

# THE POLITICS OF THE SACRED IN MEDIEVAL BARCELONA: FROM *INVENTIO SANTAE EULALIAE* TO THE MERCEDARIAN LEGENDS

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## ABSTRACT

In the medieval world, attitudes to culture and society and attitudes to the holy were inextricably linked. Starting from this statement, this article analyses the “legendary stories” of the *inventio* of Saint Eulalia and the founding of the Order of Mercy. Two stories linked by Barcelona, the city that gave birth to them, through the consensus that they generated among the city’s inhabitants, and their strong presence in the political institutions, mentalities and practices of the citizenship. An attempt is made through these two examples to show the power of certain elements to act as crucibles for symbolic agglutinates, that both then and now undoubtedly attracted the attention of power, but not alone.

## KEY WORDS

Relics, politics, Saint Eulalia, Order of Mercy, Devotional Practices.

## CAPITALIA VERBA

Reliquiae, Negotium, Sancta Eulalia, Ordo de Mercede, Meditationes de rebus diuinis.

The year was 877. Frodoino, Bishop of Barcelona, appointed by the Emperor Charles the Bald and sent to the city around 861, was visited by the Archbishop of Narbonne, Sigebuto. The archbishop came in search of the relics of Saint Eulalia for which he wanted to build a basilica in his hometown. Following the indications in the hymn of Saint Quirico, the two leaders searched in vain for the body beneath a basilica beyond the city walls dedicated to the Virgin Mary. After three days, Sigebuto left disappointed. Frodoino, on the other hand, continued the search, this time through the rituals of the *inventiones* of his time, rituals that were designed to invoke divine mercy and assistance in the task at hand. It is said that for three days the bishop and clergy of Barcelona, the religious women, the lay men and women, the great and the small, in their homes and in churches, fasted and prayed with psalms, hymns and candles lit night and day such that the place of burial be shown to the bishop. On the third day, having celebrated mass in Saint Mary's, Frodoino went down to a pit to the right of the altar and saw a small hole. He introduced his staff, and it sank in immediately. After having the place dug out, the saint's tomb was discovered. This *inventio* or "finding" was followed by the transfer, elevation and placement of the body in the city cathedral, accompanied by miracles and wonders.<sup>1</sup>

According to the 15<sup>th</sup> century stories, almost three and a half centuries after this discovery in Barcelona, Peter Nolasco, known in the city for his activities aiding the redemption of captives, had a vision and an interior revelation. Among the many people who came to see him, he saw the Virgin in the middle of them all, who, celebrating his work of redemption, invited him to found a religious order whose members would be dedicated to the task of collecting alms and redeeming captives. Because of this extraordinary experience, and with the support of King James I and his chaplain, the future Dominican Ramon de Penyaafort (after both received identical visions), on August 10, 1218 the Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mercy was founded in a ceremony at the cathedral of Barcelona before the bishop and the counsellors of the city. And the king placed Peter Nolasco at the head of this new order.<sup>2</sup> From the 13<sup>th</sup> century and through to the 17<sup>th</sup> century endless miracle stories are woven around the Virgin as patron saint of the order and also around

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1. The research carried out for this work has received support from the Ministry of Science and Innovation of Spain (MICINN) in the research project HAR2008-02426/HIST. Having studied the documentation relevant to the saint of Barcelona, among others Fàbrega i Grau, Àngel. *Santa Eulàlia de Barcelona. Revisión de un problema histórico*. Rome: Publicaciones del Instituto Español de Estudios Eclesiásticos, 1958. In his work, Àngel Fàbrega debates the authenticity of a Saint Eulalia of Barcelona different from that of Mérida. Avoiding this historiographic argument, here the Carolingian saint will be analyzed starting at the *inventio* in 877 and not before.

2. The foundational legend of "the Mercè", in its many variants, appears as authentic in all the Mercedarian historiography since the 15<sup>th</sup> century, for example in Gaver, Cijar and Zumel. The most complete bibliography on the order is in: Placer López, Gumersindo. *Bibliografía mercedaria*. Madrid: Publicaciones del monasterio del Poyo 1968: 843. Since the seventies the historic veracity of this entire tradition has been put to the test in the works of James W. Brodman. See especially: Brodman, James W. "The origins of the mercedarian Order: a Reassessment". *Studia Monastica*, 19/2 (1977): 353-360 and Brodman, James W. *Ransoming captives in crusader Spain: The Order of Merced on the Christian-Islamic frontier*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986. (Brodman, James. *L'orde de la Mercè: el rescat de captius a l'Espanya de les croades*. Barcelona: Quaderns Crema, 1990, this translation cited).



some of the order's members, men and women recognized as saints. These are the Mercedarian legends.<sup>3</sup>

Here are two stories, both legendary and true. Two stories united by the city that gave them life, by the consensus brought on among its inhabitants, and by the lasting presence achieved in political institutions, attitudes and city practices. So much so that the protagonists, Saint Eulalia of Barcelona and the Virgin of the Mercy, rival each other as patron saints of the city. Two stories intertwined, but at the same time distinct. Separated by time and even more by the sensibilities to which they responded and by the needs that they fed. A boundary between two eras is glimpsed. It is of this boundary and of the two worlds that both come together and oppose one another there, that I wish to speak in this study. However, in order to do so it is necessary to avoid a few obstacles: Are these not merely legends? Is it worthwhile to analyze both the two worlds and their boundary? Does not it all just come down to mere power plays on varying degrees of human gullibility? Does this invalidate the ability to transmit truth? How should we approach it?

Let us reserve judgment. We will leave these things to one side, as a valuable instrument that must be taken up later. We shall enter medieval Barcelona with our eyes open, full of questions, with the manner and attitude of one who wants to understand, to know why, to interpret cultural manifestations in accordance with the criteria of the very society that saw them arise and became part of them. We shall try, as much as possible, to carry out a survey that takes into account the symbolic complexity of human practices in this city in these two periods. I speak not only of their religious practices but also, more generally, of their social, political, economic and cultural practices and of the accompanying survival strategies.

Let us leave behind the premise that credulity in general, and especially in medieval societies, is an unsound interpretive clue in attempting to understand the motivations of those involved in the cult of relics and the construction of legendary hagiography.<sup>4</sup> Let us rather put them in the context of the unifying power of founding myths in the hearts of medieval communities, even when they could also be the fruit of the most diverse political strategies. As Francisco Márquez Villanueva has shown in the case of *Santiago*, a myth always grows with its back to reality, favoring instead another order of things or an "alternative reality" loaded with both pragmatic and emotional values, its only "truth" residing then in the reason for

3. Among the first Mercedarian saints, in addition to Peter Nolasco, are Mary of Cervellon and Raymond Nonnatus. For more information on both and on the hagiographic legends constructed around them, apart from the printed lives and the traditional Mercedarian historiography, see the studies: Jorner, Núria; Rodríguez Parada, Concepción. "Las sentencias espirituales atribuidas a María de Cervelló: la palabra de María en el relato hagiográfico de la orden mercedaria", *Mujer y cultura escrita. Del mito al siglo XXI, VII Congreso Internacional de Historia de la Cultura Escrita*, María del Val González de la Peña, coord. Gijón: Trea, 2005: 75-84; and Cortadellas, Anna. "Del guerrero al sant. El tema del nonat en les llegendes de la Corona d'Aragó". *Boletín de la Real Academia de Buenas Letras de Barcelona*, 41 (1987-1988): 191-211.

