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See table of contents

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Article abstract

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Savonarola's Middlemen: The Buonomini di San Martino in the Florentine Religious Revival of the 1490s

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In his program for reforming Florence Dominican friar Girolamo Savonarola not only staged his famous "Bonfires of the Vanities," but also directed his congregations to increase their alms giving, specifically for the "shamefaced poor," respectable families in need but ashamed to beg. Not allowed by his order to administer such funds directly, Savonarola instructed that they be deposited with the Buonomini di San Martino, a confraternity specifically devoted to relieving the "shamefaced poor." With these responsible middlemen in place, Savonarola would thus avoid any charges of financial impropriety. The alms collectors during Carnival seasons 1496 to 1498 were Savonarola's fanciulli*, youths reformed of their Carnival hijinks. The ceremonial depositing of alms at the oratory in Piazza San Martino would achieve a secondary goal for Savonarola, the sanctification of a profane performance space, the piazza being a prime venue for "bench singers" and other popular entertainers.*

Dans son programme de réforme de Florence, le frère dominicain Jérôme Savonarole a non seulement organisé son célèbre « bûcher des vanités », mais il a également enjoint les fidèles réunis autour de lui à augmenter leurs aumônes, en particulier pour les « pauvres honteux », de respectables familles réduites à la misère mais ayant honte de mendier. N'étant pas autorisé par son ordre à administrer directement ces fonds, Savonarole ordonna qu'ils soient déposés chez les Buonomini di San Martino, une confrérie spécifiquement vouée au secours des « pauvres honteux ». Ces intermédiaires en place, Savonarole éviterait ainsi toute accusation de malversations financières. Les collecteurs d'aumônes durant les périodes de carnaval de 1496 à 1498 étaient les fanciulli *de Savonarole, des jeunes hommes repentis de leurs frasques de carnaval. Le dépôt cérémoniel des aumônes à l'oratoire de la Piazza San Martino permettrait à Savonarole d'atteindre un objectif secondaire, la sanctification d'un espace de représentation profane, la Piazza étant un lieu privilégié pour les chanteurs de moindre talent et autres artistes populaires.*

The anonymous author of *La vita del beato Ieronimo Savonarola*, known as Pseudo-Burlamacchi, tells an interesting tale of the charismatic preacher Girolamo Savonarola of Ferrara and his patron, Lorenzo de' Medici. When he was elected prior of San Marco by his fellow Dominicans in July 1491, Savonarola conspicuously failed to pay his devoirs to the great patrons of his convent, the Medici family. The ailing Lorenzo, who had been instrumental in bringing the friar to Florence in the first place, rather than taking umbrage

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began what today we would call a "charm offensive." He attended Mass at San Marco and would even linger in the convent garden afterwards, but no special greetings were forthcoming from the new prior. The rich gifts that Lorenzo sent to the convent were repeatedly returned. Finally, Lorenzo instructed his chancellor, Piero da Bibbiena, to deposit, anonymously, 300 florins in gold coins (about USD$4,500, if this is not an exaggeration) in the public alms box reserved for the regular maintenance of the convent. When informed of this miraculous windfall, Savonarola immediately saw it as another of Lorenzo's ploys and ordered that the florins be separated out from the normal run of copper and the odd silver coins and be taken to the Buonomini di San Martino, the "Good Men" of St. Martin's.[1] This was a select brotherhood devoted to the *poveri vergognosi*, the "shamefaced poor"—those citizens (*cittadini*), guild artisans, bourgeoisie, and the occasional patrician families who had fallen on hard times but were ashamed to beg. Savonarola thus avoided being personally indebted to Lorenzo. As Bibbiena would report back, "Questa golpe ha pelata la coda" (literally, "this fox has a shaved tail," with a sense of Savonarola being wilier than expected).

