similarities.”

14. For a brief introduction to the flagellant movements, see Gary Dickson, “Flagellants,” in *Encyclopedia of the Middle Ages*, ed. André Vauchez (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Richard Kieckhefer, “Radical Tendencies in the Flagellant Movement of the Mid-Fourteenth-Century,” in *The Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 4 (1974): 157–76; Gary Dickson, “Revivalism as a Medieval Religious Genre,” *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 51.3 (2000): 473–96, and “The Flagellants of 1260 and the Crusades,” *Journal of Medieval History* 15.3 (2012): 227–67. On this subject, see also Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), ch. 7. Recent additions to the studies of flagellant movements and confraternities can be found in Gavin Hammel, “Revolutionary Flagellants? Clerical Perceptions of Flagellant Brotherhoods in Late Medieval Flanders and Italy,” in *Faith's Boundaries: Laity and Clergy in Early Modern Confraternities*, ed. Nicholas Terpstra, Adriano Prosperi, and Stefania Pastore (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 303–30. See also Andrew H. Chen, *Flagellant Confraternities and Italian Art, 1260–1610: Ritual and Experience* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019). For contributions in Italian, see Giuseppe Rubini, Claudio Ghisari, and Gianluigi Arcari, *I disciplini: ricerche sulle confraternite del mantovano* (Mantova: Arcari, 1989), and Franco Ferlino, *Vattienti: osservazione e riplasmazione di una ritualità tradizionale* (Vibo Valentia: Qualecultura, 1990).

15. Medieval hagiographies report that the mystic Caterina da Siena (d. 1380) found her mouth flooding with blood after she received the holy host. This kind of “host miracle” is a recurrent topos in medieval hagiography, especially in the ecstasies of women mystics. See Bynum, “The Blood of Christ in the Later Middle Ages,” 689–70; Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 174–79. See also Hanna-Barbara Gerl-Falkovitz, “‘Die Braut auf dem Bett von Blut und Feuer’: Zur Bluttheologie der Caterina von Siena (1347–1380),” in *900 Jahre Heilig-Blut-Verehrung*, vol. 1, 494–500. A quick search of Caterina da Siena's letters shows an impressive recurrence of the word “sanguē.” The term appears 1,363 times in Catherine of Siena, *Le lettere*, in *Opera Omnia*, ed. Fausto Sbaiffoni, Antonio Volpato, and Giuliana Cavallini (Pistoia: Provincia Romana dei Frati Predicatori, 2002); online, centrostudicateriniani.it/images/documenti/VOLPATO_Lettere/Caterina_da_Siena-Lettere-a_cura_di_Volpato_links.pdf. For Caterina da Genova, see Anonymous, *Life and Doctrine of Saint Catherine of Genoa* (New York: Catholic Publication Society, 1875). See also Paolina Paganelli Ferrari, *Caterina Fieschi Adorno* (Turin: Marietti, 1965).

Naples,¹⁶ in the numerous relics of Christ's blood found in Italian lands, and in the visions of early modern prophets like Girolamo Savonarola.

The aim of this article is thus to enlarge Bynum's spectrum of research, analyzing a unique case of Renaissance blood devotion found in the heroic poem *Staurostichon*, written by Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola (1469–1533). *Staurostichon, heroicum carmen de mysteriis Dominicae crucis nuper in Germaniam delapsis* is a poem in Latin hexameters written in 1502–03 and dedicated to Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I.¹⁷ The hymn in question is particularly important in understanding the relationship between the German and the Italian imaginary on blood devotion. The poem, in fact, while being the work of an Italian humanist, describes a supernatural event that took place in Germany around 1501, when unusual rainfalls started to mark people's bodies and garments with red crosses and other symbols generally connected to Christ's Passion. Often interpreted as a rain of divine blood, the *Kreuzwunder* gave free rein to the imagination of many historians, astrologers, and humanists of the time.¹⁸ Among the latter, we find Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola.

16. For further research, see F. P. de Ceglia, "Thinking with the Saint: The Miracle of Saint Januarius of Naples and Science in Early Modern Europe," *Early Science and Medicine* 19.2 (2014): 133–73. See also Giovanni Battista Alfano and Antonio Amitrano, *Il miracolo di S. Gennaro: documentazione storica e scientifica* (Napoli: Arti Grafiche Vincenzo Scarpati, 1950).

17. The title of the poem, *Staurostichon*, derives from a neologism created by the author himself that combines the Greek words σταῦρος (cross) and στίχος (verse/hexameter), describing both the theme and the heroic/hymnic nature of the poem. Printed for the first time by Joannes Knobloch in Strasbourg between 1506 and 1507 as part of the complete edition of Gianfrancesco Pico's works, this text was reissued several times during the sixteenth century and was published in a separate edition with a commentary by Jacob Spiegel in 1512. If the poem has thus been the object of several publications, it was also being circulated in manuscript form at least since 1505, as the letters the author wrote to Ercole Strozzi, Reuchlin, Wolf, and Zasius show. Describing the poem in a letter to his friend Ercole Strozzi, Pico writes: "[...] σταῦρος καὶ στίχος, ex quibus Staurostichon coagmentavimus, ut enim alii acrosticha et caetera id genus Graeca licentia, sic nos de cruce, id enim operi propositus finis, ex quo sumere appellationem philosophis placuit, in anima non mutavimus," Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, *Opera Omnia*, ed. Luigi Firpo, vol. 2, Monumenta Politica Philosophica Humanistica Rariora (Turin: La Bottega d'Erasmus, 1972), 1357; see also 834, 864, 866, 1357. See Charles B. Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico Della Mirandola (1469–1533) and His Critique of Aristotle* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1967), 196; Steven Rowan and Gerhild Scholz Williams, "Jacob Spiegel on Gianfrancesco Pico and Reuchlin: Poetry, Scholarship and Politics in Germany in 1512," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 44.2 (1982): 293–98.

