

Gabriella Carli

“Di Valio son, a Valio son nao, / meglio morir / che lascià il pennaio.”¹

(Of Vallico I am, in Vallico I was born — better to die than leave my billhook behind.)

History of a Small Village

I dedicate this history of Vallico Sotto to my husband, Paolo Paolini, who was even more attached than I to this land, where he now rests in the cemetery beside his vineyard.

The information gathered and presented here is admittedly partial, the fruit of research undertaken over many years, simply and lovingly, as a tribute to the place where I was born and where I lived for so long. I do not wish to claim that it is free of errors or omissions: these can always be corrected, and with everyone’s help we may one day achieve a fuller account.

Valivo

A document of 997 already records *Valivo et alio Valivo*² — “Valivo and the other Valivo.” Several parchments from the State Archive of Lucca, dated 1175, 1274 and 1324, again record *Valivo*. By the end of the 1300s the historical sources begin to use the form *Valico*, with its inhabitants called *Valichesi*. Carlo De Stefani, Alessandro Micotti and Don Valentino Carli all preserve this spelling down to the late 1600s.³

The origins of the village of Vallico are certainly ancient, like those of so many other towns of the Garfagnana. Among the rest, the wars fought between the Ligurians and the Romans for control of these territories are well attested; their poets described these lands as places “whose valleys and hills, and now and then a stretch of plain, remain abundantly supplied with everything necessary to human life — wheat, wine, meat and chestnuts in particular, in copious surplus.”⁴ Our rugged mountains were certainly the scene of battles, although no archaeological evidence or written source survives to confirm it. Historians record that in 570

¹ This is a local saying in Garfagnana/Lucchese mountain dialect, not standard Italian — hence forms such as *Valio* for *Vallico*, *nao* for *nato* (“born”), and *pennaio* for *pennato* (“billhook”), all reflecting the dialect’s characteristic dropping of intervocalic *-t-*. A *pennato* (or *piennato*) is a traditional curved-blade hand tool with a short wooden handle, used for pruning vines, hedging, and coppicing — especially of chestnut woods — and so stands here as an emblem of the *Valichese*’s daily labour and bond to the land. The saying is kept in dialect as the title, since the English translation, however accurate, loses its rhythm and its immediate, proverbial bite; “billhook” is the standard English term for this class of pruning/coppicing tool (cf. “pruning hook”). Sense: *better to die than abandon the land and the working life it demands of me*.

² Cf. E. Repetti, *Dizionario Storico* [Historical Dictionary], p. 633.

³ Cf. V. Carli, *Dell’Istorie della Garfagnana antica* [On the Histories of Ancient Garfagnana], edited by the Centro di Studi “Carfagnana Antiqua,” 1970.

BC Rome deported 40,000 Ligurians to Samnium, together with their wives, children and whatever goods they could carry.

Pacchi further records that as early as the 700s the *comune* of *Vallis di Sotto* was loyal to the Emperor, and a document of the Archiepiscopal Archive of Lucca, dated 30 June 997, mentions the two fortified settlements (“castelli”) of Valivo, together with all the other places belonging to the Pieve of Galliciano.⁵ A second document, of 1062, concerns the granting by the Bishop of Lucca, to certain Rolandinghi nobles, of goods and dues traditionally collected by the Pieve of Galliciano from all the peoples under its jurisdiction.⁶ It is certain that from the time of Matilda of Canossa (1076–1115) certain border *comuni* enjoyed full self-government under particular dispensations, and it is argued that Vallico was among them — indeed that in 1122 the men of Vallico, then subjects of the Rolandinghi, were already forming themselves into an autonomous *comune*, and swore allegiance to Bishop Benedetto of Lucca.

Another family with extensive jurisdiction in the Garfagnana were the Porcaresi; the origin and extent of their rights are not well known, but they too probably held lordship over Vallico Sotto.⁷

In 1274 Trassilico freed itself from subjection to a *podestà*, and at about the same time Vallico too must have gained its independence — whether by spontaneous agreement or under compulsion from Lucca is not known. The ancient records of the Augustinian Hermits of Lucca state that in 1214 the men of Trassilico donated to the Hermits of St Augustine the church and the lands of San Giorgio and San Galgano in Vallebona di Garfagnana, situated within the *comune* of Vallico Sotto.⁸ From the same period dates the papal bull of 14 January 1176, in which Pope Alexander III placed the Monastery of Santa Giustina in Lucca, together with all its possessions, under his protection, declaring them inviolable *in Valivo et in eius finibus* — “in Valivo and within its borders.”⁹ There also survives a parchment dated 30 May 1279, in which the consuls and council of the *comune* of Vallico Sotto, by then no longer under Porcaresi rule, granted two Lombards permission to build a house and to make charcoal on certain terms.

In so doing they were answerable to no other authority — a clear sign that the *comune* already possessed statutes of its own, at least concerning damages and offences. This charcoal was very

⁴ Cf. A. Micotti, *Descrizione cronologica della Garfagnana Provincia di Toscana* [Chronological Description of Garfagnana, a Province of Tuscany], edited by Polimio Bacci, Lucca, 1980, p. 22.

⁵ Cf. D. Pacchi, *Ricerche Istoriche sulla provincia della Garfagnana* [Historical Researches on the Province of Garfagnana], Modena, 1785, p. 23.

⁶ Cf. C. De Stefani, *Storia dei Comuni della Garfagnana* [History of the Comuni of Garfagnana], Modena, 1925, p. 12.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 105.

⁸ Cf. D. Pacchi, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

⁹ This grant of *immunitas* — exemption from secular interference — typifies papal protection of monastic holdings; the phrase “*in eius finibus*” (within its boundaries) extends the privilege to the whole territory dependent on Valivo, not merely the settlement itself.

probably destined for ironworking, for Mario Seghieri,¹⁰ in his study of the metallurgy of the period, records that in April 1308 the brothers Giovanni and Barone Pucci, at Fabbriche di Vallico, were clients of an iron merchant from Elba. Moreover, a place-name appears on a map in *Terre di confine* (ed. C.I.S.C.U., 1987): the locality called *Fabbrica* (later renamed Ferriera, today Cartiera Linder), with the stream running through it known as the “Soleo del Battiferro” (“the Iron-beater’s Run”).

By 1357 it formed part of the Pieve of Galliciano, which granted the church of SS. Jacopo e Filippo in Vallico Sotto the right to a baptismal font, along with burial rights and a cemetery; the comune of Vallico, in return, owed the Pieve of Galliciano three *staia* of grain and four *soldi* for every death, plus a pound of wax to the bishop, while the parish priest was bound to collect the holy oils from the Pieve.¹¹

In 1370, after alternating periods of Lucchese, Pisan and Florentine rule, the House of Este of Ferrara appears for the first time — “destined to govern for no short span.” Many comuni were exempted from taxation in reward for remaining loyal to Lucca despite uprisings; Vallico Sotto too, on 20 December 1371, petitioned for a tax remission, citing its past loyalty, though the city’s Elders seemed unconvinced and deferred the matter. With the fall of the Guinigi in Lucca, instability set in, and the Florentines exploited it by declaring war on Lucca in 1429. It is said that the people of Vallico Sotto appealed to Taddeo dell’Antella, an ally of Niccolò Fortebraccio, but received no prompt or decisive answer; so they chose a different course and submitted instead to the Marquis of Este. In December 1429 Marquis Niccolò d’Este accepted their allegiance, granting all the comuni that had broken from Lucchese rule numerous privileges and statutes which the Este thereafter consistently honoured.¹² Among the other concessions, the comune retained full title to its property and a guarantee of it, the right to bear arms throughout the Este state, and fiscal advantages such as exemption from tolls and duties, together with pardons for outlaws and convicted men. Thus, on 1 February 1430, most of the comuni surrendered to the Marquis of Este, weary of Lucca’s misgovernment — all save Castiglione, which, after stout resistance, fell instead under Florence, together with the upland comuni of the Garfagnana. Unfortunately, the very distance from the central authority in Ferrara, while granting the subject comuni greater liberty, also encouraged lawlessness, since security diminished, especially in the small mountain communities.