Savonarola probably knew that Lorenzo, active in almost every Florentine cultural and religious institution, had served as one of the procurators of the Buonomini in the 1480s. Lorenzo, in fact, might not have minded the misdirection of his funds.[2] Modern biographers Roberto Ridolfi and Donald Weinstein treat the anecdote with more circumspection,[3] but whatever its historical accuracy, it serves to characterize the often ambivalent relationship between the friar and his illustrious patron. And this would not be the last time that the prior would funnel funds in the direction of San Martino. In the coming years of the reformer's campaign to transform Florence into a New Jerusalem, the Buonomini would become his preferred middlemen.

The Church of St. Martin of Tours was founded in 986 in the very heart of Florence, midway between the Duomo and the Palazzo Vecchio. It was Dante's parish church, but by the mid-fifteenth century it was no longer in use and was finally razed in 1478. Part of its fabric, however, was transformed into the oratory and offices of a brotherhood founded in 1442 by the saintly prior of San Marco, Antonino Pierozzi, who would become archbishop of Florence in

1. Pseudo-Burlamacchi, *La vita*, ed. Ginori Conti, 25–26.

2. Hughes-Johnson, "Early Medici Patronage."

3. Ridolfi, *Vita*, 1:68; Weinstein *Savonarola*, 82–83.

1446 and be canonized in 1523. The confraternity, a low-profile group of twelve upright citizens with their six "helpers," working discretely, was specifically dedicated to the relief of the *poveri vergognosi*.[4] Blessed by then Florentine resident Pope Eugenius IV, the Buonomini were financially backed by Cosimo de' Medici, whose own rise to power had contributed to the new economic environment that resulted in some of these same "shamefaced poor." Cosimo would remain dedicated to this charitable foundation throughout his life.

On All Saints' Day, 1494, Savonarola preached to a vast crowd in the Duomo of Santa Maria del Fiore:

> Oh merchants, leave your usuries, return your ill-gotten gains and other people's goods, or else you will lose everything. Oh you who have extra things, give them to the poor. For they are not yours. Bring them to the company of Saint Martin so that they might distribute them to the shamefaced poor who often die of hunger while you have so much extra. Give them, I say, to the Good Men of St Martin, bring them there to them, not to me, nor to my friars, I tell you, for it is not our task to distribute alms to the poor. You, poor people, go to them so that they might distribute the city's alms and so that you might be assisted.[5]
>
> (O mercatanti, lasciate le vostre usure, restituite el mal tolto e la roba d'altri, altrimente voi perderete ogni cosa. O voi che avete del superfluo, datelo a'poveri, che' non è vostro, portatelo alla Compagnia di San Martino, acciò che lo distribuischino alle povere persone vergognose, che molte volte muoiono della fame, ed a voi avanza molto del superfluo, datelo, dico, a quelli Buoni Uomini di San Martino, portatelo là a loro, non dico a me, nè alli miei frati, perché non tocca a noi a distribuire le elemosine a' poveretti. Voi, poveretti, andate a loro che distribuiscano le elemosine della città e sarete sovvenuti.)[6]

In upbraiding the matrons of Florence the following day (All Souls' Day), he again referred to the Buonomini as the preferred institution to receive one's alms, one's "superfluity," since the Good Men render back to the community

4. Bargellini, *I Buonomini*; Kent, "Buonomini"; Hughes-Johnson, "*Poveri Vergognosi*."

5. Savonarola, *Guide to Righteous Living*, trans. Eisenbichler, 94–95.

6. Savonarola, *Prediche italiane*, ed. Cognazzo, 1:16–17.

the totality of donations received and sustain so many who cannot bear the weight of their poverty (dallo a' poveri di San Martino, chè tutto ritorna nella comunità tua e ne' poveri di quella che mi è detto che hanno alimentare tanti, che non possono più sopportare tanto peso. Così voi, madri mie date via a' poveri tante vostre cose che avete superflue).[7] Almsgiving was directly linked to apocalyptic warnings. Savonarola begged his *madri mie* to recall how often he had warned them that "a great war, a great famine, a great pestilence" would force them to leave their "pomp and vanity" if they did not abandon them through love (sapete che più volte io v'ho detto che una gran guerra, una gran fame, una gran pestilenzia vi farà lasciare le vostre pompe e le vostre vanità per forza se non le lasciate per amore)[8]—i.e., through almsgiving.

