

Life and Religion in the Middle Ages

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Edited by

Flocel Sabaté

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THE RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE, A MIRROR OF MEDIEVAL SOCIETY

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When looking for insight into the values with which Middle Age men and women regarded their surroundings, we realise that Christianity, with its capacity to be interpreted through various philosophic prisms and its adaptability to social and economic evolution, has furnished values for constructing the ideology with which to create a cohesive memory of medieval identity.

1. The ideas that structure each society

El laïcisme o ateisme modern, i la moda d'interpretar els fenòmens socials únicament a partir de les dades econòmiques, acaben impeding la comprensió dels fets històrics més clars. This was written in 1990 by a Catalan historian in an attempt to explain the anti-Jewish violence by Christians in 14th century Europe. He expressed this not from his own particular beliefs, which could just as well have been secular, atheist or otherwise akin to the prejudices he criticised.¹ Rather similarly, in 1931, Leonard Woolf, seeking a communal sense of being human after having suffered through the Great War, described as “a catastrophe and landmark in history”, concluded that understanding any behaviour meant seeking an explanation for it in the human mind: “as an event in human history, the war was caused by human psychology”.² The understanding of human behaviour and reality thus leads inside the mind: “Psychology is nearer to

¹ “Modern secularism or atheism and the fashion to interpret social phenomena solely from economic data, eventually impeding understanding of the clearest historical events” (Jaume Riera, “Els avalots del 1391 a Girona”, *Jornades d'Història dels Jueus a Catalunya* (Girona: Ajuntament de Girona, 1990), p. 122).

² Leonard Woolf, *After the deluge. A Study of Communal Psychology* (Harmondsworth: Penguin books, 1937), p. 27.

what actually exists”, as Bertrand Russell concluded.³ Thus, inside the mind, there is nothing other than ideas, held individually and shared collectively. In consequence, we can summarise that *las ideas son el azote y la esperanza de los pueblos*.⁴ It is ideas that have moved society throughout history, in one sense or another. As Leonard Guelke warned, “the motor of historical change is not the environment, the economy or any other force, but human reason. Ideas have the unique capacity of logical development and humans have changed their forms of life and relationships to the environment in an orderly and logical way”.⁵

Ideas refer, in short, to the human spirit. *C'est l'esprit, en effet, qui suscite les faits, qui en a contenu la décision et dirigé le développement*.⁶ However, the spirit must hold on to a tangible reality. In other words, the spirit in itself will vivify the material in one sense or another, because thought only acquires sense if it embodies the physical reality. As Lyotard warned, *el pensamiento y la palabra solamente pueden ser verdaderos si la realidad viene al pensamiento, si el mundo viene a la palabra*.⁷ In truth, it is reality that moves towards the thought, in the sense that, through specific values, it imposes a certain way of perceiving and interpreting the material surroundings and the experience of historic events. For example, sometimes one hears talk of educating in values,⁸ a mistaken expression, because we are always educated with values and communicate these. Whether these are the ones desired by the speaker or their opponents is another matter, but nonetheless values always arise from a specific code of

³ Bertrand Russell, *The analysis of mind* (London and New York: George Allen & Unwin Ltd. and The Macmillan Company, 1949), p. 308.

⁴ “Ideas are the scourge and the hope of the people” (Peter H. Waldeck, *Ideas. El espíritu del hombre mueve el mundo* (Barcelona: Círculo de Lectores, 1976), p. 192).

⁵ Leonard Guelke, “Forms of life, history, and mind: an idealist proposal for integrating perception and behaviour in human geography”, *The behavioural environment. Essays in Reflection, Application and Re-evaluation*, ed. by Frederick W. Boal and David N. Livingstone (London and New York: Routledge, 1980), pp. 305-306.

⁶ “It is the mind, indeed, which gave rise to the facts contained in the decision and directed the development” (Gaston Roupnel, *Histoire et destin* (Paris: Éditions Bernard Grasset, 1943), p. 231).

⁷ “The thought and the word can only be true if reality comes to the thought, if the world comes to the word” (Jean François Lyotard, *¿Por qué filosofar?* (Barcelona: Ediciones Altaya, 1994), p. 156).

⁸ Abilio de Gregorio, Javier Elzo, Pilar Ferreirós, Pío Laghi and Ramón Pérez Juste, *La educación en valores* (Madrid: Consejo General de la Educación Católica-PPC, 1997).

understanding reality and one's surroundings. What is needed then is to grasp each society's values. It is worth presenting an extreme example: in the winter of 1942-1943, with their British hosts, the governments in exile in London created a "Conference of Allied Ministers of Education". A History Committee was established whose purpose was to ensure "the publication of a history of European civilization, to be called 'The European Inheritance'".⁹ In the midst of the war, they glimpsed that the guarantee for setting the ground lines for Europe to coexist with itself were not to be found in diplomatic agreements based on national interests. Rather, these were to be found in researching, through objective historians, the values that had forged the identity traits of the different European countries and the conditions that had encouraged or destroyed peaceful coexistence.

In short, the historian's challenge consists of using an objective spirit to penetrate the values that enlightened the epoch under study, this being the only way to grasp how the events and human surroundings were interpreted. In other words, in our case, how they gave medieval Europe its *conscience et identité*.¹⁰ This is no new challenge for medieval historiography. To a great extent, John Osborn Taylor raised the same question at the start of the 20th century when delving into "the Mediaeval Mind", understood as "a history of the development of thought and emotion in the Middle Ages", with specific attention to the evolution and balance between "the ideal and the actual" in the medieval centuries.¹¹ The most widely translated and republished work by Huizinga, written a decade later, had greater repercussions in the same sense.¹² These books, together with later authors, attempted to penetrate the medieval mentality.¹³ They were aware that, in delving into this period and its ample chronology, the cognition which explained the human surroundings¹⁴ or

⁹ Ernest Barker, George Clark and P. Vaucher, *The European Inheritance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), I, p. 5.

¹⁰ Aleksander Gieysztor, "Conscience et identité occidentales", *Les Européens*, ed. by Hélène Ahrweiler and Maurice Aymard (Paris: Hermann Éditeur des Sciences et des Arts, 2000), pp. 173-178.

¹¹ Henry Osborn Taylor, *The Mediaeval Mind. A history of the development of thought and emotion in the middle ages*, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan and co., 1911).

¹² Johan Huizinga, *El otoño de la Edad Media* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1978) (first edition in Dutch: 1923).

¹³ Notable amongst recent contributions is: Hervé Martin, *Mentalités Médiévales*, 2 vols. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1996-2001).

¹⁴ Charles M. Radding, *A World Made by Men. Cognition and Society, 400-1200* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985).

the reasons that structured society,¹⁵ emphasises the weight exerted by religion on a wide range of aspects. Christianity, in its dictate and experience, thus became the catalyser and prism for understanding the setting and justification of the social order in the Middle Ages.

2. Religion in the Middle Ages: the prism for the worldview and the social order

Over recent centuries, the need to consider the predominant Christian religion in order to understand the Middle Ages has been repeated frequently, but generally from deductive postures in one sense or another. In the 18th century, Voltaire linked almost all the events of the medieval period with the effects of Christianity. After asking himself about the success of monasticism, he linked it to the reasoning relating to the omnipresence of Christianity in the Middle Ages:

Le gouvernement fut presque par-tout détestable, et absurde depuis Constantin: parce que l'Empire Romain eut plus de moines que de soldats; parce qu'il y en avait cent mille dans la seule Egypte, parce qu'ils étaient exempts de travail et de taxe; parce que les Chefs des nations barbares qui détruisirent l'Empire s'étant faits Chrétiens pour gouverner des Chrétiens, exercèrent la plus horrible tyrannie, parce qu'on se jettait en foule dans les cloîtres pour échapper aux fureurs de ces Tyrans, et qu'on se plongeait dans un esclavage pour en éviter un autre; parce que les Papes, en instituant tant d'ordres différens de fainéants sacrés, se firent autant de sujets dans les autres états; parce qu'un paysan aime mieux être appelé mon Révérend père et donner des bénédictions que de conduire la charue.¹⁶

¹⁵ Alexander Murray, *Reason and Society in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978).