This was nonetheless a period that allowed Vallico, like the other towns, to improve its conditions of life. Land-reclamation efforts increased in order to extend the area under cultivation on the mountain slopes and in the surrounding woods. Even the steepest ground was planted with vines, terraced and walled with dry stone to hold the soil. Long pergolas ran the length of the paths: every scrap of land was used and productive, none left to go to waste; the village was ringed, as far as the eye could see, by an unbroken line of vine-rows climbing the hillsides.

¹⁰ Cf. M. Seghieri, *Metallurgia e siderurgia nei territori delle vicarie di Barga e di Coreglia agli inizi del XIV secolo* [Metalworking and Ironworking in the Territories of the Vicariates of Barga and Coreglia at the Beginning of the 14th Century], in «Notiziario Storico Filatelico Numismatico», no. 200, Lucca, 1980, pp. 85–92.

¹¹ Cf. D. Pacchi, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

¹² Cf. C. De Stefani, *Storia dei Comuni*, *cit.*, p. 172 ff.

And yet “the lands lying immediately around Vallico were not sufficient for such a large and populous walled town, nor can one believe its founders would have built it [there] had they not been able to draw upon a wider plain [...] therefore much of Vallico’s land lay on the other side of the Turrîte, in the territories called Midicciana” — a land that was “the theatre of many wars.”¹³



Veduta di Vallico Sotto. In alto sullo sfondo c'è Vallico Sopra

View of Vallico Sotto. In the background, Vallico Sopra.

During this period the coppice woods began to be systematically replaced by chestnut groves; chestnuts thus became, alongside wine, one of the village’s chief resources. This increasing prosperity swelled both the population and the town’s standing. A system of military recruitment was instituted, taking the hearth as its basic unit — “four men to a hearth.” Thus arose Vallico’s Company of Volunteers, which mustered 150 men and later as many as 300.¹⁴ The

¹³ Cf. V. Carli, *Dell’Istorie*, cit., vol. II, p. 307. The original passage, embedded in Carli’s text, reflects a recurring topos in the local chronicle tradition: the claim that a fortified settlement could not have been founded, nor have endured, on land too poor to sustain it — used here as legal-historical argument in the territorial disputes discussed below (see “The Dispute over the Borders,” 1604).

¹⁴ Cf. R. Raffaelli, *Descrizione geografica storica economica della Garfagnana* [Geographical, Historical and Economic Description of the Garfagnana], Lucca, 1879, p. 24.

militia, headed by a Captain, a Lieutenant and an Ensign, answered to the Governor of the Province alone.¹⁵

Periods of peace, however, were brief, for the situation in the Garfagnana at that time remained extremely fluid: the Florentines on one side, the Lucchesi on the other, were constantly struggling to recover lost territory, while the Este too fought to keep what they held. Vallico, bordering the Lucchese towns of Gello, Colognora and Motrone, and the Florentine Cardoso, often found itself the battleground — though the “Valichesi” always distinguished themselves by their courage and bravery in such engagements.

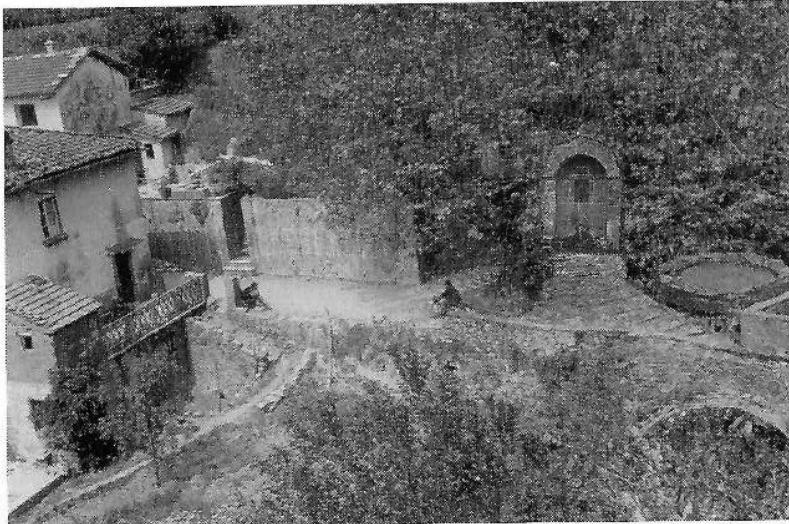
In 1512 Vallico, together with Trassilico, Castelnuovo and Le Verrucole, were the fortresses that repulsed the forces of Duke Francesco della Rovere, nephew of Pope Julius II, who had occupied the Garfagnana with 400 cavalry and 2,000 infantry. Della Rovere, eager for greater conquests, then made for Ferrara, leaving the Garfagnana to fend for itself. The Lucchesi, anxious to profit from the situation, secured the help of Ugo Moncada, viceroy of Naples, who at that moment was plundering the territory of Prato. They offered him 6,000 *scudi*, and with the addition of some Spanish troops invaded the Garfagnana jointly. Before the end of October 1512 Vallico Sotto and the other Este-ruled comuni were subdued by the Lucchesi.¹⁶



Vallico Sotto, viewed from the southeast.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 24.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 210.



Vallico Sotto: la "fontana vecchia" con l'antico lavatorio in pietra a forma poligonale

Vallico Sotto: the "old fountain," with its ancient polygonal stone washbasin.

Shortly afterwards, on 10 March 1513, Pope Julius II died, relieving both the Lucchesi and the Este dukes of a great fear; the Garfagnana thus returned to Este rule.

Unhappily, in the decades that followed, conflicts and wars succeeded one another almost without interruption, so much so that from the end of the sixteenth century into the early seventeenth the Garfagnana experienced one of its bleakest periods, marred by struggles between Guelphs and Ghibellines, religious quarrels, banditry, border disputes, and more besides. Several of these directly involved Vallico Sotto.

After the death of Julius II on 10 March 1513, the men of the Garfagnana once again sought out Duke Alfonso d'Este, returning to their old devotion. The Duke, well aware of the population's support and equally aware of Lucca's manifest weakness, demanded back the lands of the upper Garfagnana before he would grant peace; and Lucca, by now sunk into political and economic instability, had no choice but to accept.¹⁷ With this change of fortune Vallico Sotto, too, came directly under Este control once more.

