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# SAINTS AND CITY MODELS: CONTESTED BORDERS AND THE REPRESENTATION OF SUBJECT TOWNS BETWEEN FLORENCE AND SIENA

The Black Death in 1348 was followed by a period of ongoing skirmishes between the city-states of Florence and Siena, marked by active territorial expansion, mercenary raids, and larger wars. Many of the smaller towns in this region were profoundly affected by the turmoil, falling under the alternating influence and control of the two dominant cities. In the face of such unrest, commissioning religious images allowed the inhabitants of those towns to express their piety and request saintly intercession while also visualizing local identity and political allegiance.

Of the paintings made for contested sites between Florence and Siena from the late fourteenth to the early sixteenth century, a number include small representations of walled towns, here referred to as "models" or "city models," held by a patron saint. Though nearly all these depictions were painted by artists from outside the subject town (the majority were made by Sienese painters, even for towns not under Sienese rule), they nonetheless respond to the geopolitical environment of the towns for which they were made. A close study of these city models reveals patterns in the way that subject towns were conceptualized and understood. Saintly advocacy and protection are frequently invoked in relation to recent or ongoing upheaval, emphasizing civic and sacred loyalties or affiliations. The depiction of towns not within a landscape but as models held by saints also echoes the actual shifts of ownership as towns were bought or sold, reflecting the changeable and sometimes multifarious power dynamics between artist and patron, or between dominant city and subject town.

Before the creation of the Tuscan state by the Medici Grand Dukes in the mid-sixteenth century, the region was largely defined by city-republics exerting their influence and control over the surrounding towns and countryside. Though city walls were a practical necessity, both for defense and to regulate people and goods entering and leaving, there was no single line demarcating

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the border between Florentine and Sienese territory.[1] As a result of ongoing military campaigns, disputes over the control of subject towns, and overlapping spheres of cultural hegemony, boundaries between the two city-states were continually in flux. Though difficult to define, the region loosely encompasses the fortified towns of the Valdelsa, the Chianti, the Valdichiana, the Val d'Orcia, and the Val d'Arbia.

The enmity between Florence and Siena began in the eleventh century, as the two medieval cities sought to expand their influence to the surrounding territory, and came to a head in the 1260s when the traditionally Ghibelline Sienese and traditionally Guelph Florentines fought a number of major battles.[2] The initial victory of Siena at the Battle of Montaperti in 1260 was short-lived, as it was followed by the victory of the Florentines at the Battle of Colle.[3] Siena's defeat and the institution of the pro-Guelph government of the *Nove* led to an era of peace between the two cities that lasted until the mid-fourteenth century.[4]

The Black Death in 1348 ushered in a new period of unrest. Florence took advantage of the plague to expand both northward to Prato and Pistoia and southward to San Gimignano.[5] The Sienese government of the *Nove* fell in 1355, ending the peace between Florence and Siena and leading the towns of Montalcino and Montepulciano to rebel repeatedly against Siena, until in 1390 Montepulciano accepted Florentine rule.[6] Mercenary companies increasingly ravaged the countryside and small towns, alternately fighting on

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[1] Walls and fortifications of subject towns were regulated by the dominant city-state: some towns were required to construct fortifications, while others (such as Montalcino, and, temporarily, Montepulciano) lost their fortifications when conquered. See generally W. Caferro, *Mercenary Companies*, Baltimore–London 1998, pp. 81–82; on Montalcino, see D. Balestracci, *La Battaglia di Montaperti*, Bari 2017, p. 128; on Montepulciano, see D. Norman, *Siena and the Virgin*, New Haven 1999, p. 183.

[2] L. Fusai, *La storia di Siena dalle origini al 1559*, Monteriggioni 2002, p. 51 and pp. 423–424.

[3] Balestracci, *La battaglia di Montaperti*; Chapter VIII, pp. 125–166, discusses the aftermath of Montaperti extensively. See also Fusai, *La storia di Siena*, p. 424.

[4] D. Balestracci, "From Development to Crisis," in: *The "Other Tuscany": Essays in the History of Lucca, Pisa, and Siena during the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Centuries*, eds. T.W. Blomquist and M.F. Mazzaoui, Kalamazoo 1994, p. 202.

[5] F. Ricciardelli, *The Politics of Exclusion in Early Renaissance Florence*, Turnhout 2007, p. 201; D. Waley and P. Dean, *The Italian City-Republics*, Hoboken 2013, p. 229.

[6] M. Ascheri, "Siena in the Fourteenth Century," in: *The "Other Tuscany": Essays in the History of Lucca, Pisa, and Siena during the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Centuries*, eds. T.W. Blomquist and M.F. Mazzaoui, Kalamazoo 1994, pp. 164–165; Norman, *Siena and the Virgin*, pp. 158–159 and pp. 183–185.

the payroll of major cities and pillaging on their own account, heightening tensions between Florence and Siena.[7]

By the early fifteenth century, Florence had also expanded toward the southeast, gaining control over the formerly independent cities of Arezzo and Cortona as well as smaller towns in the surrounding territory, which the Sienese saw as an encroachment.[8] Florence and Siena were also on opposing sides in larger wars involving other major powers, most notably the Milanese expansion under Giangaleazzo Visconti in the 1390s, and the war between the allied forces of Naples, Rome, and Siena against Florence and the Medici in 1478–1479.[9] In 1555, Siena and its French allies fell to besieging Florentine forces, and the Treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis in 1559 finally ended resistance from the remaining pro-Sienese forces in subject territories.[10]

Though this is only a brief overview of some key events across the span of some two centuries, the practical results of this period of unrest in the territories controlled by the two cities were manifold. Subject towns were required to pay taxes and provide soldiers to the dominant city, and many were fortified against both mercenary attacks and takeover by a rival city, but they still often suffered from raids and might even be abandoned.[11] These subject towns were not only a major source of revenue, food, and soldiers, but were also important to urban and regional ideologies.