¹⁶ "The government was hateful and absurd almost in everywhere since Constantine, because the Roman Empire had more monks than soldiers (there were one hundred thousand just in Egypt); because they were exempt from labor and tax; because the heads of the barbarous nations which destroyed the empire became Christians in order to rule the Christians and exerted the most horrible tyranny, reason why the crowd moved to the cloisters, in order to avoid the fury of these tyrants and that they plunged into slavery to avoid another; because the Popes, by instituting so many different orders of sacred lazy, earned more subjects than the other social states; because any peasant would rather be called reverend father and give blessings than ride the plow" (Voltaire, *L'homme aux quarante états* (Geneva: without Publisher, 1768), pp. 55-56).

In a diametrically opposite sense, several decades later, Chateaubriand attributed chivalry, idealised as the most poetic moment in history, to Christianity:

The only poetical period of our history, the age of chivalry, likewise belongs to it: the true religion possesses the singular merit of having created among us the age of fiction and enchantment.¹⁷

The triumph of the bourgeoisie and the maintenance of the Church in the 19th century led to a view of the Middle Ages based on the positive aspects of the urban elites struggling for progress, freedom and culture, and the softening of customs to the Church, both opposed to the nobles, who were identified with oppression and the old regime.¹⁸ Thus, it is not difficult to find passionate eulogies of the medieval Church among certain authors in the early 20th century:

*Face à la menace asiatique, elle fut, pendant toute l'époque des Croisades (et jusqu'à la bataille de Lépante) la conscience même de l'Europe. Dans la paix de ses cloîtres, la grande philosophie reparut. De nouveau la raison humaine se confronta avec l'univers. Si saint Thomas d'Aquin domine son siècle, -et le nôtre,- ce n'est pas seulement, Maritain nous l'a ardemment rappelé, pour avoir opéré la synthèse des connaissances de son temps, baptisé Aristote, indissolublement uni la raison et la foi, c'est aussi pour avoir, à la différence de tant de penseurs modernes, eu foi en la raison en posant, préalablement à toute recherche, la valeur universelle, la portée cosmique des lois de l'esprit, affirmation en dehors de laquelle il n'y a que néant. A cet envoi métaphysique correspond l'élan des cathédrales.*¹⁹

¹⁷ F. A. de Chateaubriand, *The beauties of Christianity* (London: Henry Celburn, 1813), III, p. 156.

¹⁸ Josep Maria Torras i Bages, *La tradición catalana* (Barcelona: Selecta, 1966), pp. 140-142.

¹⁹ "The own consciousness of Europe faced the Asian threat, during the Crusades' period and until the Battle of Lepanto. The great philosophy reappeared in the peace of its cloisters. Human reason confronted again with the universe. If Saint Thomas Aquinas dominates his century - and our time - this is, according what Maritain eagerly recalled, not only for having reach the synthesis of the knowledge of his time, baptised Aristotle and united indissolubly reason and faith, but because in contrast to so many modern thinkers, he had faith in the reason and, before any research, he starts knowing the universal value, and the cosmic scope of the laws of the spirit. Outside of this, there is only nothingness. This is the metaphysical place for the spirit of the cathedrals" (René Grousset, *Bilan de l'histoire* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1946), p. 35).

One way or another, these ardent evocations, presented here as examples, find the Middle Ages steeped in religion and echo this according to the posture of the author. However, this cannot be the basis for research. If our purpose is to know what medieval society was like, religion and all its setting, both conceptual and institutional, must be analysed together with its role in medieval society. Then its contribution will be appreciated in three linked facets: spreading the dominant ideology, building a certain memory applied to society, and the collective acceptance of a specific identity. The link between ideology, memory and identity becomes a programme for interpreting the Middle Ages and clearly ties in with the role of the Church and Christianity in this period.

Firstly, the Church was responsible for promoting a worldview that placed medieval men and women at the centre of a world. This was accepted and explained coherently and confidently. Physical explanations, clearly separated from the religious, were given thanks to the incorporation of Aristotelian ideas in the 13th century. However, the complementarity turns reason and faith into two aspects of the same understanding of reality.²⁰ Thus, the highest elements of the faith can equally be attained through reason: five rational arguments conclude the existence of God, and the high point of late-medieval Christian existence, the presence of God in the Eucharist, is reached through a simple physical formula, because trans-substantiation would be nothing other than the maintenance of the form and the alteration of the material, in accordance with Aristotelian physics.²¹ Similarly, the supernatural places, heaven and hell, fully match the physical descriptions of the composition of the atmosphere and the inside of the earth.²² This even includes purgatory, where one repents temporarily for lesser sins, with an entrance on Station Island in Lough Derg, Republic of Ireland and another on the Sicilian volcano, Mount Etna.²³ This match is easily explicable, given that nature and religion both derive from the same divine scheme. Coherently, unravelling the meaning of the world is the gradual way to advance our knowledge of the rules laid down by God.

²⁰ Flocel Sabaté, *L'Edat Mitjana. Món real i espai imaginat* (Barcelona: Editorial Afers, 2012), pp. 42-47.

²¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologia*, p. I, c. 2 and p. III c. 73-38 (Tomás de Aquino, *Suma de Teología*, I, p. 111-113 and V, p. 637-699).

²² Flocel Sabaté, *Vivir y sentir en la Edad Media. El mundo visto con ojos medievales* (Madrid: Anaya, 2011), pp. 25-36.

²³ Jacques Le Goff, *El nacimiento del Purgatorio* (Madrid: Taurus Ediciones, 1981), pp. 205-239.

Knowledge of God's scheme of things would also be the best way to address coexistence. Significantly, the model for explaining a society that has to be structured around a feudal tri-functional order arose within the Church.²⁴ The theoretical justification for a Christian market society arose from the same origins some centuries later and in the late-medieval urban setting.²⁵

This required the Church to be able to adapt to the different socioeconomic stimuli. There was a clear evolution in the acceptance of wealth. Thus, at the end of the 12th century in Lleida, it was said that the devil entered the city disguised as a merchant.²⁶ Later, in the 13th century, the writer Ramon Llull presented the idealised biography of Evast, a merchant at the end of his life, who, after bringing up his son, understands that the best course of action would be to donate his goods to the poor and adopt the religious life.²⁷ However, at the same time, in Paris, it was being said that the Church was set up by merchants and that the knights had need of these.²⁸ Finally, in the 14th century, Francesc Eiximenis, the most influential moralist in the Crown of Aragon at that time, explained that merchants were essential for all the elements that made up society and, coherently, *nostre Senyor Déu los fa misericòrdia especial, en mort e en vida, per lo gran profit que fan a la cosa pública e per los grans treballs que sofiren en mar e en terra*.²⁹ Morals were adapted to new realities, and the deadly sins adopted social characteristics: moving away from the early medieval cloister, in the late Middle Ages, avarice was linked to

²⁴ Georges Duby, *Los tres órdenes o lo imaginario del feudalismo* (Barcelona: Argot, 1978), pp. 239-369.

²⁵ Giacomo Todeschini, *Richesse Franciscaine. De la pauvreté volontaire à la société de marché* (Lagrasse: Éditions Verdier, 2004).

²⁶ Antoni Maria Parramon, *Miracles de la Verge Maria* (Lleida: Instituto de Estudios Ilerdenses, 1976), p. 42.