4. See Brown, Peter. "Reliques et statut social au temps de Grégoire de Tours", *La société et le sacré dans l'Antiquité tardive*. Paris: Seuil, 1985: 182-183. (Brown, Peter. *Society and the holy in Late Antiquity*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).



being created and in its ability to remain standing.<sup>5</sup> The key to understanding the myth, if there is one, must come to us from the recent progress in anthropology and history of religions and the many studies on medieval spirituality, on the cult of the saints and on devotion to relics written from these new analytical perspectives. Through them we know that in the medieval world attitudes towards culture and society and attitudes towards the sacred are inextricably linked. Medieval society finds itself permeated with a mentality in which the sacred plays a fundamental role not only in the heart of the culture but also in law and in politics. A mentality that evolves from the beginnings of this period that we call the Middle Ages, consolidating after the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries in the Roman Christian West a corpus of beliefs and ceremonies that ultimately coalesce into a stable profile in the forms and social uses of cult and piety.<sup>6</sup> Based on that profile, public opinion arises that ratifies and places faith in concrete practice.

But even if this statement is valid for all of the Middle Ages, two particular periods stand out over the centuries, forming a diptych in which they join and at the same time distinguish two religious sensibilities and two worlds. The first corresponds mainly to the Europe of the Germanic kingdoms and the Carolingian Empire (the 6<sup>th</sup> -10<sup>th</sup> centuries). The second begins to solidify in the great changes experienced in the 11<sup>th</sup> century that, in the middle of the feudal period, open the men and women of the West to distinctly new forms of consciousness that mature over the last centuries of the Medieval period. Our bishop, Frodoino, and his saint, Eulalia clearly pertain to this first world, while the Virgin Mary of Mercy and the Mercedarian saints belong to the second. Medieval Barcelona is built on elements of both worlds, showing by the ability to forge cohesive myths, together with their emotional expression and devotional practice, that the city was a full participant in the cultural movements of Medieval Western Europe.

## 1. The “foundation” of Carolingian Barcelona and the *inventio sanctae Eulaliae*

In the year 717 Muslim rule reached the small town of Barcelona, enclosed within its late-Roman walls. It would last eighty-four years until April 801 when, as told in the poem by Ermoldo the Black, after a month-long siege, Louis the Pious, son of Charlemagne, entered the city with his army. During the decades of

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5. Marquez Villanueva, Francisco. *Santiago: trayectoria de un mito*. Barcelona: Edicions Bellaterra, 2004: 43-44.

6. As shown by Brown, Peter. “Reliques et statut social...”: 188, but more generally as shown by his studies on religious behavior in late antiquity and the high Middle Ages, see Brown, Peter. *La société et le sacré dans l'Antiquité tardive...*; Brown, Peter. *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981.



Islamization the cathedral had become, at least partially, a mosque.<sup>7</sup> This is most likely the reference of the verses dedicated to the triumphant arrival of the king purifying the place within the city walls that had been given over to demon worship, and offering thanksgiving to Christ in that place.<sup>8</sup> From that moment on, Christian worship was restored by the Franks in Barcelona and the Episcopal see. The years surrounding the siege and taking of the city do not suppose, however, an immediate and radical break with Spanish Christian tradition and the Visigothic church of Toledo, which apparently continued to have religious, social and cultural ties with the communities of the northeastern peninsula. The liturgy probably continued in the style of the Visigothic rite for some years. But times were changing. As we know, the reigns of Louis the Pious and Charles the Bald saw the creation of the Spanish March and its complete integration into the governmental structures of the kingdom of France. From 820 to the 870s the monarchs placed members of the Frankish aristocracy at the heads of the Catalan counties: Rampon, Berenguer, Bernard of Septimania, Aleran, Odalric, Unifred, Bernard of Gothia were all counts of the March belonging to the major “Frankish” family clans. Those counts belonging to the “Gothic” clans that would be the so-called “first Catalan counts”, especially from the 870s forward, were also faithful to the new forms of organization from beyond the Pyrenees. The strategies of political and cultural homogenization coming from the Empire’s central administration also implicated the Church. The persecution of Felix of Urgell’s adoptionism, the removal of Visigothic liturgy and its replacement with Franco-Roman liturgy, and the implementation of monastic reform with the full Benedictinization of the Catalan lands are all events which point to a united strategy and will for integration. The process was carried out over several decades. Reading into the documents, it is not a process without its tensions, ever more so as the Empire entered into a long period of strife, division of power and gradual territorial disintegration after the death of Louis the Pious and especially after the death of Charles the Bald.

We do not know exactly when the Episcopal see was restored to the city after the capture of Barcelona in 801. But we do know that when it was done, clerics faithful to the Roman politics of the Empire placed themselves before it and, furthermore, its authority was subordinate to that of the archbishop of Narbonne, as were all the Catalan bishops. In Barcelona, the first two bishops were John (documented in 850) and Ataulfus. Little remains of them beyond the mere memory of their existence. The third and best known bishop was Frodoino (861-890), he who discovered Saint Eulalia, a man very close to the crown, and likely a man of Frankish origin.

7. As stated by Vergés, Martí; Vinyoles, Teresa. “De la seu de Frodoí a la catedral romànica de Barcelona”. *Boletín de la Real Academia de Buenas Letras de Barcelona*, 47 (1999-2000): 9-49, especially 17, where they point to the discovery of a coin of Abd al Rahman I (755-788) in the layer of the demolition of the baptistery.

8. *Rex Hludowicus ovans solvere vota Deo; Mundavitque locos, ubi daemonis alma colebant* in le Noir, Ermold. *Poème sur Louis le Pieux et épitres au roi Pepin*, ed. and trad. Edmond Faral. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1964: 46. Vergés and Vinyoles likewise refer to the conservation of this tradition of “renovation” of the cathedral after the Islamic occupation in literary sources and in documents pertaining to the consecration of the new cathedral in 1058, Vergés, Martí; Vinyoles, Teresa. “De la seu de Frodoí...”: 18.