From this point on, struggles for power and influence between the Lucchesi and the Garfagnini were continual; the failure of the new alliance to truly settle matters was already plain. Della Rovere's death — the last of his line — also weakened the cause of Florentine control. The new political situation imposed by Florence's loss of grip on the Garfagnana restored Este rule, but it did not bring back lasting peace. The general instability of politics and the economy weighed heavily on the population, fostering brigandage and ungoverned violence.

In 1521 the wars of the Garfagnana resumed; the towns sided either with Duke Alfonso d'Este or with Pope Leo X. The latter — except for the towns of Barga and Coreglia, with the aid of mercenary troops — occupied the whole province. Days later, on 7 December, the death of the Pope threw the weak Florentine government further into disorder; the people of Castelnuovo,

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 217.

by their own initiative, expelled the Florentine Commissioner, Bernardino Ruffo, and brought back the standard of Florence and the Estensi, who at once consolidated control. The province, generally left to incompetent administrators, returned peacefully to ducal control, though the Duke, preoccupied with wars and invasions elsewhere, delegated governance to the Presidents of the Vicariates, who proved grossly incompetent in turn.

The Duke of Modena always sought to instil sense and impartiality among his commanders, but the realisation of this often proved impossible, given the constant border disputes and the recurring damage caused privately by both parties; nevertheless the question of borders, pasture and property rights always served as the occasion for fresh provocation and renewed quarrels.

The Vicariate of Trassilico, to which Vallico Sotto belonged, was caught up in continuous border disputes: the Valichesi, and at times their neighbours too, gave proof again and again of their courage and skill in war, defending themselves resolutely against the people of Gello, Colognora and Motrone, who provoked them in various ways, damaging boundary trees in particular and seizing pasture. In 1541, finally, a sentence was passed settling the boundaries between Vallico and Fabbriche on one side and the Lucchesi towns of Gello, Colognora and Motrone on the other — ratified on 19 May 1542. New disputes nevertheless arose, between the men of Trassilico and the inhabitants of Gello, Colognora and Motrone, over the possession of various lands and woods, in places where it could not be doubted that “[...] in time the boundaries should be re-established and unmistakably notarised [...]”¹⁸

Vallico Sotto’s borders with the Lucchesi were a source of permanent friction; the disputes between the two peoples — over woods and pasture — were never wholly resolved, however many times agreements and peace treaties were signed, nor however much these were reasserted in writing. Vallico Sotto and Trassilico were, according to one’s point of view, sometimes considered part of one Vicariate, sometimes of the other; political and military disputes provoked moments of mutual sympathy and of bitter rivalry between them. The great instability — political and economic — that characterised the late sixteenth century in particular weakened the population and rendered the area defenceless before bandits and intermittent skirmishing.

In the year 1580 General Bentivoglio began the construction of the fortress of Monte Alfonso and provided abundantly for supplies and munitions. The Lucchesi found that all the routes by which they brought arms and reinforcements into the province were now blocked, and although this circumstance might have provoked war immediately, they “delayed the rupture for some years.”¹⁹ On the first days of January 1583, however, a fresh incident occurred when the inhabitants of Lucchese Colognora cut timber in the woods of Forcone; the Valichesi retaliated by burning the wood and committing other affronts.²⁰

On St Peter’s Day the skirmish near Medicciana intensified, but the most serious assault was aimed at the Fabbriche, which the Lucchesi intended to burn entirely. A notable episode here is

¹⁸ Cf. C. De Stefani, *Storia dei Comuni, cit.*, libro VII, p. 170.

¹⁹ Cf. C. De Stefani, *Storia dei Comuni, cit.*, p. 229.

²⁰ Cf. V. Carli, *Dell’Istorie, cit.*, libro VII, p. 170.

the Battle of the Harvest (“la Battaglia della Mietitura”), in which a Lucchese assault on the Fabbriche was foiled almost by accident.²¹ As the story goes: a “Valichese” sentry, mistaking the rustling caused by a small bird hopping among the leaves for the approach of the enemy, fired his musket out of fright. The other guards and reapers, startled in turn by the report, seized their weapons impulsively, and a real battle broke out, which the Valichesi won. The Lucchesi, with their fierce intent to destroy, lacked nothing but fortune; their soldiers attacked again and again, but the defenders of the Fabbriche held firm, helped by other forces sent in time from Castelnuovo to ward off the besiegers. The fighting lasted until evening: on one side the obstinate attempt to set fire to houses and barns, on the other the equally obstinate defence. The failure of their objective provoked the wrath of the Lucchese General, who turned his army loose on the surrounding fields and farmhouses, devastating them. In this engagement 90 of his roughly 3,000 men were killed, against only 3 of our 300.

This unprecedented audacity provoked from the Duke an order for total mobilisation, and he sent reinforcements; the Marshal of the Province, Ippolito Bentivoglio, arrived with a large force already on 21 July. By 13 July 1602²² the dispute had reached such a pass that Conte Montecuccoli was instructed to occupy the contested ground without delay and to remove the immediate danger to those lands, bringing the disputants to fight along the front of the Postometa: this episode is known as the *schedino della loro pretesa* (“the little record of their claim”). The men of Vallico fielded six thousand foot soldiers and entrusted command temporarily to Colonel Girolamo Minutoli, while the defence of the Provincial militia and of the Fabbriche was distributed among various commanders, who took up their positions with great enthusiasm and shrewdness, ready to act at the right moment, even though many had at first hesitated at the prospect of so great an undertaking. The order to assail and besiege Castello Montauti was given to Colonel Simone Teregli and Colonel Celso Montauti, while command of a further 6,000 foot soldiers was given to Colonel Giovanni Vitali, called “lo Zingaro” (the Gypsy), commander of the Vicariate of Coreglia, operating on the same front as the attack against the Castle of Frignano.

The Governor of the Province had at once distributed the troops, and the senior officers of the militia of Vallico and of the Fabbriche were the first to be ordered to defend their respective territories, being already accustomed to the drums and the rallying flag of the Governor. The Valichesi, very alert and quick-witted, had no doubt at all what the enemy’s objective was, nor were they unprepared for the assault. Although there could be no real hope of resisting so much larger a force — Minutoli’s men numbered 4,000 — the small garrison, displaying great daring, met the enemy with such heart and spirit that even the women of the houses took part, loading weapons and hurling stones, sustaining the violence of the attack for some time and managing to disperse a great number of the enemy, defending the breaches the cannon had opened in the walls with great courage. Other Lucchese troops in the meantime tried to press toward the Mill of Vallico and its Fort, in order to open a passage there too — at which point the besieging army’s standard began, for the first time, to falter.

²¹ Cf. C. De Stefani, *Storia dei Comuni*, cit., p. 222.

²² The dates given in Carli’s narrative are occasionally inconsistent in the original text (compare “21 July” and “13 July 1602” within the same passage); this is preserved here as in the source rather than silently corrected, since it most likely reflects two distinct stages of the campaign rather than scribal error.

Castello di Vallico. This Fort too was staunchly defended by the soldiers of the Duke, who repulsed the Lucchesi. The arrival of Conte Tiberio's troops, sent to relieve Vallico and the Fabbriche, met with fierce resistance from the Lucchesi; both Valichesi and the people of the Fabbriche showed alarm at the surprising success so far enjoyed by their attackers, and in revenge undertook a brutal destruction of the surrounding crops, cutting vines and stripping the bark from the fruit trees so that they would yield nothing for many years to come.



