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Domestic Devotions in Early Modern Italy

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Situer conciliarisme dans la pensée espagnole de la première modernité

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ce que montre l'inscription des plaidoyers dans les guerres de religion ou dans l'actualité politique, au point de faire de la publication d'un plaidoyer, voire de sa republication pour Pasquier, un document d'« égo-histoire » (239). C'est ensuite le lien entre cet « âge des orateurs » (56, selon E. Doudet) et l'essor du français comme langue juridique qui mérite d'être souligné : dans la continuité de l'édit de Villers-Cotterêts, le succès des plaidoyers (dont certains, comme ceux de Marion ou d'Expilly, sont souvent réédités) assure et confirme l'usage du français comme la langue de la loi et des débats nationaux. Enfin, ce n'est pas uniquement à un niveau linguistique, mais également à un niveau littéraire que les plaidoyers attestent une réussite certaine, relevant d'une maîtrise orale de l'éloquence comme celle de la récriture, au moment de la publication des plaidoyers assemblés en recueil. Comme Bruno Méniel l'affirme (296), « l'avocat fait œuvre d'écrivain dans la mesure où sa réflexion sur le droit est constamment nourrie d'une méditation critique sur le langage ».

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Corry, Maya, Marco Faini, and Alessia Meneghin, eds.
Domestic Devotions in Early Modern Italy.
Intersections 59.1. Leiden: Brill, 2019. Pp. xxxv, 442 + 104 ill. ISBN 978-90-04-34256-9 (hardcover) €164.

What does it mean to be Christian in early modern Italy? For many years, contemporary historiography has been pondering the complexity of Christian belief in Italian lands before and after Trent. Recently, historians like Kocku von Stuckrad and Wouter J. Hanegraaff have contributed to the rethinking of European religious history as intersected by a series of alternatives or even as characterized by a constant situation of pluralism, in contrast to a traditional vision that sees European religious identity as evenly Christian and directed towards a gradual process of secularization. This approach is especially poignant in the outstanding array of traditions characterizing early modern domestic devotion. The volume edited by Maya Corry, Marco Faini, and Alessia Meneghin explores the complex and manifold context of private religious beliefs, and the way faith and spirituality were in dialogue between the (often,

but not always) sanctioned rituals of the church and the more intimate context of the homestead.

In their introduction, the editors delineate how the early modern home in Italian lands was the place where pious sociability intermingled with personal exercises of faith and popular forms of belief. From prayers to amulets, from orthodox religious images to heretical cults, all these elements enriched the religious experience of families and households. Their selection of essays is admirable, as it provides a broad perspective on a topic that, considering its complexity, cannot be fully enclosed in a single book. The introduction also successfully outlines a number of questions on materiality, social disparity, and religious pluralism.

Section 1, "The Unbounded Nature of Domestic Space," is dedicated to the intricate connection between the public and private spheres of domestic devotion. Iain Fenlon's contribution explores the use of devotional music in the household as well as in public ritual, tracing a narrative of *laude*, hymns, and *madrigali* resonating in the dwellings of many northern Italian families. Remi Chiu's essay similarly demonstrates how sound linked domestic and communal life in Carlo Borromeo's Milan, taking the processions organized by the archbishop in response to the plague outbreak of 1576–78 as his case study. On a similar subject, Jane Garnett and Gervase Rosser discuss Ligurian cases of ex-voto as essential witnesses to the relationship between individual religious experience and the sharing of these experiences in the communal narrative and public memory of certain religious figures. Valeria Viola's work concentrates on the private *oratori* of Tridentine Palermo as places where private and public devotion collide and where religious functions primarily meant for the close family often hosted a much larger audience that included several levels of society.

Section 2, "Domesticating the Divine," investigates the way domestic devotion encompassed many aspects of family life, bringing religious significance to many everyday events happening in the household. On this subject, Margaret A. Morse's essay encompasses the world of religious and lay paintings in the household, claiming convincingly how the domestic interior as a devotional environment was able to include non-religious portraiture in the sacred space of private devotion, putting it in dialogue with the assorted material culture of home piety. Zuzanna Sarnecka's inquiry on the use of Nativity scenes in the early modern Italian household provides a fascinating contribution

to the study of the Italian tradition of the *presepi*, tracing a convincing path between Pope Nicholas IV's *presepio* and the spreading of Nativity scenes, first in the churches, then—in miniature form—in family homes. Elisa Novi Chavarria's essay, on the other hand, analyzes the relationship between Isabella Della Rovere, princess of Bisignano, and her well-known painting of "living saint" Geremia da Valacchia, unveiling an intricate network of aristocratic friendships based on cultural connections and the exchange of religious objects linked to the figure of the Capuchin monk.

