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**Christianisation and religious identity from Late Antiquity to  
Early Middle ages: a comparative history of Gaul, *Hispania* and  
*Britannia***

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## Abstract

Conversion to Christianity was a process that transformed the Roman world not only religiously but also cultural and socially. In the passage from Late Antiquity to Early Middle ages, namely from the fourth to seventh century, while the new religion and way to deal with life and death overcomes the pagan past, cultures and societies responded to this profound change in different ways. In the Roman West, the way in which Christianity was adopted and interpreted by its followers was different, depending on their cultural background but also on the way the new religion was introduced. The purpose of this thesis is to study this complex process of conversion, substitution and adaptation in three different areas: Gaul, *Hispania* and *Britannia*. Based on the study of cultural and religious hybridity I analyse ecclesiastical sources and archaeological findings to draw a comparative analysis of these three areas, individuating differences and similitudes caused by local specificities or a common behaviour. My aim is to understand how people behaved when immersed in a context of religious and cultural encounter, and why certain choices are made, consciously or not, in order to create a sort of religious crafting that was directed to adapt the new religion to their needs and expectations at the same time that paid attention to their cultural traditions and their past.

## Abstract - Deutsch

Die römische Welt wurde durch die Bekehrung zum Christentum nicht nur in religiöser, sondern auch in kultureller und sozialer Hinsicht geprägt und verändert. Auf diesen tiefgreifenden Wandel im Übergang von der Spätantike zum frühen Mittelalter, namentlich in der Zeit vom 4. bis zum 7. Jahrhundert, als die neue Religion und ihr Weg, mit den Herausforderungen von Leben und Tod umzugehen, die pagane Vergangenheit überwand, reagierten die Gesellschaften und Kulturen in unterschiedlicher Weise. Im römischen Westen war die Annahme und Interpretation des Christentums von seinen Anhängern abhängig vom kulturellen Hintergrund, aber auch von der Art und Weise, wie die neue Religion eingeführt worden war. Es ist die Aufgabe der vorliegenden Arbeit, diesen komplexen Prozess der Bekehrung, der Substitution und der Adaption in drei unterschiedlichen Gebieten

nachzuzeichnen: in Gallien, in *Hispania* und in *Britannia*. Basierend auf der Untersuchung kultureller und religiöser Hybridität analysiere ich Schriftquellen vornehmlich kirchlicher Provenienz und archäologische Funde, um einen Vergleich zwischen den drei Gebieten zu ziehen. Dabei sollen Unterschiede und Gemeinsamkeiten herausgearbeitet werden, die durch lokale Besonderheiten oder gemeinsames Verhalten hervorgerufen werden. Mein Ziel ist es, zu verstehen, wie Menschen sich in einem Kontext der religiösen und kulturellen Begegnung verhalten und weshalb bestimmte Entscheidungen getroffen werden, ob nun bewusst oder nicht, um eine Art von *religious crafting* zu erzeugen, das darauf zielt, die neue Religion den Bedürfnissen und Erwartungen dieser Menschen entsprechend zu adaptieren und dabei zugleich ihrer kulturellen Tradition sowie ihrer Vergangenheit Rechnung zu tragen.

#### Abstract - Italiano

La conversione al cristianesimo fu un processo che trasformò il mondo romano non solo dal punto di vista della religione, ma anche per quanto riguarda cultura e società. Nel passaggio dal Tardo Antico all'Alto Medioevo, più precisamente dal quarto al settimo secolo, mentre la nuova religione e le modalità per affrontare vita e morte superarono il passato pagano, le culture e le società risposero a questo profondo cambiamento in modi differenti. Nell'Impero Romano d'Occidente, il modo in cui il cristianesimo venne adottato e interpretato dai fedeli fu diverso a seconda del loro *background* culturale e del modo in cui la nuova religione fu introdotta. Il proposito di questa tesi è di studiare questo complesso processo di conversione, sostituzione e adattamento in tre differenti aree geografiche: Gallia, *Hispania* e *Britannia*. Basandomi sugli studi di ibridizzazione religiosa e culturale, analizzo fonti ecclesiastiche e reperti archeologici per delineare un'analisi comparata in queste tre differenti aree; individuo quindi differenze e similitudini causate da peculiarità locali o comportamenti comuni. Il mio obiettivo è di comprendere il comportamento delle persone quando esse sono immerse in un contesto d'incontro culturale e religioso, il perché delle loro scelte, conscie o meno, relative alla creazione di una sorta di *religious crafting* che ebbe l'obiettivo di adattare la nuova religione ai

loro bisogni e aspettative senza dimenticare l'attenzione alle tradizioni culturali e al passato.

## **Memória**

*Carlos Drummond de Andrade*

*Amar o perdido  
deixa confundido  
este coração.*

*Nada pode o ouvido  
contra o sem sentido  
apelo do Não.*

*As coisas tangíveis  
tornam-se insensíveis  
à palma da mão.*

*Mas as coisas findas,  
muito mais que lindas,  
essas ficarão.*

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## Foreword

This work was developed during three and a half years, between 2014 and 2017 in a doctorate program at the Universities of Padua, Venice and Verona and a *cotutelle de thèse* with the University of Vienna. Filled with difficulties and adversities, I still manage to bring this path to a conclusion and the present work as well as the personal and professional development and growth acquired during these years are the results of all my efforts. I acknowledge the fact that this is not a conclusive work and much can still be done. In this study I had to leave out the analysis of Penitentials, as, although a very important type of source in what concerns hybrid practices and the use of traditional religion, these are a kind of source that has a complicated interpretation. Penitentials were widely diffused during the first centuries of the Middle Ages and even further, and for many of these documents it is very difficult to identify their provenance. Since we cannot know for sure the place where they were produced it is hard to tell if the practices that they describe and rebuke were really present in the place where the penitential was being used. Including this fuzzy type of document would be impracticable to the time available to complete this research<sup>1</sup>.

I also made few comparisons with other regions and religious realities, as it would impose a whole new range of sources and bibliographical tradition that would, again, make this study much wider but also much longer considering the ambitions of a three years doctorate program. Thorough consideration about some of the concepts discussed here need more polishing and thought, which in any case give me the opportunity to revisit this topic that seems to never end and will always provide food for thought. Finally, it is important to remind the reader that among all the inherent difficulties of researching and writing a doctorate thesis, I also needed to overcome the difficulty of writing in English, a language that I still do not feel completely at my ease and some ideas and concepts may be a bit blurred by my insufficient linguistic abilities. However, I hope to present here a research that is both

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<sup>1</sup> I refer here to the recent work of Rob Meens, *Penance in Medieval Europe, 600–1200*, 2014, that makes a very complete study of the matter.



complete and clear in its ambitions, and that reflects not only my work but also that of those who helped me along the way. For this reason I want to thank both my supervisors, Professor Stefano Gasparri and Professor Walter Pohl for their insights and advises that were crucial to the development of this research. I would aslo like to thank all the researchers of the *Institut für Mittelalterforschung der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* for hosting me many times, for their support and help, and for the opportunity to enjoy the richness of this environment. A special thanks goes to Dr. Andreas Fischer who helped me so much during these years that I honestly do not know what would have been of my research without his advises and his care. The staff of the library of History of the University of Padua saved me many times with much kindness and they deserve all my appreciation. To all my friends and family that even far away were always encouraging and supporting me, thank you so much. Finally, to Thomas, my greatest supporter and friend, the one responsible to make me keep going and the reason why I am in this journey, my most sincere thank you.

## Introduction

*Dominga de Adviento, a formidable black woman who ruled the house with an iron fist until the night before her death, was the link between these two worlds (...). [She] became a Catholic without renouncing her Yoruban beliefs, and she practiced both religions at the same time, and at random. Her soul was healthy and at peace, she said, because what she did not find in one faith was there in the other.*

*Gabriel Garcia Marquez - Of love and other demons*

On the first pages of one of his most famous novels, the Colombian writer Gabriel García Márquez describes an African slave that concentrates in herself the spirit of syncretic South America: a mix of cultures, practices, and beliefs. Early Modern New World was a place of profound change, where people were struggling to understand the world, to cope with the new and accommodate somehow the old, to be fair to their memories and traditions, yet accepting what seemed to be more powerful. This was sixteenth century South America, but it was the same in Western Europe in the passage from Late Antiquity to Early Middle Ages.

The Christianisation of the Roman Empire has been a widely discussed topic since the publication of Gibbon's influential study "Decline and fall of the Roman Empire" in the late eighteenth century. This study attributed the ruin of the Roman Empire to the conversion of the Emperor Constantine to Christianity and the influence of Christianity itself. However, modern interpretations tend to see Christianity in a different light, often pointing its major role in the survival of the Roman culture in the Mediterranean<sup>2</sup>. The change provoked by the conversion of the Emperor Constantine and the consequences it had on Roman history are indeed undeniable: from that moment on the new religion acquired more and more converts, thus becoming the hegemonic religion of the Roman world. Consequently, Greco-Roman

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<sup>2</sup> MOMIGLIANO, *Introduction: Christianity and the decline of Roman Empire*, 1963; BROWN, *The rise of western Christendom*, 1971; MARROU, *Décadence romaine ou Antiquité tardive?* 1977; WICKHAM, *The Inheritance of Rome: A History of Europe from 400 to 1000*, 2009.

Paganism and traditional practices became illegal in accordance with the Imperial Legislation and were condemned to oblivion by the Christian doctrine.

The conversion process differed in every part of the Empire, which resulted in a different modality of Christianisation and of the Christian religion in each region. It is well known that in Africa and in the Greek Orient, the new religion found fertile lands and was easily absorbed by the community<sup>3</sup>, whereas the situation in the Western provinces was different. Since the populations of Gaul, *Hispania* and *Britannia* overall were the latest Roman provinces of the west to accept the conversion, this research intends to focus upon what happened in these areas in order to study the formation of a religiosity based on specific and local characteristics. As it will be clear during this study, the historical background of these three areas promoted very different situations in what concerns the absorption of Christianity and the development of local religiosities. The way in which the new religion entered the territory influenced its spread, the facility or not of its incorporation and later the particular features of its practices. Thus, the concept of religious hybridity is fundamental to the development of this research, since it is the direct consequence of the encounter of traditional cultures and Christianity in the formation of so called local religiosities.

### **State of research**

During the twentieth century the interpretations about the period between the end of the Roman Empire and the beginning of Middle Ages continued to be stepped in traditional and most of the times misleading assumptions of a period of darkness and decline of culture following the interpretations of the above-mentioned book of Gibbon. From the 40s and 50s this situation starts to change, with the works of André Piganiol<sup>4</sup>, Santo Mazzarino<sup>5</sup> and Henri-Irénée Marrou<sup>6</sup> that started giving a new interpretation to the period known as Late Antiquity. However, it was only in 1971 with the publication of *The World of Late Antiquity* by Peter Brown, that a broad

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<sup>3</sup> BROWN, *Christianity and local culture in late Roman Africa*, 1968.

<sup>4</sup> PIGANIOL, *L'Empire chrétien*, 325-395, 1947.

<sup>5</sup> MAZZARINO, *La fine del mondo antico. Le cause della caduta dell'impero romano*, 1959.

<sup>6</sup> MARROU, *Décadence romaine ou antiquité tardive ?* 1977.

interpretation was made about the crisis of the Ancient world and how the Western word changes under the influence of Christianity. After that, the idea of Late Antiquity as a historical period of great transformation acquires popularity and the attention of modern historians.