²⁷ Ramon Llull, *Llibre d'Evast e Blanquerna* (Barcelona: Edicions 62 and La Caixa, 1982), pp. 31-32.

²⁸ *Sainte Yglise premierement / Fu par Marchéanz establee / Et sachiez que Chevalerie / Doivent Marchéanz tenir chiers / Qu'il amainent les bons destriers* (Anatole de Montaiglon and Gaston Raynaud, *Recueil Général et complet des fabliaux des XIIIe et XIVe siècles imprimés ou inédites* (Paris: Librairie des Bibliophiles, 1877), II, p. 44).

²⁹ "Our Lord God have special mercy on them, who in death and in life, for the great profit that they give to the public thing and for the great works they suffer on the sea and on land". Francesc Eiximenis, *Dotzè del Crestià*, chap. 389 (Francesc Eiximenis, *Lo Crestià* (Barcelona: Edicions 62 and La Caixa, 1983), pp. 223-224).

speculation on the prices of goods, and sloth was defined as a sin against society as laziness at work.³⁰

Faced with these changes, the Church offered to elucidate doubts about the correct interpretation. Its position was favoured by its monopoly on intercession with divinity. This meant great power, especially among the population because: *ela a poder que us tola e ha poder que us don / e poder que us defenda e poder que us perdon*³¹ Thus, the Church guaranteed the worldview, supported the social order and directly influenced the values and fears that guided every-day existence.

3. Religion, coexistence and otherness

The fact that Christianity is based on books of holy wisdom implies a need for a proper philosophical framework to interpret these. Thus, the progressive weight of stoicism,³² neo-Platonism³³ and Aristotelianism³⁴ fashioned the image of medieval Christianity at the start of the Middle Ages, the Early Middle Ages and the Late Middle Ages respectively. The transitions were highly significant. Thus, the divide between spiritualists and realists at the end of the 13th century and start of the 14th clearly shows two orientations rooted in philosophical postures. Olivi makes this clear when clinging to a visionary and spiritual Christianity, instead of accepting the influence of a pagan like Aristotle, which he was convincingly opposed to.³⁵

In reality, the strengthening of Aristotelian realism contributed to a reinforcement of the confidence that the Church was acquiring through the so-called Gregorian reform at the end of the 11th and beginning of the 12th centuries. Thus, the coexistence between Muslims and Christians that had

³⁰ Carla Casagrande and Silvana Vecchio, *Histoire des péchés capitaux au Moyen Âge* (Paris: Flammarion, 2003), pp. 148-151.

³¹ *Elle seule a pouvoir de dispenser le bien, / de défendre ses fils, de pardonner les fautes* (*La chanson de la croisade albigeoise* [Paris: Les Belles Lettres and Librairie Générale Française, 1989], p. 458).

³² J. A. Martínez, “Logos estoico y ‘Verbum’ Cristiano (Apuntes para una historia de la Razón)”, *Anales del Seminario de Metafísica*, 25 (1991), pp. 115-116.

³³ Alfons Puigarnau, “El rastre del neoplatonisme al romànic català. L’ideal de bellesa”, *Butlletí del Museu Nacional d’Art de Catalunya*, 7 (2003), pp. 13-23.

³⁴ Eudaldo Forment, “La integración de la ética aristotélica en la síntesis escolástica”, *Actas del II Congreso Nacional de Filosofía Medieval*, coord. by Jorge M. Ayala (Saragossa: Sociedad de Filosofía Medieval, 1996), pp. 37-49.

³⁵ François-Xavier Putallaz, *Insolente liberté. Controverses et condamnations au XIIIe siècle* (Fribourg and Paris: Éditions Universitaires Fribourg and Éditions du Cerf, 1995), pp. 127-135.

characterised the 11th century in the Iberian Peninsula, with the northern Christian kingdoms and counties maintaining diplomatic and political links with the neighbouring Muslim *taifes*, broke down under the new dictates of the reformed Church.³⁶ In the progressive demonisation of the adversary, the explicit aim of the struggle was to fight the infidel.³⁷ This was a religious, and even spiritual, assumption of armed combat,³⁸ and was reflected at the outer geographic limits of Christianity, where religion, otherness, feudalism and frontier mixed.³⁹ The same treatment given to the infidel should be meted out to the heretic. This was emphasised in the second half of the 12th century, a time of tension caused by the spread of the Cathars in Occitania, thus focusing on social groups inassimilable for the official Christianity.⁴⁰

At the same time, Christianity was adapting to the new intellectual stimuli inherent in the contemporary economic and urban growth,⁴¹ just when a wider vision of the role of humans and their social structure was being sought.⁴² In this context, the predominant introduction of realist thought, instead of neo-platonic idealism, avoided the dichotomy between the flesh and the spirit that had presided over early medieval Christianity and established a relation with the world from a teleological perspective. Moving away from the earlier mistrust, Christianity now understood that everything in Creation was good, whether these be expressions of the flesh or any element of Creation, as long as they were used appropriately regarding the purpose for which God had created them. Knowledge of divine will, derived from the study of the Christian message as transmitted

³⁶ Flocel Sabaté, "Frontera peninsular e identidad (siglos IX-XII)", *Las Cinco Villas aragonesas en la Europa de los siglos XII y XIII. De la frontera natural a las fronteras políticas y socioeconómicas*, coord. by Esteban Sarasa (Saragossa: Institución Fernando el Católico, 2007), pp. 79-85.

³⁷ Jean Flori, *Croisade et chevalerie. XI^e-XII^e* (Paris and Brussels: De Boeck, 1998), pp. 81-213.

³⁸ Katherine Allen Smith, *War and the Making of Medieval Monastic Culture* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2011), pp. 39-111.

³⁹ Flocel Sabaté, "La frontière catalane (s. X-XII): perception, alterité, pouvoir et mémoire", *Limites et frontières de l'Antiquité au Moyen Âge. Ériger et border diocèses et principautés*, ed. by Nacima Baron-Yelles, Stéphane Boissellier, François Clement, Flocel Sabaté (Lille: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, forthcoming).

⁴⁰ Michel Roquebert, *Histoire des Cathares. Hérésie, Croisade, Inquisition du XI^e au XIV^e siècle* (Paris: Perrin, 1999), pp. 62-66.

⁴¹ Alexander Murray, *Reason and Society in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), pp. 188-315.

⁴² Radding, *A World Made by Men. Cognition and Society, 400-1200*, pp. 153-262.

by the Church, generated confidence in all of Creation. The other inherent and logical side of this same security was the growth of intolerance towards everything that went against the divine will. Sexuality, for example, was now interpreted as good if it fulfilled the purpose for which God had created it, namely procreation. In contrast, it was abominable when it went against this purpose, as was the case of male homosexuality, which thus came to merit the worst and most ignominious of punishments.⁴³ In fact, if one knew what annoyed God, this should be avoided, precisely to escape the expressions of his wrath.

The succession of bad harvests and natural adversities during the 14th century were interpreted as a clear display of divine wrath. So, once these had occurred, action was taken, so *que Déus per la sua mercè nos vuylle aquesta mal temps levar*. The causes attributed to the punishment meted out by God tended to be similar: sometimes “*per jurar inhonestament de Déu sia provocada la ira de Déu*”, as was argued in Cervera after the town had suffered an earthquake in 1373;⁴⁴ others because *alcunes fombres casades fan adulteri ab homens casats et altres que són sens marit ab homens casats et altres que an marit ab omens que han muller oc encara que clergues se jagüen ab fombres casades (...) e per tals pecats a consentir vinguen pertelencies en la vila e nostre Senyor déu priva pluja e bon temps*,⁴⁵ as the local council of Elche announced in 1379. Mendicant preachers, many of them wandering, helped to identify the reasons for divine wrath. In Cervera in 1420, a Dominican insisted upon the dangers that the town was risking due to the excess of blasphemy, gambling and tolerance of the Jews. After his message spread, the town council stated that, *lo reverent ffrare preycador en los lurs sermons tots jorns*

⁴³ Flocel Sabaté, “La sexualitat a l’època medieval”, *Sexualitat, història i antropologia*, ed. by Xavier Roigé (Lleida: Edicions de la Universitat de Lleida, 1996), pp. 51-53.