In his fourth sermon on the Books of Ruth and Micah, delivered in August 1496, Savonarola felt the need to remind the now grumbling poor how much indeed he had done for them: "I exhorted everyone to work and staged processions, and I found alms for you—just ask those men of San Martino, they know it well" (Io ho esortato ognuno a lavorare, ed ho fatto fare processioni, e trovare limosine per te: domanda pure quelli di San Martino, ché lo sanno).[9]

It was an essential part of Savonarola's program not only to condemn the abuses of the Church, Florentine political corruption, economic disparity, and rampant hedonism, but also to repeatedly call upon his congregations to repent and do penance in the form of truly heroic almsgiving as an active sign of one's commitment to his program. As Lauro Martines notes, this created no small amount of resentment among the Franciscan and Augustinian friars and the local parish clergy who would normally have received such alms.[10] But as Savonarola indicates above, San Marco was not prepared for, or even inclined to deal with, the great influx of riches that would soon result from the prior's inspired preaching. Administering these funds would have been a major distraction from the transformative work of reform. So who better to perform this onerous task than the Buonomini? They were founded by Savonarola's saintly predecessor Antonino (whose terracotta bust Savonarola had restored

7. Savonarola, *Prediche italiane*, 1:36.

8. Savonarola, *Prediche italiane*, 1:36.

9. My translation; Savonarola, *Scelta di prediche*, ed. Villari and Casanova, 258.

10. Martines, *Fire in the City*, 114–15.

to the oratory) and had entrusted their spiritual direction to the friars of San Marco. Moreover, they were eminently suited for the work of distribution.[11]

By their own rule, the Buonomini were not allowed to accumulate capital but were required to distribute funds immediately to the poor. They were also particularly favoured by the Signoria. At the end of the Quattrocento, the Buonomini, according to Richard Trexler, were the "most fostered eleemosynary body in Florence," receiving, for example, in 1492, the secret funds from those making penitential restitution to the Commune for their frauds or usury, and again, in 1496, the confiscations from the office dealing with "rebels" as well as any profits coming from the Monte di Pietà, a low-interest pawnshop operation newly established in Florence.[12] Several of the procurators and "helpers" of the confraternity, moreover, were already committed *Piagnoni* (Wailers), as the followers of Savonarola were called after the nickname of a bell in San Marco.[13] "Wailers" began as a pejorative term but was soon embraced by the friar's people as expressive of their intense devotion. In the years of Savonarola's ascendency, the Buonomini di San Martino would reach the high point of their economic power. Amleto Spicciani has charted an extraordinary spike in Buonomini income for 1495.[14] The confraternity would have had to be working overtime.

As the anecdote of Lorenzo and the 300 florins makes clear, Savonarola was very careful to insulate himself and San Marco from any hint of financial misappropriation or impropriety, strictly interpreting the Dominicans' vow of poverty. It was a major concern. In a sermon of May 1496, upon his return to the pulpit, Savonarola would dismiss the latest slander against him: "They say we've carried off a lot of money."[15] The select group of twelve "apostles" at San Martino would thus guarantee the Dominicans' financial integrity. The discretion of the Buonomini could be counted on, their extensive and meticulous records demonstrating that they were experts in evaluating need and distributing largesse equitably and efficiently. Their many charitable activities were proudly portrayed in the oratory's frescoes executed by Domenico Ghirlandaio's studio in c. 1487 and included (1) distributing bread and wine, a weekly activity; (2) distributing clothes for the needy; (3) helping a woman who had recently

11. Sebregondi, *La Congregazione*, 99.

12. Trexler, *Dependence*, 95.

13. Polizzotto, *Elect Nation*, 32.

14. Spicciani, "Aspetti finanziari," 329.

15. Quoted in Weinstein, *Savonarola*, 196.

given birth; (4) ransoming a debtor from the Stinche Prison; (5) paying for the lodging of a young pilgrim couple; (6) paying for the burial of a deceased person; (7) making an inventory of a family's possessions to ascertain their level of need; and (8) bestowing a dowry on a young woman.