Since then, many publications were dedicated to the matter of Christianisation and how this process affected the social, cultural and political life of what was once the Roman world<sup>7</sup>. However, the matter of the conflict between the new and the old religion continued to be a controversial subject and scholars often disagreed on the cultural importance of this conflict and how their interaction influenced society<sup>8</sup>. Some would have a biased interpretation of so called “persistence” of paganism, and when these practices were found alive among Christians it was only a matter of superstitious behaviour<sup>9</sup>, while others would see a certain degree of influence between both<sup>10</sup>. Some studies tend to concentrate on the issue of the persistence of traditional cults in the Roman environment<sup>11</sup>, and as a matter of fact, many have examined the specific aspects of this persistence, such as the tenacity of pagan practices among the aristocracy<sup>12</sup>, or the difficulty faced by the new religion in its

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<sup>7</sup> Just to cite a few among the most influential works: MACMULLEN, *Christianizing the Roman Empire, AD. 100-400*, 1984 and *Christianity and paganism in the fourth to eighth centuries*, 1997; BROWN, *The rise of Western Christendom*, 1996; FLETCHER *The conversion of Europe, from paganism to Christianity 371-1386*, 1997 and more recently DUMÉZIL, *Les racines chrétiennes de l'Europe. Conversion et liberté des royaumes barbares. Ve-VIIIe siècle*; KÖNIG, *Bekehrungsmotive: untersuchungen zum Christianisierungsprozess im römischen Westreich und seinen romanisch-germanischen Nachfolgern (4.-8. Jahrhundert)*, 2008 and INGLEBERT, DESTEPHEN et DUMEZIL, *Le problème de la christianisation du monde antique*, 2010.

<sup>8</sup> MOMIGLIANO, *Il conflitto tra paganesimo e cristianesimo nel secolo IV*, 1975; GEFFCKEN, *The last days of greco-roman paganism*, 1978; CHUVIN, *Chronique des derniers païens*, 1990; BROWN and LIZZI TESTA (eds.), *Pagans and Christians in the Roman Empire: the breaking of a dialogue (IVth – Vith century A.D.)*, 2011; PETTS, *Pagan and Christian*, 2011.

<sup>9</sup> THOMAS, *Religion and the decline of magic*, 1971.

<sup>10</sup> JONES, *Between pagan and Christian*, 2014. Especially when he says “‘Between’ implies not only that Christianity and paganism had much in common, with Christianity drawing heavily on the beliefs and practices of paganism: it also refers to the ways in which Christians such as St. Paul could use the traditional culture of Greek and Romans to build a bridge from their own side to the other” . p. xiv.

<sup>11</sup> BINAZZI, *La sopravvivenza dei culti tradizionali nell'Italia tardoantica e altomedievale*, 2008; BOGLIONI, *Du paganisme au christianisme. La mémoire des lieux et des temps*, 2008; MOMIGLIANO, *Popular religious beliefs and the late Roman historians*, 2009.

<sup>12</sup> PALOL, *La cristianización de la aristocracia romana hispánica, 1977-1978*; BROWN, *Aspects of the Christianisation of the roman aristocracy*, 1961; SALZMAN, *The making of a Christian aristocracy : social and religious change in the Western Roman Empire*, 2002.

quest for the conversion of the rural environment<sup>13</sup>. The analysis of the sources revealed that it was the indigenous cults which proved to be more resistant to Christianisation; when a sort of “popular” religiosity characterized by syncretism took place, it was the pre-Roman substratum which mostly came to form this particular amalgam of beliefs that developed through Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages throughout Europe<sup>14</sup>. On this respect, many interesting contributions on each of the regions analyzed by this project cast light on the Christianisation in these provinces and on the persistence of the populations’ Pagan practices<sup>15</sup>. However, most of this literature deals with the idea of persistence and resistance of traditional practices as if their existence many years after the period of Christianisation would indicate only stubbornness and ignorance of people. Moreover, when modern literature refers to pagan practices in the Early Middle Ages, they tend to interpret these mentions in the sources as merely mechanical reproduction of previous sources, completely unrelated to reality.

Dealing exclusively with pagan and traditional practices during the Early Middle Ages in a more broad approach however is not a very diffused matter of research. On 1971 the volume by Keith Thomas, *Religion and the decline of magic*, merged history and anthropology in a study of Early Modern popular religion in England. He proposed that religion would have overcome magic for it provided a more satisfying explanation of human existence while magical practices would only address specific and temporary problems. The volume *The rise of magic in Early Medieval Europe* by Valery Flint, published in 1991, seemed an answer to Thomas’ book, since she used many of the concepts discussed by Thomas, but regarding the Early Middle Ages,

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<sup>13</sup> MANSELLI, *Resistenze dei culti antichi nella pratica religiosa dei laici nelle campagne*, 1982; LIZZI TESTA, *La conversione dei “cives”, l’evangelizzazione dei rustici: alcuni esempi fra IV e VI secolo*, 2009.

<sup>14</sup> SCHMITT, « *Religion populaire* » et culture folklorique (note critique), 1976; LE GOFF, *Pour un autre Moyen Âge. Temps, travail et culture en Occident*, 1977; KÜNZEL et CHEVY, *Paganisme, syncretisme et culture religieuse populaire au haut Moyen Âge*, 1992.

<sup>15</sup> Just to cite a few volumes and articles that deal specifically with the matter in the Iberian Peninsula: MCKENNA, *Paganism and Pagan survivals in Spain up to the fall of the visigothic kingdom*, 1938; MESLIN, *Persistence paienne en Galice vers la fin du VI siècle*, 1969 and CARNEIRO, *Sobre a cristianização da Lusitânia: novas reflexões a partir dos dados históricos e das evidências arqueológicas*, 2009. In Britain: BARLEY and HANSON, *Christianity in Britain, 300-700*, 1968 and LAMBERT, *Christian and pagans – The conversion of Britain from Alban to Bede*, 2010. And in Gaul : AUDIN, *Cesaire d’Arles et le maintien de pratiques paiennes dans la Provence du VIe siècle*, 1983.

and she proposed an innovative view of syncretism in Europe through the assumption that the Church promoted a kind of rehabilitation of magic in what she calls a “cultural compromise in matter of religious emotions”<sup>16</sup>. To Flint, who gives a very broad definition of magic, the incorporation of traditional practices into Christianity was made for three reasons: for fear of causing a “cultural dislocation”, to attract loyalty, and because these practices “valued established devotional habit”. It means that basically the process of syncretism was, according to Flint, a cautious and calculated ecclesiastical doing, as if people had no action in it. However, her interpretation was criticized for being carried with too much speculation on the meaning of practices that cannot find enough counterpart in the sources. Nevertheless, her book set the ground for the rehabilitation of magic as fundamental element in the construction of the first Christianity. In the first decade of the twenty first century some interesting studies appeared on the matter of paganism and heresy. Nicole Zeddies, with her 2003 book *Religio et sacrilegium. Studien zur Inkriminierung von Magie, Häresie und Heidentum (4.-7. Jahrhundert)*, makes a very broad study of the legal interpretation of paganism, magic and heresy based on ecclesiastical and civil legislation. She states that *Sacrilegium* was a concept that since the fourth century included magic, dipsomania and poisoning, but by the period of Early Middle Ages also prostitution and adultery (both committed by women) was added to the list. She argues that all the malpractices rebuked in the legislation were considered as a direct attack to the Christian community on the extent that they defied the divine order. Another important contribution to this matter was the dense monograph of Bernadette Filotas, *Pagan survivals, superstitions and popular cultures*, published in 2005. In this massive book, Filotas intended to set a collection of practices that she defined pagan and superstitious on the ground of pastoral literature and its condemnation of said practices, that according to her, “explicitly or implicitly entailed a reliance on powers not coming from God and not mediated by the Church – according to the council of Tours of 567, ‘that which did not belong to the church’s way’”<sup>17</sup>. Her work is a valuable summary of magic and superstition in

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<sup>16</sup> FLINT, *The rise of magic in early medieval Europe*, p.4.

<sup>17</sup> FILOTAS, *Pagan survivals, superstitions and popular cultures*, p.13.

ecclesiastical written sources, but she seems to be more of a collector, not giving much interpretation about the meaning, functionality and purpose of the practices described by her.

There seems to be very few studies (or potentially none) actually resorting in the concept of hybridity of religious practices and carrying out a comparative analysis of the development of conversion as well as the role of traditional practices in the construction of local religiosity. In this way, the aim of this research is to individuate the particular features that make each local religiosity unique, how the local culture, historical background and process of Christianisation influenced this development and how religious hybridity, a process not only inevitable but also necessary to the evolution of religious and cultures in general, impacted cultural identities.

In this study my use of written sources will rely almost exclusively in ecclesiastical sources in order to identify how Christianity developed among the communities where it entered. To understand how “normal” people lived their religiosity and what they were doing to feel more at ease to accommodate their needs to a new religious reality is one of the aims of this study. As we do not have these people’s direct testimony, we can only rely in circumstantial evidence and on passing references. Helped by archaeological sources it is possible then to individuate local as well as general behaviors that allow us to see what could have been the everyday Christianity, or else the lay religion that, as we may see, was very different from what was stated as an “official” Christianity.

### **The diffusion of Christian faith**

We should now start a short overview of the process of diffusion of Christianity, which started with a mostly urban identity but faced a long struggle to Christianise the rural areas. This difficulty could be seen at the base of the hybridization of practices, since most of what we will see in the next chapters as hybrid religiosity have a markedly rural identity.

It is assumed that during the first century Christianity spread through the Roman

Empire thanks to the businesses of merchants of Jewish and Oriental origins<sup>18</sup>. At that time, Christian communities lived as outcasts at the edge of society and up until the third century their spread was slow and limited to the Mediterranean area. Authorities and pagan writers shared the common opinion that this religion was a messy and immoral cult: a threat towards the public order and hence punishable by persecution. Since being accused by Nero for the Great Fire of Rome in 64 BC, the followers of the Palestinian religion could not find any peace until the important events that took place in 312.

In a correspondence of the second century between Pliny the Younger, governor of Bithynia and emperor Trajan, the governor required help and advice about how to deal with or punish the Christians, and about how to handle the reports of illicit practices. His opinion about the religion was: "I did not find anything but a foolish and insane superstition"<sup>19</sup>. At that time Christianity kept on growing despite the repressions against its practices and the persecution of its followers; a century later, the situation was already different: the Church had a more organized structure and the number of converted people was growing in several provinces; nevertheless the repressions were still a reality. The third century was the scenario of several persecutions that started during the crisis that Rome was going through and their purpose was indeed to maintain the unity of the Empire. *Romanitas* had one peculiar feature: its cultural and religious unity; when Caracalla, in his famous edict issued in 212, granted the citizenship to all the inhabitants of the imperial territory (apart from the famous and controversial exceptions of the *dediticii*), he justified the gesture by stating that, in that way, everyone could have joined the Romans in the worshipping of the gods<sup>20</sup>. It is hence important to remember that the persecutions against the Christians basically had a political motivation. Moreover, while Christianity was still a minority's religion, many episodes, as martyrdom and destruction of places of worship, happened at the time of emperor Decius until the times of emperors Galerius and Maximinus Daia (around 312).

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<sup>18</sup> LEGASSE, *Le altre vie della missione (dall'Oriente a Roma)*, p. 177-178.

<sup>19</sup> Pliny the Younger, Letters X, 96.

<sup>20</sup> GERACI e MARCONI, *Fonti per la Storia Romana*. 2010. p. 382.



Despite the persecutions, towards the end of the third century Christianity was much more popular among the Greek-speaking provinces and, due to its Oriental origin, the first missionaries spoke this language. In the fourth century missionaries were moving from city to city and the parishes were built in those surroundings. In the countryside many communities showed a weak Romanization, still speaking local languages, and we will see in the following chapters how Christianisation was generally bound to the degree of Romanization of the regions. Between the second century and the beginning of the fourth, the religion reckoned most of its adept among the lowest classes, while its spreading through the more literate categories encountered several obstacles due to the roughness of the Christian texts that could not hold the comparison to the erudition of the pagan poets and philosophers. Moreover, the powerful class of senators considered itself as heir of the pagan culture and could not get convinced by uneducated missionaries nor by texts which were written in terrible Greek or Latin<sup>21</sup>.

To sum up, at the beginning of the fourth century, despite the lack of an official support, the Christian religion had a network of dioceses and well established rules, and, thanks to Constantine's conversion, it grew more and more.