The news we have of Frodoino's negotiations before the episcopate and in Charles the Bald's court sketch out for us with relative precision a man committed to the religious Franco-Roman politics.<sup>9</sup> Supported both politically and economically in this endeavor by the crown, and perhaps even commissioned to do it, it seems that he dedicated his efforts to establishing the prestige of the see, restoring the cathedral and eliminating the "Hispano-Gothic" vestiges in the diocese. Some of the first news we have of him is notice of a privilege granted to him by King Charles. In 862 Frodoino and the Count of Empúries, Sunyer, were granted this privilege following the liquidation of the assets of Count Unifred, who was in rebellion against the crown, yet who still held the power of the March in his hands. They each received an important lot of assets in the eastern Montseny. The delivery of lands and payments, which were doubtlessly the Count's resources, brought them into conflict with Count Unifred and was most likely aimed at strengthening their positions on the other side of the Pyrenees and their loyalty to the Frankish monarchy.<sup>10</sup>

Twelve years later, in June/July of 874, we find Frodoino in the diet of Attigny presenting to the emperor and the elite his concerns regarding the difficulties of the administration of his diocese. We can deduce from his complaints that in the first decade of governance a certain opposition to his authority manifested itself, perhaps linked to an anti-Carolingian political resistance. In any case, the matter is expressed in religious terms and in terms of the continued existence of Hispano-Gothic cults: a Goth named Madeix has obtained, through fraudulent privileges, the ancient and noble church of Saint Stephen and conducts shameful peasant meetings there; another Goth, Recosindo, by equally fraudulent privileges, has obtained the territory of Saint Eulalia that belonged to the see (perhaps the place where, according to tradition, the bishop Quirico had a monastery built over the tomb of the saint); a certain seditious Baion at the castle of Terrasa appointed clergy to the churches regardless of Episcopal authority; and in Barcelona itself, a cleric from Cordoba named Tirs brought people together in a church within the city walls, to celebrate mass and baptize without permission of the bishop. This Cordoban man, most certainly a Mozarab in the Spanish church, seems to have usurped church tithes and when summoned by the bishop for the celebrations of Easter and Christmas, not only did he not attend, but gave the communion himself to his so-called parishioners.<sup>11</sup>

If I cover this familiar information in some detail, it is to underline the fact that all political tension implicit in these events is expressed in terms of religious authority and forms of religiosity. This is not to deny the political content therein, but rather

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9. The fundamental lines in this political process and the description of Bishop Frodoino that I address briefly were both put forward some time ago by Ramon d'Abadal in his diverse works dedicated to Catalonia in the 9<sup>th</sup> - 11<sup>th</sup> centuries: Abadal, Ramon d'. *Catalunya Carolingia II. Els diplomes carolingis a Catalunya*. Barcelona: Institut d'Estudis Catalans, 1926-1950 (reedited 2007); Abadal, Ramon d'. *Els primers comtes catalans*. Barcelona: Teide, 1958; Abadal, Ramon d'. *Dels Visigots als catalans. La Hispania visigòtica i la catalunya carolingia*. Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1969.

10. Abadal, Ramon d', *Catalunya Carolingia II. Els diplomes carolingis a Catalunya*....: 65-67; Abadal, Ramon d'. *Els primers comtes catalans*....: 6-7.

11. Abadal, Ramon d'. *Catalunya Carolingia II. Els diplomes carolingis a Catalunya*....: 430; Abadal, Ramon d'. *Els primers comtes catalans*....: 55.





to demonstrate how in the 9<sup>th</sup> century juridical and political power struggles were inextricably linked with religious practice and were expressed in terms of manipulation of the sacred. This is what was at stake for Bishop Frodoino, as well as for both the Hispano-Gothic and Carolingian sectors of society of the time. At least it seems that King Charles saw it that way. He immediately ordered an investigation into the granting of the aforementioned privileges and the manner in which they were obtained, and he sent his “Marquis” (who at this time was still the Frankish count, Bernat de Gotia) to arrest and punish those who had worked against the authority of the bishop.

The next episode starring Frodoino is, if anything, even more significant, because it shows how the strategies of consolidation of the power of the sacred were constructed around the central places of worship: Just after the diet of Quiercy in 877, which was to precede Charles the Bald’s expedition to Italy near the end of his reign, the king sent a letter written by a Jew named Judas to the citizens of Barcelona, *omnibus barchinonensibus peculiaribus nostris*, along with the large sum of ten pounds of silver for the bishop of the city to repair the cathedral; *dirigo ad Frodoynum, episcopum, libras X de argento ad suma ecclesiam reparare*. This “restoration” of the see of Barcelona, which gains the character of a re-foundation, was consolidated with the privilege awarded on September 11, 878 by Charles’s successor, Louis the Stammerer, for the restoration of the same. The privilege was recorded in the course of a council in Troyes chaired by the king and Pope John VIII, to which all the bishops of the kingdom of France and their suffragans were summoned. The council was convened on August 11, 878 and attended by the archbishop of Narbonne, Sigebuto, and the Catalan bishops dependent on his archdiocese, among them Frodoino. Both Sigebuto and Frodoino asked King Louis for aid in the restoration of their churches. Sigebuto, presenting to the council the *Lex Gotica* which governed Imperial lands of Visigothic origin (Septimania and the Catalan counties), argued that the law failed the church because it did not legislate on the sacrilege of ecclesiastical spoliation as did Roman law. Recognizing this, the Pope issued a bull for the Spanish and Narbonnese provinces, setting the reparation of this sacrilege at thirty pounds of silver and ordering that this statutory provision be added to the end of the “Law of the Goths.” Frodoino, in turn, asked for the confirmation of the concessions made by King Charles, final adjudication on the “field of Saint Eulalia”, and authorization to restore the cathedral, all of which were granted to him by the love of God and with reverence to the church where a few months earlier the relics of Saint Eulalia had been placed: *amore Dei et reverentiam Sancte Crucis in cuius honore predicta ecclesia Barchinonensis dedicata est, et Sancte Eulalie cuius corpus in ipsa ecclesia requiescit... concedimus eidem episcopo licentiam canonicam eidem ecclesie restaurando, que penitus destructa esse*.<sup>12</sup> However, both Sigebuto and Frodoino are actually speaking in two different ways about an identical question at the Council of Troyes: how to find a way to adapt the cult of their churches to the

12. Abadal, Ramon d’. *Catalunya Carolingia II. Els diplomes carolingis a Catalunya...*: 435; Abadal, Ramon d’. *Els primers comtes catalans...*: 61-65.



political-religious practice of the custody of relics which extolled and brought great prestige to their respective cathedrals, therefore legitimizing the political authority they symbolize, at least within the city.