18. For further information on the *Kreuzwunder* in the literature of the time, see Marco Piana, "Fallax Antiquitas: Gianfrancesco Pico Della Mirandola's Critique of Antiquity" (PhD dissertation: McGill

Gianfrancesco, nephew of the famous Renaissance philosopher Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and follower of Girolamo Savonarola, is better known for his *Strix, sive de ludificatione daemonum*, and for his long treatise against ancient philosophy entitled *Examen vanitatis doctrinae gentium*.¹⁹ Brought to the attention of the academic world thanks to the work of Charles B. Schmitt, Richard Popkin, and Gian Mario Cao, Gianfrancesco Pico has often been pegged as a pioneer of modern scepticism, mostly due to his use of Sextus Empiricus.²⁰ During his life, however, Gianfrancesco's greatest ambition was that of providing philosophical and theological depth to Savonarola's preaching, making his moral and religious lessons more appealing to the learned world of courtiers and rulers. In order to achieve this, he wrote several treatises, poems, and dialogues.²¹ The idea of acquainting the cultural and ruling elites with Savonarola's teachings on prophecy—together with the political intention to draw the emperor closer to his form of *pietas*—is one of the main reasons behind the writing and publishing of *Staurostichon*, a religious hymn that provides a prophetic alternative to the many astrological interpretations of the *Kreuzwunder*.²²

University, 2018), 61–73. See also Francesco Lucili, “Poesia e profezia nello ‘Staurostichon’ di Giovan Francesco Pico della Mirandola,” *Archivio italiano per la storia della pietà* 25 (2012): 275–77, and “Croci e segni della Passione. Un episodio singolare nella Germania di primo Cinquecento,” a paper presented at the conference Scienze Umanistiche nell’ambito della Pastorale Universitaria and published in *La Croce. Un simbolo attraverso i tempi e le culture* (Rome: Edizioni Studium, 2013).

19. Due to the increasing relevance of witchcraft studies, Gianfrancesco Pico's *Strix* has seen a lot of attention in the last years. To date, two valid modern editions are available: Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola and Alfredo Perifano, *La Sorcière: Dialogue en trois livres sur la tromperie des démons* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), and Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola and Lucia Pappalardo, *La Strega (Strix) di Gianfranco Pico* (Rome: Città Nuova, 2017). An English translation of the dialogue by Walter Stephens is under development. The *Examen doctrinae gentium* is not yet available in a critical edition. See Gianfrancesco Pico, *Opera Omnia*, 2:710–1264.

20. See Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico Della Mirandola (1469–1533) and His Critique of Aristotle*. See also Richard Henry Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Savonarola to Bayle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), and Gian Mario Cao, *Scepticism and Orthodoxy: Gianfrancesco Pico as a Reader of Sextus Empiricus* (Pisa: F. Serra, 2007). For a broad overview of the role of Gianfrancesco Pico in contemporary academic research, see Piana, 24–47.

21. Aside from *Strix*, Gianfrancesco allegedly wrote a late dialogue on the devotion of sacred images, called *Dialogus de adoratione*. See Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, *Dialogus de adoratione*, ed. Alessia Contarino, Studi Pichiani (Florence: Leo Olschki, 2017).

22. See Piana, 61–121.

A superficial interpretation of the hymn would easily cast *Staurostichon* as a work that is heavily influenced by German blood devotion. Such an analysis is certainly plausible, as Gianfrancesco Pico visited the emperor twice before the publication of *Staurostichon*, in 1502 and 1505.²³ Yet, while it is possible that the author had been influenced by early iconographic, literary, and oral accounts of the *Kreuzwunder* at the court of Emperor Maximilian I, Gianfrancesco was already solidly anchored in the tradition of Italian blood devotion. To understand Gianfrancesco's use of blood in the *Staurostichon*, in fact, it is fundamental to consider how his mentor, Savonarola, employed blood as a set of religious and visionary symbols. The prophetic imagination of the priest of San Marco, moreover, is especially important for understanding just how deeply rooted the devotional symbol of blood was in early modern Italy, and how such symbolism was passed on to Savonarola's followers. In this sense, one of the most vivid examples of Savonarolan blood devotion can be found in the friar's comment to Amos and Zacharias, in sermon 44. During the Good Friday Mass of 1 April 1496, Savonarola told his believers about a vision he had. In it, he saw the whole human race divided by a massive river of blood, gushing from a crucified Jesus Christ:

In the middle of the plain, there was a little mount all full of roses and lilies, and on top of the mount a Crucifix was pouring forth red blood which radiated all the way round the world, around and around, and it splashed into the air here and there with the most splendid rays. It also poured onto the ground most abundantly, and it seemed to me that it formed a river which divided the world into two parts. And the Crucified One was crying out: "*Venite ad me omnes qui laboratis et onerati estis et ego reficiam vos.*" I stood and watched: on the left side of the river there was Rome with all the Christians; on the right side, there was Jerusalem and all the pagans. The blood was spreading out on the right side and appearing on the foreheads of each of those Moors and pagans, and it seemed to me that it made on the foreheads of all of them a red cross more splendid than a ruby.²⁴ And as they felt themselves marked with the sign,

23. Schmitt, 18–20. See also Gian Mario Cao, "Pico Della Mirandola Goes to Germany: With an Edition of Gianfrancesco Pico's *De Reformandis Moribus Oratio*," *Annali dell'Istituto storico italo-germanico in Trento* 30 (Bologna: Il mulino, 2004): 465.