Archivio di Stato di Lucca, Capitoli 10, c. 211v, n. 424 N.N. (Zanmagna published on Van

State Archive of Lucca, Capitoli 10, c. 211v, p. 424 N.N. — a seventeenth-century map of the disputed Vallico–Gello–Cognora borderlands.

All this took place without ever slackening the siege of the Fabbriche; the Fort of the Mill and the other forts had likewise been assigned their own garrisons, ready to seize every opportunity to harm the adversary. Eventually, Minutoli, realising the bad turn of events, decided to bring up artillery, dragging three field-guns over the mountain of Cognora, in order to bring down the walls by cannon-fire. With these balls, although small, he managed to inflict some damage on the buildings, but the daring of the besieged was not in the least diminished by it.



Characteristic corners of Vallico Sotto.



Vallico Sotto, Via Sasso del Leone.

Meanwhile the Florentine troops had conquered Monteperpoli, Cascio and Monterotondo, and would have gone on to occupy the Pieve, had not Duke Cesare and the Prince come to its aid with militia arriving from Modena and Lombardy under General Bentivoglio, who entrusted the resolution of the whole dispute on the spot to the negotiator Bilia; he, indeed, since the arrival of the Duke's standard at Castelnuovo, had remained loyal to him alone, and was responsible for settling this protracted affair, the conditions of which he ratified in 1603.

The Catholic King, who had always favoured Lucca, entrusted mediation to Scaramuccia Visconti, but the Senate of Milan, by now weary of the Lucchesi's inconstancy, did not give way to this lengthy mediation; only the truce subsequently and favourably ratified by the Este in the Garfagnana finally brought peace, and the long-awaited end of the wars between Cognora and the Fabbriche.

The Dispute over the Borders (1604)

When the dispute over the boundaries was finally argued before the Tribunal of Castelnuovo, this was sufficient to confirm that the land in litigation was indeed subject to Ducal Jurisdiction, since neither party could otherwise demonstrate, by any valid argument, that the matter was clearly and publicly known to be otherwise. All the arguments presented were set out in detail across eight paragraphs.

For its part, the Republic of Lucca produced further arguments, which, while plausible at first sight, only confused the issue, and were eventually shown to be without foundation; this is reported in the *Libro degli Estimi* of Don Valentino Carli, from page 305 onward, where the relevant instrument is cited at length, concluding that “[...] those who have the most certain knowledge of the place agree that this assignment along the Turruta has always been, evidently, the more correct and the more just one, and that the boundary which the other party today claims lies at a distance of some 3 miles in height from where, by good reason, it ought to be placed.”²³

(The case argued on Vallico Sotto's behalf, in eight points)

1. It can be shown by both ancient and modern Estimi — cadastral surveys — that all the disputed lands belong properly to His Highness's Jurisdiction. They are explicitly recorded, with their toponyms, all situated beyond the River Turruta, which the Republic of Lucca has always sought to claim as her boundary. These Estimi are preserved by the Officials of the Community of Vallico, and on these very holdings dues continue to be paid to the Comune of Vallico or to Cognora.
2. That fines have repeatedly been levied by the *guardiani* for damage done on these very lands, paid to the Comune of Vallico — proof, were the matter otherwise, that they should instead have gone to the Comune of Cognora or of Motroni.
3. That the accumulated weight of more than a hundred years of sales and purchases of those holdings, in which the disputed lands are designated, points overwhelmingly in one direction: such contracts are recorded among the many notarised instruments executed for the lands beyond the Turruta and known as belonging to the Territory of Vallico, under Ducal Jurisdiction.
4. That many ancient boundary-markers, situated well above the disputed area, mark the confines between Vallico and Cognora, and clearly show that the entire hillside, down to the bank of the river opposite, is Vallico's territory.

²³ Cf. V. Carli, *Dell'Istorie*, cit., pp. 305 ff. The bracketed ellipses in this passage reproduce lacunae already present in Carli's own transcription of the seventeenth-century instrument; they are not an editorial omission on the present translator's part.

5. That the River Turruta itself, claimed by the Republic of Lucca as her own boundary, is leased every year at public auction by the Comune of Vallico to whoever bids highest for it — proof that, were the river truly the dividing line, the Communities of Gello or Colognora would long since have contested such an arrangement.

6. That many ancient boundary terms still in existence — though many others have evidently been lost or destroyed over time — show clearly that the disputed boundary lies far higher up the mountain than the Republic now contends.

7. That every year, without the least interruption, the produce of these contested lands — wheat and other crops — has been gathered freely by the inhabitants of Vallico, with no opposition whatsoever, despite the much greater poverty of the Lucchese side, who would certainly have contested the harvest had any right to it existed; nor would the Founders of so populous and well-provisioned a fortified town have established it at a site where its own people could not draw sustenance, were this not in fact the case.

8. Above all the reasons hitherto stated, there remains one yet stronger, drawn from an authentic instrument preserved in the Ducal Archive of Modena, recording that, several years before, a civil suit concerning Postometa had been tried before the magistracy of Castelnuovo among the ancient possessors of that land, and decided in favour of the party best able to demonstrate possession by right — a most clear proof of Ducal jurisdiction, since had the land in fact belonged to the Republic, the suit would necessarily have been tried before a Lucchese magistrate.

(The Lucchese counter-arguments)

Although none of the above gave the Republic of Lucca any reasonable cause to renounce her claim entirely, she nonetheless put forward further arguments, which appeared plausible at first hearing but were swiftly shown to be groundless by those acquainted with the actual lie of the land — by careful inspection of the sites, by the certain knowledge of those most versed in the matter, and by the testimony of older inhabitants, who knew the boundaries far better than the moderns could claim to. The pretension thus advanced, however injurious to the truth, was nonetheless treated with all due seriousness, given how great a distance separated the boundary line the Republic now asserted from the one always until then recognised — namely the boundary of Gello, which by long custom lay some three miles further up the mountain than where the Republic now wished it placed.

When fresh disputes arose in 1604 between the workers of ducal Fabbriche and the inhabitants of Lucchese Gello, commissioners of both states were sent to quell the disturbance. Having examined the matter as set out above, they fixed the boundary unanimously. Because the river Turruta had quite justly been assigned as the boundary line above the Fabbriche, the Republic later sought to extend the same boundary downstream as well — a claim that might appear reasonable to outsiders unfamiliar with the terrain, but which was unanimously rejected as unjust by those who knew it, since the Turruta boundary assigned to Gello's lands lies nearly three miles higher than the point the Republic now claims.

They went on to confuse the toponym *Acquapendura* — a waterfall that drops from the cliffs within the disputed territory — with *Acquapendurina*, in their own territory; though the diminutive form might suggest a connection, the two are entirely distinct places, the first lying

beyond the Turruta within Vallico's territory, the other within Lucchese Cardoso, on the far side of the river.