Taking into account the letter from Charles the Bald and the privileges granted by his successor to the see for the restoration of the cathedral, Martí Vergés and Teresa Vinyoles interpret that an important renovation of the architectural structures of the see of Barcelona was undertaken in the seventies, with the remodeling of the cathedral and the canonical residence. This reform runs parallel, and is quite similar, to the renovations in the see of the archbishop in Narbonne, both from an urban standpoint and in actual content.<sup>13</sup> It is important to note that the reform not only affected the buildings. The physical structures were thought of and organized according to religious practice which in the 9<sup>th</sup> century Western Roman-Christian tradition revolves around the liturgy of the saints and their relics. These relics, be they of martyrs, confessors, or the more recent local saints, essentially under the bishop's care, were transported both mentally and physically to the center of the liturgy through the architectural use of a *confessio* excavated beneath the altar.

Let us go back a few months. We remember that it was just between these two dates (that of Charles's letter of July 877, and that of the privilege granted by his successor in September 878) that Sigebuto's search for the relics of Saint Eulalia occurred, based on the memory of a cult at the tomb of the martyr in Barcelona. The search, as we know, was resolved by the *inventio* of the saint by Frodoino in a church outside the city walls dedicated to Saint Mary<sup>14</sup> and the transfer of the relics to the city's cathedral, where they were placed in a space excavated to the right of the altar, that is: a *confessio*.

Information on the vicissitudes that accompanied the possible existence of an earlier cult of Saint Eulalia prior to 877, the discovery of the relics and their transfer to the cathedral, and the cult that was then developed come to us through various documents, some of which are ambiguous or difficult to interpret. The first report we owe to Quirico, who might have been bishop of Barcelona. It seems that around the middle of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, he was able to record a few acts of the martyrdom and compose a hymn in trochaic verse and a mass in compliance with the provisions of the 4<sup>th</sup> Council of Toledo.<sup>15</sup> The hymn gives the impression that its author had built a monastery where the saint was buried. Be that as it may, the monastery, tomb and cult were all forgotten in the years of Islamic domination, although a certain memory remained. Because of that memory the search for relics was undertaken in 877, and as a result we have the *inventio* of the tomb and the transfer of the body to the cathedral. These facts are first confirmed historically by an inscription, contemporary to the discovery, on a marble slab that is today broken in two pieces and

13. Vergés, Martí; Vinyoles, Teresa. "De la seu de Frodoí...": 21.

14. This is likely *Santa Maria de les Arenes*, beneath the present-day Gothic church, *Santa Maria del Mar*. For a discussion of this topic, see Travesset i Queraltó, Magí. "La realitat històrica de la màrtir Eulàlia a la Barcelona del segle IV. Resultats de les excavacions arquitectòniques de la necròpolis paleocristiana de Santa Maria del Mar". *Finestrelles*, 13 (2005): 73-112.

15. Fàbrega i Grau, Àngel. *Santa Eulàlia de Barcelona...*: 49-50.





embedded with iron fixings in the central wall of the apse of the crypt below the altar of the present-day Gothic cathedral. The tombstone reads: *Hic requiescit beata Eulàlia martirys Christi, qui passa et in civitate Barchinona sub Daciano preside II idus februarias, etfuit inventa a Frodoino episcopo cum suo clero in domum sancte Marie X Kalendas Novembres. Deo Gratias*. The second piece of evidence, the story of the *inventio* and the transfer, is much more explicit as regards the motivation of the search, invention and devotional practices that accompanied the solemn movement of the body, but its dating is much more difficult to assess. The story is preserved in three manuscripts, three 14<sup>th</sup> century lectionaries, probably written around the time of the new *traslatio* of the relics from the Romanesque cathedral to the crypt built in the Gothic cathedral. According to Àngel Fabregas, it is possible to sense in this text a later reworking of a primitive narrative, which was much shorter and more concise, contemporaneous with the events.<sup>16</sup> Certainly the rewriting and expansion of such stories after a considerable length of time, with various motivations such as, for example, the new movement of the relics, is a well known phenomenon in the Middle Ages.<sup>17</sup> Many of the stories of invention, deposition and translation that have survived were written subsequent to the event or re-written over an initial text at important points in time when it was desirable to enhance the *virtus* of the relics or glorify the custodians.<sup>18</sup> The difficulty arises, in our case, in trying to discern which parts of the story correspond to the earlier text and which portions were added later. On the one hand, the precision of some of the historically proven details suggests an early text: the text, which names both Frodoino and Sigebuto in the first lines, adds next to the name of the archbishop the words “*beatae memoriae*”, perhaps indicating that when it was written Sigebuto had died yet Frodoino was still alive.<sup>19</sup> If that is true, at least part of the text was written between 885 and the early 890s. On the other hand, the 14<sup>th</sup> century text in many respects aligns itself well with what we know about the rites of invention and translation of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, of which there are many written examples, and the narrative we have contains, at the very least, what we also know from the tombstone: what was believed in regard to the Roman saint and her martyrdom in the Dacian era and the central role of the bishop Frodoino in the invention and translation of the body.

In any case, it is worth questioning the text on two different levels: first, investigating the similarities in the early Medieval rites of invention, translation and deposition of relics, and secondly, considering what objectives and strategies were

16. Fàbrega i Grau, Àngel. *Santa Eulàlia de Barcelona...*: 109.

17. For an example in the north of France Helvétius, Anne Marie. “Les inventions de reliques en Gaule du Nord (IXe-XIIIe siècle)”, *Les reliques. Objets, cultes, symboles*, Edina Bozoky, Anne Marie Helvetius, eds. Turnhout: Brepols, 1999: 255-269e.

18. Bozóky, Edina. *La politique des reliques de Constantin à Saint Louis*. Paris: Beauchesne, 2006: 255-256.

19. Abadal, Ramon d'. *Els primers comtes catalans...*: 70. Anscari Manuel Mundó adds that the detail of the concelebration reinforces the antiquity of the story since a later writer would have difficulty being that this use had disappeared, Mundó, Anscari Manuel. “El Commicus palimpsest Paris Lat.2269. Amb notes sobre liturgia i manuscrits visigòtics a Septimània i Catalunya”, *Liturgia I. Cardinali I. A. Schuster in memoriam*. Montserrat: Abadia de Montserrat, 1956: 234.



brought to the writing, or possible re-writing and amplification, in the late Medieval period, precisely at the time of the consecration of the Gothic cathedral.

