HiLL PUBLISHING

Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Science, 2026, 10(9), 1101-1107
https://www.hillpublisher.com/Journals/jhass/
ISSN Online: 2576-0548
ISSN Print: 2576-0556

Vocal Action, Public Attribution, and Female Authorship: Three Latin Sacred Solos in Francesca Caccini's 1618 Collection

Youli Zhou

Yangzhou University, Yangzhou 225009, Jiangsu, China.

How to cite this paper: Youli Zhou. (2026) Vocal Action, Public Attribution, and Female Authorship: Three Latin Sacred Solos in Francesca Caccini's 1618 Collection. *Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Science*, 10(9), 1101-1107.
DOI: 10.26855/jhass.2026.09.011

Received: July 21, 2026
Accepted: August 18, 2026
Published: September 17, 2026

*Corresponding author: Youli Zhou, Yangzhou University, Yangzhou 225009, Jiangsu, China.

© 2026 by the author(s).
This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives (CC BY-NC-ND) license, which permits non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited and is not modified or adapted.
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

Abstract

The sacred section of Francesca Caccini's 1618 *Il primo libro delle musiche a una e due voci* ends with seven consecutive Latin solos. This article compares three of them: *Laudate Dominum in sanctis eius* (a psalm), *Regina Coeli* (a Marian antiphon), and *Te lucis ante terminum* (a Compline hymn). All three are scored for solo voice and continuo but differ in textual function and formal scale. It asks how diminution (the division of longer note values into shorter, often ornamented figures, also referred to as *passaggi*), meter, bass motion, cadence, repetition, and instrumental ritornellos organize command, acclamation, declaration, intercession, and prayer. The comparison suggests that, in these three works, these resources acquire their function from their position in a textual and formal sequence. Local closure can prepare another command, a metrical shift can mark a change of utterance, and a ritornello can sustain formal continuity after vocal closure. The 1618 title page, dedication, correspondence, and contemporary accounts connect these arrangements to Caccini's public identity as a composer. The article therefore locates the works' gender-historical significance in the public attribution of compositional responsibility to a professional woman, rather than in musical devices presumed to be feminine.

Keywords

Francesca Caccini; Latin sacred solo; vocal action; female authorship; *Il primo libro delle musiche a una e due voci*

Introduction

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, Italian monody brought verbal clarity, affective expression, and musical process into closer relation. Francesca Caccini's *Il primo libro delle musiche a una e due voci*, published in 1618, places that relation at the intersection of female authorship and Latin sacred music. Seven Latin works for solo voice and continuo appear consecutively at the end of its sacred section, and the collection circulated publicly under Caccini's name (F. Caccini, 1618, title page, dedication, and table of contents; Cusick, 2009, pp. 68-97). McClary argues that scholarship should ask how music defines a subject's range of utterance, rhetorical capacity, and conditions for completing an action, and then situate those acts within historical relations of gender and power (McClary, 1989, pp. 203-207). This article asks how three settings organize repeated command, acclamation and intercession, and sustained prayer, and how the signed print and related documents connect those musical arrangements to Caccini's public authorship.

Existing scholarship provides three foundations. Raney, Predota, and Alexander and Savino examine the collection, its monodic vocabulary, and performance practice (Caccini, 2004, pp. 5-8; Predota, 1993, pp. 87-113; Raney, 1967,

pp. 350-357). Cusick places Caccini's teaching, court service, family authority, print order, and female authorship within one historical framework (Cusick, 1998, pp. 5-41; Cusick, 2007, pp. 127-162; Cusick, 2009, pp. 68-111). McClary and Cusick show how musical rhetoric can define the range of utterance available to different voices and connect it to gendered power (Cusick, 1994, pp. 21-32, 35-38, 41-43; McClary, 1989, pp. 203-223; McClary, 1991). More recent scholarship situates Caccini within broader histories of women's composition, Medici court service, and musical representation (Cypess, 2024, pp. 137-158; Harness, 2026, pp. 11-18; Wilbourne, 2023, pp. 43-63). Together, these studies establish the collection's musical language, performance context, courtly setting, and modes of public authorship. Yet Caccini's Latin sacred solos have seldom been examined by bringing close musical analysis into direct conversation with documentary evidence for authorship and reception. This article addresses that gap through three comparative case studies. All three works appear in the same 1618 print and use solo voice with continuo, while their textual genres and formal designs differ (F. Caccini, 1618, table of contents and nos. 13, 15, and 18; Raney, 1967, pp. 350-357). *Laudate Dominum in sanctis eius* tests successive commands and local cadences; *Regina Coeli* tests metrical and syntactic change among acclamation, declaration, and intercession; and *Te lucis ante terminum* tests the alternation of vocal strophes and instrumental ritornellos across a larger form.