⁴⁴ “That God in his mercy save us from this bad weather”; “for swearing dishonestly on God has provoked the wrath of God” (Carme Olivera, Antoni Riera, Jérôme Lambert, Enric Banda and Pierre Alexandre, *Els terratrèmols de l’any 1373 al Pirineu: efectes a Espanya i França* (Barcelona: Generalitat de Catalunya, 1994), p. 64).

⁴⁵ “Some married females commit adultery with married men and others that are without husbands with married men and others who have husband with men who have wives or even that clergymen lie with married women (...) and for these sins being consented to pestilences are visited on the town and our Lord god denies rain and good weather” (Pedro Ibarra, “Elig. Noticia de algunas instituciones y costumbres de la Edad Media”, *III Congreso de Historia de la Corona de Aragón* (Valencia: Excelentísima Diputación Provincial and Excelentísimo Ayuntamiento de Valencia, 1928), p. 39).

*continuant los es donat gran càrrech axí a ells com encara al molt honorable mossèn lo batlle dels greus peccats e abominacions qui's fan continuament en aquesta vila.*⁴⁶ Thus, if these individual sins could unleash divine wrath over society as a whole, the authorities should act to curtail them. The influential preacher Vicent Ferrer warned precisely that the municipal authorities were doubly at risk before God, for endangering themselves and the town they ran, *per què són alguns que han a retre compte de si matex e de altres, axí com regidors de viles, e açò contra sis coses o peccats que y han a provehir, e si no, vindrà la ira de Déu sobre ells e encara sober la vila que-u sosté.*⁴⁷

The same preacher warned that the Christians *no havem major enemichs (...) que ls juheus o moros.*⁴⁸ This is the perception of danger with which the inassimilable otherness was regarded. This religious atmosphere could not fail to have a direct influence on popular attitudes and, very importantly, the municipal by laws that limited the activities and even the visibility of the inassimilable minorities, especially the Jews living in towns and cities that were, by definition, Christian.⁴⁹ Jews everywhere were forced to live under worsening conditions, ever more restricted and marginalised socially and health-wise. This process culminated with their expulsion from various European territories at different times.⁵⁰ In fact, if the unity of society was to be achieved

⁴⁶ “The reverent friar preacher is, every day in his sermons, telling [the council] and the very honourable bailiff about the serious sins and abominations that continually take place in this town” (Agustí Duran, “Referències documentals del call de juhéus de Cervera”, *Discursos llegits en la “Real Academia de Buenas Letras” de Barcelona en la recepció pública de D. Agustí Duran y Sanpere el 20 d’abril de 1924* (Barcelona: Imprenta Atles Geográfico, 1924), p. 57).

⁴⁷ “Because some have to give account of themselves and others, like the councillors of the towns, and for the six things or sins that they have to take care of, and if not, God’s wrath will fall on them and also on the town where they govern” (Vicent Ferrer, *Sermons*, ed. by Gret Schib (Barcelona: Editorial Barcino, 1975), III, p. 13).

⁴⁸ “We have no greater enemies (...) than those Jews or Moors” (Ferrer, *Sermons*, III, p. 14).

⁴⁹ Flocel Sabaté, “L’ordenament municipal de la relació amb els jueus a la Catalunya baixmedieval”, *Cristianos y judíos en contacto en la Edad Media. Polémica, conversión, dinero y convivencia*, ed. by Flocel Sabaté and Claude Denjean (Lleida: Editorial Milenio, 2009), pp. 733-804.

⁵⁰ Flocel Sabaté, “L’espace des minorités ethniques et religieuses: les Juifs dans les villes catalanes au Bas Moyen Âge”, *Morphologie et identité sociale dans la ville médiévale hispanique*, ed. by Flocel Sabaté and Christian Guilleré (Chambéry: Université de Savoie, 2012), pp. 231-286.

following the Christian dictate under the fear of God, the Jews were the best example of a minority that was not only inassimilable but also even an enemy of God, who they had attempted to murder with the crucifixion of Christ, an accusation the Christians often used as an insult against the Jewish population.⁵¹

The evangelic mandate was that the world at the end of time should be one single flock. Thus, the inability to bring the inassimilable minorities closer could become a serious breach of this divine mandate. This was believed especially as there were many events interpreted as heralding the approach of the end of time, as was increasingly spread through the Joachimite ideas which continued to extend from the end of the 12th century.⁵² Thus, the 13th century was a time of attempts to convert the so-called infidels.⁵³ However, given the duty to unify the faith within a relatively short time span, the question should be considered as Roger Bacon formulated it: it is possible to envisage the return of the Greek Church, the conversion of the Tartars, but there may be some, like the Muslims, who do not agree with conversion, thus leaving no other option than their destruction.⁵⁴ Accordingly, if the enemies of the faith could not be assimilated, they had to be marginalised and destroyed to enable society to reach the end of time united.⁵⁵

The unifying of society under the Christian dictate, jointly with the fear of an anthropomorphised God, led to an inability to tolerate inassimilable minorities and an increasingly Redemptorist religious experience. This had to facilitate personal conversions towards more rigorist customs and a reform of ecclesiastical practices and attitudes, all tinged with anxiety provoked by the conviction that the end of time was nigh.⁵⁶ These stimuli

⁵¹ Flöel Sabaté, "Les juifs au moyen-âge. Les sources catalanes concernant l'ordre et le désordre", *Chrétiens et juifs au Moyen Âge: sources pour la recherche d'une relation permanente*, ed. by Flöel Sabaté and Claude Denjean (Lleida: Editorial Milenio, 2006), pp. 124-136.

⁵² Gian Luca Potestà, *El tiempo del Apocalipsis. Vida de Joaquín de Fiore* (Madrid: Editorial Trotta, 2010).

⁵³ Jacques Le Goff, *Lo maravilloso y lo cotidiano en el Occidente medieval* (Barcelona: Editorial Gedisa, 1985), p. 127.

⁵⁴ Marjorie Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy in the Late Middle Ages. A Study in Joachimism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 399.

⁵⁵ Aleksey Klemeshov, "The Conversion and Destruction of the Infidels in the Works of Roger Bacon", *Religions and Power in Europe. Conflicts and Convergence* (Pisa: Plus and Pisa University Press, 2007), p. 23.

⁵⁶ Claude Carozzi, *Visiones apocalípticas en la Edad Media. El fin del mundo y la salvación del alma* (Madrid: Siglo Veintiuno de España Editores, 2000), pp. 154-177.

led to a search for new horizons under the fear that the end of time was approaching, with all that it meant being widely announced around the Antichrist.⁵⁷ It is understandable, then, that at the end of the 15th century and beginning the 16th, the fear of the end of the world and the discovery of the New World merged into the religious attitude that was taking shape on the new continent, in an agonistic and contradictory dynamic that lasted until 1585,⁵⁸ just when the religious tensions in Europe hatched a new reality.