In fact, stories of inventions and translations are rooted in the sermons of the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries. However, it is in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries that they gained their true form as a “literary genre” independent of the *vitae* and in close relation to the political clout that the cult of relics acquired in the Franco-Roman milieu and in a devotional context that would only see significant change after the 11<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>20</sup> Likewise the liturgical structure of the ceremonies to relocate the body of a saint or martyr were fixed in the West in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, becoming codified<sup>21</sup> and operating, in any case, as a ritual amplification over the course of the centuries immediately following. What is most important was the realization of the existence of a ritual display performed by the clergy, presided over by the bishops, and directed at the whole community.<sup>22</sup> Its function was the construction of a non-verbal communication system that intended to go beyond words in establishing a dialog between the sacred and the community. The weight of the rites was carried mainly by the gestures, sounds, objects, and smells that form the alphabet of this non-verbal communication; an alphabet whose meaning was perfectly clear to its contemporaries and that today, separated from this sensory performance, we should perhaps once again decipher.<sup>23</sup> Lastly, the authority of the saint present in the relic was, until the 11<sup>th</sup> century, potentially foundational and able to dictate the patronage of a church.<sup>24</sup> All of these elements are latent in the preserved text: The formal structure of the narration as an independent text; the importance of the ritual as a means of verification presided over by the bishop, followed by the people and acted out by the clergy who were specialists in the manipulation of the sacred; and of course the sensory miracles, especially that of the sweet odor that accompanied the finding of the body with the bishop’s staff and again the moment of its deposition in the cathedral of the Holy Cross in Barcelona, the Carolingian see of Frodoino, the place which was destined to have its patronage renewed.

But while it should not be difficult to recognize traces of an earlier text in the 14<sup>th</sup> century story, it is also easy to see why the 14<sup>th</sup> century lectionaries pick it up,

20. As is demonstrated in general for the Latin-West in the work of Heinzelmänn, Martin. *Traslationsberichte und andere Quellen des Reliquienkultes*. Turnhout: Brepols, 1979: 24 and following, 94 and following.

21. See especially Herrmann-Mascard, Nicole. *Les reliques des Saints. Formation coutumière d’un droit*. Paris: Klincksieck, 1975; Heinzelmänn, Martin. *Traslationsberichte und andere Quellen...*

22. The many actors in inventions and translations and the role played by the common people in these events is discussed in Bozoky, Edina. “Le rôle du petit peuple dans les inventions des reliques (IX-XI siècle)”, *Le petit peuple dans l’Occident Medieval. Terminologies, perceptions, réalités: actes du congrès international tenu à l’Université de Montréal, 18-23 1999*, Pierre Boggioni, Robert Delort, Claude Gauvard, eds. Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne 2003, 549-558. His realization that only after the 11<sup>th</sup> century does it become relatively normal for the common people to discover a relic, while in the 9<sup>th</sup> century only the high dignitaries of the church were the principle discoverers, is interesting.

23. The non-verbal codes in the translation of relics have been analyzed by Röcklein, Hedwing. “Non-verbale Kommunikationsformen und –medien beim Transfer von Heiligen im Frühmittelalter”, *Medien der Kommunikation im Mittelalter*, Karl-Heinz Spiess, ed. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2003: 83-104.

24. Heinzelmänn, Martin. *Traslationsberichte und andere Quellen des Reliquienkultes...*: 24.



being contemporary to the translation of the body of the saint to its current crypt and the consecration of the Gothic cathedrals. Clearly, in a very different devotional context that we will see in a moment, and with the motivation of the transfer of the relics of Saint Eulalia, the desire was to refresh the emotional base on which the cult of the city stood, where, in any case, Saint Eulalia would remain the patron. According to the Rubrics of Bruniquer, the highest dignitaries in the country were present at the 1339 translation: King Peter and King James of Majorca.<sup>25</sup> According to the Chronicle of Peter the Ceremonious which also describes the ceremony, these two kings carried the body in the procession with their own hands.<sup>26</sup> Without diminishing the power of the church, the monarchy had moved to the forefront of community urban ritual creators in the late Middle Ages.

Yet before entering this second world and crossing the threshold that both unites and separates two eras and two religious sensibilities, it is necessary to dwell a bit more on the consequences of Frodoino's discovery. The cult of the relics of Saint Eulalia, linked to the Franco-Roman liturgy and developed immediately following the translation to the cathedral, provoked a strong devotional trend that resulted in donations to the church. With these donations, the bishop carried out the restoration of both the cathedral and the residence of the canons that he had begun with the assistance of Charles the Bald and later with the support of Louis the Stammerer. The Counts of Barcelona became involved in the enterprise very early on, making important donations: Sunyer in 944, and then, after the critical years following the Almanzor raid, Ramon Borrell in 1009. But the lay people also multiplied their gifts, among which a donation by the merchant Roberto, also in 1009, stands out. The references to votive candles and offerings of the laity, that accompanied requests and bequests reveal the emotional response identified with the mediating power of the *virtus* of the relics, which placed itself beyond any political strategy yet did not ignore or dispense with it. Without claiming a total consensus on the part of the citizens, there is no doubt that the invention of the relics brought a prestige to the cathedral of Barcelona and to its bishop upon which was founded the idea of an urban renaissance. Already in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, in 1058, the Roman cathedral was consecrated, likely built over Frodoino's cathedral, but moving the central axis toward the right such that the saint (whose *confessio* was to the right of the main altar) would occupy, without being moved, the exact center of the church.<sup>27</sup> By that time, the cathedral of Barcelona, dedicated to the Holy Cross, had changed its name to the cathedral of Saint Cross and Saint Eulalia decades past.

25. Bruniquer, Esteve Gilabert. *Ceremonial dels magnífichs consellers y Regiment de la Ciutat de Barcelona (Rúbriques de Bruniquer)*. Barcelona: Ajuntament Constitucional-Impremta d'Henrich y Companyia, 1914: III, 161.

26. *Les Quatre grans cròniques. Crònica de Pere el Cerimoniós*, ed. Ferran Soldevila. Barcelona: Selecta, 1983: chapter 35, 1034.

27. As deduced by Vergés Martí; Vinyoles, Teresa. "Santa Creu i Santa Eulàlia de Barcelona", *Catalunya Romànica*. Barcelona: Enciclopèdia Catalana. 1992: XX, 155-157; Vergés, Martí; Vinyoles, Teresa. "De la seu de Frodoí...: 24 and following.



Thus the formation of Carolingian Barcelona once again clearly follows one of the most characteristic paths of the Early Middle Ages: the centrality of the sacred potential of the dead negotiated by the bishops, concentrated in the cult of martyrs, confessors and some saints, and objectified in their mortal remains —the relics. The cult of relics would not disappear in later centuries, but it would lose centrality as only in the Early Middle Ages was the use of relics an exceptionally effective means to access the sacred and an indispensable way of establishing, glorifying and making legitimate all political authority.<sup>28</sup>

## 2. The triumph of the Virgin and the Order of Captives of Saint Eulalia: the birth of a new spirituality in Medieval Barcelona

We know that the legend of the foundation of the *Merced* described above is a later version, developed in the 15<sup>th</sup> century in the form of an “origin myth” of the story of the birth of a charitable order in the city of Barcelona in the first half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century under the patronage of Saint Eulalia. In several of his works on the Order of Mercy, James W. Brodman has pointed out the remarkable separation between what we know of the beginnings of this community for the redemption of captives formed by friars and laity and, in his own words, the Mercedarian “fable” tied to royal power and built in later texts around the idea of a mendicant, military and aristocratic order under the foundational patronage of the Crown.<sup>29</sup> Yet it is precisely this evolution of the Order between the 13<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries (which continues in to modernity), which brings us the first activities of Peter Nolasco at the consecration of the Order of Mercy as an institution particularly tied to royal politics (and also to the modern canonization of Mercedarian saints and the formalization of the patronage of Our Lady of Mercy). This evolution can provide the key to the new religious sensibilities (which explain the existence of the order) and to the clericalization, institutionalization, manipulation, and increasing power of the myth in the service of the political interests of the crown, all without one or another aspect invalidating the others.