### **The conversion of Constantine**

The literature about the conversion of Constantine oscillates between the consideration of the Emperor as a *Religionspolitiker* or as a saint and pious man<sup>22</sup>. The work of Paul Veyne, *Quand notre monde est devenu chrétien*, gives one interpretation that states that the conversion of Constantine was dictated by purely spiritual reasons. According to Veyne the Emperor was affected by the new religion and believed he was supposed to be its paladin, a servant of God who would organize the Church in order to make it as important as it deserved to be. He believed in the redemption from sins, in the only God and in his own role as His champion who would reunite the empire and promote the 'good' and the unity of the Church<sup>23</sup>. His

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<sup>21</sup> JONES, *Lo sfondo sociale della lotta tra paganesimo e cristianesimo*. In MOMIGLIANO, 1975. p. 35.

<sup>22</sup> PARENTE, *L'idea di conversione da Nock ad oggi*, p. 21.

<sup>23</sup> VEYNE, *Quand notre monde est devenu chrétien*, p. 84.

real religious inspirations, however, remain a mystery for the modern historian, as it is difficult to conciliate his religious behavior with his choice of being baptized only in his death bed<sup>24</sup>.

Nonetheless, what is important is that right after his victory against Maxentius, Constantine started a policy that favoured the new religion; the famous Edict of Milan in 313 is the emblem of this new approach. That agreement, signed by Constantine and Licinius, established that all the Christians and the followers of all the other religions were free to profess their faith<sup>25</sup>. Moreover, all the Christians and the churches that had had their property seized had the possibility to have all of them back<sup>26</sup>.

The favour of Constantine towards the new religion had already started in 312, the same year of his presumed conversion, when he ordered to give the seized property back to the churches and to the Christian communities of Africa<sup>27</sup>. The following years witnessed the imposition of several measures whose aim was to show the open-minded approach of the Emperor towards Christianity: privileges were granted to bishops, new regulations were imposed for governors who hence had to respect Sundays and Christian holidays, religious institutions were allowed to receive donations like pagan temples used to do; these were only a few among many other measures that brought the Empire towards a new conformation that did not involve the religious field alone but also politics and the whole society.

### **Illegal paganism: the laws against the practices, the temples and the idols**

Laws, despite being far from a perfect instrument, are still a very important source to study a society, since they help us to understand how public authorities handled civil and religious problems; to our purpose, the imperial legislation of Late Antiquity

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<sup>24</sup> FOX, *Pagans and Christians*, p. 609. See also ALFÖLDI, *The conversion of Costantine and Pagan Rome*, 1948; JONES, *Constantine and the conversion of Europe*, 1948.

<sup>25</sup> Lattanzio, *De mortibus persecutorum*, capitolo XLVIII,2: "(...) quibus divinitatis reverentia continebatur, ut daremus et Christianis et omnibus liberam potestatem sequendi religionem quam quisque voluisset, quod quicquid est divinitatis in sede caelesti, nobis atque omnibus qui sub potestate nostra sunt constituti, placatum ac propitium possit existere".

<sup>26</sup> Lattanzio, *Op. Cit.* XVIII,9.

<sup>27</sup> BINAZZI, *La sopravvivenza dei culti tradizionali nell'Italia tardoantica e altomedievale*, p. 18.

provides important proofs concerning those set of rules involving religion and the topic of intolerance against paganism that followed Constantine's conversion. The most useful texts to inquire into the juridical intolerance topic are stored in the Theodosian code, compiled around 438, and in the code of Justinian, whose second edition, edited in 534, is the only one that has arrived to our days<sup>28</sup>.

Since the first decades and until about the middle of the fourth century, laws were not addressed to censor the pagan religion as a whole but only those practices which were considered as harmful. It was only in the second half of the fourth century that the first important measures against pagan cults appeared<sup>29</sup>. Afterwards, several laws were issued in order to forbid sacrifices and nocturnal rites, to enforce the closure of temples<sup>30</sup> and the prohibition to worship other idols. In 357, emperor Constantius II eventually ordered to remove the Altar of Victory from the Roman Senate House, a move that represented a heavy blow against the pagan aristocracy of the city of Rome.

The following laws were meant to eradicate practices like wizardry, divination and witchcraft. Anyhow, many sources testify how these bans remained basically ineffective since either prominent figures and the population continued to apply these traditional practices.

The famous Edict of Thessalonica (380) was the first step towards a new route of intolerance. In that, Emperor Theodosius I established Christianity as the official religion of the Empire<sup>31</sup> hence marking the end of religious freedom. Those who would not be converted to the new faith were accused of heresy, which was a sin

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<sup>28</sup> See PURPURA, *La compilazione del Codice Teodosiano e la Lex Digna*. 2009.

<sup>29</sup> CHUVIN, *Cronaca degli ultimi pagani*, p. 57.

<sup>30</sup> CTh. 16, 10, 4. *Placuit omnibus locis adque urbibus universis claudi protinus templa et accessu vetito omnibus licentiam delinquendi perditis abnegari.*

<sup>31</sup> CTh.16.1.2: *Cunctos populos, quos clementiae nostrae regit temperamentum, in tali volumus religione versari, quam divinum Petrum apostolum tradidisse Romanis religio usque ad nunc ab ipso insinuata declarat quamque pontificem Damasum sequi claret et Petrum Alexandriae episcopum virum apostolicae sanctitatis, hoc est, ut secundum apostolicam disciplinam evangelicamque doctrinam patris et filii et spiritus sancti unam deitatem sub pari maiestate et sub pia trinitate credamus. Hanc legem sequentes Christianorum catholicorum nomen iubemus amplecti, reliquos vero dementes vesanosque iudicantes haeretici dogmatis infamiam sustinere 'nec conciliabula eorum ecclesiarum nomen accipere', divina primum vindicta, post etiam motus nostri, quem ex caelesti arbitro sumpserimus, ultione plectendos.*

punishable by God's judgement other than a crime of *laesae maiestatis*. In 386 there was a first case of a bishop who deliberately decided to bring down a pagan temple aided by the new legal support: it was the Temple of Zeus in Apamea. The bishop meant to lead a policy of systematic destruction of the sanctuaries; he believed that this was the quickest way to convert the population<sup>32</sup>. However, the iconoclastic religious was lately killed while trying to destroy another temple.

Between 381 and 435 several laws were approved in order to fight paganism and in favour of Christianity. Indeed, after 435 few more laws were issued against pagan practices since the existing ones already provided enough instruments to deal with the traditional religion.

The important public festivities were abolished all over the Empire after 392, but in this case the ordinance did not change anything, it just speeds up the evolution of the public opinion that preferred watching chariot races, 'hunts' or fights<sup>33</sup>. Christian morality condemned the gladiators bloody shows, but even before a decree were approved, people would rather watch races in the circus or in the hippodrome since those had already gained a high level of appreciation from the public. Augustine condemned the attendance of theatres, and, even in Gaul, during the fifth and the sixth centuries the barbaric kings wanted to re-introduce the races mainly because of the population complaints.

In 437, during the regencies of Theodosius II and Valentinian III, official laws against the pagan religion were issued: their purpose was to destroy the temples and purify them with the *signum crucis*; these laws were a mile-stone among the events that signed the irreparable and irreversible defeat of the traditional religion as an official cult.

The measures against paganism followers were applied later than those against the religion and the temples; they did not appear until the old religion was not popular any more among people and politicians. The first laws against pagans were mainly

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<sup>32</sup> CHUVIN, *Op. Cit.*, p. 67.

<sup>33</sup> CHUVIN, *Op. Cit.*, p. 79.

against the privileges of the pagan clergy, imposing the exile to the priests from some of the cities<sup>34</sup>.

In general, before 392, the legislation sketchily described pagan practices and a generic word was assigned to all the traditional customs. The law that best described pagan rituals was issued in November 392, CTh. 16, 10, 12, and it was widely accepted as the one which eventually established the censure of paganism; it was probably for its ultimate purposes that it drew a more complete overview of the illegal practices, such as the sacrifice of victims, the worship of *Lares* with fires, geniuses with wine and *Penates* with perfumes, the kindling of candles and incenses, the hanging of crowns and the decoration of trees with ribbons and the making of altars using grass<sup>35</sup>. These kind of practices actually reflect those purification gestures of the *consacratio* of pagan rituals; animal and vegetal sacrifices were similarly handled.

The ban of private rites, that in the legislation were called *sacrificia privata*, was more a sign of refusal of their subversive nature than of the rites themselves. Starting from 320 (CTh. 16,10,1-5) the object of the ban was the clandestinity of the rituals and the civil threat that those practices represented. Previously, at the time of emperor Augustus, secret practices had already been condemned, thus entailing the blame to fall on the private rituals, labelled as *secretiore*<sup>36</sup>, while public sacrifices, practised in *libera luce*, were more controlled and hence more tolerated. During his short regency<sup>37</sup>, in 353, Magnentius approved a law which was completely in agreement with the measures adopted before.

It is now possible to make some assumptions about how the places of worship were abandoned. It must be mentioned that this was not a phenomenon typical of the Late Antiquity alone, indeed, during all the antiquity, many temples were abandoned either for lack of usage, for socio-cultural and economic reasons or for substitution of

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<sup>34</sup> CTh. 16, 10, 24.

<sup>35</sup> BELAYCHE, *Ritus et cultus ou superstio? Comment les lois du Code Théodosien (IX & XVI) de Constantin à Théodose parlent des pratiques religieuses traditionnelles*, P. 194-5.

<sup>36</sup> CTh. 9,1,2 e 1. Also 16,10,9,3.

<sup>37</sup> *Abolentur sacrificia nocturna magnentio auctore permissa et nefaria deinceps licentia repellatur.*

the cults; what made this period unique was the generalization of the process, since, from that moment on, many temples and sanctuaries ended up being something different from what they were at the beginning of the fourth century or they were put down. It is worth to notice that the process did not follow a general scheme but every case of abandonment, destruction or substitution was different.

According to archaeological studies, the abandonment, meant as the lack of usage and the subsequent decay, was more common in the countryside than in the cities. During the period that became famous as the “pagan reaction”, Julian started the restoration of the temples and after that it is possible that the bishops realized that temples were not neutral places and that even if it was not necessary to destroy them to put an end to the idolatrous practices, their existence could favour the return of the traditional religion. That is when the first hints of a systematic destruction appeared: when it became clear that leaving the monuments to a slow decay was not enough anymore<sup>38</sup>.

### **The conversion of the countryside**

As mentioned before, at the beginning Christianity was an urban religion, and its rapid spread was due to the dynamics of urban economy and trade. The target of the conversion was initially people from low rank, and only around the third century that aristocracies started to adhere to the new faith. Most evidences of a rural spread of Christianity are from the eastern provinces, while in the West, big cities were not as common and rural landscape was a pagan territory for many centuries after the conversion of cities.

The third century was the period that saw the first effective efforts in Christianise the countryside. We can presume that the relationship between *Christianitas* and *Romanitas* demanded that every Roman citizen should be a Christian, which means that the peasants, the majority of the population in the empire were to be converted.

Martin of Tours is an example of a preacher that had pass from the rebuke to

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<sup>38</sup> SOTINEL, *La disparition des lieux de culte païens en Occident*, p. 48.

practice, going directly to the countryside in order to convert and condemn the pagan practices. However, his example is not an evidence of a diffused behavior among the clergy and most of the times priests and bishops were limited to their urban activities in the biggest churches of the dioceses. A good strategy in the process of conversion of peasants was then the incitation of landowners by preachers in order to act as overseers of their peasantry. We will see further how landowners would be directly called by preachers and bishops to be the arm of the church in the countryside, probably because the church was not strong enough to exercise control over these places, where the majority of people lived and where traditional religion was stronger.

The particular features of the conversion of the countryside are a complex affair, and for this reason the different strategies using in the tree areas will be presented and discussed throughout this dissertation. However, what the analysis will demonstrate is how the complexity of these processes would be crucial to the development of different religious interpretations.