4. Our selection

In an attempt to find new contributions to medieval research that tackle various aspects aimed at approaching medieval society from the perspective of life and religion, the 2011 and 2012 meetings of the “International Medieval Meetings Lleida” facilitated a coming together of researchers who had dealt with various aspects of research in this sense, thus allowing them to obtain interesting transversalities. The challenge has been to attempt to construct an explicative discourse through combining reflections on different aspects of the binomial of religion and life in the Middle Ages. It is therefore necessary to research into the formation of the elements of religiosity and piety that build religious identity, as Maria Chiara Succurro does with research into the abbey of Leno (Brescia) in the Early Middle Ages. Then there is the question of how territory and society fit together through the ways in which the diocese put down social roots, as Jaume Camats studies in the case of the bishopric of Urgell in the 10th and 12th centuries. This articulation acquired specific traits in lands on the frontier, which Ferran Arnó analyses in the case of the Urgell. This also requires a specific relation with political power, as Toshihiro Abe Salam shows through the relation between the counts of Barcelona and the archbishops of Tarragona in organising new lands seized on the frontier with Islam. Frontier, reform of the Church and political power configure a crossroads where we find the Cistercians, as Francesco Renzi proposes, in a comparison between the Empire and the kingdoms of Leon and Castile. The monastic renewal in a context of tension with religious and cultural otherness and promotion of the nobility, requires mention of the military orders, not so much for their activities in the Holy Land, but rather for their acceptance and perception in the West, either in specific cases, like Giuseppe Perta’s study

⁵⁷ José Guadalajara, *Las profecías del Anticristio en la Edad Media* (Madrid: Gredos, 1996), pp. 93-399.

⁵⁸ Flocel Sabaté, *Fin del Mundo y Nuevo Mundo* (Mexico: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2011).

of the Hospitallers, or their explicit deployment around Rome, in Lazio, as analysed by Nadia Bagnarini. In any case, the Church's relation with otherness, given its assumption of the duty to impose the faith, leads to the contrast between a *modo bellandi* and a *modo convertendi*, which centred the debate in the 13th century, as José Higuera Rubio analyses from the plans for crusade drawn up by Louis IX of France and Ramon Llull. Meanwhile, the ecclesiastical institutions had to prolong their existence, in other words, their adaptation to the new stimuli, as Maria Pia Contessa studies with the evolution of the Florentine monastery of San Miniato al Monte between the 11th and 13th centuries. In fact, urban development meant a specific relation with the religious orders, as Francesco Salvestrini has studied in the case of Tuscany. This requires analysing both the relations between nunneries and political power, as Silvia Carraro and Anna Rapetti have done in the case of Venice, and also specifically delving into the relation between urban elites and the religious leaders, as studied by Julia Conesa Soriano for the elite in Barcelona, and this and the city's cathedral chapter. Liturgy assumes the internal and external connection between clergy, community and beliefs, so its evolution should be studied, as Mercedes Pérez does around the Dominican nunneries. The leading function of the decoration of the temples as a display of wealth and to transmit the message of the religion requires an analysis of the roles of both the artist and patronage, appreciating the evangelising function of the frescos painted in the Franciscan convent of La Verna, according to the work of Nicoletta Baldini. In reality, the actual impact of religion on the population can be seen by comparing the ideal and the reality in such cases as the model of women, which Antònia Juan studies, or the people's experience of such important events as death, analysed by Ana del Campo. At the end of the Middle Ages, this Christianity that had become so deeply rooted in western society continued to face the challenge of its relation with otherness. This was found in all its crudeness on the borders, either to the east, where Johan Hunyadi had to face the last crusade, as Andrei Pogăciaş studies, or in the evolution of relations between the kingdoms of Castile and Granada in the Iberian Peninsula, as Yuga Kuroda shows. Finally, the social cohesion earned throughout the religion became an arm in the hands of political power, which could discriminate invoking filthy roots, so not pure Christian blood, as shows Monique Combesbure around the uses, during 16th and 17th centuries, of a specific Aragonese book.

We believe sincerely that the innovative contents in each of these works justify the respective quality. However, there is no doubt that, putting them together gives us a clear understanding of the key links between religion and life in the European Middle Ages and how this evolved.

BUILDING AN IDENTITY: KING DESIDERIUS, THE ABBEY OF LENO (BRESCIA), AND THE RELICS OF ST. BENEDICT (8TH CENTURY)¹

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1. The foundation of the Abbey

1. 1. Preliminary remarks

The Abbey of Leno was founded by Desiderius, the last king of the Lombards, in the year 758. The account of this foundation can be read in a Catalogue of Lombard and Frankish kings written in the late ninth century:

*Anno dominicae incarnationis 758, indictione 11. ceptum est monasterio domini Salvatoris locus qui dicitur Leones a prefato gloriosissimus Desiderius rex; sed et ecclesia ad honorem domini Salvatoris et beatae semper virginis Mariae et beati archangeli Michaelis aedificata est ab ipso praefatus rex, antequam regnum cepisset. Non longe post introitum regni et inchoationem huius coenobii, Domino cooperante et praenominato excellentissimo rege, translatus est a civitate Beneventum de Cassino castro quaedam corporis partem beatissimi atque excellentissimi confessoris Benedicti abbatis, et ab urbe Roma corpora beatorum martyrum Vitalis et Martialis, et in eodem sacrosanctum conditum est coenobio. Praefuit autem ipso tempore in ipso coenobio, hoc est Leone, Ermoald abbas, quod ipse praefatus rex ex Beneventum monasterio secum adduxit seu et alii 11; ex quibus unum nomine Lampertum p(rae)p(ositum) constituit; Domino auxiliante usque ad perfectum ductum est.*²

¹ Abbreviations used: AD, Archivio Diplomatico; ASB, Archivio di Stato di Brescia; ASC, Archivio Storico Civico; ASM, Archivio di Stato di Milano; PF, Pergamene per Fondi.

² “Catalogi regum Langobardorum et Italicorum Brixienis et Nonantulanus”.

The *locus qui dicitur Leones* mentioned in the text is the village of Leno, which lies in the Po Valley near the city of Brescia.³

1. 2. The political project of King Desiderius

The decision of King Desiderius to found a monastery at this particular location does not appear fortuitous because it abided by specific criteria. Firstly, there was already an old Lombard settlement in Leno since the first Lombard arrival in Italy, and the Leno area was rich and populous.⁴

Secondly, shortly before becoming king, Desiderius had built a little church dedicated to the Saviour, the Virgin Mary and the Archangel Michael on the same site, as can be read in the *Catalogus regum: sed et ecclesia ad honorem domini Salvatoris et beatae semper virginis Mariae et beati archangeli Michaelis aedificata est ab ipso praefatus rex, antequam regnum cepisset*.⁵

Desiderius owned very large properties in Leno and nearby villages,⁶ and probably even a *regalis domus*, according to the later commentator Giacomo Malvezzi.⁷ Medieval sources on the little church have been

Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Scriptores rerum Langobardicarum et Italicarum saec. VI-IX, ed. by Georg Waitz (Hannoverae: Impensis Bibliopolii Hahniani, 1878), pp. 501-503, especially, p. 503; on the foundation of the abbey, see: Mechthild Sandmann, *Herrscherverzeichnisse als Geschichtsquellen. Studien zur langobardisch-italienischen Überlieferung* (Munich: Fink, 1984), pp. 101-118 and 208-241; on the Catalogue, see: Beniamino Pagnin, "La provenienza del Codice Antoniano 27 E del 'Chronicon regum langobardorum' in esso contenuto", *Miscellanea in onore di Roberto Cessi*, 3 vols. (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1958), I, pp. 29-42.

³ On this toponym, see: Maria Chiara Succurro, "L'abbazia di San Benedetto di Leno (secoli VIII-XV). Istituzione, relazioni, aspetti patrimoniali" (Florence: University of Florence, PhD Dissertation, 2013), pp. 77-83.