These charitable works targeted a very specific segment of the poor: not the vagrants and mendicants but rather fellow citizens who needed relief to maintain something of their former standing in the polis. It was essentially a socially conservative strategy.[16] Savonarola's "poor" were not the lowest of the low, the severely marginalized or the potentially dangerous outcasts. The Ciompi Revolt of the previous century—a rebellion of lowly, disenfranchised labourers in the wool trade—was still very much a part of Florentine consciousness. Savonarola's advocation of active discrimination in the process of almsgiving, through the offices of the Buonomini, was only following the teachings of his saintly predecessor, Antonino, as outlined in the *Summa Theologica Moralis* (1458–59), where due consideration of the merits of the recipient was called for, it being actually a sin to give to the unworthy. The Buonomini, founded by the archbishop, would likely be conversant with if not actually employing his elaborate system of nine levels of alms-worthiness.[17] Savonarola would indeed argue for a broader enfranchisement of the *popolo minuto* (lower classes), but, like the great reformer of the next generation, Luther, who would call for complete suppression of the 1525 Peasant's Revolt (*Bauernkrieg*), Savonarola was not interested in turning society upside down. As Weinstein put it, "He was preaching the Apocalypse, not social revolution."[18] The Church and the polis were to be reformed, present society sanctified. Once Lorenzo's incompetent heir, Piero *il Fatuo* (the Fatuous), had been driven out of Florence and the Republic given a new lease on life in November 1494, it was time to overhaul not only the government but the spiritual life of the city as well. Renewed devotion and true penitence, signalled by conspicuous almsgiving, were to be the means.

The diarist Luca Landucci, an early follower of Savonarola, chronicles the expansion of the preacher's almsgiving initiative. In early Advent of 1494, he writes:

16. Trexler, *Dependence*.

17. Henderson, *Piety and Charity*, 356–58.

18. Weinstein, *Savonarola*, 78.

> 6th December (Saturday). Fra Girolamo preached, and ordered that alms should be given for the *Poveri Vergognosi* in four churches: *Santa Maria del Fiore*, *Santa Maria Novella*, *Santa Croce*, and *Santo Spirito*; which were collected on the following day, Sunday. And so much was given that it was impossible to estimate it: gold and silver, woolen and linen materials, silks, and pearls and other things: everyone contributed so largely out of love and charity.[19]
>
> (E a di 6 detto, sabado, predicò frate Girolamo e ordino una limosina per poveri vegogniosi, la quale s'ordino in 4 Chiese: in Santa Maria del Fiore, in Santa Maria Novella, in Santa Croce e in Santo Spirito; la quale si dètte el dì seguente, la domenica. E fu sì grande da non poterla stimare, d'oro e d'ariento, panni lani e lini, drappi e perle e altro: ogniuno porgieva con tado amore e carità.)[20]

On Sunday, Savonarola preached again in the Duomo and called for a procession of thanksgiving for the following day, where "more offerings were given for the *Poveri Vergognosi* without stint. It was a marvelous procession, of such a number of men and women of high estate and carried out with perfect obedience to the *Frate*. […] The alms given were not less than on the previous day. I did not hear the exact amount, but it must have been thousands of florins."[21] Savonarola was enlisting the principal churches of each of Florence's four quarters, but only as drop-off points for eventual transfer to San Martino. Landucci does not mention it, but the end point of this procession was most probably the headquarters of the Buonomini. Savonarola's alms campaign during the penitential season of Advent was now assuming the character of a full public spectacle.