### **Specifying the limits and structure of this research**

In these contexts of struggle against paganism we often see the sources having trouble to define the nature of the converters' religion. Christians have always interpreted the world through a binary system: good and bad, heaven and hell, us and them, Christians and non-Christians. But what we aim to reach here is the awareness of the impossibility of these neat distinctions when talking about Christianisation period, how this process developed and why. According to Maijastina Kahlos, the concept of *incerti* would be the most fitting term to define this situation, since this term aims to highlight the gray areas between pagans and Christians, in order to demonstrate that this dichotomy do not have a straight line between both sides. *"Incerti might be described by an irresoluteness or an openness. Not everyone in Late Antiquity regarded it as necessary to choose either Christianity or 'paganism'. People certainly reacted in a different manner in different circumstances. Some (Christian) people were troubled by such a thing as participating in urban 'pagan' festivals, but some of them saw no connection between 'pagan' celebrations and the Christian*

*religion*"<sup>39</sup>.

When modern scholars attempt to draw clear distinctions between pagan and Christian, they ignore the fact that Late Antique/Early Medieval people had their own complexities. Admitting the possibility for them to be as complex as ourselves is a very fair conception. Being either Christian or pagan could perfectly mean that people could also gravitate the line between both worlds, following personal inclination and piety, social obligations and traditional memory, culture and identity. However, although the concepts developed by Kahlos do fit the main conceptions of this work, I still think that the term *incerti* bears some of the own misconceptions of medieval churchmen, who would believe that people who were baptized but still resorted to pagan practices were bad Christians or in the worlds of Caesarius of Arles, "lukewarm Christians" (*tepidos christianos*)<sup>40</sup>. Furthermore, many scholars have interpreted the hybrid behavior of Christians as an incomplete Christianisation, which is, in my opinion, not the case.

As previously mentioned, my research aims to make a comparison between three different processes of Christianisation from the fourth to the seventh century, a period in which most of the missionary efforts towards the spreading of the new faith is concentrated, which is also the period known as the passage between Late Antiquity and Early Middle Ages. The fourth century is the time in which Christianity was already present almost everywhere in western provinces but at different degrees of development. It is, for the regions contemplated in this study, the earlier limit, since while already present in Gaul and Spain since earlier centuries, in Britain it was on the fourth century that the new religion was presumably brought by the Roman army. Since this research is not only about Christianisation but also about how this religion spread and how it was interpreted and adapted to and by the converters, it is more profitable start with a period when Christianisation, although already present in most of the Roman world, was still giving its first steps in what concerns the consolidation of its conversion. The fourth century was also the period

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<sup>39</sup> KAHLOS, *Incerti in between. Moments of transition and dialogue in Christian polemics in the fourth and fifth centuries*. 2004.

<sup>40</sup> Sermo 184.4.



when Christianity was officially recognized as the sole religion of the lands of the Roman Empire but Roman culture was still present and maintained a certain importance, which probably influenced the modalities of absorption of Christian religion.

My thesis focuses on the southern part of Gaul, the northern part of Iberian Peninsula and Britain. These regions present three different stages of Christianisation during the period above mentioned and were passing through very distinct social, cultural and political moments that make these places three very interesting objects for a comparative study. I am aware of the rough artificial cut since we are dealing with a time in which borders were almost inexistent and cultural and political boundaries were very feeble. However, these geographical regions already presented at that time specific cultural and historical features that allow us to identify a certain uniformity on local and circumscribed identity. Indeed, when we think about the cultural and historical development that follows the period contemplated in this study, we can see that this process of religious change and building of local culture and religiosity were crucial to delimit what could be considered the cultural identity of these places. Nevertheless, I will not neglect sources and documents from other geographical regions and historical periods if they can be considered relevant to my analysis.

The seventh century is the opposite limit of this study because it constitutes a period of major change in these areas. After that we see the establishment of the Carolingian kingdom in Gaul at the mid of the eight century, which brings a new era to Christianity, starting what later would culminate into a fusion between secular and religious power. In Hispania, we see the Arab conquest of the eight century that lasted for centuries and influenced the cultural, social, political and religious development of that area, while in Britain it was the period of consolidation of Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, and the moment of settlement and spreading of Christianity thanks to the mission sent by Pope Gregory the Great. After the seventh century the dynamics of organizing power and religious institutions change almost everywhere in the West, and since this work aims to concentrate on the period in which people

were struggling to build their religious identity, it seems appropriate not to go beyond.

The focus of this research is cultural and religious history. As I tried to individuate a general behaviour towards religious conversion, political affairs will be analyzed here only marginally. It is obvious that all instances of social history cannot be dissociated from one another, but since there are so many good volumes and articles that concentrate on political matters, I opted to dedicate my attention to less navigated environments, which are the many interpretations and behaviors regarding social and cultural change.

This research is organized in six chapters: after this introduction, I deepen the concepts and methodology that I will use in this project in the first chapter, as well as some preliminary notions of conversion and the spread of Christianity. I will also discuss the concept of paganism as an antithesis of Christianity and my conception of popular religion in contraposition to the ecclesiastical doctrine. I explain my methods of comparison, how I read and interpret the sources and the role of the concept of cultural and religious hybridity in this work. After this methodological outline three chapters dedicated to each region follow, starting with Gaul for chronological reasons for it was the first of these three regions to accept the new faith.

As a matter of fact, in Gaul Christianisation arrived very fast, and due to its vicinity to the Italian Peninsula (not only geographical but also cultural), this province absorbed more easily what is identified as the process of Romanization. It is known that Roman culture was a way in which Christian religion could be propagated more easily in the Western world, and in many cases we see that this premise is true. In southern Gaul the Christian religion was flourishing already during the fourth century, when a well-established web of churches was spread on the territory. This however does not mean that traditional practices completely disappeared, and as ecclesiastical and archaeological sources demonstrate some gestures and practices were still alive but mixed with Christian religiosity. The situation was different in northern Gaul, specifically east of the Rhine, where Roman influence was not strong and where Christianity would struggle with local religion for many centuries.

In Hispania the spreading of Christianity started later than in Gaul, but in the fourth century it was possible to find a well-established church mostly in the south, in Seville, Cordoba and Toledo, for the Christianisation presumably first came from North Africa. In it is also possible to see a difference between north and south, a distinction that was equally conditioned by the presence of Roman influence and culture. The northern part of the province and specifically the region of Galicia, although being a place of imperial interest for its mines, presented a pre-roman social organization and material culture that seemed to have been stronger than any effort of assimilation. It was later possible to observe a very peculiar religious development during the presence of the Sueves in this region. Priscillianism, a heretic doctrine that acquired great success in the area in the fourth century was interpreted as a mixture of Manichaeism and astrological beliefs, with nightly meetings and active participation of women. Some interpretations say that Priscillian “translated” the indigenous beliefs to a Christian light, which suited the needs of people in this crucial moment of change. In this region our sources give many references of hybrid practices, attesting a local initiative to “craft” their own religion.

In Britain, we have a completely different situation. With a much later Christianisation, its development was distinct from the regions presented so far. Although the new religion was present on the island during the Roman occupation, its influence seems to have been not so strong. The labor of re-Christianisation of the island and the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons started at the end of the sixth century with the missions sent by Pope Gregory the Great. Here, not only the role of the foreign missionaries was important, but also the influence of the sovereigns. In fact, the first targets of the missions were the kings and their family along with nobles. This situation was different from what we have seen so far, since here the process of conversion was much dependent of a ruler and the spreading of the new religion followed a “top-bottom” model. We can see reflexes of this particular path in the further development of local religion.

After the description and study of each separate region I start the comparative analysis, in which I explain the points of similitudes and differences that are due to

cultural and historical characteristics. When talking about specific practices and gestures, such as funerary rites, medical and healing practices I stress how local historical background influenced these developments, thus accounting for the tendency of developing a hybrid religiosity that was common to all regions touched by Christianisation, but was also a familiar behavior in periods of cultural change. At the conclusion of this thesis I develop some thoughts about the idea of a popular piety based in cultural specificities, the importance of traditional culture that manifests itself in the hybridization of religious practices, what this religious hybridity means in this context, how this is conditioned by the anthropological behavior of shaping religion and beliefs according to personal or communal necessity. Furthermore, I stress the importance of people's agency in building their own religion in a sort of religious crafting influenced by cultural identity.

## Chapter one - Methods, definitions and concepts

*“So often the study of the Middle ages starts from the premise of the ‘One Church’. If one is then careless enough to confuse the terms ‘Church’ and ‘Christianity’, this leads ipso facto to position the existence of ‘One Church’. One step further, and ‘Christianity’, unqualified, becomes confused with ‘religion’, giving rise to the image of the ‘one religion’. And so the monolithic image of the religious phenomenon in the Middle Ages grew and is perpetuated. In this context the increasing power of the church and the centralization of its administration are usually seen as improvements and as fulfilling God’s will<sup>41</sup>”.*

According to the current state of the art, it is almost unanimous in contemporary historiography that Christian religion was practiced and understood in different forms everywhere. Peter Brown talks about “micro-Christendoms” to allude to the existence of local varieties of practices and interpretations of the faith in what concerns the ecclesiastical milieu<sup>42</sup>. For this reason, when talking about the period of Christianisation we should bear in mind that we are not dealing with static notions of Christianity nor even of paganism. There were several forms of both and their mixing was a fluid process<sup>43</sup>. As a matter of fact, what we call paganism was “an immensely rich, variform, crisscrossed and, above all, a randomly reported world of beliefs, in which no doubt you could find almost anything somewhere<sup>44</sup>”, and as for what concerns Christianity, as it is one of the aims of this dissertation, it was equally crowded by interpretations and variations that made it possible to talk about multiple *Christianities*<sup>45</sup>.

Therefore, when “church” as a global institution is mentioned here, it is not as if

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<sup>41</sup> MILIS, *Introduction: the pagan middle ages – a contradiction in terms?* p. 5.

<sup>42</sup> BROWN, *The rise of western Christendom*, pp. 355.

<sup>43</sup> See, JONES, *Between pagan and Christian*, 2014.

<sup>44</sup> MACMULLEN, *Two types of conversion to early Christianity*. 1983.

<sup>45</sup> LAROCCA, *Cristianesimi*, 1998; and *La cristianizzazione dei Barbari e la nascita dell’Europa*, 2006. Also KLINGSHIRN, *Caesarius of Arles: the making of a Christian community in Late Antique Gaul: “The Christianity practiced in local communities, while remaining an organized religion in many aspects also took of the characteristics of a community religion. Variously opposed and abetted by the clergy, this process was driven largely by the efforts of lay men and women to refashion Christianity according to their own expectations and traditions. The making of local communities into Christian communities thus entailed the making of Christianity into a community religion”*, p. 2.

considering it a monolithic system<sup>46</sup>. The term, although risking to place a variety of realities under a vague and imprecise label, is used mostly as a tool to identify a more or less diffused and generally accepted doctrine and religious interpretation that, despite its wide variety, was most of the time unanimous into condemning what we will see here as a mixing of practices. Indeed, it will be soon clear that inside this very “church”, individuals would much often disagree in their interpretation of what were licit and illicit practices, and some members of the clergy even had a direct and crucial responsibility into shaping hybrid religiosities.

Paganism is another concept that is important to define from the beginning, since the term is in itself ill-defined and carries many misconceptions from when it was coined until today. In fact, when we make the decision to keep using this term it is important to consider that ‘pagans’ probably would have never used this term to define themselves, and what now is placed in a big indistinct group of pagans, like Roman senators and peasants in Sardinia, are not at all the same thing<sup>47</sup>. We will talk further about the meaning of this term and what it represents in the sources, but it is important to remember that what will be here considered as paganism was not something distinct and completely separated from Christianity, since a level of knowledge existed from one another<sup>48</sup> and as we will see, even a certain degree of mutual influence. However, at the level of intellectual disputes, when pagans were still active in public positions until at least the fourth century and could liberally practice their rituals, the result of the interaction between both religious creeds was a sort of “disappointing dialogue between deaf people<sup>49</sup>”. Nonetheless, the boundary that seemed to be more important to overcome was not the one between pagan and Christian, but that between what was culturally familiar and the “Other”<sup>50</sup>.

## 1.1 Religious Hybridity

In spite of that, it is important first to specify from the beginning the concept of

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<sup>46</sup> POHL, *Comparing communities – the limits of typology*, p. 20.

<sup>47</sup> JONES, *The fuzziness of paganism*, 2012.

<sup>48</sup> WOOD, *The missionary life*. p. 250-1.