Despite the weakness of such arguments, the Republic obstinately pursued this minor jurisdictional claim — sacrificing wider provincial interests to it — perhaps in the knowledge that it would, in any case, be impossible to overturn the Imperial investitures already granted to the House of Este. Thus border skirmishes and provincial hardship continued until [...] ²⁴

Some peace at last returned to these territories, with only minor disturbances, until 1613, when the Este refusal to allow Florentine troops passage through the Garfagnana — troops on their way to help the Duke of Mantua against Savoy — shattered this fragile calm. Seizing the opportunity presented by the Este's entanglement with Florence, the Lucchesi reopened the old boundary dispute between Vallico and Motrone, attacking the Fabbriche once again — fruitlessly, as before. ²⁵ After this failed attack the Lucchesi did not relent, and planned a new assault not only on the same lands but across the whole Province. Command was given to Capitano Jacopo Lucchesini, who reinforced Castiglione against the resistance of the local people, while ordering simultaneous attacks against Vallico and the Fabbriche, hoping finally to glut his men on their ruin. He at once dispatched Colonel Simone Teregli and Colonel Celso Montauti — both men of great valour — to direct the operation against that fortified town, entrusting the siege itself to Girolamo Minutoli with his 6,000 infantry. At the same time he charged Colonel Giovanni Vitali, “lo Zingaro,” commander of the Vicariate of Coreglia, with the assault on the Province of Frignano.

Once roles and troops had been assigned, the advance began at once, and since Vallico had most recently injured Lucchese interests, it was struck first. The vigilant Valichesi, shrewdly anticipating the enemy's movements, kept watch over their supposedly impregnable strongholds while reinforcing the Fabbriche — Minutoli's primary target — with barricades and soldiers. They even sent a drummer to alert the Governor. Yet, undaunted, and with the greatest courage, they faced the enemy, proving that they had both the heart and — in the vivid expression used by the chronicler — the *fegato* (“guts,” literally “liver”) to resist. ²⁶ Their resistance astonished Minutoli, who had never imagined that so small a garrison could hold off his 4,000 troops, who were imprudently exposed to enemy fire. The defenders, well supplied with firearms, kept up an unrelenting fire, aided by women who tirelessly reloaded weapons for them. The Lucchese losses mounted alarmingly, obliging their commander to besiege the town by stationing troops on the surrounding hillocks. Meanwhile other Lucchese units assailed the Fortress of Vallico's Mill, hoping to break through there and open a way toward the fortified town of Vallico itself.

This fortress too was staunchly defended, and its garrison repelled the Lucchesi. The combined resistance of the Duke's soldiers, reinforced under the command of Conte Tiberio, emboldened

²⁴ Cf. V. Carli, *Dell'Istorie*, *cit.*, pp. 305 ff.

²⁵ Cf. C. De Stefani, *Storia dei Comuni*, *cit.*, p. 235.

²⁶ The Italian *fegato* (“liver”) was, as in modern colloquial Italian, used figuratively to mean “courage” or “nerve” — a usage already current in this period; rendered here as “guts” to preserve the colloquial register of the original, set off in the text by the author's own quotation marks.

the Valichesi while sowing doubt among the attackers as to their chances of success. The Lucchesi retaliated by savagely ravaging the surrounding countryside: burning the crops, cutting down the vines, and stripping the bark from the fruit trees to ensure years of barrenness to come.

These depredations did nothing to loosen the sieges of the Fabbriche, the Mill Fortress, and the other strongholds, whose purpose was precisely to keep the raiding parties apart. Both sides held their ground, each ready to exploit the other's least misstep. Eventually, recognising the futility of his position, Minutoli ordered three field-guns dragged along the mountain paths of Colognora, hoping to blast breaches in the walls. Although the small cannonballs did damage some of the buildings, the defenders' resolve remained entirely unbroken.

Meanwhile General Lucchesini had captured Monteperpoli, Cascio and Monterotondo, and would have gone on to occupy the Pieve — and very probably Castelnuovo too, by then stripped of the troops it had sent to Vallico — but for an inexplicable halt in his advance, which spared the town just as General Bentivoglio arrived from Modena with Lombard forces, accompanied by Prince Alfonso d'Este (heir to the Duke), who personally rallied his loyal subjects. Soon afterwards a "Modenese Gentleman" led a band of irregulars to harass the enemy's lines. These reinforcements together pinned down the Lucchese Republic's forces, cutting off their means of resupply. Micotti records days of pitched fighting on several fronts, in which, he says, "many fell, both in the assaults and in the defences, with such fury and such bloodshed that the mutual hatred and ferocity of the two peoples — no less than the valour of both — were laid starkly bare."²⁷ Still fiercer and more uncertain were the clashes fought over the lands of Vallico, where the Lucchesi, having failed to take the fortified town itself, besieged the Mill Fortress instead from the hillock of Capannori, dominating the road that linked Vallico to its mills. This stranglehold prevented the besieged from receiving food or munitions — a tactic that might well have succeeded, had the people of Vallico not devised a counter-stratagem. Among them were those who, "recalling the wars of old, told how in 1583 a similar shortage had been overcome by sending pack-animals, accustomed to those very paths, loaded as if with wheat — but laden in fact with munitions — which, left to find their own way, delivered reinforcements safely to the besieged."²⁸ While this attack on Vallico was under way, others took place simultaneously on several fronts across the Garfagnana,²⁹ requiring the mediation of the Catholic King, who had long favoured Lucca.

This mediation was entrusted to Scaramuccia Visconti, but Duke Cesare d'Este, weary of Lucca's repeated bad faith, rejected every proposal of truce out of hand. Conte Baldassarre Bilia, who led the negotiations, entered Castiglione, raised the Spanish standard there, and declared the town to belong to his King. Confronted by so authoritative an act, the Estensi gave way, reaching an agreement that simply reaffirmed the terms of 1603.

On 27 August 1618 the Imperial Court upheld the ruling of the Senate of Milan in favour of the House of Este, definitively confirming their possession of the Garfagnana. This inaugurated the

²⁷ Cf. A. Micotti, *Descrittione*, *cit.*, p. 249.

²⁸ Cf. V. Carli, *Dell'Istorie*, *cit.*, libro X, p. 358.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 359–360.

longest period of peace the region had known since Lombard times. By 1619 Vallico, too, had reached reconciliation with the Lucchese towns of Motrone, Gello and Colognora.

The Garfagnana subsequently became a transit zone and rear base during the Franco-Spanish wars in the Po valley fought under Duke Francesco I d'Este, then Captain-General of the French forces (1657). The movement of troops, and the banditry that came with it, occasioned brief but destructive Este raids into the northern Lucchese territories. Through her Papal connections Lucca protested these incursions, and the Governor of Milan, acting on the Emperor Leopold's orders, settled the matter on 1 October 1688 on the existing terms.

After this, life proceeded peacefully, the theatre of war having shifted northwards, to far weightier conflicts — the Franco-Austro-Spanish wars. Duke Francesco III himself was forced to abandon Modena to Austro-Sardinian forces until the Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle, in 1748, restored the Garfagnana to Este rule.

Toward the end of the eighteenth century the Garfagnana came under the Cispadane Republic, which imposed new taxes that impoverished the communities and provoked minor, futile uprisings. From 1805 to 1814 it belonged to the Baciocchi Principality of Lucca, before the Congress of Vienna and the Restoration returned it to Este–Habsburg-Lorraine rule under Archduke Ferdinand and Maria Beatrice. In 1848 the Garfagnana briefly joined the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, reverting afterward to the Duchy of Modena, until 1859, when the Province — led by Luigi Carlo Farini in the name of the King of Sardinia — joined the newly unified Kingdom of Italy by plebiscite. During the subsequent reorganisation, the lands of the Garfagnana were assigned to the Province of Massa. In 1923 the comune of Trassilico (which included Vallico Sotto, Vallico Sopra and Gragliana) was transferred to the Province of Lucca. By Decree No. 441 of 10 May 1947, the seat of the comune passed from Trassilico to Fabbriche di Vallico.