Austin's account of utterances as actions serves as a point of departure, not as a strict taxonomy for the sacred texts (Austin, 1975, pp. 94-108; McClary, 1989, pp. 208-217). Textual action refers to what the inherited text commands, acclaims, declares, requests, or prays. Vocal action refers to the way rhythm, diminution, bass motion, cadence, meter, and repetition give those utterances duration, transition, and closure. The comparison shows that the same techniques serve different functions according to their textual and formal position. That position determines whether a phrase renews exhortation, separates acclamation from intercession, or links one prayer strophe to the next. The title page, dedication, correspondence, and contemporary accounts connect these arrangements to Caccini's public status as a composer. This evidence supports an account of female authorship based on publicly attributed compositional responsibility rather than on a feminine musical style.

1. Analytical Framework: The Musical Organization of Vocal Action

McClary's method provides the point of comparison without treating a Latin sacred solo as an operatic character. In both repertories, music shapes words into recognizable actions. McClary examines how a voice generates expectation, advances syntax, and approaches cadential goals before situating that range of utterance within contemporary relations of rhetoric, gender, and social power (McClary, 1989, pp. 203-207, 208-220). This article adapts that sequence to concrete questions. When does a command, declaration, or request enter? How long does it last? Where does it change or close? What can the musical phrase complete, and which outcomes demanded by the text remain outside the music?

The analysis focuses on syllabic declamation, diminution (the division of longer note values into shorter, often ornamented figures, also referred to as *passaggi*), bass motion, cadence, repetition, meter, and instrumental ritornellos (F. Caccini, 2004, pp. 5-8; G. Caccini, 2009, prefatory discourse; McClary, 1989, pp. 208-212). Their analytical value depends on textual syntax and formal position. Clear syllabic articulation can reinforce a clause boundary. Diminution can give a word more notes and more musical time. Bass motion and cadence can confirm or delay an ending. Repetition and changes of meter can mark recurrence or a shift in rhetorical function. An instrumental ritornello can separate two vocal strophes and time the entry of the next one.

These criteria establish how the score organizes an inherited utterance, while the textual voice remains distinct from the historical author (McClary, 1989, pp. 208-217). Applied comparatively, they reveal whether closure ends an action, separates it from the next, or prepares its renewal. The following case studies trace these functions at the scales of clause, section, and strophic form.

2. Case Comparison: Vocal Action in Three Works

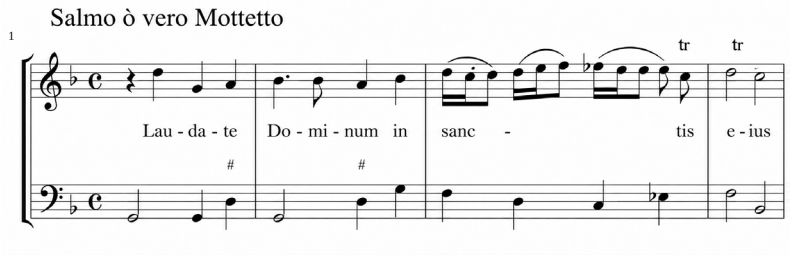
This section compares the three works through textual segmentation, the coordination of voice and bass, and phrase closure. The liturgical genre identifies the action of each text. The psalm repeats imperatives of praise. The Marian antiphon moves from address and acclamation to a declaration of the Resurrection and intercession. The Compline hymn presents successive strophes of prayer for protection. The comparison traces how the score distinguishes, prolongs, connects, or closes these utterances.