The Order of Mercy was born into a completely different society from that of the Barcelona at the time of Frodoino’s invention. Over the course of the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>

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28. Bozóky, Edina. *La politique des reliques de Constantin à Saint Louis...*: 6 and following; Boesch Gajano, Sofia. “Reliques et pouvoirs”, *Les reliques. Objets, cultes, symboles. Actes du Colloque international de l’Université du Littoral-Côte d’Opale (Boulogne-sur-mer), 4-6 septembre 1997*, Edina Bozóky, Anne Marie Helvetius, eds. Turnhout: Brepols, 1999: 255-269. The political use of relics in general is addressed in Geary, Patrick. *Furta sacra. Thefts of Relics in the central Middle Ages*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990. Also for Visigothic Spain: Guance, Ariel. “Hagiografía y culto de las reliquias en la Hispania romana y visigoda: testimonios y mensajes”, *Sociedad y Memoria en la Edad Media. Estudios en homenaje a la profesora Nilda Guillelmi*, Ariel Guance, Pablo Ubierna, eds. Buenos Aires: Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas-Instituto Multidisciplinario de Historia y Ciencias Humanas, 2005: 163-170.

29. Brodman James W. “Fable and royal power: The origins of the Mercedarian foundation store”. *Journal of Medieval History* 25/3 (1999): 229-241.



centuries, in the city as in all of the western world, a totally new situation arose. Within the framework of feudal society and the accompanying urban awakening, there was an important transformation in the forms of religiosity and spirituality on all sides. The most visible feature of this change was the emergence of a pauperist movement frequently known as “religious poverty” and tied to the evangelical figure of Christ.<sup>30</sup> It was a movement to renew the concept and practice of poverty and also the sense of *caritas* and the use of the word by the laity. In this context, in contrast to the profit economy arising in the hearts of feudal towns and extending throughout the lands and cities of the West, and in contrast to the slow but increasing affirmation of profit as a measure of the world, charitable action and the ability to renounce materialism stood out as an expression of rejection and liberation.<sup>31</sup> But in close relation to all of this, the 11<sup>th</sup> century and especially the 12<sup>th</sup> century are also key to understanding the birth of the process of individualization and self-awareness in contrast to the idea of the collective that was manifest on many levels.<sup>32</sup> In terms of religiosity, this consciousness of the individual is primarily seen in the use of the first person in dialog with the divine, whether in devotional practices, confession, or in the forays into religious and spiritual writing.<sup>33</sup> Society’s relationship with the sacred and the supernatural was radically transformed, creating a dramatic shift between the objective and the subjective. The sacred, that until then had objectified the consolidation of group values, for example, in a relic, was transformed into the repository par excellence of personal sentiment,<sup>34</sup> while individual participation in the values of the community acquired a whole new meaning.

Barcelona in the 13<sup>th</sup> century was a city full of dynamism and growth. Turned towards the Mediterranean, international trade, and the political expansion of the Crown, it was a city with all the characteristics of a Western European urban center in which the new forms of spirituality took root and grew with extraordinary vigor. The urbanization of the Augustinian and Cistercian monastic orders, the appearance of male and female mendicant orders, and the proliferation of hospitals and urban convents put 13<sup>th</sup> century Barcelona on a level with the urban centers of Italy, Languedoc and Provence that experienced a renewal of evangelical and apostolic ideals embodied in poverty and transmitted through a “Mediterranean” reading of similar and parallel phenomena in Northern Europe and Anglo-Saxon territories.

We know that the origins of many of these movements which led to the foundation of both male and female orders were often found in earlier informal communi-

30. As defined by Little, Lester K. *Religious Poverty and the profit economy in medieval Europe*. London: Paul Elek, 1978 (Little, Lester K. *Pobreza voluntaria y economía de beneficio en la Europa medieval*. Taurus: Madrid 1980).

31. See Garí, Blanca. “La vida del espíritu”, *Las relaciones en la historia de la Europa Medieval*, María-Milagros Rivera, coord. Valencia: Tirant lo Blanch, 2006: 205-275.

32. Macfarlane, Alan. *The Origins of English Individualism: the family, property and social transition*. Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1978.

33. Regarding the important role of women in this process, see Cirlot, Victoria; Garí, Blanca. *La Mirada Interior. Escritoras místicas y visionarias en la edad media*. Madrid: Siruela, 2008.

34. Brown, Peter. “La société et le surnaturel. Une transformation médiévale”, *La société et le sacré dans l’Antiquité tardive...*: 260.



ties, sometimes very small, or simply in the desires of one, two or more people to live a different life, although these individuals are not always visible in the sources. Only later, with the transformation of these communities into real institutions of varying types (Beguines, third orders, charitable orders or mendicant convents), do these early figures appear, sometimes more intuited than visualized, through the somewhat mythical fog that covers the initial history. From this perspective, we are able to imagine the origin of the Order of Mercy and also make out a few of the first Mercedarian figures as individuals who later form the foundation hagiography: Peter Nolasco and Mary Cervellon.<sup>35</sup> As Brodman has shown, from the historical perspective of the 13<sup>th</sup> century the founding legend of the Order of Mercy and the cathedral ceremony in 1218 collapse under their own weight when the documentation relevant to the early activities of Peter Nolasco is analyzed. From a chronological standpoint there is no reliable documentation before 1230 when, in the context of an offensive against the Balearics, we find Friar Peter collecting alms for the ransoming of captives. From the perspective of the available content, it seems that there was no possible contact in 1218 between James I, a child of ten, Raymond of Penafort, who was not yet a Dominican, and the layman Peter Nolasco. On the other hand, when King James much later turned his attention to this quaesitor of alms and his community he did so, without undue emphasis and with lesser generosity than shown to other orders, for a donation of some lands and protection for travel. Thus it seems clear that the ceremony at the Cathedral of the Holy Cross and Saint Eulalia in 1218 moves exclusively in the realm of myth and corresponds with the wished-for origins of the order of a later period.