24. Ezech. 9:4–6.

they would run to that river and throw away their clothes and enter into it and drink of that blood and become inebriated, and then they would come forth gentle and sweet, beautiful as angels. Likewise, on the left side, the blood was spreading out, and I saw that it made a mark on the forehead of every Christian of whatever condition—I saw Rome, in particular—and a red cross would appear on their foreheads because of the rays of that blood coming from the Crucified. And I saw that some would put on a cap to cover the cross; others would put up a hand; others a mask. [...] The preachers were standing there, and it seemed to me that they cried out and said, “Do you not hear what He says? ‘*Venite ad me omnes qui laboratis et onerati estis et ego reficiam vos.*’” But they did not want to hear or remove the masks or uncover the crosses.²⁵

Savonarola’s symbolic imaginary certainly shows a remarkable synthesis of certain basic patterns of medieval piety and theology.²⁶ It also has the

25. Girolamo Savonarola et al., *Selected Writings of Girolamo Savonarola Religion and Politics, 1490–1498* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 9–10. A critical edition to the original text can be found in Girolamo Savonarola, *Prediche sopra Amos e Zaccaria*, ed. Paolo Ghiglieri (Rome: Angelo Belardetti, 1972), 249–50: “In mezzo la pianura uno Monticello tutto pieno di fiori e gigli, e in cima del monte uno Crucifisso, el quale versava sangue rosso e radiava per tutto il mondo a tondo a tondo e schizzava in aria qua e là con razzi splendidissimi. Versava ancora in terra abundantissimamente, e mi pareva che facessi uno fiume che divideva il mondo in dua parte. E gridava il Crucifisso: *Venite ad me omnes qui laboratis et onerati estis et ego reficiam vos.* Stavo a vedere: e dalla parte sinistra del fiume era Roma con tutti gli cristiani; e dalla parte destra Ierusalem e tutti e’ pagani. Radiava il sangue dalla parte destra e dava nelle fronti di ciascheduno di quelli Mori e pagani, e mi pareva che a tutti facessi una croce rossa nella fronte, splendida più che uno rubino; e come quelli si sentivano segnati, correvano a quello fiume e buttavano via le veste ed entravano in quello fiume e beevano di quello sangue e inebriavansi, e poi ne uscivano tutti mansueti e dolci, belli come angeli. Dalla parte sinistra similmente radiava il sangue; e vedevo che dava nelle fronti di ciascheduno di qualunque condizione cristiano, e vedevo massimamente Roma, e nasceva a ciascuno una croce rossa nella fronte per il razzi di quello sangue che venivano dal Crucifisso; e vedevo che alcuni si mettevano la berretta per coprire la croce, alcuni la mano, alcuni la maschera. [...] Erano quivi in piedi gli predicatori, e parevami che clamassino e dicessino: — non udite voi quello che dice: *Venite ad me omnes qui laboratis et onerati estis et ego reficiam vos?* — E non volevano udire né levare le maschere né scoprire le croci.”

26. Savonarola’s vision echoes the prayer “Anima Christi,” attributed to Pope John XXII, who attached an indulgence to it in 1330. In the prayer, in fact, we find the verses “Sanguis Christi, inebria me. / Aqua lateris Christi, lava me.” The verb *inebria* in this case can mean both “intoxicate” and “drench.” See Pope John XXII, “Art. 19, Anima Christi, Sanctifica Me,” in *The Complete Harley 2253 Manuscript*, ed. Susanna Fein, et al. (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 2014); online,

uncommon quality of proving that, despite the possible “dryness” of certain Italian iconography, popular imagination still rejoiced in medieval blood imagery. Moreover, Savonarola’s take on the topos of *imago pietatis*²⁷ is quite important. His Christ, in fact, is far from being a dead, mummified figure, peacefully displaying his wounds: a feature that, according to experts like Hans Belting, was proper to southern European imagery.²⁸ The Savonarolan crucified Christ is a living man, calling humanity for conversion, and spouting never-ending cascades of blood, much like his “northern” counterparts.