Musical examples and measure numbers follow the 2023 transcription by Lorenzo Girodo and Alessandra Milesi (F. Caccini, 1618, nos. 13, 15, and 18; F. Caccini, 2023, nos. 13, 15, and 18). Its barlines, numbering, and rhythmic normalization provide editorial coordinates rather than independent evidence for Caccini's phrase structure. Claims

about segmentation and closure rest on text underlay, vocal duration, bass motion, changes of meter, and the coordinated arrival of voice and bass. References to measures locate events within the transcription.

2.1 *Laudate Dominum in sanctis eius*: Completing and Renewing the Command

The opening sentence of *Laudate Dominum in sanctis eius* consists of the command "Laudate Dominum" followed by the phrase "in sanctis eius." Measures 1-2 set the command in longer note values and an almost syllabic rhythm. In measures 3-4, sixteenth-note diminution and notated *trilli* give "in sanctis" more notes and more musical time. On "eius," the voice returns to half-note values. The bass lengthens at the same point, and the two parts close the clause together. The coordinated setting gives the clause a clear temporal contour: diminution prolongs the middle phrase, and the joint arrival of voice and bass on "eius" closes it. The musical evidence therefore supports a claim about duration and closure, while the lexical ambiguity of "sanctis" remains unresolved.



Example 1. Francesca Caccini, *Laudate Dominum in sanctis eius*, measures 1-4, transcribed by Lorenzo Girodo and Alessandra Milesi (2023): statement of the command, diminution on "in sanctis," and closure on "eius."

In measures 5-10, a new "Laudate eum" enters after the preceding local closure. In measures 11-14, the diminution on "in virtutibus eius" becomes denser. A sustained vocal note and a bass arrival mark the end of the phrase, and "Laudate" returns in measure 15. Each local cadence closes the current command and prepares the next entry. The repeated plural imperative supplies the exhortative force; the music organizes that force through a cycle of command, closure, and renewed entry.

Across the passage, closure functions as a hinge: each cadence completes one exhortation and supplies the starting point for the next.

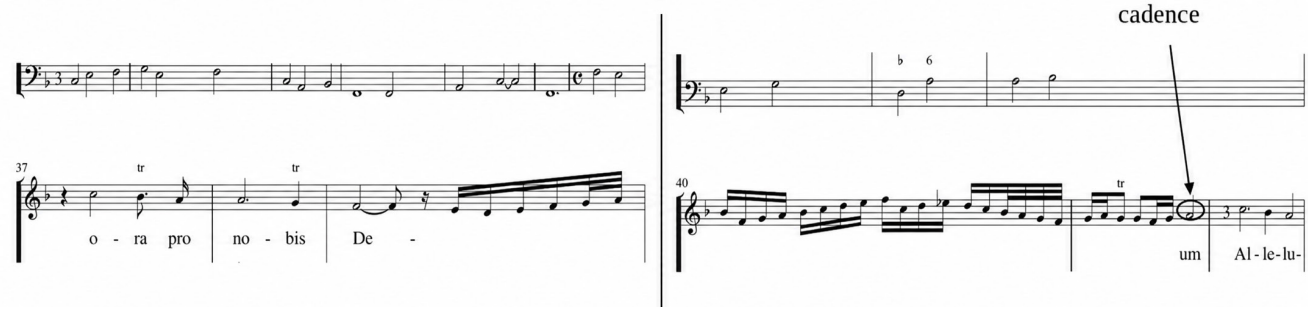
2.2 *Regina Coeli*: From Acclamation through Declaration to Intercession

The text of *Regina Coeli* first addresses the Virgin and commands her to rejoice. Repeated statements of "Alleluia" then provide an acclamation before the declaration of the Resurrection. In measures 1-6, "Regina Coeli" unfolds in half notes and dotted half notes. "Laetare" moves into dense diminution but closes before measure 7. The address and the command to rejoice therefore form separate units before the acclamation. Measure 7 shifts to 3/2. Each of the three statements of "Alleluia" forms an independent melodic contour and ends in long values over a regular half-note bass (Benedictines of Solesmes, 1961, p. 278; F. Caccini, 2023, no. 15, mm. 1-13). The return of the same word, meter, and cadential rhythm makes the acclamations consecutive yet self-contained phrases.