Much modern scholarship on fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Tuscany tends to focus on Florence and Siena as the dominant political, economic, and cultural powers. Subject towns appear only in cursory discussions of the "periphery" in relation to those two "centers."[12] This pattern of concentrating

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[7] Caferro, *Mercenary Companies…*, pp. 65–85 and pp. 165–171.

[8] Arezzo was purchased by Florence in 1384; Cortona came under Florentine control in 1412. See G. Brucker, *The Civic World of Early Renaissance Florence*, Princeton 1977, pp. 104–106; Ricciardelli, *The Politics of Exclusion…*, p. 201; Waley and Dean, *The Italian City-Republics*, pp. 220–221; Caferro, *Mercenary Companies…*, pp. 34 and 105–106.

[9] Brucker, *The Civic World…*, pp. 85–86 and 119; H. Baron, "A Struggle for Liberty in the Renaissance: Florence, Venice, and Milan in the Early Quattrocento", *The American Historical Review* 1953, 58, pp. 279–285; J. Najemy, *A History of Florence, 1200–1575*, Malden 2006, pp. 352–361.

[10] M. Ascheri, "Siena: The City and Its State Throughout Time", in: *A Companion to Late Medieval and Early Modern Siena*, eds. S. Casciani and H. Richardson Hayton, Leiden 2021, p. 30.

[11] Ibidem, pp. 171–172; W. Bowsky, *The Finance of the Commune of Siena, 1287–1355*, Oxford 1970, pp. 225–255.

[12] See, for example, Bowsky, *The Finance…*, Chapter IX, "The Role of the Contado", pp. 225–255; and Caferro, *Mercenary Companies*, Chapter 4, "Mercenary Companies and the Countryside", pp. 62–85.

on major cities also holds true for the study of city models across the Italian peninsula.[13]

In his book *The Endless Periphery*, Stephen Campbell highlights the problems of such a city-focused approach. He identifies a homogenized and teleological narrative retroactively constructed by a Florentine-centric, Vasarian account of art history, and discusses the importance of rediscovering the decentered and multifaceted networks of fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century art production.[14] An important model of such a project, which considers the complex dynamics between the major "center" of Siena and its subject towns, is Diana Norman's *Siena and the Virgin*. Norman offers an invaluable analysis of how the Sienese dedication to the Assumption of the Virgin was an organizing principle for the submission of conquered territories, one that manifested in the spread of Marian imagery and paintings of the Assumption.[15] If studying Assumption imagery reveals the dynamics between Siena and its subject towns, examining painted city models for the towns contested between Florence and Siena provides an opportunity to explore the interplay between local understandings of civic identity and the territorial ambitions of larger city-states.[16]

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[13] See C. Frugoni, *A Distant City: Images of Urban Experience in the Medieval World*, Princeton 1991, especially pp. 76–81; L. Nuti, *Ritratti di città. Visione e memoria tra Medioevo e Settecento*, Venice 1996, especially her chapter on "Modelli e ritratti medievali", pp. 43–68; P. De Vecchi and G. A. Vergani, eds., *La rappresentazione della città nella pittura italiana*, Milan 2003, especially Vergani, "Tra simbolo e realtà: immagini di città dal Duecento all'inizio del Quattrocento", pp. 51–77; *La terra dei musei. Paesaggio arte storia del territorio senese*, ed. T. Detti, Siena 2006, especially pp. 84–103; and R. Barzanti et al., *Iconografia di Siena. Rappresentazione della Città dal XIII al XIX secolo*, Siena 2006, pp. 2–23, especially cat. nos. 5–19. For images of the Sienese countryside, though not in the form of town models held by a saint, see the 2011 issue of the journal *Torrita. Storia, arte, paesaggio* 4, especially the article by E. Pellegrini, "La 'Battaglia della Val di Chiana' di Lippo di Vanni e il paesaggio 'vero' nella storia dell'arte", pp. 35–51, with further bibliography.

[14] S. Campbell, *The Endless Periphery*, Chicago–London 2019, especially Chapter 1, pp. 1–24.

[15] Norman, *Siena and the Virgin…*, especially Chapter 1 on "Civic Rituals and Images", pp. 1–17; Chapter 8 on "Montalcino", pp. 157–181, and Chapter 9 on "Montepulciano and Siena", pp. 183–207.

[16] Though, as noted above, Florence and Siena were certainly not the only city-states seeking to establish control over a larger territory, this article concentrates solely on the subject towns within the sphere of influence of the two cities. This selection is in part justified by the prevalence of depictions of city models in towns from this region, a prevalence that seems to suggest a particular regional interest in images of subject towns as a means of negotiating a complex geopolitical situation and invoking saintly protection.