<sup>49</sup> PASCHOUD, *L'intolleranza cristiana vista e giudicata dai pagani*, p. 155.

<sup>50</sup> WOOD, *Missionaries and the Christian frontier*, 2001.

hybridity, one that I consider crucial to this research. The term hybridity is borrowed from biological and botanical studies and implies that two or more individuals after a process of interaction produce what is known as a hybrid, which carries characteristics from all the elements involved in said interaction but cannot be identified as none of the original individuals but something other. This concept then implies the existence of original elements that are identified as “pure” specimens, being the hybrid often associated to something out of order, unnatural or strange. In the nineteenth century the term hybridity was applied to identify the mixing between colonizers and native populations from the places where this kind of domination happened, in a clear attempt to categorize as unnatural and bizarre the miscegenation between races<sup>51</sup>. The twentieth century sees a shift in the use of the term “hybridity” to a cultural conception, but always referring to mixing and loss of purity applied to cultural contacts. Homi Bhabha in the 1990s was responsible for the post-colonial rehabilitation of the term, that he sees as an in-between state, a “Third Space” as a way of “conceptualizing an *international* culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the *diversity* of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's *hybridity*”<sup>52</sup>.

Peter Burke also considers hybridization in a cultural aspect, and his understanding of culture is as “a reasonably broad sense to include attitudes, mentalities and values and their expressions, embodiment or symbolization in artefacts, practices and representations<sup>53</sup>”. Hybridization is the natural consequence of the encounter between cultures and it can happen with objects, practices and people. Even though these exchanges are not always equal in view of the consequences they have for the groups involved, it is certain that they all mutually influence each other, a process that brings about changes.

Imitation, appropriation, borrowing, assimilation, acculturation and syncretism are all terms that are frequently used to describe the process of mixing of cultures after an encounter and confrontation. The term accommodation was recently readopted by

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<sup>51</sup> YOUNG, *Colonial desire. Hybridity in theory, culture and race*, p. 5-6.

<sup>52</sup> BHABHA, *The Location of Culture*, p. 38.

<sup>53</sup> BURKE, *Cultural hybridity*, p. 5.

religious historians that believe the term acculturation is too radical for it implies a complete change. At the same time, the term syncretism is seen with distrust while it could suggest a deliberate mixture, and it often implies “*mixture in contrast to purity, a mixture occasioned by insufficient instruction, geographical remoteness, cultural crudeness or aloofness to history or even church leaders’ cynical acculturation of great theological ideas*”<sup>54</sup>. The problem with all these terms is that they presuppose a certain degree of subordination from one culture to another, as if the mixing was made on the benefit of some and disadvantage to others in an unequal exchange. Other terms that are often used in these cases of cultural encounters and the dynamics involved in it are transfer and exchange, that try both to supplant the problem of terminology but are concepts that designate only the process that is triggered by cultural encounter, but not its product. As noted by Burke, scholars are increasingly becoming aware of the fact that religious encounters must be considered from both sides and more than a matter of conversion, this process was actually the development of some form of hybridization<sup>55</sup>.

Hybridity is very often, if not always, a process and not a state, and in every culture, in a given moment, an encounter with other cultures has occurred or will occur. These encounters create many levels of hybridization and some cultures can absorb more than others, due to specific historical backgrounds. In the hybridization process, it can also happen that some individuals get more involved than others, or even a whole category of society. The process is therefore very different when the encounter of cultures is in an unequal degree, for example, when missionaries are a minority and for this reason tend to get into compromise with local culture more easily, trying to adapt in a way that both religions should get what is important for each one. This was the case of the Jesuit mission in China, where missionaries were accused of being converted themselves to the Chinese religion when their adaptations of Christianity in order to better suit local culture were considered too

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<sup>54</sup> FRANKFURTHER, *Beyond magic and superstition*, p. 266-7.

<sup>55</sup>BURKE, *Op. cit.*, p.44.



extreme<sup>56</sup>. On the other hand we have a situation where the people converted are a minority, or did not have enough power to impose a confrontation (in South America Jesuits often had the support of soldiers and could use force in order to “convince”). In this case it seems that it is the receiver culture that has to compromise more and give up more than the culture that is being imposed. We will try to see if this model can be applied in the cases that will be studied here, if it is possible to see a correspondence between the model of spread of Christianity and the level of hybridization found in each religious culture.

It is important to state that I do not believe in an idea of original purity regarding culture<sup>57</sup>, since according to Lévi-Strauss, every culture develops around the solution to specific problems<sup>58</sup>, or else, it progresses after facing and solving issues, adapting to new environments and necessities as any other living thing in this planet. In a word, it evolves. This means that even the encounter between cultures, a phenomenon that pervades the history of humanity, is part and fundamental tool of the development and surviving of the aforementioned cultures. Thus, trying to find the original purity of something is to ignore the fact that interaction and hybridity are deeply connected to the nature of things. From the moment that something exists, it needs interaction and exchange in order to survive. The religious development that will be studied here, or else the conversion from paganism to Christianity, will be therefore understood as a fluid and complex process that evolved to adapt itself to local necessities. And as it is the aim of this research to demonstrate, the Christianity practiced in each place where it was rooted should be also understood as a hybrid product of the encounter of cultures. Indeed, if we think about it, Christianity itself, throughout its history, has absorbed so many elements from other cultures, traditions, and religions that it can be seen essentially as a syncretic religion<sup>59</sup>. Moreover, it is important to consider Christianity as a living religion, not a set of dogmas detached of human beings. It is a religion for the people, and it must serve

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<sup>56</sup> See BURKE, *Lost (and Found) in Translation: A Cultural History of Translators and Translating in Early Modern Europe*, 2007.

<sup>57</sup> See STOCKHAMMER, *Questioning hybridity*, p. 12 ss.

<sup>58</sup> LÉVI-STRAUSS, *Race et histoire*, 1987.

<sup>59</sup> KÜNZEL et CHEVY, *Paganisme, syncrétisme et culture religieuse populaire au haut Moyen Âge. Réflexions de méthode*, p. 1059.

and be adequate to these people.

## 1.2 What is it to be a Christian?

Which bring us to a very important question: what is it to be a Christian? This question has been posed by several authors along the first centuries of Christianity (and is still being made) with several different answers, but almost all of them agreed that it should be one sole identity for the whole of Christendom. "To be a Christian meant being a member of a group that extended across the gulf which divided heaven and earth"<sup>60</sup>, and as said by Augustine: "we are all members of one Body, whether we are here or anywhere else on earth, now or at any other time from Abel the just to the end of the world" (*Sermo* 341.9.11). For this reason the clergy has always been very concerned with the internal dissidents in Christianity and its doctrine, with the several heresies that spread along the way and the lack of uniformity between the church of the West and the East. In its first centuries the ecclesiastical authorities were very concerned with the creation of a self-identification of all Christians as part of *one people*, but it soon appeared to be more difficult than it was desired, since heresies and differences in doctrinal interpretations demonstrated that a single model could not suit all mentalities. Indeed, as Robert Markus states, "*Christians had, of course, always felt the need to identify themselves doctrinally, if not in some incipient way. But the history of Christian self-identification cannot be written in terms of a steady progression from simple to complex. In one sense the whole of the church's history is a growth in self-awareness; every important encounter with a new society, a new culture, with shifts in men's assumptions about their world, themselves or God, with upheavals in the values by which they try to live, brings with it new self-discovery*"<sup>61</sup>. At the end, being all the same under God in the matter of identification was the true major desire of Christian religion, it does not matter the place of origin or social condition: all Christians are the same. But is this really possible? When studying conversion we should ask about how people imagined Christ, how did they pray and how did they interpret Christianity. Also, what does this mean in their lives, the space and

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<sup>60</sup> MARKUS, *The end of ancient Christianity*, p. 22.

<sup>61</sup> MARKUS, *The problem of self-definition: from sect to church*, p. 3.

importance that religion has<sup>62</sup>. This leads to some considerations on what is popular and how this is important to the notion of local religious identity.

### 1.3 What is popular?

To Isidore of Seville in his *Etymologiae*, the definition of *populus* is: “an assembly of human multitude, allied by the sharing law and by agreement as if of one mind. But the *populus* differs in this respect from the plebs, because all the citizens make up the *populus*, including the higher ranks of the citizen body. So the *populus* is the entire citizen body, while the plebs is the commons indeed. And plebs gets its name from *pluralitas* (majority), since the number of those lower rank is greater than that of the higher ranks<sup>63</sup>”. Isidore’s definition of people is similar to a very modern definition of it, as a simple designation for the totality of the population of a place, without distinctions of rank.

When we use the term “people” it is commonly accepted that we are denominating a group or the whole community that not necessarily appertain to the cleric or aristocratic social classes, much like Isidore’s definition. Generally, these people are identified as those attached to traditions that were handed down by the ancestors and the term “popular” associated to religion is often linked to the notion of a piety typical from a low stratum of the population<sup>64</sup>.

This means the study of popular culture, and here specifically of religious culture, presupposes the existence of a stratification, or else a culture of the elites and a culture of lower classes. The division between these two distinct categories would assume a sort of subordination from one towards the other, which is, however, not the case. Indeed, as stated by Gurevich, “one should not conceive of the influence of official ideology on the popular world-view as a one-way process of planting new ideas and beliefs into virgin soil. There was an interaction between church ideology and pre-Christian (more accurately, non-Christians) popular culture. The result of this multifarious and

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<sup>62</sup> See PLUSKOWSKI and PATRICK, “How do we pray to God?” fragmentation and Variety in Early Medieval Christianity, 2005.

<sup>63</sup> Isidorus of Seville, *Etymologiae*, IX- 44-5. Translation from WOOD J., *Elites and baptism: religious strategies of distinction in Visigothic Spain*, p. 5.

<sup>64</sup> SCHMITT, “Religion populaire” et culture folklorique (note critique), p. 942.

*conflicting mutual influence was a cultural-ideological complex, which might be called 'popular Christianity' or 'parish Catholicism'"*<sup>65</sup>. Indeed, it is not a matter of one culture that dominates the other, but a dialectic relationship between two cultures, influencing one another and searching a place of meeting and fusion<sup>66</sup>.

The distinction between two different levels of culture however existed, but not on the different strata of society, and not in a matter of "low" and "high" assuming a hierarchy of quality. To Oronzo Giordano the distinction is between the *ordo clericorum* and the *ordo laicorum*. The first one has the monopoly of the literary and pastoral activity and its activities are based in a rational conception of the sacred. The second group, the faithful, would have their day to day practices based in emotional impulses that answer to stimuli outside the ecclesiastical area<sup>67</sup>. According to this author, "*la dinámica de esta relación entre los dos órdenes se expresa en la contraposición constante entre religión y superstición, entre paganismo y cristianismo. Pero el conflicto a su vez se desarrolla a lo largo de una línea de demarcación fluida e inestable, a través de una ósmosis recíproca de influencias y de contaminaciones, de agresiones y de concesiones, de superposiciones y de adaptaciones, que constituyen la característica y, al mismo tiempo, el trabajo de la religiosidad medieval*<sup>68</sup>". Indeed, it is undeniable that clerics appertained to a cultural elite and the difference that existed between those that had the monopoly of writing, and those with a more practical collection of beliefs, related to the everyday necessities and preoccupations, is the content of the next chapters. In this way, in terms of religion, popular could be applied to something that is different from the official cult, what is not preached in the churches, treatises or in the canons. Those popular practices and attitudes could develop from people's initiative or in some circumstances encouraged by priests (without official approbation) to create these "inventions out of the canonical order" that we will see further. Raoul Manselli calls these two different cultures *religion populaire et religion savant*, roughly the same

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<sup>65</sup> GUREVICH, *Medieval popular culture. Problems of belief and perception*, p. 5.

<sup>66</sup> MANSELLI, *La religion populaire au moyen âge. Problèmes de méthode et d'histoire*, p. 20.