Example 2a. Francesca Caccini, *Regina Coeli*, measures 1-13, transcribed by Lorenzo Girodo and Alessandra Milesi (2023): address to the Virgin, diminution on "laetare," and three groups of "Alleluia" in triple meter.

After the triple-meter acclamation, the duple-meter clause "Quia quem meruisti portare, resurrexit sicut dixit" unfolds in a more stable syllabic rhythm. Whereas "Alleluia" returns as three metrically and cadentially matched units, the Resurrection text unfolds once as a continuous clause and closes on "dixit." The return to duple meter and the continuous declamation distinguish declaration from acclamation and prepare the intercession.

After the declaration of the Resurrection, the second group of triple-meter "Alleluia" statements ends in measure 36. Duple meter returns in measure 37. "Ora pro nobis" is declaimed in separated long notes. "Nobis" creates a brief pause, while the bass supports the sustained opening note of "Deum" instead of forming a complete cadence. The diminution on "Deum" extends from measures 39 to 42. The final syllable "-um" then falls on a longer value together with the bass, and the triple-meter "Alleluia" returns (F. Caccini, 2023, no. 15, mm. 37-42). The diminution therefore increases vocal density while delaying syntactic and cadential closure until "-um."



Example 2b. Francesca Caccini, *Regina Coeli*, measures 37-42, transcribed by Lorenzo Girodo and Alessandra Milesi (2023): declamation of "ora pro nobis," extension of "Deum," and cadence on "-um."

The first-person plural "nobis" places the solo voice grammatically within a communal prayer. The text supplies this communal position, while the music prolongs the request and completes its phrase.

Across the work, shifts between duple and triple meter, repetition, and cadential weight separate address, acclamation, declaration, and intercession. The extended "Deum" is critical: its deferred cadence lengthens the intercession between the self-contained triple-meter acclamations that precede and follow it.

2.3 *Te lucis ante terminum*: Vocal Strophes and Instrumental Returns Sustain Prayer

The formal continuity of *Te lucis ante terminum* is established by the alternation of vocal strophes and instrumental ritornellos.

The work remains in 3/2. The four lines of the first strophe use mostly half notes and quarter notes, then approach their endings through longer vocal values coordinated with bass arrivals. The lines do not occupy equal numbers of measures, but they follow the textual syntax at comparable rhythmic densities. At "terminum," the voice and bass lengthen together. At "clementia," the bass moves from shorter values to a dotted whole note, and the voice also closes on a dotted whole note. Brief figures and *trilli* on "ante" and "Creator" create local emphasis without disrupting the line-by-line segmentation. The first strophe cadences on "custodiam" in measure 21. An instrumental ritornello follows in measures 22-29. The second strophe uses newly composed vocal material, and the ritornello returns in measures 52-60 (Benedictines of Solesmes, 1961, p. 266; F. Caccini, 2023, no. 18, mm. 1-29, 52-60).

The ritornello continues in 3/2 and retains the relatively stable bass motion and cadential language heard at the end of the strophe. The first strophe has reached a cadence, and the instrumental passage carries the music forward until the next vocal text enters. It separates two complete strophes while connecting them within one formal sequence. The next strophe begins after the preceding vocal cadence, the bass closure, and the end of the ritornello. The solo voice presents new prayer text, and the intervening instrumental passage sustains formal continuity. Newly composed strophes are therefore embedded within a recognizable alternation of strophe and ritornello.

Cadential closure of each vocal strophe and the intervening ritornello create a cycle of completed plea, instrumental continuation, and renewed vocal prayer in *Te lucis ante terminum*.

Example 3. Francesca Caccini, *Te lucis ante terminum*, measures 1-13 and 22-28, transcribed by Lorenzo Girodo and Alessandra Milesi (2023): the vocal strophe and the first instrumental ritornello.