Section 3, "The Materiality of Devotion," deserves special attention. Material objects are undeniably a fundamental vessel for the understanding of the culture encircling the masses. Even more importantly, the centrality of material and visual culture to early modern forms of Catholicism—and especially folk Catholicism—is unavoidable. Michael J. Brody's study provides an overview of religious themes and examples of religious devotion related to the sixteenth-century *piatti da pompa*, arguing that such objects often had the same function as devotional paintings and that their cheap production costs made them more affordable for low-income households. Michele Bacci's study shows how, despite the quick evolution of naturalism in the visual arts in the late medieval and early modern period, Byzantine-style icons maintained a pivotal role in domestic devotion, up to the point of becoming an independent style practised and personalized by many Italian artists and workshops. The contributions of Irene Galandra Cooper and Katherine M. Tycz further develop the volume's analysis of materiality and domestic devotion in a remarkable fashion. Cooper's essay concentrates on the fascinating tradition of the *agnus dei*, sanctioned pieces of candle wax distributed by the church. Posited unequivocally between the realm of Christian devotion and practical magic, the *agnus dei* were often worn as talismans of protection and treasured as portentous objects. On a similar subject, Tycz's essay considers the material religious culture that surrounded early modern women. Concentrating on items like girdles, amulets, and *brevi* (holy words and prayers kept in pouches to be worn), Tycz provides the reader with the opportunity of witnessing the complexity of popular religious devotion in the early modern period.

The contributors to the fourth section, "Prayer and Meditation," deal with devotional texts and works of art regulating the everyday religious life of early modern Italian families. Sabrina Corbellini's work delves into the influential handbooks written by the clergy to guide the laity in their private

devotional practices. Maya Corry turns her attention to the vast production of cheap devotional paintings depicting the infancy of Christ. Through such iconography, concerned parents aimed to provide early spiritual education to their children. Erminia Ardissino focuses her research on the production of books dedicated to the rosary, from Alberto da Castello's 1522 *Rosario della gloriosa Vergine Maria* to Francesca Turini Bufalini's 1595 *Rime spirituali sopra i misterii del santissimo Rosario*, and beyond.

The last section, "Conflict and Control," hosts three final essays. Giorgio Caravale's inquiry underlines how the mid- to late-sixteenth-century Inquisition saw mysticism and superstition as possible threats to church orthodoxy and how Rome, given the impossibility of controlling every form of private devotion, resorted to a compromise: intolerance towards any form of deviance in public ritual; tolerance towards private forms of piety. Caravale's work dovetails with Stefano Dall'Aglio's essay on the underground devotion to the Dominican preacher Girolamo Savonarola. The cult to the prophet of Florence, active in Tuscany and beyond, suggests, on the one hand, the undying success of Savonarola's ideas throughout the sixteenth century, and, on the other, the progressive tolerance of the Dominican order towards forms of devotion that did not publicly challenge orthodoxy. Joanna Kostylo's contribution focuses on Venice, a multicultural city that has been for centuries the subject of uncertain religious forbearance among confessions. Kostylo's analysis of apothecaries' homes shows the way in which religious identities often entered in contact with episodes of heterodoxy and could generate conflict within the very same household.

This volume makes a substantial contribution to the redefinition of religious identities in early modern Italy. Its various essays delineate the importance of domestic forms of devotion in the private and communal life of believers. In their variety, all contributions shed light on domestic devotion as something that was "simultaneously personal, familial and communal" (3). In so doing, the volume excels at challenging the enduring notion of an evenly shared Catholic religiosity, administered and regulated rigorously through institutions. The early modern household, so well presented here, reveals itself to be a complex network of devotions and cults, mixing vivid images and icons with pouches of seeds, holy scrolls, herbs, rosaries, and, most importantly, ideas.

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