<sup>67</sup> GIORDANO, *Religiosidad popular en la alta edad media*, p. 24.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibidem*.

distinction made by Jacques Le Goff<sup>69</sup>, both however believing that these are not two separate things. Religion is a human experience that is unique, in the sense that there is only one Christian religion, but it is lived and interpreted in different ways. What I intend here is then a distinction between the ecclesiastical interpretation of religion, or else the “official” one and the lay religion, or what is commonly called lay piety<sup>70</sup>. As a matter of definition, the laity are considered those “baptized members of the church, who had not been ordained and did not live in organized religious communities as monks or nuns”<sup>71</sup>.

#### 1.4 *Paganus and superstitio*

It is worth now to briefly focus on the story of the word *paganus*, which is actually the story of an otherness. At first the word was used as a sign of belonging to a *pagus*, which is a limited area or a rural district but the word was also used to address limited areas within the urban perimeters. This means that the original meaning of the word *pagus* was not necessarily referring to the concept of rusticity and the people living in those districts could have been urban citizens, living in the *vici* and in the country *villae*. The word “paganus” could hence address both people from the city and from the countryside and it was meant to describe the ordinary population of a limited and specific address. As we will see, lately the Christian vocabulary started considering the word *paganus* instead of *gentilis*<sup>72</sup>; the word's meaning and weight completely changed then and it assumed an exclusively negative value. Pagan was hence the denial of the identity of the majority: the non-Christian that was not even Judean nor Manichaeen<sup>73</sup>.

The words *paganus* and *pagus* were also meant as an opposition to another word. In imperial society *paganus* or the inhabitant of a *pagus* was seen as opposed to a soldier

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<sup>69</sup> LE GOFF, *Culture cléricale et traditions folkloriques dans la civilisation mérovingienne*, and *Culture ecclésiastique et culture folklorique au Moyen âge : saint Marcel de Paris et le dragon*, both in *Pour une autre Moyen Age*, 1977.

<sup>70</sup> See DELARUELLE, *La piété populaire au Moyen Âge*, 1975; COOPER and GREGORY (eds.), *Elite and popular religion*, 2006; and more recently BAILEY, *The religious worlds of the laity in late antique Gaul*, 2016.

<sup>71</sup> BAILEY, *Op. cit.*, p. 5-6.

<sup>72</sup> ROBLIN, *Paganisme et rusticité, un gros problème, une étude de mots*. 1953. p. 186.

<sup>73</sup> CHUVIN, *Sur l'origine de l'équation paganus= païen*. 2002. p. 7.

who would wander without a permanent accommodation - *paganus* was who would put roots down. That is why peasants were *pagani* par excellence. “*Pagani*” were hence just the 'local people', who, in the city or in the countryside, would keep the traditional customs alive, where the *alieni*, the 'people from the outside', were more and more often interpreted as Christians<sup>74</sup>.

The religious meaning of the word started taking place in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. In 353 AD, the word appeared in a Constitution of Constantius II with the meaning “peasant living in a *pagus*”, but with a more negative note than *rusticus*, *agricola*, *cultor* or *colonus*. It was only at the beginning of the fifth century that *paganus* replaced the biblical word *hellén*, or the literate *gentilis*<sup>75</sup>. It's in the law of Valentinian, issued in February 370, that one of the first official examples of the word *paganus* meant as “pagan” appears. From that moment on the word *paganus* was exclusively used with derogatory purpose<sup>76</sup>.

Along with the negative connotation of the word *paganus* in the apologetic texts and the sermons, there often goes the word *superstitio* that refers to rites and pagan cults altogether. With the development of the Christian literature and after the Holy Scriptures were translated into Latin, it became necessary to find a word that would label the new religion as the only true one, compared to the demonic practices of the *pagani*. That is when the opposition between the Christian religion, the *religio*, and pagan superstition, *superstitio*, appeared. To our purposes it was useful to investigate on the development of both words.

During the antiquity two hypothesis were proposed and discussed about the origin of the word *religio*: *relegere* (*religere*) e *religare*. One of the meanings of the word *relegere* is “scruple” or “fear”<sup>77</sup>, which would turn into the need of people to respect the rules, the religion, and to be careful and assiduous when listening to god<sup>78</sup>, or else, to be a pious person. This word only describes one of the many sides of the

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<sup>74</sup> CHUVIN, *Cronica degli ultimi pagani*. 2008. p. 19.

<sup>75</sup> LIZZI TESTA, *La conversione dei “cives”, l’evangelizzazione dei rustici: alcuni esempi fra IV e VI secolo*, p. 124.

<sup>76</sup> CHUVIN, *Sur l’origine de l’équation paganus= païen*, p.11.

<sup>77</sup> CHAMPEAUX, *La religione dei romani*. 2002. p. 12.

<sup>78</sup> SACHOT, “*Religio/superstitio*”. *Historique d’une subversion et d’un retournement*. 1991. p. 367.

Roman religion but it was chosen anyway to describe a wide reality like religion is. The definition of the Roman religion hence regroups all the practices which were carefully followed in order to respect religion, urban institutions and the divinities. In the Romans' eyes, this peculiar way to approach the religion and the institutions was what made them a civilization above the other ones<sup>79</sup>.

When it comes to the word *superstitio*, it is hard to find out if the origin and the use of the word were meant to address a negative or derogative side of a religion. The word comes from the adjective *superstes*, in origin *superstare*, which means “survival”, “witness”. It was hence established a transition from the meaning “witness” to the one “superstition” that goes through an intermediate state that would be the association of the word with divination, that is the ability to be a witness of the past without having actually lived in it. Romans have always been loyal to the official Augurs and they used to condemn wizardry, divination and other practices judged as childish<sup>80</sup>. After a while, the word started to address an excessive behaviour towards religion, an excessive belief in the gods or a belief without a foundation. There lies the derogative meaning of the word, still it is not clear how this word became an adjective referred to the Roman religion used by the Christians.

It was in the first decades of the second century that Christian writers started to use the word *superstitio* to talk about all the other religions. It is interesting to notice that in the first century pagan writers were the ones to address as *superstitio* the Christian religion which had just started to gain new followers; indeed, from a pagan point of view, the new religion was full of excesses, which explained the use of the word. Moreover, the way to look at the new religion as something derogative strengthened the choice for this word. However, the word was also found in other contexts related to Greeks, Gallics, Celts, Bretons. That is why, from a Roman point of view, the *superstitio* always defines a belief that does not have any foundation<sup>81</sup>.

With the coming of Christianity, the word *religio* was used as the opposite to the

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<sup>79</sup> Cicerone, *De haruspicum responsis*, 19.

<sup>80</sup> SACHOT, *Op. Cit.*, p. 373.

<sup>81</sup> SACHOT, *Op. Cit.*, p. 382.

*Romana religio*. Christianity would be the *vera religio*, inspired by the only true God versus all the pagan gods that were just made of lies. It was in that moment that the contrast between the true religion and the Roman religion simply became an opposition between *religio* and *superstitio*, a word that re-acquired the derogative meaning that it used to have among the Romans, that would now define all the religions that are not Christianity.

In many ecclesiastical sources (and even in some modern interpretation of them) we often find that *paganus* and peasants were two things that went side by side. Nonetheless, Augustine in the *De catechizandis rudibus* (16, 24) uses *rustici* as a cultural definition, meaning those that are not yet Christian. It is important to stress this fact because when we talk about popular religion here, it is not necessarily understood as religion of “simple men” or rural inhabitants. We will see that Martin of Braga, in his *De correctione rusticorum* defined *rustici* as those who, although already baptized, still resorted to pagan traditions, and he clearly attributed to them a low level of education since he puts the stress in the fact that he will use a simple language. In this way, according to our sources and how we interpret them here, the religion of the *rustici* can be classified as: religion practiced by people that did not have a religious education (or at least a formal education) or do not assimilate it properly; people who mix cultural elements with religious behavior; use ritual of religious practices to get solution to problems that cannot be solved in a formal way<sup>82</sup>.

### 1.5 On religious identity

Another term that must be defined here is the concept of identity, a term that is been used indiscriminately, without actually any real reflection about its meaning. “It carries a massive hermeneutic weight, since it indicates both collective/social identity and individual identity”<sup>83</sup>. Brubaker and Cooper criticize the use made of this word as, according to them, if identity is constructed, fluid and multiple, its imprecision and vagueness cannot allow it to be used as an analytical category. They

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<sup>82</sup>NASCIMENTO, A “*religião dos rústicos*”, p. 324.

<sup>83</sup> POHL, *Introduction – Strategies of identification: a methodological profile.*, p. 4.



propose some alternatives to this term such as identification and categorization, self-understanding and social location, commonality, connectedness and groupness<sup>84</sup>. Indeed, many of the terms that we use today are not the most appropriate and very often carry misconceptions and old-fashioned concepts, yet we still need them. It is important to acknowledge the imperfection of the terms we are using and state precisely the meaning that we give to them. In saying so, religious identity will be used in this study but neither in the meaning of a self-identification or self-awareness, nor even as a collective identity as if people were conscious of their appurtenance to a specific group with its own religious interpretation. The type of religious identity that I intend here is a more subtle and subjective concept, in which I associate the religious practices, or else the hybrid religion, with local traditions and memory, which means, with cultural identity. The concept of a local religion takes into consideration that religion is not static or immune to continuities. It is subjected to the cultural and social dynamics of the village or community, and to talk about a local identity that influences religion is to take into consideration a shared cultural identity. This religious interpretation would be in my point of view, the product of local culture and therefore unique. As well pointed by Frankfurter, local religion, “refers to the particular, geographically situated syntheses of central and peripheral traditions, practices, and notions of power that villages and towns mediate through their landscapes and folklore.”<sup>85</sup>

## **1.6 The concept and process of religious conversion**

As we investigated the contraposition between Christianity and paganism and the origin of their conceptual and ideological conflict it is time to analyse the notion of religious conversion, another concept that is crucial to this research. The Latin term *conversio* can have three fundamental meanings: the first is the sense of overturning, reversal or convolution that is often found in literature to designate the movement of stars and planets; the second meaning denotes change and transformation, while the

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<sup>84</sup> BRUBAKER and COOPER, *Beyond “identity”*, 2000.

<sup>85</sup> FRANKFURTER, *Beyond magic and superstition*, p. 283.

third one is that of turning or to tip<sup>86</sup>. Philosophically, if we think about religious conversion we would probably need all these meanings together in order to explain the complex and subjective process of abandoning a religious belief to embrace another. However, on late Judaism and in the first period of Christianity, “conversion” is often a scatological concept in which a person have no will and psychological influences have no effect. People received a call from God and could do nothing other than to accept it<sup>87</sup>.

Nevertheless, as it is now conceptually understood, conversion is a social process that do not mean the simple shift from one religion to another: it implies the changing of a whole range of practices and social behaviours, ways of seeing and interpreting life and the way invidious relate with themselves and with the community<sup>88</sup>. Indeed, as stated by Diane Broos, *“possibly experimental at first, [conversion] becomes a deliberate change with definite direction and shape. It shows itself responsible to particular knowledge and practices. To be converted is to reidentify, to learn, reorder, and reorient. It involves interrelated modes of transformation that generally continue over time and define a consistent course. Nor mere syncretism, neither can conversion involve a simple and absolute break with a previous social life. Learning anew proceeds over time and requires a process of integrating knowledge and experience. Even in the context of conquest, the aspiration of another power to ‘know’, ‘domesticate’, ‘name’, and ‘claim’ is difficult to accomplish”*<sup>89</sup>.

A few social changes are apparently common to different social/religious conversion: the establishment of a formal and hierarchical authority structure; a sort of legal autonomy; the fusion between language and religion; and the “recognition of religious authorities as spokesmen for the religious community and as examples of religious life”<sup>90</sup>.

Religious conversion was for many years a research topic investigated by

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<sup>86</sup> IRMSCHER, *Sul concetto di conversio e i corrispondenti termini Greci*,1987.

<sup>87</sup> PARENTE, *L’idea di conversione da Nock ad oggi*, p. 14.

<sup>88</sup> BULLIET, *Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period: An Essay in Quantitative History*, p. 33.

<sup>89</sup> AUSTIN-BROOS, Diane. *The anthropology of religious conversion: an introduction*, p.2.