Table 1. Vocal Action, Musical Organization, and Functions of Closure and Connection in the Three Works

Work	Genre and Function	Temporal Organization	Primary Evidence	Closure and Connection
Laudate Dominum in sanctis eius	Psalm; repeated imperatives of praise	New command after local closure	Diminution; bass cadence; renewed command entry	Cadences divide commands and prepare re-entry.
Regina Coeli	Marian antiphon; address, acclamation, declaration, intercession	Triple-meter acclamation; duple declaration and intercession	Meter shifts; repetition; delayed closure of intercession	Meter and cadence mark the three transitions.
Te lucis ante terminum	Compline hymn; successive pleas for protection	Strophes alternate with ritornello	Strophic cadences; stable bass; ritornello return	Ritornello and reentry sustain continuity.

Across these three works, a consistent principle emerges: common monodic resources acquire their function from their place in a textual and formal sequence. Cadence can complete one utterance while preparing another; meter can mark a change of utterance; and an instrumental return can carry a prayer from one closed strophe to the next. Whether this principle holds more broadly in early seventeenth-century monody would require further comparative study. The scores thus show how inherited Latin texts are organized in time. The next section turns to the 1618 print and related documents to connect these arrangements to Caccini's publicly attributed authorship.

3. Historical Interpretation: Musical Organization, Public Attribution, and Female Authorship

The parameters analyzed above include diminution, clear declamation, bass-directed cadence, metrical change, repetition, and ritornello. They belong to the shared resources of early seventeenth-century monody rather than to a female musical vocabulary. Giulio Caccini's *Amarilli, mia bella* from *Le nuove musiche* likewise prolongs selected words within clear declamation and uses cadence to divide phrases (G. Caccini, 2009, prefatory discourse and no. 8; Predota, 1993, pp. 87-113; Raney, 1967, pp. 350-357). This comparison confirms the availability of these resources

but does not constitute a systematic comparison of personal styles. The exhorting, declaring, or praying voice also remains distinct from Caccini's direct self-expression. Within the scope of these case studies, her compositional responsibility concerns the arrangement of rhythm, diminution, bass motion, cadence, meter, repetition, and ritornello as they give inherited texts duration, transition, and closure. The 1618 print and correspondence identify whose name and preparation were attached to those arrangements.

The 1618 print makes the attribution of authorship explicit. The title page uses prominent type for the collection's title, the identity of its dedicatee, Cardinal de' Medici, and the name Francesca Caccini. The dedication page places the cardinal's full title in large type at the top. Caccini's signature is smaller and separated from the main text. This layout identifies the author while presenting her before the dedicatee as a deferential court servant. The title page and dedication therefore establish public attribution and the relation of patronage (F. Caccini, 1618, title page and dedication; Cusick, 2009, pp. 98-103).

On 13 February, Caccini wrote that she hoped to travel to Pisa with "il mio libro finito." On 23 February, she reported that "il negozio poi della mia stampa è andato tanto bene" and asked Michelangelo Buonarroti the Younger to revise the collection's prefatory materials. She also sent all the works to her father for review, yet worried that readers might think he had completed, revised, or polished them. The letters show that she acknowledged her father as a teacher while actively managing the collection's preparation, preface, and authorial presentation. Together with the print, they show that the works containing these arrangements circulated under Caccini's name as their author (Cusick, 2009, pp. 107-110, 314-316).

The gender-historical importance of this attribution is documented in its reception. As Cusick shows, contemporary accounts often foregrounded Caccini's singing, family training, and court service. Severo Bonini and Cristoforo Bronzini also cited the signed 1618 volume as evidence that she was a composer as well as an outstanding singer (Cusick, 2009, pp. 100-103). Their comments matter because they used the print to identify compositional responsibility that a reputation for performance alone could not establish. The evidence therefore forms one continuous argument. The scores reveal how the sacred utterances are organized; the print and correspondence attach the works containing those arrangements to Caccini's name; and contemporary reception shows that the attribution supported her recognition as a composer. Within these three works, gender-historical significance lies in a professional woman publicly bearing responsibility for decisions about how inherited Latin utterances begin, continue, close, and begin again. It does not lie in a diminution, cadence, or ritornello presumed to be feminine.