But the upheaval that toppled the Medici and greatly increased Savonarola's political influence in the city also coincided with a severe economic crisis. In reaction to the emergency "Loan of 1495" (*bazello*) of 100,000 florins called for by the Commune, Landucci records: "The people were so much dismayed, that almost everyone stopped working, and gave way to discontent. Everyone

19. Landucci, *Florentine Diary*, trans. Rosen Jervis, 74.

20. Landucci, *Diario fiorentino*, ed. Badia, 90.

21. Landucci, *Florentine Diary*, 75.

said, 'This thing cannot be; the poor who live by their labor will die of hunger, and will be obliged to apply for the alms of San Martino.'"[22] Savonarola's alms campaign, appealing to the upper levels of society, addressed a very real crisis, as Florence, already suffering from famine and outbreaks of plague, attempted to buy off the invasion of the French under Charles VIII. For the lower orders, Savonarola's middlemen were the ones to look to for relief. In June of 1495, the miracle-working Madonna of Impruneta was brought to Florence to counteract the threat of another costly visit by Charles in retreat from his briefly conquered Naples. As the "entire populace, male and female, poor and rich, noble and humble, followed the procession," [23] Savonarola took advantage of the opportunity and arranged for alms tables to be set up along the six-mile route from Impruneta to Florence, with half the collection going to the Buonomini di San Martino. Piero di Marco Parenti estimated that around 2,000 ducats were collected during the procession.[24]

The confraternity was directly involved in the most spectacular events of Savonarola's Florentine crusade. From 1496 until his downfall in 1498, the friar concentrated particularly on reforming—indeed, transforming—the elaborate and much-loved Florentine festival of *Carnevale*. The pre-Lenten festival had spawned numerous revels, parades, masquerades, and its own genre of wittily obscene songs, the *canti carnascialeschi*, of which Lorenzo de' Medici was an enthusiastic composer and performer.[25] Savonarola, however, would transform Carnival from a "pagan" bacchanal into a Christian extravaganza, highlighted by the famous "Bonfires of the Vanities" of 1497 and 1498, where luxury items, cosmetics, jewellery, masks and wigs, lutes and other musical instruments, chessboards, playing cards and dice, lascivious literature, and "pagan" art works were all committed to the flames.[26] Bonfires of this sort were not invented by Savonarola. Bernardino da Siena had introduced the ritual to Florence in 1422, and Bernardino da Feltre staged one in 1483, but these were relatively small-scale affairs taking place in front of churches, not the grand city-wide spectacles organized by Savonarola for the Piazza della Signoria.[27]

22. Landucci, *Florentine Diary*, 80–81.

23. Parenti, quoted in Weinstein, *Savonarola*, 161.

24. Parenti, *Storia Fiorentina*, ed. Matucci, 231.

25. Ciappelli, "Il brucuamenti."

26. Ciappelli, "Il brucuamenti"; "Il carnevale."

27. Weinstein *Savonarola*, 218; Ciappelli, "Il carnevale."

But this increased level of spectacle was only the reverse image, so to speak, of the larger alms-gathering campaign, perhaps more show than substance. As we saw, Landucci had mentioned that woolens, linens, silks, and even pearls had previously been offered as alms. Items with an immediate cash value or of immediate use to the *poveri vergognosi* were as likely to wind up in collection baskets as in the notorious bonfires. One sacrificed one's "vanities" not as a substitute for but as a supplement to one's significant almsgiving.

The most conspicuous of the solicitors of these alms for the *poveri vergognosi* during the Carnival seasons of 1496–98 were Savonarola's *fanciulli*, young boys who had been reformed of their Carnival hijinks—such as stone-throwing, erecting barriers in the streets, and building bonfire structures, the *cappannucci* (little huts)—and were now participating in impressive religious processions throughout the city. If the present generation could not be purged of its oppositional, indifferent, or lukewarm individuals (the *tiepidi*), these militarized youths would rightly inherit Savonarola's New Jerusalem. The ages of these *fanciulli* can be gauged from the records of the prominent youth fraternity of the Archangel Raphael, where membership was open to those between the ages of twelve and twenty, with those aged nine to eleven as possible trainees.[28] The *fanciulli* often patrolled the Florentine streets as rather invasive "vice squads," but, with their angelic faces and youthful voices raised in song, they also greatly enhanced the friar's holy spectacles and inspired enthusiastic piety in a surprisingly large portion of the population. These massive processions prominently displayed the previously collected alms and were also the occasion for further solicitation. The Milanese ambassador Paolo de Somenzi was an eyewitness to Carnival 1496. In a letter to his lord, Duke Ludovico Sforza, dated 16 February, he disdainfully reported the following:

> For about the past twenty days this friar has exhorted the whole populace to try to get their children to make altars in the streets […] and then beg for alms for the embarrassed poor; for this reason, on virtually every corner of the streets, there was an altar where a crowd of children hung about with basins in hand, asking for *denarii* for the embarrassed poor. They were so importunate that it was difficult to pass down the street unless one gave them some coins. […] They held long sticks in their hands so that one could not pass without first paying something. By resorting

28. Eisenbichler, *Boys of the Archangel Raphael*, 117–18.

> to such devices, they collected about three hundred ducats, and then today this friar has had a procession of these children, who numbered about ten thousand, and most of them have not attained fourteen years of age; of six- to nine-year olds there were some four thousand. First they had a Mass said in the main church [the Duomo] with great solemnity, and then these children, separated by quarters, with trumpets before them and crying out "Long live Christ," went in procession to the Nuntiata and many other churches, and finally to San Martino to hand over the money, that is, to dispense it to the embarrassed poor. Such has been the feast celebrated today in Florence, which all the people attended to watch.[29]

Somenzi's numbers are perhaps exaggerated (Florence at this time had a total population of around 60,000), but this was nonetheless a formidable display of youth power. Notice how the traditional extortion-action of the carnival barriers has been "sanctified" into a holy shakedown by means of the long sticks, just as the conical structures of the neighborhood bonfires, the *cappannucci*, would be consolidated into one great *cappannuccio* for the Bonfires of the Vanities the following years. During this same Carnival, Piero di Marco Parenti mentions little altars for gathering alms for the *poveri vergognosi* appearing on almost every street corner—*altaruzzi*, he somewhat dismissively calls them—complete with the movement's little red crosses and other sacred images: "On every street corner one could see tiny altars with crucifixes and other figures where the youth begged alms to distribute to the shamefaced poor" (in su ogni canto delle strade si vedeano altaruzzi con crocifissi e altre figure, dove,' fanciulli accattavano per distribuirsi poi a' poveri vergognosi).[30]

Savonarola would continue throughout the year to exhort the Commune to redirect festival budgets dedicated to Carnival, Calendimaggio, San Giovanni (24 June), or other major feast days to the *poveri vergognosi* via San Martino. The saints would be more pleased with this, he preached, than with *palio* horse races, Catherine-wheel fireworks (*girandola*), or processions of giants and sprites (*giganti, spiritelli*) in their honour.[31] In the peroration of his sermon for San Giovanni 1495 he would instance the proverb, *Fatta la festa, gabbato lo Santo*

29. Quoted in Savonarola, *Selected Writings*, ed. and trans. Borelli and Pastore Passaro, 211.

30. My translation; Parenti, *Storia Fiorentina*, 311.

31. Trexler, *Dependence*, 95–96; Savonarola, *Prediche italiane*, 2:260, 290, 310.

(The feast day over, the saint's forgotten), meaning that secular entertainment elements inevitably detracted from the dulia owed to the saints.[32]

Pseudo-Burlamacchi's *La vita del del beato Ieronimo Savonarola* describes the Carnival of the following year on 7 February 1497:

> After the Savior [an image of the Infant Jesus by Donatello, accompanied by child choristers], the guardians (*custodi*) with their officers and almoners (*ufficiali et elimosinieri*) carried silver vessels to receive alms for the poor of St. Martin, besides those which they collected on such days and begged on festival days throughout the year. […] Afterward they offered a great quantity of money to the officers (*ufficiali*) of St. Martin to subvent the embarrassed poor, and once the prayers and lauds were finished they came to the Piazza della Signoria.[33]