Here, then, ends the chronicle of a “small historic village,” which, finding itself by chance at the centre of grander events, met them with such spirit and courage that it gave rise to the saying:³⁰

DI VALIO SON, A VALIO SON NAO, MEGLIO MORIR CHE LASCIÀ IL PENNAO.

(Of Vallico I am, in Vallico I was born — better to die than leave my billhook behind.)

Description of Vallico Sotto

The villages of Vallico Sopra and Vallico Sotto cling to the southern slopes of Monte Palodina, on the left bank of the Turrite Cava, rising some 490 metres above sea level. Vallico Sotto stretches “vertically” along a rocky spur, flanked along its whole length by the Rio Selvano and the Rio Maggiore, and surrounded by chestnut woods and groves. Below the village, the Rio Maggiore joins the Rio Selvano at Lupinari before plunging through the deep gorge of the Pili into the Turrite Cava, at the Mills of Vallico. The territory of the village still preserves its ancient boundaries within the comune of Fabbriche di Vallico, bordering Trassilico, Vallico Sopra, Gello, Motrone, Colognora and Cardoso.

³⁰ See the note on this saying at the title of the work, above.

In ancient times the only links between these settlements were mule tracks, some of them man-made — paved with stone steps cut into the rock or shored up with dry-stone walls — others simply paths worn by generations of men and mules.

These routes allowed the inhabitants to bring down to the valley, and to transport, the goods plentiful in the area: wood, charcoal, chestnuts and wine. Vallico Sotto was served by a well-arranged network of mule tracks connecting it to neighbouring villages. Four main tracks converged here: one, climbing up through Vallico Sopra toward San Luigi, linked it to Trassilico and Galliciano; this same track then descended steeply, by way of the Rio Selvano, to the Mills of Vallico, where it joined the two mule tracks coming from Motrone and the one from Fabbriche di Vallico — all converging, in turn, into a single road that, following the Turrîte, reached the villages along the Serchio. The mule track to the east linked Vallico to Cardoso and to the Serchio valley by way of the Scalette; it was probably the oldest route, descending to the foot of Monte Penna along the left bank of the Turrîte as far as Turrîte Cava. Of the western tracks, one led to Fabbriche, the other — passing through Pomponella, Tesserata and Foce Monda — to Trassilico and San Pellegrinetto.



Vallico Sotto: area of the “Portone,” from which one enters the village.

Conditions today have changed: the village is now easily reached by an asphalted road (built between 1960 and 1970), leaving the provincial road just by car. Leaving the provincial road at Fabbriche, one winds along a hillside road, full of bends, until Vallico Sotto comes into view. Already from a distance one can make out its solid, compact structure clinging to the hill, surrounded by terraces, vineyards and fields — once well tended, but now showing signs of complete neglect: the woods are encroaching steadily, but the village retains its ancient charm.

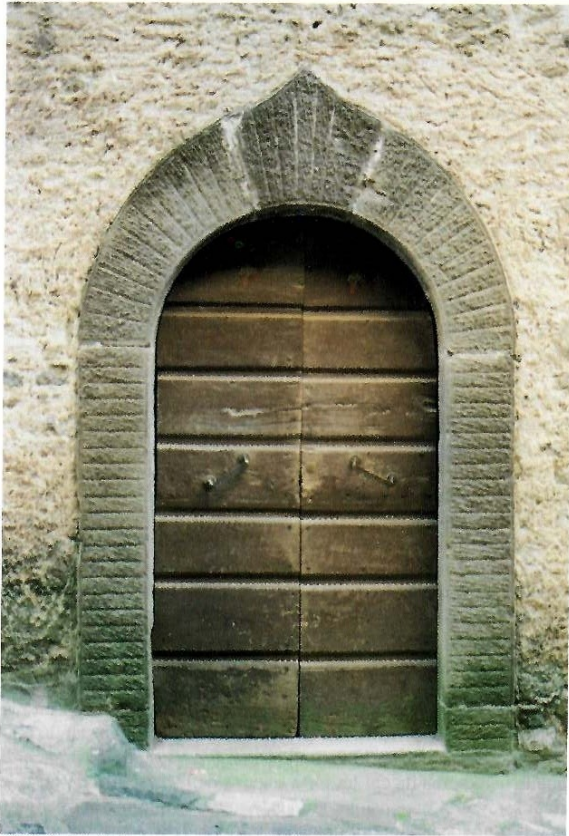
Of Vallico I am, in Vallico I was born, better to die than leave my billhook behind.

History of Vallico Sotto: the layout

The “porte” of the village — small chapels, alleys, and steep stairways — created what amounted to a fortress within a fortress: the tall houses, almost joined roof to roof, with their austere doorways. The streets are linked, transversally, by three arched passageways — the

Arco di Cima, the Arco di Mezzo and the Arco di Fondo — with dwellings built directly above them, connecting perpendicularly the buildings on either side.

Around the Arco di Mezzo, in particular, a labyrinth of small arches, narrow passages, stairs and lanes unfolds beneath tall walls, which support kitchen gardens and link the houses to one another. Elsewhere in the village, similar fortress-like walls support yet other gardens.



Vallico Sotto: portale

Vallico Sotto: portal.

The portal facing the Aia della Castellina opens onto a broad, vaulted courtyard, still paved with flagstones, with a sandstone stair leading to an exit that opens, in turn, onto a walled garden. Set into the building to the right of the entrance gate is the Chapel of San Silvestro. The elderly recall that this house once had an emergency exit leading to the “Rocchetta,” a small rise just above the village. Outside these fortification walls runs the mule track to Vallico Sopra. Nearby once stood the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix, locally called the “Collegio.” It was probably founded — as so many hospices of that era were — to shelter travellers passing through, the site lying roughly three hours’ walk from both Trassilico and Turrîte Cava.



Vallico Sotto: casa che si affaccia sulla piazza esterna alle mura del paese

Vallico Sotto: house overlooking the square outside the village walls.

Throughout the village, especially along its two main streets, one can still admire iron-grilled windows and sandstone doorways carved with coats of arms dating from the 1500s onward. Some of these portals open onto spacious stone-paved courtyards. Iron rings set into the walls mark where horsemen once tethered their mounts. Over time the village grew beyond its walls, as the return of peace allowed its people to venture outside the castle — inevitably changing its character.



Vallico Sotto: porta a ovest del paese

Vallico Sotto: western gate of the village.



Scorcio della piazza di Vallico Sotto con la Chiesa di S. Giacomo

View of Vallico Sotto's square with the Church of S. Giacomo.

The Church of Vallico Sotto

The Church of Vallico Sotto bears witness to the village's once populous and important past. Its history is largely lost to time, and we cannot say with certainty whether the present building enlarges an earlier one — possibly dedicated to San Cristoforo, as suggested by a parchment of 1272, which may be the earliest attestation.