⁴ Andrea Breda, "Leno: monastero e territorio. Note archeologiche preliminari, L'abbazia di San Benedetto di Leno. Mille anni nel cuore della pianura Padana", *Brixia Sacra. Memorie storiche della Diocesi di Brescia*, 7/1-2 (2002), pp. 239-254. See also: Pauli Diaconi, *Historia Langobardorum*, II, p. 32.

⁵ "Catalogi regum Langobardorum et Italicorum Brixienensis et Nonantulanus", p. 503.

⁶ Malvezzi in his Chronicle recalls that Desiderius held broad properties –*spatia, et lata pratorum, terrarumque, atque sylvarum*– within the territory of Leno and the close territories: Jacobi Malvecii, "Chronicon Brixianum ab origine urbis usque ad annum MCCCXXXII", *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, ed. by Ludovico Antonio Muratori (Milan: A. Forni, 1979), XIV, col. 771-1004, especially, cap. 86, col. 845.

⁷ Malvecii, "Chronicon Brixianum ab origine urbis usque ad annum MCCCXXXII", cap. 90, col. 848.

preserved, but there are no records about the *regalis domus* before the *Chronicon Brixianum* written by Malvezzi. Even taking the interpretative uncertainty of this source into account, it appears likely that the Leno area was already largely controlled by Desiderius through possessions and dependencies, and it is also likely that the monastery was built on an area previously occupied by a complex of properties already belonging to the king.

From these premises, this location appears to be involved in a strategic plan of the king's, devised in order to consolidate his power. Desiderius was duke of Tuscany during the kingdom of his predecessor Aistulf (749-756) and when the king died hunting in December 756, he tried immediately to seize the throne, the rest of the Lombard aristocracy was strongly opposed, however, and instead supported Ratchis, Aistulf's brother.⁸ After troubled months, Desiderius finally became king in March 757.⁹

In order to strengthen his political and economic position, Desiderius had to exploit a precise strategy in the region of Brescia, where his influence was strong and Adelchi, his son, was elected duke of the city.¹⁰ A structured plan to centralise personal power and economic assets emerged in the area, and a part of this strategy was the founding of monasteries.

The promotion and control of religious foundations with their assets was an effective instrument of supremacy for the Lombard kings,¹¹ since

⁸ On the reign of Aistulf and the beginning of the kingdom of Desiderius, see: Paolo Delogu, "Il regno longobardo", *Longobardi e Bizantini*, ed. by Paolo Delogu, André Guillou and Gherardo Ortalli (Turin: Utet, 1980), pp. 1-216, especially, pp. 168-180; Jörg Jarnut, *Storia dei Longobardi* (Turin: Einaudi, 2002), pp. 110-118.

⁹ The chronology of the takeover of power of Desiderius is confirmed also by the text of the *Catalogus regum Langobardorum et Italicorum*, p. 503.

¹⁰ See: Gian Pietro Brogiolo, "Desiderio e Ansa a Brescia: dalla fondazione del monastero al mito", *Il futuro dei Longobardi. L'Italia e la costruzione dell'Europa di Carlo Magno. Saggi*, ed. by Carlo Bertelli and Gian Pietro Brogiolo (Milan: Skira, 2000), pp. 142-155, especially, p. 143. On the relationship between Desiderius and the city of Brescia and his strategy of consolidation of power, see: Claudio Azzara, "Il re e il monastero. Desiderio e la fondazione di Leno, in L'abbazia di San Benedetto di Leno", pp. 21-32; Angelo Baronio, "Il monastero di San Salvatore/San Benedetto di Leno e le sue pertinenze nel quadro della 'politica monastica' di Desiderio", *Tra Pavia e Ravenna. Il territorio e la fascia di confine tra il regno longobardo e l'esarcato bizantino (secoli VI-VIII)*, ed. by Claudio Azzara (Brescia: Fondazione Civiltà Bresciana, 2010), pp. 57-82.

¹¹ For an introduction to monasteries in Lombard, see: Mayke de Jong and Peter Erhart, "Monachesimo tra i Longobardi e i Carolingi", *Il futuro dei Longobardi. L'Italia e la costruzione dell'Europa di Carlo Magno. Saggi*, pp. 105-128; Claudio

these foundations had an important role in strategic control, due to their geographic position, near the borders of the kingdom or in other key areas, where economic, political and cultural penetration could be exercised. Through generous donations of goods, Lombard elites were also able to concentrate and manage wealth in these monasteries, even if it was by the veiled practice of channelling some of that wealth through family members.¹² In this context the foundation of Leno does not appear as an isolated event in the religious history of the Lombards: Desiderius promoted the development of San Salvatore/Santa Giulia, the major monastery in the city of Brescia, through the donation of goods drawn from personal possessions and even from the royal treasury.¹³ As part of the same project, he founded the abbey of Leno, which was established shortly after his seizure of power.

King Desiderius made large donations to his new monastery. An examination of the territorial possessions of the abbey donated by the king shows that behind these donations there was a precise plan of land management aimed at the control of roads, population and resources through a system of strategically placed dependencies.¹⁴ This plan of reorganization and control of the countryside involved both the abbeys of

Azzara, "Ecclesiastical institutions", *Italy in the early Middle Ages*, ed. by Cristina la Rocca (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 85-101, especially, pp. 94-99. On the monasteries founded during the kingdom of Desiderius, see: Delogu, "Il regno longobardo", pp. 182-183; Jarnut, *Storia dei Longobardi*, p. 120; Karl Voigt, *Die königlichen Eigenklöster im Langobardenreiche* (Aalen: Scientia Verlag, 1969), p. 20.

¹² On the strategies for management of family assets and the power of Lombard kinship, see: Cristina la Rocca, "La legge e la pratica. Potere e rapporti sociali nell'Italia dell'VIII secolo", *Il futuro dei Longobardi. L'Italia e la costruzione dell'Europa di Carlo Magno. Saggi*, pp. 45-69, especially, pp. 54-55; Claudio Azzara, "La normativa sui monasteri e sui loro patrimoni nell'Italia longobardo-carolingia", *Le scritture dai monasteri*, ed. by Flavia de Rubeis and Walter Pohl (Rome: Institutum Romanum Finlandiae, 2003), pp. 67-73.

¹³ The character of this institution was that of a family monastery, protected directly by the king, and it is not a coincidence that a daughter of the monarch, Anselperga, was appointed as abbess of the monastery. On the foundation of San Salvatore of Brescia, see: Brogiolo, "Desiderio e Ansa a Brescia: dalla fondazione del monastero al mito".

¹⁴ See: Angelo Baronio, "Tra corti e fiume: l'Oglio e le 'curtes' del monastero di S. Salvatore di Brescia nei secoli VIII-X", *Rive e rivali. Il fiume Oglio e il suo territorio*, ed. by Carla Boroni, Sergio Onger and Maurizio Pegrari (Roccafranca: La compagnia della Stampa, 1999), pp. 11-74; Baronio, "Il monastero di San Salvatore/San Benedetto di Leno e le sue pertinenze nel quadro della 'politica monastica' di Desiderio".

Leno and Santa Giulia, confirming the usefulness of monasteries in supporting the Lombard policy.