<sup>90</sup> BULLIET, *Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period: An Essay in Quantitative History*, p. 34-5.

psychologists, theologians and then anthropologist. In 1933, however, the book *Conversion* by Arthur Darby Nock essentially translated this concept to historical terms. His book is a study of conversion in Late Antiquity and how religious conversion affected the cultural and religious context of societies. To him, the diffusion of Christianity is a social phenomenon but he is also interested in knowing the reasons why a pagan society would want to adhere to the new religion making it the prevalent one. This means that he considers conversion as an individual and psychological transformation. Nock suggested that Christianity was attractive for its ethics, and conversion was a process of "reorientation of the soul"<sup>91</sup>, an interpretation shared by Markus, which considered this process as "a 'deliberate turning from indifference or from an earlier form of piety to another, a turning which implies a consciousness that a great change is involved, that the old was wrong and the new is right'. Just how much renunciation of the old does conversion to the new require"<sup>92</sup>? However, the analysis of Nock lacks a consideration about conversion as something conditioned by external factors that not always are related exclusively with religion. Indeed, as stated by Rodney Stark, when an individual first receives the teaching of a new religion, it does not mean that he will eventually convert, because being preached on is not determining or the only factor important to trigger the process of conversion<sup>93</sup>. What would count more according to him is the social interaction with other converters, or else, the social environment that is responsible to more convincingly and efficaciously bring people to religious conversion. Moreover, in this study it is my aim to demonstrate that historical and cultural aspects have also a crucial part in this process, not only determining whether or not someone or a whole community will convert, but how this will occur, in which terms and the result of this process.

Ludwig Milis establishes three phases of the process of religious conversion: the first one is the imposition of a social and collective form of behavior, followed by an external regulation of individual conduct, to finally achieve the conversion on the

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<sup>91</sup> NOCK, *Conversion: the old and the new in religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo*, p. 7.

<sup>92</sup> MARKUS, *The end of ancient Christianity*, p.5.

<sup>93</sup> See STARK, *The rise of christianity: a sociologist reconsiders history*, 1996.

sphere of internal behavior<sup>94</sup>. This final phase would be what he calls the *conversion en profondeur* which was represented by the individual and internal conversion that was supposed to be achieved only centuries after the first phase<sup>95</sup>. It has, of course, something to do with the change of mentalities, a process that is not so simple. However, this definition presents some problems since it is impossible to know how people felt about their conversion and their beliefs. Milis creates a model that concentrates on the personal feelings towards religion, which is almost impossible to reach through our sources. The documents available describe the process of conversion concentrating in the high spheres of power or on the work of missionaries and bishops, while the personal behavior of people and their general feelings towards conversion are almost absent from the documents, and must be individuated relying only on indirect and partial accounts. As a model that is based in anthropological interpretations of religious conversion Milis' categorization do makes sense, but unfortunately our sources cannot give a proper confirmation of its applicability in early medieval society. On what concerns subjective interpretations of religious conversion, we can only stay, in this point, under the sphere of speculation.

Jacques Le Goff also makes a tripartite division of the process of religious conversion, but his model is more concerned with structures and the general establishment of the new religion concerning material objects and practices. This division would represent the refusal of what he defines as folkloric culture by the ecclesiastical culture's side and the process starts with the physical destruction, in which structures and ancient symbols must be erased. The following stage is that of obliteration and substitution in which the memories or sacredness of old religions are superposed by themes, practices and symbols of the new religion. The final stage of this process is denaturation, which Le Goff considers the most important since it implies a change of meaning in which old themes receive a new definition and

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<sup>94</sup> MILIS, *Introduction: the pagan middle ages – a contradiction in terms?* p 11.

<sup>95</sup> MILIS, *La conversion en profondeur: un processus sans fin*, 1986.

significance<sup>96</sup>.

As much as these divisions and categorizations are useful to illustrate a kind of model, they seem not to take into account the fluidity of the intricate process of conversion while putting into a single structure all the possible realities that as we know, are not this precise and well defined. Not all examples fit perfectly into these models with their specificities and own complexities. Although as examples of structured models they can help us to visualize a certain pattern of behavior, they should not be taken as *the* sole representation of reality. Each case should be analyzed in its particularities and individually.

Peter Foote however distinguishes conversion into “conversion period’ and “conversion moment”. According to this model “conversion moment” is linked to the official conversion of a king or another public authority or the arriving of missions that is followed by a period of gradual Christian consolidation, a period of “growing familiarity with Christian imagery, notions and claims”<sup>97</sup>. This classification seems the most appropriate since it relies on the notion of conversion as a process that is not uniform. Some places however are not characterized by a precise “conversion moment”, such is the case of southern Gaul where Christianity spread in a sort of eventless way, probably by means of merchants, soldiers or travelling clerics. In such cases conversion moment could be seen in itself as a process.

There were several ways in which the processes of Christianisation in the Roman west developed, some conditioned by the presence of missionaries, some influenced by the authority of rulers, some independent of all these aspects and a myriad of variations between them. For example, Richard Sullivan makes a comparison between methods employed by the Eastern and Western missionaries in the conversion of Slavic and Germanic groups living on the borders of Christendom from the seventh to the ninth century<sup>98</sup>. Byzantine society used primarily political pressure to impose Christianity and the imperial government very often used the

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<sup>96</sup> LE GOFF, *Culture cléricale et traditions folkloriques dans la civilisation mérovingienne*, p. 230-1.

<sup>97</sup> FOOTE, *Historical Studies: Conversion Moment and Conversion Period*, p. 137, cited by GARIPZANOV, *Introduction: Networks of Conversion, Cultural Osmosis, and Identities in the Viking Age*. p.1.

<sup>98</sup> SULLIVAN, *Early Medieval missionary activity: a comparative study of eastern and western methods*, 1954.

argument of political benefits and gain of power that should be granted to the prince that would accept conversion. The new religion would bring advantages not only to the ruler himself but to his state too, and it often found a captive audience among the aristocracy of Slavic society. On the other hand western missionaries among Germanic peoples also made use of political and cultural forces, but they usually arrived in a milieu that has not been previously prepared for their arrival, and all the merits on the success of conversion is generally to be found on the efforts of the missionary himself. The western missionary was more independent, he was the one to provide and seek for the means to promote his missionary activity, engaging in political affairs and searching lay support to his work. Even if political power was engaged in promotion of Christianity, the initiative is always from missionaries, while in the east, imperial government was the perpetrator and operator of missions, giving no opportunity for missionaries spontaneous initiative.

Although referring to realities that are far geographically and historically to those that are the aim of this study, these models can somehow reflect the differences in the process of conversion in Gaul, in Hispania and in Britain, as they all fall into the two fundamental approaches of early medieval conversion that are the “top-down” and “bottom-up” models<sup>99</sup>. The first concerns the type of conversion in which first a ruler is converted and then imposes religious conversion to his people; the second model regards a kind of conversion characterized by a more diffused conversion, first spread among people and then eventually reaching the rulers and aristocracy. In this kind of process the new religion arrives in the communities by means of missionaries or through a penetration more difficult to identify such as merchants, soldiers or settlers. We will see in the next chapters how these different models were applied and influenced the further development of local religious culture.

What we should now discuss is the anachronistic problem of using, in early medieval period, the term mission and the title missionary to the clerics that dedicated their lives to spread the new faith. As Ian Wood stated, our conception of mission is deeply based into modern paradigms and was first developed by Jesuits in the late

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<sup>99</sup> See CUSACK, *The Rise of Christianity in Northern Europe, 300–1000*, 1999.

sixteenth century to designate their activities overseas<sup>100</sup>. *Praedicare* seem to have been the more suitable term, which was used in the time of Christian conversion in the Early Middle Ages. However, although preaching was indeed the main activity that missionaries were doing among pagans, there is a big difference between preaching to a pagan audience and preaching to Christians. Even acknowledging that this term is imprecise, for the sake of simplicity here I will use mission and missionary when talking about the labor of conversion carried out by priest or bishops, yet with the consciousness that the meaning of these terms has nothing to do with their early modern counterpart. The concept of conversion itself is commonly understood as a colonial construct, that tends to reify the religious beliefs of the target group in such a way that most probably does not reflect real life<sup>101</sup>. Some would therefore make a difference between conversion and adhesion, as a way to say that being baptized is not enough to make a person a Christian. However, this interpretation or rather a judgment, even if made by many clerics and writers on the period of Christianisation, should not be followed to the letter by the historian. Again, each individual and each community had its own religiosity and ways to interpret it, and attempting to make a distinction of their commitment based on non-objective accounts is a mistake that historians should avoid, by reading carefully the sources and averting anachronism<sup>102</sup>.

### 1.7 Comparative studies and their problems

Is now the moment to ask a very crucial question regarding this study, which is why compare, as states the title of an article of Radhakrishnan of 2009<sup>103</sup>? And the answer is as simple as it could be: why not<sup>104</sup>? On nineteenth century in the context of the development of national historiographies, comparative studies suffered from the

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<sup>100</sup> WOOD, *What is a mission*. p. 135.

<sup>101</sup> See COMAROFF and COMAROFF, *Of revelation and revolution: Christianity, colonialism and consciousness in South Africa*, 2 Volumes, 1991, 1997.

<sup>102</sup> See WICKHAM, *The Comparative Method and Early Medieval Religious Conversion*. 2016.

<sup>103</sup> RADHAKRISHNAN, *Why compare?* 2009.

<sup>104</sup> STANFORD FRIEDMAN, *Why not compare?* 2011.

discredit and misbelief of many scholars<sup>105</sup>. Historians continued to defend a conservative approach to history and consequently to comparative analyses until the first decades of the twentieth century, when its popularization started being promoted by the *École des Annales*<sup>106</sup>. This method however is now increasingly gaining adepts and its relevance is being acknowledged in many fields of humanities<sup>107</sup>. Marcel Detienne, with his *Comparer l'incomparable* writes a sort of manifesto in defense of comparison, which he opens with the statement: “Il n’y a rien que l’esprit humain fasse si souvent que des comparaisons”<sup>108</sup>. After all, the construction of identity, and as a consequence, of otherness pass through comparison: who I am is the opposite or somehow different from who you are. The complicated question of otherness cannot be answered without looking at both the external and internal worlds, and the construction of a personal, collective, cultural or religious identity cannot neglect it either. Thus, it is possible to individuate a local religious identity only if we compare it with other local realities. In the present study I chose a comparative approach for two main reasons: to realize that single realities are not islands but are immersed in a context, to know why “here” things function and develop in one way and “there” in another; and to prove and to experiment. We need to test possibilities that allow us to verify theories and comparison is the best way to do so. As Chris Wickham writes, “comparison is the closest that historians can get to testing, attempting to falsify, their own explanations”<sup>109</sup>.

However, comparison has its problems<sup>110</sup>, and as outlined by Wickham himself, these problems are mainly three. The first one is empirical and it is the difference of

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<sup>105</sup> BOAS, *The Limitations of the Comparative Method of Anthropology*, 1896; WELSKOPP, *Comparative History*, p.1; DETIENNE, *Comparer l'incomparable*, p. 17ss, where he makes a short history of the aversion to comparative studies.

<sup>106</sup> See the classical works of PIRENNE, *De la méthode comparative en histoire*, 1923 and BLOCH, *Pour une histoire comparée des sociétés européennes*, 1928, and a critical approach to both in VERHULST, *Marc Bloch and Henri Pirenne on Comparative History. A Biographical Note*, 2001.

<sup>107</sup> See also SULLIVAN, *Early Medieval Missionary Activity: A Comparative Study of Eastern and Western Methods*, 1954; SMITH, *Drudgery divine. On the comparison of early Christianities and the religions of late antiquity*, 1994; MORRIS and SCHEIDEL (eds). *The Dynamics of Ancient Empires: State Power from Assyria to Byzantium*, 2009; WICKHAM, *The Comparative Method and Early Medieval Religious Conversion*, 2016.

<sup>108</sup> DETIENNE, *Comparer l'incomparable*, p.9.

<sup>109</sup> WICKHAM, *Problems in doing comparative history*, p. 7.