The true origins of the first community of Our Lady of Mercy bring us much more directly into contact with the spiritual atmosphere of the city in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century and the new role of lay men and women in religious movements. We know that on the one hand this was welcomed by the Church throughout the West as a startling novelty and, in general, viewed positively. However, it was viewed with increasing suspicion, bringing greater institutionalization and control. In 1230, the date of the first trustworthy document according to Brodman, *frater Petrus* (Peter Nolasco) received 100 pences (*solidos*) in a will for the ransoming of captives, and in 1231 Ramon Rovira paid him half of the promised sum referring to him as *questor et custos helemosinarum captivorum*; in 1233 lands were ceded to his partner, Friar Juan de Laes, in Majorca; in 1234 Peter was named *commendator hospitalis captivorum Barchinona* and directed, already by this time, the hospital built for himself and his friars beyond the Ramon de Plegamans sea wall. The fact that the founder of the Order of Mercy was called “friar” in 1230 and “recipient of alms” the following year, and that his community received lands in Majorca in 1233 indicates that he was already in some way part of a religious brotherhood dedicated to the ransoming of captives. For Brodman, that brotherhood would have begun with some certainty at the time of James I’s campaign against Majorca

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35. On feminine foundational hagiography see Garí, Blanca. “María de Cervelló. El velo hagiográfico y el nacimiento de las ‘santas vivas’ en Barcelona en el siglo XIII”, *Espiritualidad medieval y sociedad femenina en el área de influencia catalana* (s. XIII-XVI), forthcoming.





in 1229, and likely continued to be active as an informal community in the following years, gaining enough momentum that lands were granted to them by various individuals in Barcelona, Girona, and Majorca in recognition of their redemptive work, included among these gifts was the hospital in Barcelona, which was to become the mother house. In 1235 the brotherhood was recognized by the Pope as a community of friars, and he gave them the rule of Saint Augustin in a papal bull that speaks of the hospital of Barcelona as the "House of Saint Eulalia." From this document, the order received its original name and patronage: the Friars of the House of Saint Eulalia of Barcelona of the Alms (Mercy) of Captives, underlining the prestige the saint of the cathedral enjoyed in 13<sup>th</sup> century Barcelona. Yet throughout its first century of existence the community founded by Peter Nolasco would be more commonly known as the "Order of the Captives", "Friars of the Alms (or of Mercy)", and the "Order of Saint Mary of the Alms (or of Mercy)." It is this last name which reveals to us the second and final patron of the Order: the Virgin Mary of Mercy.

To what point can we assume that Peter, and perhaps a companion, were active in the city of Barcelona before 1230 (1229)? Brodman denies the presence of such activity and there is certainly nothing to confirm it; however we do know that in many cases the charitable activities of the laity immersed in the pauperist spirit of the cities at the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century only became progressively visible to the historian as, one way or another, they took on institutional form. It is therefore not impossible that the veil of hagiography and myth both hide and reveal, albeit falsified, a reality from the end of the second decade of the 13<sup>th</sup> century that seeped into the intricacies of the construction of the "fable". As such, I think it is neither possible to sustain nor entirely rule out the existence of redemptive lay activity or charitable activity in city in the 1220s by individuals involved in works which created solidarity, among them perhaps Peter Nolasco. In any case, we know for a fact that after 1230 these "saviors" were part of an informal community, that 1235 brought the rapid institutionalization of this community in a charitable order, and that the further clericalization over the course of the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century brought profound internal conflict by the turn of the century. We also know that in the 14<sup>th</sup> century the order would become interested in power, always attentive to penetrating the intricacies of movements which create community.<sup>36</sup>

It is certainly no coincidence that we must place the story of the order being founded by the crown in the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, during the reigns of James II (1291-1327) and especially Peter III (1336-1387). This process (that of the creation of the legend of royal foundation) has been superbly discussed by Brodman, and it is unnecessary to repeat all the details here.<sup>37</sup> But it is important to recognize some of his conclusions. The legend began to take shape in documents sent

36. On the ability of the Order of Mercy to respond to the sentiments and desires of community see the interesting reflexions of Brodman, James W. "Community, identity and the redemption of captives: comparative perspectives across the Mediterranean". *Anuario de Estudios Medievales*, 36/1 (2006): 241-252.

37. Brodman James W. "Fable and royal power...": 229-241.



by King James II to the prior of the order and the Counselors of Barcelona in 1309 and 1310 respectively. It is explicitly stated that the order “was initiated by their predecessors”, or that his grandfather King James I “established the Order of the Mercy of the Captives.” In Brodman’s view, the king, who never recognized papal priority over the order, used these statements meant only for his subjects to simply strengthen his own influence over the city governance and the redemptive order. In contrast, Peter III’s strategy as regards the Mercedarians went much further: His political program not only strengthened the Order of Mercy in the face of the Trinitarian redemptive order, but also gave the order equal privileges to the mendicant orders, and, above all, placed trusted men in charge of the *encomiendas* and recruited royal agents (royal chaplains, counselors, etc...) from among the Mercedarians. As such, the discourse of a privileged relationship between the Catalan-Aragonese dynasty and the Order of the Virgin Mary of Mercy that clearly came into existence with the affirmation of royal foundation in 1218 is situated at the heart of this political strategy.

There is no reason to be surprised, nor is there special about the treatment of the Order of anything Mercy compared to the treatment received by other orders or more generally by devotional practices and pauperist “findings” in the previous century. In 14<sup>th</sup> century Barcelona, all the female mendicant organizations were royal (the Poor Clares of Pedralbes and the Dominicans of Mount Sion are good examples) and the kings of the Catalan-Aragonese confederation leaned decidedly toward Franciscan spirituality and religiosity, including that of the so-called “spirituals”. The crown, in the midst of the process of consolidation, developed strategies for associating itself with the conventual and hospital orders that represented the integrated spirit of the new era.

And it was not only the orders; in 1339 the Gothic cathedral was consecrated with the new crypt of Saint Eulalia at its center. The relics of the saint, the paradigm of Episcopal power in the Carolingian era, were paraded once again through the streets of the city in a procession to the place of the *inventio* and in solemn return to the heart of the city —the new church. We have seen that those who carried the relics beneath the canopy were not bishops but the kings of the new era, Peter III and James of Mallorca.<sup>38</sup> The monarchy had laid its hand on the city and now it was the king who represented the eyes watching over the unifying potential of the sacred.