The guardians, officers, and almoners first mentioned were not the Buonomini but Savonarola's own functionaries, meticulously organized by his right-hand man, Fra Domenico da Pescia, who would eventually join him at the stake. The older boys among the *fanciulli* and other laymen served as various types of "magistrates"—the peacemakers (*paciali*), organizers (*ordinatori*), correctors (*correcttori*), and purifiers (*lustrelatori*)—who in turn selected the almoners who "would carry basins to receive alms for the benefit of the embarrassed poor."[34] Again, the emphasis is on the amazing display of alms with further donations accepted en route. In the enthusiasm of the moment, how could one refrain from adding one's silver to the basins? The usual dynamic was reversed, largesse flowing into rather than out from the Carnival parade. The "prayers and lauds," the essential religious part of the event, were evidently concluded at San Martino. The nearby Piazza della Signoria would then be the site of the Bonfires of the Vanities to follow.

The transfer of funds to the Buonomini was thus a significant part of the overall spectacle, and this produced an added side benefit for Savonarola. The little Piazza San Martino had long been a favorite venue for "bench singers" (*cantimpanche*) and other popular entertainers. Some were highly

32. Savonarola, *Prediche italiane*, 2:336.

33. Savonarola, *Selected Writings*, 258.

34. Savonarola, *Selected Writings*, 216.

accomplished musician-poets, the *canterini*, and others low-level buskers.[35] The piazza was also a notorious loitering place for drunkards and the neighborhood pundits, the *paccaccieri*, as well as a stage for practical jokes or *beffe*, such as one finds in Anton Francesco Grazzini's *Story of Doctor Manente* of 1549. The elaborate trick to make the doctor and his family believe he has died depends upon his habitually passing out drunk on "the benches outside those shops at San Martino" and believing that he has been kidnapped by devils.[36] As the city's most famous performance space, the piazza in front of San Martino would no doubt have been a venue as well for the many squibs and satires (*burle e baie*) directed against Savonarola and his *Piagnoni* in the final months of the movement.[37] By cramming a part of his ecstatic processions into the small squares in front of and behind the oratory for a final ceremony of transference to the Buonomini, silver vessels brimming with offerings, Savonarola was also specially sanctifying a profane public space. Just as the festival *time*, Carnival, was being redeemed, so too was an acknowledged "pagan" *space*, the Piazza San Martino, being reclaimed. The modest, newly furbished chapel of the Buonomini would become another portal to Savonarola's New Jerusalem. But, alas, it was not to be, as his many enemies, from the Borgia pope to the local clergy and councillors, soon closed in on him. As Savonarola's execution pyre replaced the Bonfires of the Vanities, the heady years of abundant public alms collecting came to an end.

For a brief period—from 1498, the year of Savonarola's execution, until 1502—the Buonomini di San Martino fell under the direct control of the Commune because of their previously too close association with the friar, and San Marco's spiritual direction of the confraternity was officially revoked.[38] But when the Buonomini were seen to be seriously in decline, they were restored to the full autonomy they had enjoyed since their founding. Though they continued to be influenced by the *Piagnoni*, Savonarola's diehard followers, against Medicean interests for some decades thereafter, the confraternity safely outlasted the Savonarolan moment.[39] And they are still in operation today,

35. Kent, *Cosimo de' Medici*, ch. 5; Atkinson, *Noisy Renaissance*, 158–60; Wilson, "Dominion of the Ear."

36. Grazzini, *Le cene*, ed. Bàrberi Squarotti, 361.

37. Martines, *Fire in the City*, 157–58.

38. Dall'Aglio, *Savonarola and Savonarolism*, 70.

39. Polizzotto, *Elect Nation*, 221–24.

only a hundred yards from the site of Savonarola's execution in the Piazza della Signoria. The brotherhood still follows, for the most part, its original mandate of 1442, having celebrated nearly 600 years of continuous service to the city of Florence, an achievement the millennial prophet Savonarola would have blessed.

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