Savonarola’s vision is not just about a living and bloodied Christ; it is also about the conversion of those who left their paraments on the shore, diving into the saviour’s blood, drinking and partaking of his vital fluid. Conversion to Christianity is seen here as the act of—literally—bathing in Christ’s blood. Savonarola’s vision of a massive tidal wave of blood, engulfing humankind and the world, is not a unique narration in Italian Renaissance devotion. Less than ten years later, Gianfrancesco Pico will echo almost perfectly Savonarola’s prophecy in his poem *Staurostichon*:

Afterwards from the fiery heavens descended the mighty / offspring of
God, wisdom of the mighty father, so that / he could wash away the disease

d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/fein-harley2253-volume-2-article-19. Savonarola’s prophecy, moreover, bears an uncanny similarity to some of Fra Angelico’s frescoes found at the Dominican Monastery of San Marco, where Savonarola resided. I am referring especially to the 1442 “Crucifixion with St Dominic” in cell 17, and “Fra Angelico — Crucifixion with St Dominic Flagellating Himself” in cell 20. A similar set of symbols can be found in the writings of the aforementioned Caterina da Siena. See, for example, letter 2: “voglio che ci destiamo dal sonno della negligenza, essercitando la vita nostra in virtù col lume acciò che in questa vita viviamo come angeli terrestri, anegandoci nel sangue di Cristo crocifisso, nascondendoci nelle piaghe dolcissime sue” (I want us to wake up from the slumber of negligence and live our life in light of virtue, so that we could live this life as terrestrial angels, drowning into the blood of the crucified Christ, and hiding in his sweet wounds), in Siena, *Lettere*: www.centrostudicateriniani.it/images/documenti/VOLPATO_Lettere/Caterina_da_Siena-Lettere-a_cura_di_Volpato_links.pdf.

27. See Peter Murray, Linda Murray, and Tom Devonshire Jones, “Imago Pietatis,” in *The Oxford Dictionary of Christian Art & Architecture*, ed. Peter Murray, Linda Murray, and Tom Devonshire Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013): “A devotional image of Christ showing His wounds, very similar to the Arma Christi or the Trinity (as a ‘Seat of Mercy’), and not intended to represent any actual incident in the Passion. The usual form is a half-length figure, upright in the tomb, with eyes open or closed, and arms folded to show the wounds.”

28. Hans Belting, *The Image and Its Public in the Middle Ages: Form and Function of Early Paintings of the Passion* (New Rochelle, NY: A.D. Caratzas, 1990), 32–33.

contracted by the first man / by means of the dark-red wave of the sacred blood, / so that he could lead mortals exiled from besieged Olympus, / with his light he diffused sacred things in the unholy world, / casting the darkness of Tartarus away from the hearts of men.²⁹

The author, who spent most of his youth in Florence, was probably present when Savonarola told his gory prophecy in 1496. Considering the absolute devotion that Pico had for Savonarola (a devotion he would keep all his life), one cannot avoid seeing the similarities between the Dominican priest's prophecy and Pico's narration of the *Kreuzwunder*. For Pico, as we will see, the German rain of crosses inevitably mirrors the foretold rain of Christ's blood sent to sanctify the good and punish the wicked. The marks splattered on the people's bodies and garments are described as the marks Savonarola had witnessed in his prophetic dream.

Staurostichon, as previously noted, was designed by its author to provide Emperor Maximilian I with an example of "true" prophecy and to prod the ruler toward ideas and forms of belief that were proper to Savonarola's preaching.³⁰ Pico uses an alternative interpretation of the marks left by the red rain of 1501 as the bloody instruments of Christ's Passion, better known as *Arma Christi*, to further his Savonarolan intent.³¹ Aside from its vital significance in Gianfrancesco Pico's

29. Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, *Staurostichon*, in *Opera Omnia*, 2:355–65, lines 14–20: "Postquam flammifero praeepes descendit ab axe / summa Dei soboles, summi sapientia patris, / Ut male contractas a primo semine labes / Purpurea elueret sacrati sanguinis unda, / Mortales clauso profugos ut ferret Olympo, / Sacra prophanato diffudit lumine mundo, / 20 Tartareas pellens hominum de corde tenebras." The following quotations regarding the poem *Staurostichon* will be simplified.

30. On this subject, see Piana, 92–111.

31. Lynn Ransom, "Arma Christi," in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, ed. Robert E. Bjork (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010): "The Latin term meaning 'weapons of Christ' and referring to the symbolic representations of the instruments of Christ's Passion (for example, nails, crown of thorns). The Arma Christi were the weapons with which Christ gained victory over death. They functioned as mnemonic signs for meditation and devotional images on the whole Passion narrative." See also Lisa H. Cooper, Andrea Denny-Brown, and Mary Agnes Edsall, *The Arma Christi in Medieval and Early Modern Material Culture: With a Critical Edition of "O Vernicle"* (London: Routledge, 2014). On the survival of forms of piety for the *Arma Christi*, see Flora Lewis, "Rewarding Devotion: Indulgences and the Promotion of Images," in *The Church and the Arts: Papers Read at the 1990 Summer Meeting and the 1991 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society*, ed. Diana Wood (Oxford, UK and Cambridge, MA: Ecclesiastical History Society by Blackwell Publishers, 1992), 183.

historiography and in the history of astrology in general, the *Staurostichon* is also a fundamental testimony to the evolution and vitality of important forms of Christian devotion such as the cult of the holy blood combined with the effigies of Jesus Christ. With deep roots in the late medieval ideas of Passion piety and relic veneration, the worship of the symbols of the Passion often intertwined with the cult of Christ's blood and endured for several centuries under many forms, even after the scythe of the Reformation movements of the sixteenth century.³² In the early sixteenth century, moreover, the devotion for such symbols was still both physical and metaphorical, and heavily enforced by Savonarolans like Gianfrancesco Pico.³³ Poised between the role of icon and relic, thanks to their ability to adapt easily to different media (painting, manuscript, print), Christ's bloodied banners maintained a special place among both the lesser population and the nobility, functioning as "holy defenses" against earthly and otherworldly suffering.³⁴ *Staurostichon* is clear proof of this, as the entire poem consists of a celebration of the *Arma Christi* falling from the sky, in the guise of holy blood—a divine message of unity and conversion:

Here, the mysterious signs descended, people and men / look at the recent
marvel, and everywhere trace onto the emptiness / of the spotless heavens
the befallen bleeding banners / of the cross: the memorable shape of the

32. Shannon Gayk suggests that, while late medieval usages of the *Arma Christi* emphasized their ability to incarnate and reenact Christ's sacrifice, early modern representations usually stressed the metaphorical and emblematic significances of the instruments. Arthur Marotti, moreover, stressed how, after Catholic relics came under attack during the 1530s, the reverence for relics began to transfer into print culture. See Shannon Gayk, "Early Modern Afterlives of the *Arma Christi*," in Cooper, Denny-Brown, and Edsall, eds., 274; Arthur F. Marotti, *Religious Ideology and Cultural Fantasy: Catholic and Anti-Catholic Discourses in Early Modern England* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 27. For the *Arma Christi* in the context of the English Reformation, see R. N. Swanson, *Indulgences in Late Medieval England: Passports to Paradise?* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 108–09.

33. On this subject, it is sufficient to consider Gianfrancesco's use of what he considered a piece of Savonarola's heart to exorcise a possessed woman. See Giovanni Francesco Pico della Mirandola, *Vita Hieronymi Savonarolae*, ed. Elisabetta Schisto (Florence: Olschki, 1999), 187–95. See also Armando Maggi, *In the Company of Demons: Unnatural Beings, Love, and Identity in the Italian Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 32–33.

34. John C. Hirsh, "Two English Devotional Poems of the Fifteenth Century," in *Notes and Queries* 15 (1968): 7.

famous triumph / is observed everywhere, burning sponges are seen, / the secret Seamless Robe, and nails are seen drenched / in copious blood, and that lance is also pictured, / which pierced the sacred side with a ruthless blow, / and the watchman remarkable for the winged crest / and the three dice shine, which the fortunate soldiers / had casted over the sacred garments of innocent Christ.³⁵

The way Pico utilizes the gory symbols of Christ's passion to justify prophecy is quite unique. His tactics, in fact, involve the vision of a world in continuous dialogue with God through divine signs.³⁶ In such a world, the alleged appearances of the *Arma Christi* throughout history allow him to build a narrative of misunderstood prophecies, of missed opportunities for the pagan world to acknowledge Christian truth: a narrative that, as often happens in Gianfrancesco Pico's works, mirrors the contemporary world of European courts, where the author perceives Scripture-driven religion as threatened by non-Christian forms of belief, like astrology.³⁷ In such a narrative, only a true form of devotion for the crucified Christ, the cross that fulfilled his destiny, and the blood that washed away original sin, could lead to what Pico perceived as true and sacred prophecy. Like his mentor Savonarola before him, Gianfrancesco Pico feels entitled to this form of precognition, as he turns the poem into a long, encomiastic (and yet unrealized) prophecy of the emperor's great crusade against the Turks.³⁸ Pico

35. Gianfrancesco Pico, *Staurostichon*, lines 208–18: "Hic demissa recens populi mysteria, mirum / Attoniti inspectant homines, ac inania passim / Inscribunt puro delapsa insignia coelo / Sanguinolenta crucis: clari memoranda triumphi / Effigies late spectatur spongia flagra / Visuntur, tunica inconsutilis intima, clauī / Cernuntur multo madefacti sanguine, telum / quod sacram saeuo discreuerat impete costam / Pingitur, excubitor crista spectabilis ales, / Tergeminique micant tali, quos inclyta Christi / Iecerat innocui sortitus tegmina miles."

36. Gianfrancesco Pico, *Staurostichon*, lines 21–23: "Inque uices uarias, diuersa in tempora, signis / Quae captum superant humanae mentis, adegit / Suaue serenata in praecordia uulnus amoris" (And in various places, in different times, with signs / that overcome the understanding of the human mind, / he instilled the sweet wound of love in hearts now made peaceful).

37. See Piana, 78–92.

38. See Gianfrancesco Pico's introductory letter to Maximilian I in Gianfrancesco Pico, *Opera Omnia*, 2:354: "Cuius lectione (si erit ocium) addi animo stimulos optarim, ut Christi memoriam in Occidente minus reuerenter quandoque habitam. In Oriente vero principium desidia iam pene abolitam, renovandam pro viribus et illustradam suscipias, et impii mahometis cultum penitus obliteres" (By the reading of it [the poem *Staurostichon*] (if time will allow), I would hope, encouragement will be given to your soul, so that you undertake, to the best of your abilities, the renovation and illustration of the