One of the earliest images of a patron saint holding a city model from this region was painted by the Sienese artist Luca di Tommè for the town of Lucignano. This altarpiece of a *Madonna and Child with Saints John the Baptist, Michael, Peter, and Catherine of Alexandria* (ill. 1) offers a useful introduction to a number of recurring themes in the depiction of subject towns. Despite being made by a Sienese painter, the placement and appearance of the model reveal a sensitive awareness of the precarious existence of walled towns within the sphere of influence of multiple city-states. The polyptych further underscores the importance of a geography protected by saints.

Though the altarpiece is now in the church of San Francesco in Lucignano, it was likely originally made for the parish church dedicated to St. Michael the Archangel.[17] The full-length figure of the Archangel stands in the place

1. Luca di Tommè, *Madonna and Child with Saints John the Baptist, Michael, Peter, and Catherine of Alexandria*, c. 1374–1390, tempera on panel, San Francesco, Lucignano. Photo: Scarlett H. Strauss

[17] P. Refice, "Al di là e al di qua dell'Appennino: Valdichiana e Valtiberina, senesi e romagnoli", in: *Arte in Terra d'Arezzo. Il Trecento*, eds. A. Galli and P. Refice, Florence 2005, p. 82.

of honor, to the proper right of the Virgin. In his left hand he holds a small model of Lucignano, of which he is the patron saint. The town's coat of arms appears prominently on the walls.[18] Indeed, as the walls take up nearly three-quarters of this small model, it is the coat of arms that serves to identify it, not the buildings peeking out from behind the crenellations. The hilt of Michael's sword just overlaps the painted walls, interposed between the town and the viewer. Although the Archangel holds the town out to be seen, he – like the walls themselves – also protects it.

The precise date of this altarpiece is uncertain: the primary scholar on Luca di Tommè, Sherwood Fehm, catalogued the painting with a broad date range from circa 1374–1390, but discussed it stylistically in relation to Luca di Tommè's paintings from the 1380s.[19] This chronological period is pivotal to the history of Lucignano. In 1363, the town was involved in a broader conflict in the Valdichiana, when the Sienese fought off the predations of the mercenary Compagnia del Cappello.[20] Though Florence disavowed any involvement, the Sienese saw this as a Florentine attack on their territory.[21] Some two decades later, in 1384, the Florentines purchased control over the city of Arezzo, and claimed Lucignano as a part of this acquisition. The Sienese objected, and only accepted this shift of ownership after arbitration from Bologna in 1385, which included a substantial payment to Siena.[22]

Given the uncertain date of Luca di Tommè's painting, it is unclear if it was commissioned and completed before, during, or after this dispute over the ownership of Lucignano. Small towns were rarely able to sustain a painting workshop, so it was common to commission works from artists in larger cities – as such, it is unsurprising for a patron in Lucignano to have selected a Sienese artist. However, if the altarpiece was commissioned after the Florentine purchase of Arezzo in 1384, then the choice of a Sienese artist might carry a subtle political message, indicating a desire to maintain ties to Siena.

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[18] S.A. Fehm, *Luca di Tommè: A Sienese Fourteenth-Century Painter*, Carbondale–Edwardsville 1986, p. 50.

[19] Ibidem, p. 50, and cat. no. 49, p. 146.

[20] See D. Balestracci, "La vittoria involontaria", pp. 12–15, and G. Fattorini, "Da Lippo Vanni", p. 22, both in: *Torrita* 2013, 4.

[21] Balestracci, "Una vittoria involontaria", p. 13; Caferro, *Mercenary Companies…*, pp. 169–170.

[22] Brucker, *The Civic World…*, pp. 104–109; Ricciardelli, *The Politics of Exclusion…*, p. 201. Caferro, *Mercenary Companies…*, p. 34, notes that the Florentine purchase "was perceived by the Sienese as an overt challenge [as] they had long coveted Aretine lands" and that the dispute over Lucignano was a direct result of this purchase.

The selection of a Sienese painter also resonates with the earlier history of the Compagnia del Cappello. As Fehm observes, St. Michael is depicted in an active role as protector of the city: he, and the figure of St. Paul holding the sword of his martyrdom above him, are the only two figures looking out of the altarpiece at the viewer.[23] Significantly, St. Paul was seen as an intercessor who inspired the Sienese victory against the Compagnia del Cappello.[24] His presence above St. Michael and also holding a sword seems far from coincidental. St. Michael as protector of Lucignano, and St. Paul as protector against the recent attacks of the Compagnia del Cappello, are commemorated here as defenders of the town. This battle was an important touchpoint both for the inhabitants of the Valdichiana and for the Sienese – the event was commemorated almost immediately in a major fresco in the Palazzo Pubblico of Siena painted by the artist Lippo Vanni, in which Lucignano appears in the background as a walled and labeled city. The Sienese painter Luca di Tommè might thus have shared the same cultural memory as the citizens of Lucignano: of defending against mercenary incursions with the aid of St. Paul and the militant Archangel Michael.