1. 3. The dedication of the abbey

The naming of the abbey is a topic worthy of attention. The oldest monastic chronicle, the Catalogue of the Lombard kings written in the late ninth century, attests that the monastery was dedicated to the Saviour: *monasterio domini Salvatoris*. This was a common name for Lombard monasteries, but it was soon replaced by a dedication to St. Benedict, attested by a *charta* from the year 806, about fifty years older than the Catalogue, which refers to the *casa Sancti Benedicti de Leonis*.¹⁵

The same dedication to St. Benedict is reported in the first public documents preserved from the monastic archive, one from the 9th and the other from the 10th century. They are a privilege of Ludwig II of Italy, dated February 26, 861 or 862, that refers to the *monasterium, quod vocatur Leones, in honorem sancti Benedicti constructum in territorio Brixiano, quod per Desiderium regem Longobardorum constat fuisse fundatum*,¹⁶ and a *privilegii pagina* from Pope Sylvester II, dated 19th April 999, reporting the *monasterium Domini et Salvatoris nostri et Sancti Patris Benedicti a piissimo Desiderio dive memorie rege constructum in loco qui dicitur Leones in territorio Brixiano*.¹⁷

The dedication to St. Benedict appeared early in documents which attest the common use, while the reference to the Saviour is contained in a quasi-official chronicle of the foundation of the abbey. The double naming is reported only by the Pope's letter, since pontifical documents are always very well informed about the traditional dedication of churches, showing a situation where the official dedication to the Saviour, very typical for

¹⁵ *I placiti del Regnum Italiae*, ed. by C. Manaresi (Rome: Istituto Storico Italiano, 1955-1960), I, p. 59. 18, *Codice Diplomatico Veronese dalla caduta dell'impero romano alla fine del periodo carolingio*, ed. by Vittorio Fainelli (Venice: Deputazione di Storia Patria per le Venezie, 1940), pp. 86-89, n. 71, a p. 88: 806 aprile, Verona.

¹⁶ Ludovici II. "Diplomata". *Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Diplomatum Karolinorum*, ed. by Konrad Wanner (Munich: Monumenta Germaniae Historica, 1994), IV, pp. 137-139 (doc. n. 35).

¹⁷ Francesco Antonio Zaccaria, *Dell'antichissima badia di Leno libri tre* (Venice: Pietro Marcuzzi, 1767), pp. 80-82 (doc. n. 8). On Zaccaria and his erudition see: Francesco Salvestrini, "'Ameno pascolo di gentiluomini curiosi'. L'erudizione storica a Pistoia durante l'età moderna (1620-1815)", *Bullettino Storico Pistoiense*, 105 (2003), pp. 101-143, especially, pp. 136-137.

Lombard monasteries, was very soon supplanted and almost replaced by the traditional dedication to St. Benedict, which was established by the common use and is the only naming mentioned in the imperial and private documents from the following centuries.

The reference to St. Benedict is certainly explicable with the presence of a precious relic. Transfers of relics should be considered a relevant fact for monasteries, as they were able to generate newer and stronger dedications replacing almost immediately the usual Lombard names. An analogous process occurred in the monastery of Santa Giulia in Brescia, where the initial dedication to the Saviour changed with the transfer of the relic, probably at the time of Berengar.¹⁸

The figure of the saint, the father of Benedictine monasticism, had a strong influence on Leno, and the role of the relic was extremely important for building the identity construction of the abbey. However, since the abbey building was completely destroyed and razed to the ground during the 18th century, no evidence of the oldest church structures has survived, and it is not possible to verify the presence of visual links with the figure of the saint, such as pictures or statues.¹⁹

The decision of Desiderius to place a relic of St. Benedict, which established an evident link with Monte Cassino in his new monastery, acted as an “imprinting” for Leno. Because the presence of a relic meant the presence of a saint, it was a foundational fact for the public image of a monastery in terms of organisation, dynamics, and relationship with the territory.²⁰ In conclusion, a transfer of relics should be considered a culturally relevant operation: identities are always, in some way, “built”, “invented” and periodically redefined. It is not a neutral operation: even in the absence of a clear theoretical consciousness, the different motivations, which could be cultural, political or social, imply the presence of a precise responsibility. In this way, the promoter of an operation of identity

¹⁸ See: *Culto e storia in Santa Giulia*, ed. by Giancarlo Andenna (Brescia: Grafo, 2001), p. 12; Paolo Tomea, “Intorno a Santa Giulia. Le traslazioni e le ‘rapine’ dei corpi santi nel regno longobardo (Neustria e Austria)”, *Culto e storia in Santa Giulia*, pp. 29-101, especially, p. 48.

¹⁹ St. Benedict appeared on the monumental portal of the church built in 1200: see: Pierfabio Panazza, “Per una ricognizione delle fonti artistiche dell’abbazia di Leno: le sculture, in San Benedetto ad Leones”, *Brixia Sacra. Memorie storiche della Diocesi di Brescia*, 11/2 (2006), pp. 187-304, especially, pp. 203-205 and 266-269.

²⁰ See: Giuseppe Sergi, “Sulle strade del potere. Monasteri e paesaggio politico”, *L’aristocrazia della preghiera. Politica e scelte religiose nel medioevo italiano*, ed. by Giuseppe Sergi (Rome: Donzelli, 1994), pp. 31-53, especially, p. 45.

construction is shown to have held great ideological power, through his ability to influence the organization of certain elements of society.

2. The transfer of the relic of St. Benedict

2. 1. The first monks from Monte Cassino

As part of a deliberate plan to gain prestige for his new foundation, King Desiderius requested a group of twelve monks from Monte Cassino to settle in the new monastery,²¹ a primary spiritual reference for European monasticism, in order to establish a connection between Leno and Monte Cassino, with its prestigious tradition.²² The monks, led by Hermoald, who became the first abbot of Leno,²³ brought with them the relic of St. Benedict, settling a precise identity for Leno under the sign of a strong bond with Monte Cassino.

²¹ See: “Catalogi regum Langobardorum et Italicorum Brixienensis et Nonantulanus”, p. 503. Also the “Epitome chronicorum Casinensium”, *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, ed. by L. A. Muratori (Milan: A. Forni, 1973), II, pp. 345-370, especially, p. 357, tells the episode, but, mistakenly, puts it in connection with the abbot Petronax, who died in the year 749 or 750 (see: Hartmut Hoffmann, “Die älteren Abtlisten von Montecassino”, *Quellen und Forschungen aus italienischen Archiven und Bibliotheken*, 47 (1967), pp. 224-354, especially, pp. 246-247).

²² On Monte Cassino as a symbol, see: Mariano Dell’Omo, “Montecassino altomedievale: i secoli VIII e IX. Genesi di un simbolo, storia di una realtà”, *Il monachesimo italiano dall’età longobarda all’età ottoniana, secc. VIII-X*, ed. by Giovanni Spinelli (Cesena: Badia di Santa Maria del Monte, 2006), pp. 165-192; Walter Pohl, “History in fragments: Montecassino’s politics of memory”, *Early medieval Europe*, 10 (2001), pp. 343-374; *Werkstatt der Erinnerung: Montecassino und die Gestaltung der langobardischen Vergangenheit* (Vienna: Oldenbourg, 2001).

²³ On Hermoald little is known beyond legends. See: Malvecii, “Chronicon Brixianum ab origine urbis usque ad annum MCCCXXXII”, col. 849, cap. 92; Zaccaria, *Dell’antichissima badia di Leno libri tre*, pp. 11-13 and 292. According to the Epitome chronicorum Casinensium, he lived more than thirty years after his arrival in Leno (“Epitome chronicorum Casinensium”, p. 357). The name of Hermoald appears at the head of a list of monks of Leno, entered in the liber confraternitatis of the monastery of Reichenau: “Das Verbrüderungsbuch der Abtei Reichenau (Einleitung, Register, Faksimile)”, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Libri memoriales et necrologia, nova series*, ed. by Johanne Autenrieth, Dieter Geuenich and Karl Schmid (Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1979), I, pp. 18-19 (“Nomina fratrum de monasterio quod vocatur Leonis”). See: Sandmann, *Herrscherverzeichnisse als Geschichtsquellen. Studien zur langobardisch-italienischen Überlieferung*, pp. 362-416.