depicts the coming together of all Germanic peoples, drenched in the blood of Christ, in an act of collective piety and humble devotion, cleansing themselves from sin and preparing for the necessary sacrifices of holy warfare: "It is now good to shed tears, many cities / ask for forgiveness of sins together with their bishops, / the bridge of river Inn is stricken, its inhabitant walks on / barefoot celebrating a procession: so much could religion do."³⁹ In Pico's vision, therefore, the *Kreuzwunder* becomes a massive act of blood piety, echoing, as we have seen, Savonarola's 1496 prophecy of the red river. The bloody signs of the cross from Savonarola's vision are here marking the subjects of the Holy Roman Emperor in a period of imperial instability, thus enforcing the Savonarolan idea that any government should submit to, and be justified by, divine will. Playing with astrological propaganda and Savonarola's popular prophecies, *Staurostichon* provided the emperor with an alternative reading of the *Kreuzwunder*, and an alternative but sanctioned form of justification for his rule. In a way that implicitly subordinates the astrological determination of the year 1503 to the providential design manifesting itself in the miraculous appearance of the cross in the sky, Gianfrancesco Pico's *Staurostichon* exhorts Emperor Maximilian to align his political decisions to the perceived "real" course of history:

Listen, instead, what signs, detested by sinners, he has recently sent forth. / As soon as the Sun through the oblique band with twelve signs / had counted fifteen times one hundred from the birth / of the Virgin's son, completing the last / of the first three years, mysterious signs started falling down from heaven.⁴⁰

Often in dialogue with medieval hagiographies and their emphasis on stigmata and other miraculous manifestations of the divine on the very bodies of saints,⁴¹ *Staurostichon* constructs the bloodied *Arma Christi* of the

memory of Christ, at one time held less reverently in the West, but in the East now nearly abolished by the idleness of the rulers, and so that you obliterate the cult of the impious Mahomet).

39. Gianfrancesco Pico, *Staurostichon*, lines 263–67: "Iuuat lachrymas effundere, multae / Implorant ueniam scelerum cum patribus urbes / Aeni concutitur pons, illius accola nudis / Incedit pedibus celebrans amburbia: tantum / Religio potuit."

40. Gianfrancesco Pico, *Staurostichon*, lines 179–83.

41. See, for example, Pico's poetic rendition of the stigmata of Saint Francis of Assisi in *Staurostichon*, lines 163–66: "Propterea Assysius nimio calefactus amore / Rettulit effossis flammantia stigmata

Kreuzwunder not only as a set of symbols but as an “actual” supernatural cause of visible phenomena manifesting itself upon the bloody remains of martyrs, like Ignatius of Antiochia. In Pico’s narrative, such divine messages are able to trigger Satan’s wrath in the form of earthquakes and sulfurous exhalations, thus providing a religious explanation to natural cataclysms:

[...] Lions are too afraid to touch the sacred body of the man [Saint Ignatius], / holding back their maw from the innocent blood, / which merciless Trajan’s cruel sword had drained. / Once extracted (for a cruel attendant had taken it out / from the chest), carved on the heart one sees the honoured / name of Jesus, which is the terror of gloomy Tartarus, / the visible banner of the right hand of the Father. [...] Frightened Orcus roared for ascending into heaven / under the various cloaks of both those countless families: / and the Sicilian sent out flames, and that eminent with signs, / glory of the people of Piceno and once of the female / sex; and the Tuscan and the Umbrian also showed / faith, and the banners on display, and even the river Nar / white with sulphur water, the Reate of the ancients.⁴²

This example clearly demonstrates how *Staurostichon* is able to achieve some of its highest lyrical peaks through a succession of gory images. For Gianfrancesco Pico, in fact, the presence of the blood descending from the sky in the *Arma Christi* is as important as the symbols themselves. As *Staurostichon* illustrates, from the author’s perspective, blood, as both symbol and actual bodily fluid, is the overarching theme in the life of Christ. It first materialized in the circumcision imposed upon him—as the Gospel of Luke teaches—on the eighth day according to Judaic Law, and then continued through the Massacre

membris / Franciscus, pauper terris, ditissimus aula / Principis aetherii, perrari signifer aequi” (Therefore Francesco of Assisi, inflamed by excessive love / received the fiery stigmata on his worn-out body, / poor on earth, most affluent in the palace of the ethereal / prince, bearing the mark of the most rare equality).

42. Gianfrancesco Pico, *Staurostichon*, lines 136–42; 169–75: “Sacra uiri nimum formidant membra leones / Tangere, ab innocuo cohibentes ora cruore. / Quem rigidi immitis Traiani exhauserat ensis. / Protinus euulso (nam dirus pectore lictor / Traxerat) inscriptum cordi spectatur IESV / Nomen honoratum, quod tristia Tartara longe / Formidant, superae conspecta insignia dextrae [...] Utrunque innumerae uaria sub ueste cateruae / Conscendere polos fremuit perterritus Orcus: / Nec non et Siculus flammas emisit, et ille / Conspicuus signis Picenae gloria gentis / Olim foeminei sexus; et Tuscus, et Vmber / Monstrauere fidem, et gestata insignia, nec non / Sulphurea Nar albus aqua, priscumque Reate.”

of the Innocents until his Passion: "The infant had barely seen the light of His eighth day / barely had he touched the mold of his given flesh / when his wounded skin experienced bloodstained knives / and escaped the hostile wrath of king Herod."⁴³ The life of the saviour, therefore, is drawn in blood, and his suffering begins with his circumcision. Such an omen, like every other sacred presage, finds its natural realization in the Passion, described a few verses later: a prophecy fulfilled with another ritual shedding of divine blood.