The choice of artist becomes even more significant for depictions of the city of San Gimignano, located in the Valdelsa between Florence and Siena and within the sphere of influence of both city-states. Previously an important independent city, San Gimignano came under Florentine control in 1353 in the wake of the plague.[25] Though traditionally allied with the Guelph Florentines, the town also had longstanding political and artistic ties with Siena.[26] Indeed, major painting commissions continued to go primarily to Sienese artists for the first half-century that San Gimignano was under Florentine rule.[27]

A pair of artworks both dated to circa 1401 mark the beginning of a transition away from this tendency: one by the Sienese artist Taddeo di Bartolo depicting *Saint Geminianus Enthroned with Scenes from his Life* (ill. 2), and the other a *Reliquary Tabernacle of Saint Fina* by the Florentine Lorenzo di Niccolò (ill. 3).[28] Each includes one of the city's patron saints – Geminianus

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[23] Fehm, *Luca di Tommè…*, p. 50.

[24] Fattorini, *Da Lippo Vanni…*, pp. 29–30.

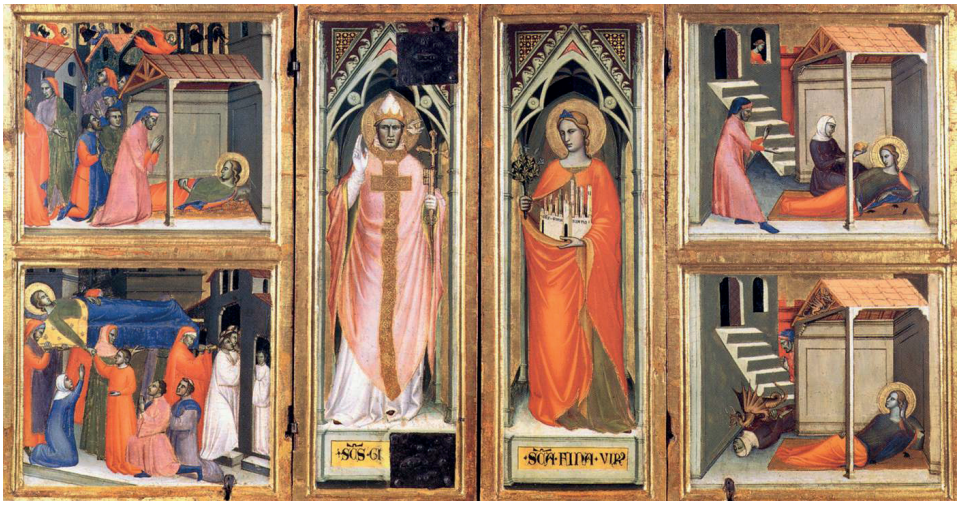
[25] Ricciardelli, *The Politics of Exclusion…*, p. 201.

[26] Norman, *Siena and the Virgin*, pp. 58–59.

[27] D. Krohn, "Between Legend, History, and Politics: The Santa Fina Chapel in San Gimignano", in: *Artistic Exchange and Cultural Translation in the Italian Renaissance City*, ed. S.J. Campbell and S.J. Milner, p. 247, notes this pattern.

[28] Taddeo's painting has been variously dated between the 1390s and early 1400s. I follow Gail Solberg's dating of 1401 – see G. Solberg, "Taddeo di Bartolo: His Life and Work", 1991, pp. 844–846. Another earlier painted city model of San Gimignano, not discussed

2. Taddeo di Bartolo, *Saint Geminianus Enthroned with Scenes from his Life*, c. 1401, tempera on panel, Collegiata, San Gimignano, now Pinacoteca, Palazzo Comunale, San Gimignano. Source: Wikimedia Commons, https://tinyurl.com/555wffxz




3. Lorenzo di Niccolò, *Reliquary Tabernacle of Saint Fina*, c. 1401, tempera on panel, Collegiata, San Gimignano, now Pinacoteca, Palazzo Comunale, San Gimignano. Source: Wikimedia Commons, https://tinyurl.com/5f9u9h6m

and Fina, respectively – holding a small-scale model of San Gimignano, and both were made for the Collegiata. Taddeo's was most likely for the high altar, while Lorenzo's was probably originally situated on the altar of St. Fina prior to the creation of a new altar-shrine made by Benedetto da Maiano.[29]

Taddeo's city model is a relatively realistic depiction of San Gimignano, slightly angled to be visible to the viewer.[30] If in Luca di Tommè's earlier painting Lucignano is defended by its high walls and by St. Michael's sword, here it is primarily through the spiritual power of blessing that St. Geminianus protects his city. St. Fina, by contrast, holds a city model that is identifiable by the labeled walls, profusion of towers, and identity of the patron saint holding it. It is perhaps by virtue of the smaller dimensions of this model that St. Fina is able to enfold the entire city within her cloak. As noted by Chiara Frugoni, this iconography is reminiscent of images of the Madonna of Mercy embracing and protecting her subjects beneath her mantle.[31]

Though the city of San Gimignano adopted the name of its saintly protector, the actual St. Geminianus was the Bishop of Modena, and thus a foreigner. In an article on the altarpiece, Brenna Graham proposes that the choice of St. Geminianus as patron was a strategic decision: by choosing a protector from a distant city, the inhabitants of San Gimignano asserted their allegiance to a saintly bishop whose status was far higher than the earthly Bishop

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here, appears in a fresco attributed to Lippo Vanni in the Loggia del Giudice of the Palazzo del Podestà. Dated to the 1350s, and possibly an inspiration for later depictions of the town, the fresco shows the *Madonna and Child with Saints Geminianus and Augustine (?)*. See G. De Nicola, "Arte inedita in Siena", *L'arte* 1912, 12, p. 15; G. Kaftal, *Iconography of the Saints in Tuscan Painting*, Florence 1952, pp. 439–441; S. Dale, "Lippo Vanni: Style and Iconography", Ph.D. dissertation, Rutgers University, 1984, pp. 86–88; and A. Mennucci, *San Gimignano: Civic Museums of San Gimignano, The Palazzo Comunale, The Pinacoteca, Torre Grossa*, Milan 2011, pp. 143–144.