One firm date is 4 August 1357, when the church is recorded as the parish church dedicated to Santi Giacomo Maggiore Apostolo e Cristoforo. Some sources record its dedication instead to San Giacomo and San Filippo, though the former attribution seems the more credible.

After this date the parish gained independence from the Pieve di Galliciano, with authority to bury and to baptise its own parishioners. On this occasion the Pieve of Galliciano gave it a hexagonal sandstone baptismal font, which still stands at the entrance of the left aisle. The parish baptismal register, however, was only begun in 1611, after the Council of Trent had made such record-keeping obligatory. The church, together with its old and new rectories, sacristies and bell tower, forms a substantial architectural complex overlooking the Piazza San Giacomo, the village's main square. The ecclesiastical complex is itself surrounded by the heart of the village, with houses of notable size and structure bearing witness to the historical importance of the place and the prosperity of its inhabitants. The pavement of the square forms geometric patterns with its flagstones, still centred upon a stone trapdoor giving access to a large cistern that, during sieges, supplied the whole population with drinking water.

The church's main façade is presently covered with a rough plaster that conceals its original appearance, very probably of exposed stone. Three standard double doors open in the façade, framed with simple, sturdy sandstone slabs; these give onto the two side aisles and a large room called the Old Sacristy, today used to store old vestments, statues and furnishings. The main door of the central nave, a double-leafed door with an arched top, is likewise framed in sandstone, but crowned with a scallop-shaped stone pediment.

The church has a three-aisled plan, well proportioned, on two rows of columns, each comprising five monolithic, cylindrical sandstone columns supporting the arched structure above. All the columns stand on square bases and are topped by capitals that alternately attempt to reproduce the Doric and Ionic orders. The side aisles are covered with groin vaults, while the central nave has a series of arches with the beginnings of cross-vaulting. The arches are decorated with a frieze of Greek key patterns, mouldings and lively colours — orange and yellow especially — which, together with the starry-sky motif, make the church bright and imposing. On the side walls of the central nave, above the arches, eight pointed windows fitted with coloured glass illuminate the interior and lend it further preciousness.



Vallico Sotto, Chiesa di S. Giacomo: Madonna con Bambino tra S. Rocco e S. Sebastiano, ca.

Vallico Sotto, Church of S. Giacomo: Madonna and Child between St Rocco and St Sebastiano, altarpiece attributed to Simone Carretta of Modena (16th century).

The apse, centred beneath a starry sky decorated with blind arches, is dominated by a roundel depicting the patron saint. Behind the high altar, above the wooden choir, stands the late-Gothic triptych of Bernardino del Castelletto: its central panel shows the Madonna enthroned with the Child, flanked to the right by San Cristoforo carrying the Christ Child across the water, and to the left by the Apostle Giacomo. Above these, within three pinnacled Gothic frames, are a central Crucifixion flanked by the Annunciate Virgin and the Announcing Angel. The triptych is enclosed by two pointed towers containing six figures of saints. The predella, more Renaissance than Gothic in feeling, with its rounded arches, has three central panels, two transitional sections and two end panels depicting scenes from the life of Christ. The apse has, above the side walls, two large rectangular windows that light both the choir and this precious altarpiece. The marble-grey walls of the church, veined with darker tones, form a pattern resembling great slabs and are broken up by dark-grey bands streaked with white.



Vallico Sotto, Chiesa di S. Giacomo: trittico di Bernardino del Castelletto con al centro

Vallico Sotto, Church of S. Giacomo: triptych by Bernardino del Castelletto, with the Madonna enthroned with Child at centre, St Christopher ferrying Jesus to the right, and the Apostle Giacomo to the left.

According to local testimony, the original floor was of stone slabs; today it is laid with hexagonal tiles in white, red and black, arranged in a chequerboard pattern.

The balustrade unifying the three aisles, entirely of white Carrara marble, is formed of a row of small columns supporting the rail. Also of white marble is the hexagonal pulpit, attached to one of the stone columns between the central and right aisles.

All this shows how the church's interior has been continually altered over time, as is evident from the contrasting architectural styles present — most notably the High Altar, built in 1966.

The church has seven altars in all. The high altar, in the centre of the apse, is dedicated to San Giacomo. Flanking it are, to the right, the altar of the Holy Assumption, and to the left that of Sant'Orsola. In each side aisle stand two further altars, dedicated respectively, in the left aisle, to the Madonna and to Sant'Antonio, and, in the right aisle, to Saints Rocco and Biagio, and to the Crucifixion.

All the altars are adorned with sacred images; with the exception of the Crucifixion altarpiece, these are paintings, some of considerable merit, set within decorative plasterwork — smooth or

spiral-fluted columns painted to imitate coloured marble — and crowned by capitals, pediments and tympana in a decidedly Baroque style.

The altarpiece of the Madonna is further adorned with depictions of the Mysteries of the Rosary.

Particularly notable is the sixteenth-century altarpiece of Saints Rocco and Sebastiano, currently under restoration, attributed to the Modenese painter Simone Carretta. This oil-on-panel work, in its wooden frame and crowned by a representation of God the Father, depicts the Madonna enthroned with the Christ Child, surrounded by a glory of angels and life-sized figures of saints, among them San Rocco and San Sebastiano.

The Crucifixion altarpiece consists of plaster statues showing the Crucified Christ with the holy women at His feet; above, at the centre of a rose-window, appears the date 1695.

On the wall of the left aisle, between the sacristy door and the altar of Sant'Orsola, one may admire a fifteenth-century Gothic marble tabernacle, with ogival arches and pinnacles, converted in the early seventeenth century into a repository for the *olea infirmorum* (the oils for anointing the sick).

In the left aisle, near the entrance, still stands the sandstone baptismal font donated to the church by the Pieve di Galliciano on 4 August 1357.

In the right aisle, near the so-called “men’s door,” set within a stuccoed and painted niche, stands a precious baptismal font whose construction dates to 1714: a beautiful oval marble holy-water basin, topped by a wooden canopy adorned with gilded reliefs and ornaments.

The whole baptismal complex rests on a broad sandstone plinth, which also supports the wrought-iron railing enclosing and protecting it.



Vallico Sotto, Chiesa di S. Giacomo: confessionale del XVII sec. e armadietto degli Olii Sancti

Vallico Sotto, Church of S. Giacomo: 17th-century confessional and cabinet for the Holy Oils.



Vallico Sotto, Chiesa di S. Giacomo: fonte battesimale ed acqua santiera

Vallico Sotto, Church of S. Giacomo: baptismal font and holy-water stoup.

Two fine holy-water stoups flank the church entrance, near the second pair of columns. The one on the left, including its pedestal, is entirely of carved marble. The one on the right, in white marble, stands on a stone column whose base bears the date 1629.

This last date — like the others mentioned above — shows that the church underwent considerable alteration during the seventeenth century. A marble slab set into the floor before the central doorway bears the inscription “1925,” recording when the present hexagonal tile flooring, balustrade and pulpit were installed; the pulpit’s steps still bear the names of those who donated them.