A punishment in just blood is required, tortures / Are demanded, as a spectacle for the savage crowd / They nailed the limbs of the salvific king on the Cross. / Innocent blood is poured from the whole body, / Copiously the notorious stream of water flowed, mixed with blood, / By which the ancient crime from the first origin of the world / Is washed away; the youthful, expiatory offering for original sin. / Certainly stricken down for love of the human race, / Cruel nails, laughter, and harsh whiplashes, / Spitting, slaps, tearing of the beard, and a dire, rough crown / Bristling with thorns he suffered, determined to chase away death / by a death on the Cross.⁴⁴

Alongside the possible "dryness" of other Italian early modern representations, Pico's version of the Passion of Christ seems especially expressive, painted with vivid details and indulging in a description of ruthless and continuous bloodshed with a taste that recalls many northern European cases of blood piety.⁴⁵ It puts even the most extreme iconographic renditions to shame.⁴⁶ *Staurostichon* itself resonates with the uproar of the infernal powers

43. Gianfrancesco Pico, *Staurostichon*, lines 27–30: "Iam uix octauam lucem conspexerat infans, / Iam uix assumptae prima incunabula carnis / Attigerat, cultros pellis cum caesa cruentos / Sensit, et hostiles aufugit principis iras / Herodis."

44. Gianfrancesco Pico, *Staurostichon*, lines 91–102: "Supplicium petitur iusto de sanguine, poenae / Poscuntur, saeuae condunt spectacula plebi / Membra salutiferi transfixo stipite regis. / Funditur innocuus toto de corpore sanguis, / Uberrim celebris mixto fluit unda cruore: / Qua scelus antiquum primaque ab origine mundi / Eluitur, patriae primaeva piacula noxae. / Scilicet humani generis percussus amore / Crudeles clauos, risus, atque aspera flagra, / Sputa, alapas, barbae uulsus, diramque coronam / Sentibus horrentem subiit, mortemque fugare / Morte Crucis uoluit."

45. I am considering especially the case of the Middle English treatise *A Talking of the Loue of God*, and that of the fifteenth-century devotional prayer already considered by Bynum. See Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, 2–3.

46. See, for example, Matthias Grünewald's coeval "The Mocking of Christ" (1503–05).

trying to gain control over the world. In the battle between the darkness of superstition and the light of true faith, waves of blood wash away men's sins as they gush from the wounds of Jesus Christ, described as "the crimson wave of Holy Blood" that carried the once exiled mortals to the formerly inaccessible, and now open, heavens.⁴⁷ In Pico's vision, therefore, the copious pouring of Christ's blood is deeply linked to humanity's salvation, just as the holy cross is. The act of witnessing the blood and wounds of the crucified Christ, moreover, will become a staple in Gianfrancesco Pico's devotion. The bloody depiction of Christ's passion, in fact, returns in the conclusion of his 1513 poem, *De Venere et Cupidine expellendis*, where the author exhorts his readers to focus their imagination on Christian symbols, purging away the malevolent influence of pagan iconography and statuary:⁴⁸

Return [Christ's] love as you look at his hair / filthy with dust, and that forehead crowned / with prickly thorns: with a nod it illuminates the entire Heaven, / with a nod it would have made the Devil tremble in chains. / Look at the body drenched in dark blood, / the wounded side, the outstretched arms and the hands / and feet transfixed by nails; look at the many wounds / with their gushing flow of sacred blood.⁴⁹

47. Gianfrancesco Pico, *Staurostichon*, lines 14–20: "Postquam flammifero praepes descendit ab axe / Summa Dei soboles, summi sapientia patris, / Ut male contractas a primo semine laves / Purpurea elueret sacrati sanguinis unda, / Mortales clauso profugos ut ferret Olympo, / Sacra prophanato diffudit lumine mundo, / Tartareas pellens hominum de corde tenebras" (After he descended swiftly from the fiery heavens above / the mighty offspring of God, the wisdom of the supreme father, / So that he would wash away the deeds wickedly committed by the first seed / With the crimson wave of Holy Blood, / So that he would carry the mortals exiled to the inaccessible Olympus, / With his light he poured out holy things onto the unholy world, / casting the darkness of Tartarus away from the hearts of men).

48. For a more detailed discussion on Gianfrancesco Pico's *De Venere et Cupidine expellendis*, see Piana, 209–82.

49. Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, *Illustrissimi Ac Doctissimi Principis Jo. Francisci Pici Mirandulae ... De Venere & Cupidine Expellendis Carmen ; Item Eiusdem Laurentius & Geminianus Hymni* (Rome: Iacobus Mazochius, 1513), lines 310–17: "Hunc redama aspiciens [*adspiciens*] foedatos puluere crines / Atque coronatam dumis pungentibus illam, / Fronte[m] illam, nutu totum quae illustrat Olympum, / Quaeque catenatum nutu tremefecerit Orcum. / Hunc redama aspiciens [*adspiciens*] foedatos puluere crines / Atque coronatam dumis pungentibus illam, / Fronte[m] illam, nutu totum quae illustrat Olympum, / Quaeque catenatum nutu tremefecerit Orcum. / Aspice [*Adspice*] purpureo madefactum sanguine corpus, / Disiectumque latus, distentaque brachia, clavis / Transfixasque manus, plantasque; sacrique cruoris / Aspice [*Adspice*] multiplices undanti flumine riuos."