[29] On Taddeo di Bartolo's altarpiece and the difficulty of reconstructing its original location and date from early accounts by Borghini and Vasari, see Solberg, "Taddeo di Bartolo…", pp. 843–846. For a discussion of Lorenzo di Niccolò's reliquary tabernacle, see D. Carl, "Der Fina-Altar von Benedetto da Maiano in der Collegiata zu San Gimignano: Zu seiner Datierung und Rekonstruktion", *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 1978, 22, pp. 276–277.

[30] On the relative but not complete topographical accuracy of this city model, see Solberg, "Taddeo di Bartolo…", pp. 839–840; Vergani, *Tra simbolo e realtà*, p. 66. C. Frugoni, "The City and the 'New' Saints", in: *City States in Classical Antiquity and Medieval Italy*, eds. A. Molho, K. Raaflaub, and J. Emlen, Stuttgart 1991, p. 85, notes the emphasis on civic buildings with only a singular church depicted at the far right.

[31] Frugoni, *The City…*, p. 81.

of Volterra, who oversaw the diocese.[32] Fina, instead, was a local saint who lived and died in San Gimignano, and her closer relationship to the subject town is reflected in her embrace of the city model. In the subsidiary scenes of this reliquary tabernacle, she is shown within the urban fabric of life, rather than floating above the town, as in the posthumous miracles performed by St. Geminianus in Taddeo di Bartolo's panels.[33]

The coeval commissions to a Florentine and a Sienese artist seem particularly important, especially as both artists sign other paintings for San Gimignano as "de Florentia" and "de Senis", indicating their respective places of origin.[34] Graham argues that the *Saint Geminianus* altarpiece was intended to show the city's resistance to Florentine rule, an understandable position for a formerly independent commune; this would also explain the choice of a Sienese painter rather than a Florentine. She highlights especially the emphasis on civic buildings in the city model, and the notable absence of the fortress and tower constructed by the Florentines.[35] It may also be that the selection of artists was in part tied to the identity of the saints themselves: at a point when San Gimignano had been under Florentine control for a half-century, a Florentine artist was chosen to paint a reliquary tabernacle for a local saint, while the foreign Taddeo di Bartolo was asked to paint a foreign saint who became the patron of the town.

Taddeo di Bartolo most likely painted the *Saint Geminianus* altarpiece at or near the same time as another major altarpiece, the *Assumption of the Virgin* for the *pieve* or parish church of Montepulciano (ill. 4). At the top of the right panel, to the Virgin's proper left, is a detailed view of Montepulciano held up by one of the town's patron saints, Antilla (ill. 5). Like the scene in the *Saint Geminianus* altarpiece, this city model is fairly topographically

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[32] B. Graham, "In the Hands of the Saint: Taddeo di Bartolo's *St. Geminianus with Scenes from His Life*", *Athanor* 2009, 27, p. 36.

[33] For a discussion of these images in relation to the *vite* of each saint, see for the *Saint Geminianus*, Solberg, "Taddeo di Bartolo…", pp. 833–837; and for the *Saint Fina*, Frugoni, *The City*…, pp. 74–77.

[34] This is not uncommon, though most of the paintings discussed here do not include signatures. Taddeo di Bartolo signs a pentaptych of the *Madonna and Child with Saints Nicholas, Christopher, John the Evangelist, and Martin* as "Tadeus Bartoli de Senis", while Lorenzo di Niccolò signs a *Saint Bartholomew Enthroned with Scenes from his Life* as "Laurentius Nicholai de Florentia." Both of these paintings were also for the Collegiata of San Gimignano.

[35] Graham, *In the Hands of the Saint*…, p. 37. Solberg, "Taddeo di Bartolo…", p. 839. See also comments on the topographical accuracy of the scene.

4. Taddeo di Bartolo, *Assumption of the Virgin*, c. 1401, tempera on panel, Santa Maria Assunta, Montepulciano. Photo: Wikimedia Commons, https://tinyurl.com/56vcxtv6

5. Taddeo di Bartolo, detail from the *Assumption of the Virgin*, c. 1401, tempera on panel, Santa Maria Assunta, Montepulciano. Photo: Wikimedia Commons, https://tinyurl.com/56vcxtv6

accurate.[36] This attention to the urban environment of the two cities is particularly intriguing: if both altarpieces indeed date to circa 1401, it is probable that Taddeo di Bartolo painted them in his workshop in Siena, and only then sent them to their respective destinations.[37]

Though Taddeo painted a number of city models, not all share this investment in topographical accuracy. In a fresco from 1406–07 of the *Beato Ambrogio Sansedoni* holding a smaller model of Siena, the Duomo and the

[36] Solberg, "Taddeo di Bartolo…", p. 840; Norman, *Siena and the Virgin*…, p. 193.
[37] Solberg, "Taddeo di Bartolo…", p. 840.