Above the central nave’s main doorway hangs the original wooden staircase. The church possesses a particularly fine bell tower. Architecturally unremarkable, but dominant on the skyline, this campanile rises 25 metres above the rectory and sacristies which, together with the church, enclose it on three sides. The massive structure has a single window above the entrance and is built of hammered sandstone quoins set in lime mortar, crowned by two linear sandstone cornices — one marking the level of the bell-chamber, the other forming a “crown” at the summit. The bell-chamber is reached by a ladder, over disjointed plank flooring. The belfry opens onto a balcony, sheltered by sandstone arches and an iron rail. The two present bells — one smaller than the other — were cast by Valentini e Bimbi in 1823 and 1825 respectively; the smaller was recast in 1959. For centuries the bells have marked the rhythm of life in Vallico:



Vallico Sotto: the bell tower of the Church of San Giacomo.

— sounding for moments of joy and of sorrow alike. The bell-ringers took turns on Sundays, on great feast days and on their vigils, as well as on the Patron Saint's day, announcing them with the bells, whose pealing filled the valleys and gladdened the people's hearts. Different tolls announced deaths, whether of a man or of a woman. In times past, the campanile's "hammer-stroke" warned of imminent danger — the threat of war or of attack. On such occasions the community would gather, in turn, to discuss matters, consult together, and decide upon the measures needed to meet an imminent danger or emergency. From the seventeenth century onward, the campanile housed a clock-mechanism, without a face, that struck the larger bell. Above the entrance door, two plaques bear the only two dates relating to the tower's construction: the first, 1532, the other, 1822, with the inscription:

SACRA TURRI REPARATA FUIT A.D. MDCCCXXII ("This sacred tower was restored in the year of our Lord 1822.")

Parish History of Vallico Sotto, to AD 1822

The parish of Vallico Sotto remained part of the Diocese of Lucca until 1430, continuing as part of it even under Este rule. On 3 July 1822 it was detached from the Diocese of Lucca and transferred to that of Massa (taking practical effect, however, only from 1826).

On 29 March 1828 it was created a vice-pieve (a parish exercising certain rights of a Pieve). Several years later, on the death of the parish priest, it returned once more to being a parish dependent on the Diocese of Lucca.

The parish has, since 24 December 1984, no longer had its own resident priest; following the death of Don Enrico Turelli, it has been administered by the priest of Fabbriche di Vallico.

Devotional Practices

In times past, religious sentiment was deeply rooted in the population, expressed in the community's normal observances and especially exalted on occasion of the two great patronal feasts: that of the patron, San Giacomo, and that of the Madonna del Rosario. Other important feasts were celebrated on 25 July (the patron's own day) and on the first Sunday of October (the feast of the Rosary), with further important festivities held for the Assumption, on 15 August, and for Corpus Domini, in addition to the ordinary calendar.

In joyful moments and in solemn ones alike, the bells were the protagonists. The bell-ringers took turns on a Sunday, at the great anniversaries and in the days before them, such as Christmas, ringing in the feast of the patron, or alerting the community before the arrival of enemies. In times of greater urgency the bell was sounded with a "*martello*" — a heavy hammer-stroke — to warn the people of imminent danger, gathering the population in front of the Casa Pubblica to discuss and decide upon the measures necessary, in cases of emergency, of an attack imminent or a fire about to break out. From the seventeenth century the campanile had a quadrant-less clock attached to the great bell, above the doorway, recording the only two dates concerning the tower's construction: the first 1532, the other 1822, together with the inscription:

SACRA TURRI REPARATA FUIT A.D. MDCCCXXII

The Oratory of the Holy Suffrage



L'Oratorio del Suffragio in un disegno del XVII secolo

The Oratory of the Holy Suffrage, in a seventeenth-century drawing.

On the eve, or on the day itself, of these feasts, candle-lit processions wound through the village streets, carrying the statues of the Madonna or the relics of the saints. During these

celebrations the men of the village belonging to the “Compagnia” wore caps and cloaks; to ensure the success of the feast of the Rosary, “festaioli” were nominated to coordinate the preparations. On these feast days each family invited friends and relatives from neighbouring villages and laid out their best produce upon the table.

Throughout the year there were also several rogation processions, which wound along the country lanes. The main one, called the “Long Procession,” descended along the “Mulini” mule track to reach the locality of Isola, almost at the boundary of the comune’s territory, where a frugal meal was eaten before the procession returned, by way of the same mule track, to the parish church, where Mass was celebrated.

The Cemeteries

Local tradition identifies, between the sacristy and the apse, a small exterior space called “Ai Morti” (At the Dead) as the ancient burial ground. From the early nineteenth century, following ecclesiastical instructions, burial pits were dug beneath the church floor itself. Stone trapdoors giving access to these pits still survive in the central nave, before the high altar, and in the old sacristy.

The present cemetery dates from 1880, situated to the east of the village along the “delle Scalette” track — one of Vallico’s original access routes. A marble plaque on the cemetery wall records the first burial there:

PORTA GIUSEPPE MORTO NEL MARZO DEL 1880 CHE PER PRIMO QUI EBBE RIPOSO

(“Giuseppe Porta, died March 1880, who was the first to find rest here.”)

The Confraternities

Vallico Sotto had five well-organised confraternities, each with its own statute. It is possible to learn detailed information about them from the pastoral-visitation records of 1683, in particular the records kept by Monsignor Lorenzo Angelini, preserved as Codex 3.228 in the Biblioteca di Lucca.

Membership of these confraternities entailed serious religious participation: processions, rogations, rosaries, Masses and similar duties were expected of members, with financial penalties due from members who failed in their obligations. They also undertook to contribute economically toward the upkeep of their altar’s wax candles, linens and other furnishings. Unfortunately, since the start of the twentieth century, some of these confraternities have ceased to exist.

The Oratory of the Holy Suffrage

This oratory stands adjoining the house of its then owner, Capitano Giulio Cesare Mariani, who in 1667 commissioned its construction, on 28 January, for its realisation. He had a regular income of 5,000 scudi in Garfagnana currency assigned to it, to be spent at the rate of 150 scudi a year, for the celebration of Masses in suffrage for the Souls in Purgatory every Monday and Friday, and one on 31 December, provided by the priest. A few years later, in 1686, the then owner of the property, having taken pastoral visitation of the oratory itself, was forbidden to

sleep in the room above it unless it were given “a proper vault” — that is, brick-vaulted. Today the oratory is opened solely for the visit of the Visita Pastorale and for the Blessing of the Palms.

The Oratory of the Holy Crucifix

The Oratory of the Holy Crucifix stands in the locality known as “Collegio,” its origins unknown. It is mentioned in the Pastoral Visitation of 26 November 1625, by which time it is recorded as being “officiated” — i.e. served — by the Reverend Francesco Pierotti of Pieve Fosciana, then rector of Vallico. Today the building is put to other use.

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Abbreviations used

- A.S.L. — Archivio di Stato di Lucca (State Archive of Lucca)
- B.S.L. — Biblioteca di Stato di Lucca (State Library of Lucca)
- A.A.M. — Archivio Arcivescovile di Massa (Archdiocesan Archive of Massa)

N.B. Much of the information recorded in this text comes from testimonies given to the Author by the residents of Vallico. The Author thanks the population for its contribution towards achieving a fuller account.

Acknowledgements

The Author wishes to thank, for their valuable assistance, Andrea Capuano, Fabrizio Mari, Vinicio Martini, Marco Panigada, Giancarlo Paolini, and Edi Romagnoli.

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