For Pico, the blood that covers the suffering Christ acts as a constant reminder of his love for humanity, and of the love that his ultimate sacrifice demands in return. It is because of such blood that—according to Pico—the doors of heaven have been reopened, dispersing the cloud of madness and deceit that suffocated pre-Christian antiquity.⁵⁰

In this article, we have analyzed *Staurostichon*, a poem written by a Renaissance Italian humanist, to demonstrate how blood devotion, even in its most violent forms, was not foreign to the Italian culture of the time. As we have seen, blood was an integral part of the Roman Catholic rite, and it often evolved into extreme forms of devotion and mysticism. Blood was also a central element in the messages of post-Joachimite prophets, like Girolamo Savonarola, and tended to reverberate in the work of their followers, as Gianfrancesco Pico clearly demonstrates. Yet, a poem like *Staurostichon* poses some questions, as it was conceived to be read by a non-Italian, the Habsburg Maximilian I, about a German topic, the *Kreuzwunder* of 1501. Even more importantly, *Staurostichon* had little success in Italy, while it was widely read in German lands.⁵¹ The answer to these three questions, I argue, is rather simple. *Staurostichon* is a notable example of how northern and southern European cultures often informed each other, providing a fruitful exchange that did not follow precise borders. This is especially true for the territories under the Holy Roman Empire. Gianfrancesco Pico, lord of Mirandola, was under imperial orders, and was confirmed by the

50. Gianfrancesco Pico, *Illustrissimi Ac Doctissimi Principis Jo. Francisci Pici Mirandulae*, lines 318–21: “Scilicet haec rerum omnipotens, qui temperat orbem, / Matris Acidaliae flammas, puerumque perosus / Pertulit, eriperet tete ut de faucibus Orci, / Ut secum aeternae sequeris praemia [*gaudia*] palmae” (Certainly the omnipotent, who brings peace to the world, / in spite of the Acidalian mother’s flames and her son, / suffered all this to rescue you from the fangs of Orcus, / so that you would pursue the rewards of eternal glory).

51. As previously stated, the work was printed for the first time by Joannes Knobloch in Strasbourg between 1506 and 1507 as part of the complete edition of Gianfrancesco Pico’s works. However, the text had so much success that it was reissued as a standalone publication several times during the sixteenth century. It was published in a separate edition with a commentary by Jacob Spiegel in 1512, and a similar edition was printed in Tübingen by Thomas Anshelm in the same year; 1513 marks an edition published by Albert Pafraet in Deventer, Netherlands, and the work was printed once again in Lipsia by Valentin Schuman in 1517. See Leonardo Quaquarelli and Zita Zanardi, *Pichiana: bibliografia delle edizioni e degli studi* (Florence: Olschki, 2005), 289–90. A later edition to the poem with an erudite introduction by Burkhard Gotthelf Struve and a transcription of Gianfrancesco Pico’s letter to Emperor Maximilian I can be found in Marquard Freher, Burkhard Gotthelf Struve, and Johann Reinhold Dulssecker, *Rerum Germanicarum scriptores* [...] (Strasbourg: Johannes Reinholdus Dulsseckerus, 1717), 493–506.

emperor himself as rightful ruler of his territories in 1502. This can be said about most Italian nobles of imperial lands. On the other hand, many non-Italian servants of the Holy Roman Empire had ties with northern Italy and Rome. Even more northern European scholars went to Bologna or Padua to pursue their advanced education.

In the case of pre-Reformation Italian and German lands, therefore, where can we draw a line when it comes to forms of religious devotion? If a line must be drawn, I argue, it must be blurred. It is certainly fair to argue that a certain Germanic influence could have been cast upon Gianfrancesco Pico during his two visits to the emperor. It is also fair to underline that his writings were published in twenty-three separate editions in northern Europe between 1504 and 1550, while they enjoyed only fifteen editions in Italy (mostly produced by the author's printing house in Mirandola): something that can be seen as indicative of the affinity between Pico's work and sixteenth-century German thought.⁵² All these elements, however, should draw even more attention to *Staurostichon* and Pico's attitude toward blood devotion. His interpretation of the *Kreuzwunder*, although probably informed by the symbolic significance that the event had in German lands, did not necessarily have to draw its symbolic sources exclusively from a German imaginary. In fact, it finds one of its most reliable sources in Savonarola's sermons. As we have seen, Savonarola's prophetic imagination has deep roots within the Italian religious traditions of the Middle Ages and shows how blood devotion was widespread not only in Italy but throughout the fifteenth century as well. The same can be said about Pico's poem.

In its 421 verses, *Staurostichon* builds a visionary universe depicting the red rain of 1501 as a miraculous flood of religious symbols, capable of uniting people under a deep desire for Christianity and blood devotion. Its visionary intensity, apt to debunk astrological practices and celebrate divine prophecy, enticed the German-speaking world that would soon embrace the Reformation and, in certain cases, the Calvinist idea of predestination. Yet, the poem is the product of an Italian mind, raised in a flow of narratives belonging to medieval and Renaissance Italian culture: a mind that was influenced by some of the most brilliant and influential protagonists of the Florentine Renaissance; a mind that, in hindsight, can provide further depth and complexity to many of the current historiographical narratives of early modern Europe.

52. See Schmitt, 203–08. See also Rowan and Williams, 293.