Palazzo Pubblico serve as a synecdoche for the city. Similarly, in a 1411 altarpiece of the *Madonna and Child with Saints Anthony Abbot, John the Baptist, Michael, and Francis* for Volterra, the small figure of St. Ottaviano in a roundel holds only a tiny model of the town, but this schematic rendering of the Palazzo dei Priori and city walls is sufficient as an attribute of the saint. Taddeo's works thus do not reveal a chronological progression towards more naturalistic and topographically accurate city models. Instead, it seems likely that the topographical accuracy of the early city models was specifically requested by patrons, perhaps even with drawings or plans to assist Taddeo in representing these towns.

The patron of the Montepulciano *Assumption*, Jacopo Aragazzi, may in fact have commissioned the altarpiece to commemorate his newly enhanced status as an archpriest under the direct supervision of the papacy rather than being subject to the bishop of Arezzo.[38] This change in ecclesiastical hierarchy was coeval with political shifts: throughout the later fourteenth century, the powerful Del Pecora family of Montepulciano instigated a number of rebellions against Sienese rule. Though these revolts were successfully quelled for decades, often through Florentine intervention, Florence's role eventually shifted from outside peacemaker to ruling city. In 1390, before Taddeo's painting, the Florentines claimed ownership of Montepulciano, though this was not recognized by Siena until 1404.[39]

As both Gail Solberg and Diana Norman note in their extensive studies of the altarpiece, Taddeo's depiction of Montepulciano reflects this instability.[40] Indeed, the shifts in both religious and political jurisdiction might explain the choice to depict such an extensive view of Montepulciano. If Taddeo's representation of San Gimignano floats in the lap of its eponymous saint, here instead Antilla very actively supports the model, offering it to the central figure of the Virgin of the Assumption. Norman explains this pictorial decision in relation to the fact that Montepulciano – as well as Siena – was dedicated to the Assumption. Consequently, Norman interprets the scene not through the lens of the Virgin as protector of Siena, but recognizing Mary's role as patron of Montepulciano. She proposes that the polyptych highlights both enduring links to Siena and the shifting political situation.[41]

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[38] Ibidem, pp. 498–501.

[39] Norman, *Siena and the Virgin*…, pp. 183–185. See also Ricciardelli, *The Politics of Exclusion*…, p. 201.

[40] On this polyptych, see Solberg, "Taddeo di Bartolo…", pp. 477–547; and Norman, *Siena and the Virgin*…, pp. 186–197; with further bibliography.

[41] See Norman, *Siena and the Virgin*…, pp. 193 and 196–197. Solberg, "Taddeo di Bartolo…", pp. 516–520 offers a detailed explanation of Taddeo's Sienese models.

Whether or not Aragazzi stipulated that Taddeo di Bartolo depict the Virgin in line with earlier Sienese paintings, as for example with a *modo e forma* commission requesting an image similar to an preexisting example, he must have been aware that by selecting a Sienese artist the resulting altarpiece would have visual and stylistic links to Sienese imagery. It is therefore worth highlighting the tension between both possible readings of this polyptych: the affirmation of the Virgin as patroness of Montepulciano, as opposed to as a stand-in for Sienese rule. While Aragazzi commissioned the painting from a position of power, in terms of both his social standing and his importance within a religious hierarchy, he nonetheless operated as a citizen of a subject town. Smaller towns could not sustain artistic workshops able to produce an altarpiece on this scale, so Aragazzi's desire for such a monumental painting required him to choose an artist from a larger city such as Florence or Siena. This results in something of a reversal of the usual power dynamic, placing the artist in a position of power as a citizen of the dominant city-state.

These two hierarchies exist concurrently in the commission of the Montepulciano *Assumption*, allowing for different readings of the polyptych. For Jacopo Aragazzi, the offering of Montepulciano to the Virgin would have reflected local devotion to the Madonna. Taddeo di Bartolo likely saw the image in Sienese terms, as part of a larger pattern of the diffusion of a Sienese interpretation of the Assumption, which could be associated with Sienese political and cultural dominance over subject territories. St. Antilla's gesture can be understood both as an offering in exchange for Mary's advocacy and protection, and in relation to the very real commodification and transfer of ownership of subject towns.

Pictorial borders offer another lens to understand this city model and its walls. The very existence of these fortifications is significant: when the Sienese conquered Montepulciano in 1232, they razed the town's walls, though soon thereafter they offered 8,000 lire in reparations for their reconstruction.[42] Walls were a tool of defense, but also a tool of control on the part of a dominant city-state. In the polyptych, the walls are depicted as swooping curves punctuated by towers, echoing the crenellations of the gilded frame above this portion of the polyptych and providing an additional border above and in front of the painted model. Taddeo situated the town of Montepulciano level with the central Virgin. Just as the crenellations frame the Virgin, the walls frame the town under her protection, highlighting the sense of equivalency between city model and holy figure. Here, in a sense, these fortifications are rededi-

[42] Norman, *Siena and the Virgin…*, p. 183.

cated to the Virgin, this time on behalf of the citizens of Montepulciano, no longer under Sienese rule.