Since Petronax, the second founder of Monte Cassino and also the abbot who restored the abbey in the early 8th century after it was destroyed by the Lombards,²⁴ was from Brescia, this earlier link between Monte Cassino and the territory of Brescia in some ways favoured the request from King Desiderius to the abbot Optatus of Monte Cassino regarding the receipt of such a precious relic. The relationship established between Leno and Monte Cassino was very strong and durable, and the relic was evidence of this bond. Leno can be called the “first-born son of Monte Cassino”;²⁵ there are no historical sources about other European monasteries before Leno founded directly by a community of monks from Monte Cassino.

The strong symbolic value of the saint's figure was part of the process of identity construction led by King Desiderius for his new monastery. Transfers of relics were a privileged vehicle for the cult of saints, and during the Middle Ages –but not only then– they represented an essential element in the formation of the identities of communities,²⁶ holding a special place among the practices used for the social construction of reality.²⁷ A transfer created a precise model of identity, redefining religious hierarchies and political and ecclesiastical geographies.²⁸ For this strong potential, the role of the promoter of the transfer, in this case King Desiderius, appears extremely important, since he was able to use the powerful social value of the relics and the related prestige which they were able to bestow.²⁹ The transfer of the relic of St. Benedict to Leno defined

²⁴ On Petronax, see: Pauli Diaconi. *Historia Langobardorum*, VI, 40. See also: Dell’Omo, “Montecassino altomedievale: i secoli VIII e IX. Genesi di un simbolo, storia di una realtà”, pp. 166-176.

²⁵ Giovanni Spinelli, Leno e Montecassino, <<http://www1.popolis.it/abbazia/classico.asp?IdNew=102&IdSezione=12>>.

²⁶ Julia M. H. Smith, “Saints and their Cults”, *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, 3. *Early Medieval Christianities, c. 600 – 1100*, ed. By Thomas F. X. Noble and Julia M. H. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 581-605; Martina Caroli, “Bringing Saints to Cities and Monasteries: Translations in the Making of a Sacred Geography (Ninth-Tenth Centuries)”, *Towns and Their Territories between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. by Gian Pietro Brogiolo, Nancy Gauthier and Neil Christie (Leiden, Boston and Cologne: Brill, 2000), pp. 259-274.

²⁷ See: Walter Pohl, “History in fragments”, p. 347.

²⁸ See: Patrick J. Geary, *‘Furta sacra’: Thefts of relics in the central middle ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); Edina Bozóký, *La politique des reliques de Constantin à saint Louis: protection collective et légitimation du pouvoir* (Paris: Beauchesne, 2007).

²⁹ See: *Les reliques. Objets, cultes, symboles. Actes du colloque international de*

the close relationship with Monte Cassino as being part of a precise strategy by King Desiderius. On the other hand, this link persisted in time. For example, in the 11th century, the reforming abbot of Leno, Richer of Niederaltaich,³⁰ was promoted by the Emperor to abbot of Monte Cassino, and remained the “superior” of both monasteries, Leno and Monte Cassino, until his death, a unique case in the history of Italian monasticism.

2. 2. Preliminary remarks on the historical sources regarding the relic

A question arises from the analysis of the historical sources about the relic of Leno: what exactly was this relic? The oldest sources report only *quedam corporis pars*, without specifying which part of the body the relic consisted of.³¹ Due to the loss of the monastic archive regarding this period, the Medieval sources on this relic are highly precarious, and in general, those reconstructing the history of Leno Abbey have to deal with a dramatic lack of documentation.³²

There is a document from 1473, a section of the Statutes of the city of Brescia, which specifically identifies the relic with an arm of the saint.³³ This document and an inventory from 1475,³⁴ testify that, in the late 15th century, the relic was kept in the treasury of Brescia Cathedral. Somewhere along the line, because of the crisis and the decline of the monastery after the 12th century, the relic passed from Leno to Brescia.

Undoubtedly, the relic of the arm of St. Benedict kept in Brescia Cathedral, often mentioned in the local tradition of the following centuries, came from Leno. The newfound presence of this relic and its symbolic

l'Université du Littoral-Côte d'Opale (Boulogne-sur-Mer) 4-6 septembre 1997, ed. by Edina Bozóky and Anne-Marie Helvétius (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999).

³⁰ See: Herbert Bloch, *Monte Cassino in the Middle Ages*, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), I, p. 32; Maria Chiara Succurro, “L’abbazia di San Benedetto di Leno”, pp. 206-208.

³¹ See: *Catalogi regum Langobardorum et Italicorum Brixienensis et Nonantulanus*, p. 503; Malvecii, “Chronicon Brixianum ab origine urbis usque ad annum MCCCXXXII”, col. 848, cap. 91.

³² On the archive of the monastery, see: Ezio Barbieri, “L’archivio del monastero in L’abbazia di San Benedetto di Leno”, pp. 255-262; Maria Chiara Succurro, “L’abbazia di San Benedetto di Leno”, pp. 1-30.

³³ *Statuta civitatis Brixiae* (Brixiae: Damian Turlin, 1557), p. 133 (Statuta civilia, rubrica CCCIV: *De feudo et iuribus ac reliquiis Communis Brixiae*).

³⁴ A copy of the document is in: ASB, ASC, Reg. A (G.XIII.1523), f. 150.

importance was a good opportunity for the city of Brescia to gain prestige, and for this reason scholars and local historians in the 17th century aimed to demonstrate that the relic was transferred directly from Monte Cassino to Brescia in ancient times, at the behest of Petronax, replacing Leno in historical local memory, and taking advantage of the great decline of the abbey in those centuries. These local historians are already known for their forgeries, and in this case, they were also carried away by their imagination in order to gain prestige for their city,³⁵ however it is demonstrable that the relic of the arm of St. Benedict did arrive in Brescia from Leno. The many debates around the origin of this relic show its symbolic importance during the 18th and 19th centuries, an importance that it still carries nowadays.³⁶

2. 3. The long-term persistence of a symbol

The issue of the relic of Leno still appears to have been critical in 1950, when two graves were discovered with two bodies, attributed to St. Benedict and St. Scholastica in Monte Cassino. These remains were analysed, and anatomical and radiological studies were performed on the bones. In 1951, a volume was published on the issue of the body of St. Benedict, drawing the conclusion that the relic of Leno was compatible with the remains discovered in Monte Cassino. This was considered evidence that the body of the saint was never transferred to Fleury.³⁷

The question of the two bodies of St. Benedict and the *translatio* to Fleury is an issue that transcends the limits of this paper. What can be

³⁵ See: Maria Chiara Succurro, “Una ‘politica della memoria’? Fondazioni monastiche e traslazioni reliquiali nel progetto di re Desiderio”, *Desiderio. Il progetto politico dell’ultimo re longobardo*, ed. by Gabriele Archetti (Rome: Studium, forthcoming). On the Brescia historiography on the relic see also: Ennio Ferraglio, “La reliquia del braccio di san Benedetto tra Montecassino, Leno e Brescia. Note sulle fonti storiografiche moderne, in San Faustino Maggiore di Brescia, il monastero della città”, *Brixia Sacra. Memorie storiche della Diocesi di Brescia*, 11/1 (2006), pp. 473-486, bearing in mind however that the local scholars mentioned in this article are suspected of many forgeries. On the characteristics of 17th century local historiography, see: François Menant, *Lombardia feudale* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1992), pp. 3-22, in particular, pp. 9-11.

³⁶ See: Paolo Guerrini, *Brescia e Montecassino in un carteggio inedito intorno a una reliquia di s. Benedetto* (Subiaco: Tippographica dei Monasteri, 1942).

³⁷ *Il sepolcro di San Benedetto* (Montecassino: Pubblicazioni Cassinesi, 1951); on the anatomical and radiological comparisons, see: pp. 44, n. 1 e 59-60, fig. 14-15 and rad. 28; on the considerations about the relic of Leno and the translation to Fleury, see: pp. 139-140.