In this sense it is also interesting to note that in the 14<sup>th</sup> century the patron saint of the city (who was also the patron of the Mercedarians) continued to be an object of devotion and a source of power, even if the *virtus* emanating from the remains and tied to the cathedral and the bishop lay ultimately in the hands of new

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38. It is interesting to analyze the iconography of the miniature that illustrates the *traslatio* of the relics of the saint in the so-called “Missal de Santa Eulàlia” in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century. In the foreground we see the figure of a king and a citizen carrying the body, illustrating better than any commentary the change in the last resting place of the *virtus* of the saint. See Bohigas i Balaguer, Pere. “La decoració i la il·lustració del Misal de Santa Eulàlia”, *El Misal de Santa Eulàlia (Còdex de la Catedral de Barcelona a.1403)*, Àngel Fabrega, Pere Bohigas, eds. Madrid: Edilan, 1977: 130-131.

administrators. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Saint Eulalia was no longer the exclusive symbol of the creation of community and the quasi-legal reaffirmation of urban power. Before her rose two closely intertwined branches also strongly related to the new times: devotion to the Virgin and devotion to “living saints”. Both cults arose in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries and came to the special attention of those in power in the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

Since the 12<sup>th</sup> century, throughout Western Christendom and also in Barcelona, the previously totalizing action of the relics and their cult was seen to be slowly eroded by the popular magnetism of the devotion to Mary and the cult of male and female heroes in religious poverty. This is a notable change which tended to center the sacred in human supernatural potential. Mary is the principal symbol, whose humanity has left no relics, no flesh and no bones,<sup>39</sup> only the memory of her presence and the model of a redemptive com/passion developed in perfect parallel to the passion of Christ. Devotion to Mary appeared in Cistercian circles in the 12<sup>th</sup> century and settled comfortably into the mendicant orders, especially those of the Franciscans and Dominicans. The triumph of the *imitatio Christi* also included her. And so, following the path of Mary, from the 13<sup>th</sup> century onwards humankind was capable of renewing the supernatural potential which brings each individual to transcendence. Living examples were everywhere. They were the urban heroes of compassion, the evangelical life, and religious poverty. Among them, Francis is exemplary. But in 13<sup>th</sup> century Barcelona it was the men and women of the poor and charitable life who embody that model of sanctity and constructed a legend. We know of several connected to the order of captives, but the most significant were its founder, Peter Nolasco, and the woman that legend would make the founder of the feminine branch of the order, Mary the Helper or Mary of Cervellon according to the texts. It is no coincidence, of course, that the memory of the first hagiographies of both saints goes back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century, to Joan de Laes for Mary and to Pere de Amer for the founder Nolasco. These lives were likely successively reworked and rewritten in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries before arriving at the 17<sup>th</sup> century version destined for the canonization of the “Mercedarian founding saints.” The texts that have reached us, that carry with them both the change of religious sensibility and the political strategies of the crown in the late Middle Ages, contributed to the Mercedarian book of saints post-Tridentine figures important to the creation of a genealogy and a historical founding myth unique from the Franciscan and Dominican mendicant orders and from other orders of the time. Neither is it coincidental that at that same time, in the midst of the Modern Age, the Virgin Mary of Mercy was officially proclaimed the patron saint of Barcelona.

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39. As described by Brown, Peter. “La société et le surnaturel...: 264. Martin Heinzelmann also analyzes that transformation and states that the change of sensibility was profound, with an incorporation of the feminine which broadly matched the birth and diffusion of courtly lyric and with a more interior sense of devotion: Heinzelmann, Martin. *Traslationsberichte und andere Quellen...*: 24.



### 3. Conclusion

What is the value of these findings? What can we deduce from this journey through medieval Barcelona that carries us from the *inventio* of Saint Eulalia to the Mercedarian legends? What unites and what separates the creations of these founding myths? I think the answer can be addressed at two levels, on two different analytical levels.

First, this comparative study highlights the caesura between two worlds and two religious sensibilities that we are well familiar with throughout the Christian West and that here illustrate Barcelona's place in the general processes of creation and transformation of religious and social practice between the early and late Middle Ages. Initially, the focus was the sacred potential of the dead as only the highest dignitaries of the church, the bishops, were privileged to convey. It was a selective power that became concentrated into a cult only for some and carried with it the ambiguity of a power objectified in mortal remains: the relics themselves creating a consensus. The devotion and social use of relics as such would endure in the West for centuries, even beyond the Middle Ages, but their almost monolithic role in the organization and hierarchy of Western societies, and their validating of social status, community consensus, and juridical and political systems belongs primarily to the early times. Later, especially in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the birth of a process of individualization occurred along with a growing awareness of the individual as separate from the collective. This is a qualitative leap which introduces a personal search for meaning operating within the self. The transformation was accompanied by a vast renewal of religious and social practices and a diversification of potential managers of the sacred, most notably the State. In Barcelona, Saint Eulalia serves as the barometer of the disposition of the city from her *inventio* by Frodoino through her patronage of a charitable order in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, later obscured by the triumph of Mary and the Mercedarian saints.

But beyond this, it is possible to establish a second level of analysis focused on the common elements of both periods. The principal element of commonality runs through the narration of both legends with which I began the texts: the consistent presence of power strategies tied to the sacred. Is it possible to go beyond the binomial understanding of "political manipulation/popular credulity" present in so many studies of religious phenomenon in Medieval societies? If we start from a prior consideration that affects not only the Middle Ages, I think it is.

Those in power are naturally attentive to everything that constitutes or is likely to become a symbolic binder (be it physiological, pre-logical or post-logical).<sup>40</sup> Those elements which hold this symbolic function for human beings fulfill the

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40. I thank Rosetta Stella for the concept of the "*collante simbolico*" that I have translated here as "*aglutinante simbólico*" (symbolic binder), which she suggested to me over the course of a long conversation one spring night in the plaza before the church of Santa Maria del Mar, beneath which, they say, Frodoino discovered the remains of Saint Eulalia.



highly important need for “belonging”<sup>41</sup> for those that manage the organizational mechanisms of society. In this sense, the variety or quality of names given to this thing that strengthens bonds and creates solidarity, be it in the short- or long-term, is irrelevant. What matters is the essence that allows these symbols to function in a way that separates the “we” from the “you” without thought or effort. In the context of political parties and participation in modern democracy one can find many examples. However, I will choose a much more banal, and as such more obvious, example to illustrate this point: When, after having won the soccer league, the streets of Barcelona are filled with people shouting “we won” (while the players themselves go to nowhere else but the Church of the Blessed Virgin of Mercy to offer the victory to the exact same Virgin of the Mercedarians), there is no doubt that everyone knows that they themselves did not shoot the last goal, that the players are all professionals and foreigners who could be playing for any team, and that a complex politics of economic interests and a thousand other entanglements are behind it all. And yet for the majority, nothing blemishes even for a moment the redemptive power of this “we”, led by the heroes of the team.

I do not intend to compare content. Distances can be vast, and indeed they are. I intend only to say that if the bishops of the 9<sup>th</sup> century and the monarchs of the 14<sup>th</sup> sought after any of the social phenomena that could act as symbolic binders of community, and if they were vigilant and attentive to them, being attracted by and convinced of their value and also willing to appropriate their content, this was precisely because of the ability of certain elements (relics or pauperist movements) to act as a crucible of symbolic links; before looking scornfully on the credulity of those involved we must ask ourselves how much the quality of such elements has been maintained through to the present day. At least in certain cases.

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41. About *belonging* from the anthropology, see Lovell, Nadia. *Locality and Belonging*. London: Routledge, 1998: 1-24.