Two examples of city models held by patron saints from the early sixteenth century reveal a continually shifting attitude toward city walls: a figure of *Saint Agnese Segni* by the Sienese painter Domenico Beccafumi from circa 1507 (ill. 6), and a tondo of the *Madonna and Child with Saints Michael, Vincent, Margaret of Cortona, and Mark* from circa 1510 by the Cortonese artist Luca Signorelli (ill. 7). Like Taddeo's *Assumption* altarpiece, Beccafumi's *Saint Agnese Segni* also depicts the town of Montepulciano, though the painting's original location is not known.[43] In the Beccafumi, the angle of the city model makes it more difficult to see the interior of Montepulciano than in Taddeo's polyptych a century earlier, and only the tops of buildings are visible over the walls. This is not, however, a return to Luca di Tommè's or Lorenzo di Niccolò's city models, where the walls vastly overpower the buildings inside and towns are identifiable mainly by labels or coats of arms. The Palazzo Comunale, recognizable from its crenellated façade and two-tiered tower, rises up just above St. Agnese's fingers, and the many churches are clearly and accurately rendered.[44] This precisely-depicted city model stands in contrast to the more fantastical city directly below it, situated in the landscape behind St. Agnese.

Beccafumi's representation of Montepulciano is also notable as the city model does not end at the fortifications. If walls demarcate the defensible perimeter of a real town, the inclusion of additional land around these walls provides another pictorial border. Beccafumi's model of Montepulciano appears to have just been dug out of the earth: there is a grassy area around the city walls, with a brown underside as though representing the ground beneath. This land is also part of the city model held and protected by the saint, suggesting a new conception of subject towns that could also include the surrounding territory, as well as a new conception of a city model as something that resembled the actual town so closely that it might have simply been lifted from the landscape itself.

Signorelli's city model of Cortona also extends beyond the walls, with considerable green space around the city proper. Of all of the city models considered here, Signorelli's places the least emphasis on walls: while the town is surrounded by fortifications, the main distinction between urban space and

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[43] On this painting, see A. Angelini, "Una 'Sant'Agnese di Montepulciano' di Domenico Beccafumi. Per una revisione dell'attività giovanile del pittore", *Prospettiva* 2015, 157/158, pp. 74–93, with further bibliography.

[44] For a detailed discussion of the buildings represented, see ibidem, p. 78.

6. Domenico Beccafumi, *Saint Agnese Segni*, c. 1507, oil on canvas, Museo Civico, Montepulciano. Photo: Wikimedia Commons, https://tinyurl.com/2p8hz9b8

7. Luca Signorelli, *Madonna and Child with Saints Michael, Vincent, Margaret of Cortona, and Mark*, c. 1510–1511, tempera on panel, Palazzo dei Priori, Cortona, now Museo dell'Accademia Etrusca, Cortona. Photo: Wikimedia Commons, https://tinyurl.com/yy2wyp2w

the surrounding countryside is the color shift from gray to green. By 1510, the probable date of Signorelli's tondo, Cortona had been under Florentine control for nearly a century – though the expanse of the town is still encompassed by its walls, these walls do not need to dominate the city model as a reminder of a fortified border. Unlike Luca di Tommè's painting, with the tall walls of Lucignano and the militant presence of St. Michael prepared to defend its borders in a clear response to recent military threats, Cortona here is on the

opposite side of the painting from the armed archangel, whose sword fends off the devil rather than alluding in any way to foreign invaders.

Also important for Signorelli's painting is that the artist himself was from Cortona. Unlike the other city models examined here, which were made by artists from Florence or Siena who may or may not have visited the subject towns they represented, Signorelli here represents his hometown. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, to see the town laid out accurately, viewed not from outside the walls as an imposing fortress to be breached, but from an insider's perspective.[45] The decision to represent city models with topographical accuracy is thus not merely a product of an increasing investment in naturalism, but a reflection of specific interests and knowledge.

The choice to represent a subject town realistically or schematically is closely linked to the circumstances of the town and its relationship to a patron saint. In the case of Lorenzo di Niccolò's *Saint Fina*, the relatively abbreviated view of San Gimignano allowed St. Fina to embrace the model, underscoring her all-encompassing protection. Only in the surrounding scenes does Lorenzo represent the town's interior, situating Fina within the urban landscape she actually inhabited. By contrast, in the altarpiece of *Saint Geminianus,* Taddeo di Bartolo's far larger city model depicted precise buildings and details of the town. Rather than integrating St. Geminianus into this environment, the bishop saint's presence – making a blessing gesture over the city model he holds in the central scene, or appearing over the walls in subsidiary stories of his miracles – is sufficient to indicate his role as protector.

The choice of artist also seems to have been important for patrons in subject towns who commissioned paintings that represented a city model of their home. An artist such as Luca di Tommè might share the experiences of citizens in a subject town that was recently threatened by mercenaries, and consequently offer a nuanced portrayal of the need for saintly protection. By contrast, a complicated polyptych such as Taddeo di Bartolo's *Assumption* could remain open to multiple interpretations: both a view from the city-state of Siena seeing the altarpiece in relation to the imagery of Sienese power, and a perspective from Montepulciano reading the offering of the city model to the Virgin as a way of seeking Mary's protection outside of the auspices of Siena. This is further complicated with an artist such as Signorelli, born in

[45] On the relative accuracy of Signorelli's depiction, see *Il museo dell'Accademia etrusca di Cortona*, eds. P. Bocci Pacini and A.M. Maetzke, Florence 1992, p. 165. For further bibliography, see *Signorelli 500. Maestro Luca da Cortona, pittore di luce e poesia*, ed. T. Henry, Milan 2023, cat. no. 25, p. 166.

