By the time Job Vener rose to prominence at the Council of Constance, reformers within the orders had worked for decades to establish key enclaves of reform in central Europe.¹ Already in 1368, in the mountainous lands around his home of Foligno, the Franciscan Paoluccio dei Trinci had established a hermitage at Brugliano, and his Observant Franciscan followers soon claimed houses in the dozens across Italy.² In the same years the Augustinian Hermits had begun the reform of their order—most famously in Florence, where a return to discipline intertwined with a return to the ancients under Luigi Marsili and his disciples, among them Coluccio Salutati, Niccolò Niccoli and Roberto de’ Rossi.³ By 1400 Giovanni Dominici had established with his followers a network of Dominican Observant houses across northeastern and central Italy. From that foundation he sternly opposed the humanists’ return to the ancients with a call to return to sound moral formation based on sound doctrine. “It is more useful for Christians to plow the earth,” so Dominici put it, “than to waste time with pagan books.”⁴ Benedictines in Italy also renewed their observance, most successfully in small but eager congregations centered on the ancient communities of Subiaco, Farfa and Padua. In these communities, too, there emerged a fruitful interaction between religious and humanist returns to antiquity.⁵

¹ For an overview see the literature cited above, 4, nn. 13 and 14.
⁵ Elm, “Verfall und Erneuerung,” 222–23 and n. 81, with further literature.
To the north, reform took hold along a similar chronological arc. In Bohemia, regular canons at Raudnitz had begun to cultivate patterns of devotion that would nurture the new piety in central Europe. Benedictine reform took hold at Kastl after 1380 and at St. Matthias in Trier after 1420. At Windesheim by 1415, Thomas of Kempen and other regular canons had begun to fashion their own new devotion in dialogue with the Brothers and Sisters of the Common Life. More slowly on the scene, but with lasting success, Dominicans under Raymond of Capua had also begun to lead their order back to pristine observance. The Council of Constance then provided a catalyst for many of these fledgling reforms, especially in the Empire. Among the council’s many measures, as Phillip Stump has shown, was a series of decrees focused on religious life. The Council also heard disputes among the Franciscan Observants over whether to establish an independent reforming hierarchy within the order. The council also provided a forum for the orders themselves to advance their own reforms independently. In 1417, a Benedictine chapter gathered at nearby Petershausen set out foundational guidelines for a return to strict observance.

At the heart of these reforms, in ways particular to each of the orders’ traditions, was a return to strict observance of religious community. Many of the particulars of that process have eluded sustained analysis, not least because so many details remain buried in the manuscripts. Some scholars have now begun to work toward more complex accounts

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6 Zibermayr, “Zur Geschichte der Raudnitzer Reform” (above, 8 n. 23).
8 Van Engen, Sisters and Brothers (above, 3 and n. 11).
10 See the discussion of the Decretales reformationis in Stump, Reforms, 158–67. Stump also briefly notes the place of Vener’s compendium in this context on 158 and n. 40.