4. Conclusion

This article has compared three Latin sacred solos in Francesca Caccini's 1618 *Il primo libro delle musiche*. The comparison shows that musical closure does more than end a phrase. Across the three works, a cadence can prepare another command, help mark a move from acclamation to intercession, or give way to an instrumental return that sustains prayer between completed strophes. This finding clarifies why close musical analysis matters to the history of authorship. It identifies the compositional decisions for which the signed print attributed responsibility. The title page, dedication, and correspondence connect those decisions to Caccini, while contemporary accounts show that the volume supported her recognition as a composer as well as a singer. The article's contribution is therefore to connect the temporal organization of sacred utterance to female authorship without treating any musical feature as intrinsically feminine. In this documented case, gender matters because a woman's name publicly carried responsibility for organizing the works.

The scope remains limited to three of the seven Latin solos and to one comparison with Giulio Caccini. A broader account requires analysis of the remaining four Latin works, systematic comparison with contemporary Latin sacred monody, and examination of corrections and dedicatory evidence across the three surviving copies of the 1618 print. That larger body of evidence would show whether the patterns identified here recur within Caccini's collection or belong more generally to early seventeenth-century monody.

References

Austin, J. L. (1975). *How to do things with words* (2nd ed.; J. O. Urmson & M. Sbisà, Eds.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Benedictines of Solesmes (Eds.). (1961). *The Liber Usualis, with introduction and rubrics in English*. Tournai: Desclée.

Caccini, F. (1618). *Il primo libro delle musiche a una e due voci*. Florence: Zanobi Pignoni.

Caccini, F. (2004). *Francesca Caccini's Il primo libro delle musiche of 1618: A modern critical edition of the secular monodies* (R. J. Alexander & R. Savino, Eds.). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Caccini, F. (2023). *Il primo libro delle musiche a una e due voci* (L. Girodo & A. Milesi, Transcr.; L. Girodo, Ed.). IMSLP. https://imslp.org/wiki/Primo_Libro_delle_Musiche_(Caccini%2C_Francesca)

Caccini, G. (2009). *Le nuove musiche* (2nd ed.; H. W. Hitchcock, Ed.). Middleton, WI: A-R Editions.

Cusick, S. G. (1994). 'There was not one lady who failed to shed a tear': Arianna's lament and the construction of modern womanhood. *Early Music*, *22*(1), 21-43. doi:10.1093/earlyj/XXII.1.21

Cusick, S. G. (1998). 'Who is this woman . . . ?': Self-presentation, 'imitatio virginis,' and compositional voice in Francesca Caccini's Primo libro of 1618. *Il Saggiatore Musicale*, *5*(1), 5-41.

Cusick, S. G. (2007). This music which is not one: Inaudible order and representation of the feminine in Francesca Caccini's Primo libro delle musiche (1618). *Early Modern Women: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, *2*, 127-162. doi:10.1086/EMW23541479

Cusick, S. G. (2009). *Francesca Caccini at the Medici court: Music and the circulation of power*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Cypess, R. (2024). Women and composition, circa 1600-1750. In M. Head & S. Wollenberg (Eds.), *The Cambridge companion to women composers* (pp. 137-158). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/9781108774079.009

Harness, K. (2026). Francesca Caccini. In B. Glixon & W. Heller (Eds.), *Barbara Strozzi in context* (pp. 11-18). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/9781009288699.002

McClary, S. (1989). Constructions of gender in Monteverdi's dramatic music. *Cambridge Opera Journal*, *1*(3), 203-223. doi:10.1017/S0954586700003001

McClary, S. (1991). *Feminine endings: Music, gender, and sexuality*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Predota, G. A. (1993). Towards a reconsideration of the 'Romanesca': Francesca Caccini's Primo libro delle musiche and contemporary monodic settings in the first quarter of the seventeenth century. *Recercare*, *5*, 87-113.

Raney, C. (1967). Francesca Caccini's 'Primo libro.' *Music & Letters*, *48*(4), 350-357. doi:10.1093/ml/XLVIII.4.350

Wilbourne, E. (2023). Songs to entertain foreign royalty. In *Voice, slavery, and race in seventeenth-century Florence* (pp. 43-63). New York: Oxford University Press. doi:10.1093/oso/9780197646915.003.0002