Cortona and depicting his own hometown through the lens of an insider after nearly a century of Florentine rule.

Importantly, these representations of subject towns are a predominantly Sienese phenomenon: of the thirteen examples I have discovered in the territories contested between Florence and Siena, four were painted by Florentine artists, one by a Cortonese painter, and eight by Sienese artists (with Taddeo di Bartolo being particularly prolific).[46] While it is possible that this is partly a result of the need to commission major paintings from large workshops in Florence and Siena, the repeated commissions to Sienese artists, even in Florentine subject towns, suggests an intentional preference. Border theory offers a potential approach to understanding this choice, especially the concept of a "portable border" as articulated by Ila Sheren. Rather than a limited focus on a physical border line or wall demarcating territory, a "portable border" considers conceptual zones of cultural contact more broadly. Sheren underscores the importance of seeing the border not from an imagined point of external objectivity, but from within the border itself, as part of a "border mentality" in which knowers recognize their own subjectivity within a larger system of cultural as well as physical borders.[47]

I contend that the prevalence of bordered city models in Sienese painting is a reflection of a "border mentality" shared between the Sienese and the smaller subject towns in the region. Unlike Florence, which overall successfully expanded its territory in the centuries following the Black Death, Siena saw its borders as a city-state narrowing, even briefly becoming a subject town of Milan from 1399 until 1402, precisely the period when Taddeo di Bartolo painted his altarpieces for San Gimignano and Montepulciano. The Sienese thus had a particular understanding of borders. Sensitive portrayals of subject

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[46] In addition to the examples discussed and illustrated here, note also: Lippo Vanni (Sienese), *Madonna and Child with Saints Geminianus and Augustine (?)*, 1350s, St. Geminianus holding San Gimignano; Jacopo di Cione and Niccolò di Pietro (Florentine), *Annunciation*, 1382, St. Ottaviano holding Volterra; Lorenzo di Niccolò (Florentine, signs as "de Florentia"), *Saint Bartholomew Enthroned with Scenes from his Life*, c. 1401, predella figure of St. Geminianus holding San Gimignano; Taddeo di Bartolo (Sienese, signed "de Senis"), *Madonna and Child with Saints Anthony Abbot, John the Baptist, Michael, and Francis*, c. 1411, St. Ottaviano holding Volterra; Priamo della Quercia (from Lucca or Siena, of a Sienese family; attested also in Volterra), *Madonna and Child with Saints Victor and Ottaviano*, c. 1445–1450, St. Ottaviano holding Volterra; Benozzo Gozzoli (Florentine), *Saint Geminianus* from the *Stories of Saint Augustine*, 1464–1465, St. Geminianus holding San Gimignano; and Pietro di Francesco Orioli (Sienese), *Coronation of the Virgin*, 1489, St. Casciano holding San Casciano dei Bagni.

[47] I. Sheren, "Portable Borders/Mythical Sites: Performance Art and Politics on the US *Frontera*, 1968–Present", Ph.D. dissertation, MIT 2011, especially pp. 125–129.

towns occur again and again in Sienese painting, reflecting concerns about fortified perimeters, local identity, and divine protection (whether via a saintly advocate or through the Virgin's intercession), and echoing a distinctive Sienese understanding of images of and for the border.

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## SAINTS AND CITY MODELS: CONTESTED BORDERS AND THE REPRESENTATION OF SUBJECT TOWNS BETWEEN FLORENCE AND SIENA

Summary

The Black Death in 1348 was followed by a period of ongoing skirmishes between the city-states of Florence and Siena, marked by active territorial expansion, mercenary raids, and larger wars. Subject towns were profoundly affected by this turmoil and came under the alternating influence and control of the two dominant cities. In the

face of this unrest, one way for inhabitants of subject towns – including Lucignano, San Gimignano, Montepulciano, and Cortona – to manifest both local identity and political allegiance was to commission artworks.

Of the paintings made for these contested sites from the late fourteenth to the early sixteenth centuries, a number include depictions of the town for which the image was made, held by a patron saint. These city models offer a valuable lens on a marginalized area, providing insight into how subject towns were conceptualized and understood by patrons, artists, and viewers. Saintly advocacy and protection are frequently invoked in relation to recent or ongoing political upheaval, emphasizing civic and sacred loyalties or affiliations. The depiction of towns as models held by saints also echoes the actual transactional changes of ownership that frequently occurred, reflecting the multifaceted power dynamics between artist and patron, or between dominant city and subject town. Furthermore, the prevalence of such city models in paintings commissioned from Sienese artists suggests a particular Sienese "border mentality," or an awareness of the intersections of identity that result from existing on shifting cultural and political borders.

Keywords:
Florence, Siena, Tuscany, Lucignano, San Gimignano, Montepulciano, Cortona, Luca di Tommè, Taddeo di Bartolo, Lorenzo di Niccolò, Domenico Beccafumi, Luca Signorelli, city model, subject town