<sup>110</sup> See also ANGERMANN, *Challenges of ambiguity doing comparative history*, 1991



source material available to each region and even historical period. The second problem is historiographical and has much to do with solipsism or else the realization of different national historiographical models that see, write and interpret history differently according to local interests, while the third problem is to know what can be compared, or else, the necessity to compare like with like<sup>111</sup>. Starting with this last problem, I believe that Christianisation is a process common and alike enough to permit a comparison. All the three regions analyzed in my study were subjected to the swift of religious belief that characterized the period known as the passage from Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages. This element alone provides enough parallels to allow the consideration of a comparative analysis. The second problem concerns the fact that I have to deal with multiple different research and historiographical traditions, but the variety of these readings allow a critical approach. Indeed, by following a comparative analysis I am able to individuate the potential weaknesses of these studies, where they tend to be partial and tendentious, as well and permitting to find their point of strength, originality and impartiality. Indeed, the variety of the bibliography used permits to be critical and selective at the same time. While, when doing a study based in one single reality one risks to be prey of solipsism, this is indeed the advantage of comparison, confronting and individuating the modes and tendencies of research traditions and try to bypass them. It is of course crucial to remember and to point out that not every comparison is meaningful and that anachronism should be avoided. Generalizations too broad would lead to a reification of the spheres of comparison, and it is important to remember that "Christianity and "paganism" are labels for dynamic and hybrid cultural phenomena whose particularities are relevant.

As for the problem of the difference of sources, this is a topic that is worth to say a few more words.

### **1.8 The problem of the sources**

As one can presume, the areas contemplated in this study provided a wide range of

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<sup>111</sup> WICKHAM, *Problems in doing comparative history*, pp. 8.

sources of different quality and nature. While for Gaul we had a profusion of writing documents of all kinds (sermons, ecclesiastical councils, histories and hagiographies), in Spain, a part from a fairly good amount of councils and some historical accounts, only Martin of Braga's treatise could be considered a kind of sermon and direct admonition against popular practices. In Britain the situation is more complicated, as Bede with his writings constitutes the main part of our documentation. The same can be said about the archaeological testimony, since the most abundant visible remains of a hybrid mentality are funerary structures (for obvious reasons of a primordial desire of eternity), and this kind of material is different in character, but also different in terms of meanings and its distribution in the three regions is unequal. Because of this huge discrepancy the type of information collected in each region and the apparent result provided by their analysis, they inspire us to think on very different realities going on considering the process of Christianisation in western provinces. However, we should always bear in mind that the absence of evidence does not mean evidence of absence. In Britain the majority of information from the first centuries of Christianisation comes from an aristocratic milieu. Nonetheless, it does not mean that in this region elites were the only social stratum that developed their own religiosity. It could be possible that the particular "top-bottom" conversion, compared to the other regions, favored a predominance of elite identities in religious life in the sources. After all, kings and nobles were the promoters of religious conversion and the first addressees, probably first motivated by political interests but no less engaged in diffusing and developing the new faith. Nothing more natural that their own values and identities was imprinted in the religious conception. In my analyses I acknowledge the limits of my comparison due to this discrepancy of sources, but I still believe in the possibility of building an advantageous analysis of the differences and similitudes on the various processes of Christianisation. After all, the different type of sources produced in these regions is another element that can attest their different religious and cultural development which is only possible when, in fact, comparing them.

It is important to stress that I am also aware of the difference of my sources in what concerns their discourse and narrative while making a comparative analysis.

Comparing information given in sermons with those of historiographical works, hagiographies and acts of councils is comparing material produced with different aims, different languages, to different audiences. As a consequence, different sources provide different kind of information: historiographical works most of the times were concerned with events regarding rulers and the elites; hagiographies would reflect very often particular political or religious interests, be based in stereotypical narratives and very often had a didactic role, which differ from sermons that aimed also to have a didactic role but could most of the times reflect actual behaviors found among the community of the preacher that wrote them. I am aware of this and will describe the sources, their meanings and aims as they appear in my study. For the sake of comparative analysis I need to overcome these differences, without however neglecting them. It is the role of the historian to, again, sort, select and interpret these sources with the awareness of their limits but the knowledge of what kind of information they can offer. As mentioned by Milis, “all knowledge is of course conditioned, qualitative and quantitative, by the prevailing system of transmission<sup>112</sup>”, which in our case is the clerical and monastic monopoly of written knowledge and production of information. It is also important to stress here that *“discourse could not simply be created by a ruling class, whose potential to manipulate or control it was limited. Of course, the hold on discourse was firmer in the Christian sphere where to say the wrong thing might be fatal; but in spite of the enormous efforts that went into codification and control of the Christian discourse, even their success was limited<sup>113</sup>”*.

In this way, my research is based on texts by bishops and preachers, canons of ecclesiastical councils, hagiography produced during the centuries in question, legal codes and literary works when available. What I seek in these sources are references to religious hybridity and influence of traditional practices, so I must be aware that in an ecclesiastical environment, in which these practices were considered immoral and deviations of the true faith, their eventual mention was probably made in a very partial way or sometimes only in passing. For this reason I depend on what the sources can provide, so I will concentrate my analysis on practices, but sometimes,

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<sup>112</sup> MILIS, *Introduction: the pagan middle ages – a contradiction in terms?* p. 3.

<sup>113</sup> POHL, *Social language, identities and the control of discourse.* p. 139-140.

depending on the sources, I will focus on religious structures as well. The reading of these documents must be done very carefully, with a constant awareness of their tendency to generalize, ridicule, manipulate and sometimes exaggerate for excess or paucity the information regarding Paganism and traditional practices<sup>114</sup>. David Frankfurter calls this behavior a “*discourse or ritual censure*”, in which the ecclesiastical sources tend to interpret and describe the deviations from the orthodox practices as “inappropriate behavior or gesture in a sanctioned context” or as “inappropriate ritual exploitation of sanctioned materials”<sup>115</sup>. When dealing with Ecclesiastical canons for example it is important to be aware that they sometimes give a specific description of cases in order to illuminate a particular ruling, but lack of contextual details. Indeed, this means that “we can rarely discern whether they are actually describing contemporary events or presenting a general, idealized vision of society, with little relation to objective ‘reality’”<sup>116</sup>.

Most of the time converters are seen in these sources as a passive group, that would change religion if a cleric would pray convincingly enough or if their king would tell them to do so. We rarely see traces of a certain difficulty or even resistance to Christianisation and there are plenty of reasons why the sources behave this way, and all of them have much to do with a sort of religious propaganda: to give a more optimistic image of the conversion as a way to enhance the power and the success of the Church.

We should also consider the general knowledge that churchmen had of paganism. As will be shown, many of these bishops were learned men with liturgical and even classical training, highly versed in ecclesiastical culture but presumably not much acquainted with the everyday beliefs and necessities of their communities. Information about paganism will be acquired in indirect ways, sometimes the only idea that they have of these practices are from the descriptions from the Bible, and only active missionaries such as Martin of Tours, who unfortunately did not leave

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<sup>114</sup> CHUVIN, *Cronaca degli ultimi pagani*, 2008; SOTINEL, *La disparition des lieux de culte païens en Occident*, 2004.

<sup>115</sup> FRANKFURTER, *Beyond magic and superstition* p. 257.

<sup>116</sup> WOOD J., *Elites and baptism: religious strategies of distinction in Visigothic Spain*, p. 7. See also NASCIMENTO, *A “religião dos rústicos”*, p. 325.

any personal account of it, would have had direct contact with pre-Christian practices. Sometimes authors mention practices that they considered pagan, but a closer analysis can individuate these descriptions as practices that may once have been religious, but in the contexts in which they are presented, are possibly devoid of any religious meaning<sup>117</sup>.

Harmening in his book *Superstitio* of 1979 says that Caesarius of Arles was one of the most copied authors of the Early Middle Ages, which resulted in a misconception of later historiography about paganism in this period. According to him, it is not possible to use these sources since they were not reflecting real situations and the insistence with which the sources repeat the same descriptions and reprimands means only that they were applying repetitions of stereotypical formulas without any connection with reality<sup>118</sup>. However, we should not completely dismiss the information given by the sources because they were probably reflecting a *topos*. The authors used these formulas probably acknowledging that certain practices were reproduced by people, but as we mentioned above, these authors very often suffered of a general ignorance of actual and specific practices, which means that they were relying on pre-fixed models. The problem of the historian is then the impossibility to recognize but also to exclude the correspondence between these *topoi* and reality<sup>119</sup>. Indeed, as it will be clear through my analysis, it is not my intention to try to decipher the real existence of each specific practice described, but the fact that some sort of hybridity was being practiced, with features that we cannot know with certainty because our sources chose to be silent about it. However, what is important here to acknowledge is that, as said by Mark Bloch: “above all, a lie is in any case a testimony”<sup>120</sup>, and if preachers and bishops were resorting to fake, or inaccurate information, this most definitely has a meaning that we should investigate. We will see in a further chapter, when Isidore of Seville presents many names of pagan *magi*

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<sup>117</sup> WOOD, *The pagans and the others*, p. 4. See also DINIZ, *Paganism and traditional practices in the sermons of Caesarius of Arles*, 2016.

<sup>118</sup> HARMENING, *Superstitio. Überlieferungs- und theoriegeschichtliche Untersuchungen zur kirchlichtheologischen Aberglaubensliteratur des Mittelalters*, 1979.

<sup>119</sup> KÜNZEL et CHEVY. *Paganisme, syncrétisme et culture religieuse populaire au haut Moyen Âge. Réflexions de méthode*, p. 1058.

<sup>120</sup> BLOCH, *Apologie pour l'histoire*, p. 98.

in his *Etymologiae* that can be found scattered in previous sources from all over Europe, this could be his stereotypical “invention” of groups, but did their classifications as such, their great variety and specialization mean something in itself? The repetitions could be, for this reason, a kind of testimony of the struggle of the church against these practices.

Hagiographies are a type of sources that can have a variety of readers and for this reason have a variety of intentions. For example, there are some lives of saints that were commissioned by kings with the ambition to be a sort of Mirror for princes or even to the common people<sup>121</sup>. Some other lives have an explicitly politic purpose and try to legitimate a certain monarchy instead of another, celebrating their religious qualities and linking them to important saints. The same can be said of an ecclesiastical milieu, when a diocese or a bishop wants to legitimate their own authority towards another territory using a life of a saint to do so<sup>122</sup>. It is also known that hagiographies often followed models, certain patterns that were widely diffused and gave the basics to many hagiographers to build saints’ lives that were intended to suit local necessities, only needing to substitute names and crucial events<sup>123</sup>. These documents were designed to present the saint as an example of Christian virtue, which means that historical accuracy is not the priority of this literature and “biblical models, stereotypical features, mythological accounts and idealized presentation” generally prevails over actual facts<sup>124</sup>.

On what concerns those information that are often copied and diffused it is difficult to assess their reliability. Gurevich suggests a method to evaluate these stereotypical sources in order to identify what could be considered useful to the historian in terms of reliable testimonies of paganism: one should compare the texts that bring information about a practice, and when these texts have no dependence from one

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<sup>121</sup> On the social impact of hagiographies specifically on Frankish milieu, see KREINER, *The social life of Hagiography in Merovingian Kingdom*, 2014.

<sup>122</sup> WOOD, *The missionary life*, p. 248ss.

<sup>123</sup> An interesting and wide collection of studies about hagiographies and their narrative approaches is CONERMANN and RHEINGANS (eds.), *Narrative Pattern and Genre in Hagiographic Life Writing : Comparative Perspectives from Asia to Europe*, 2014.

<sup>124</sup> KLANICZAY, *Hagiography and historical narrative*, p. 111, who makes a brief presentation of the use of hagiographies, their meaning and relevance to historical research.

another, they probably provide truthful description. Another criterion concerns the use of certain words: when we find, among a series of words belonging to a so called stereotyped tradition a term that does not appear in previous texts, then it is most probable that this word was used by the author to describe a practice known by him and currently used in his own time. The use of a word of vulgar language could then indicate the knowledge of a local practice. These deviations to the well-known formulas can be an attestation of their legitimacy, for example Burchard of Worms, who uses the word *holda* to designate the women who are retained to possess magical powers. This word, probably used in popular language could only attest its use by the people, since it does not appear in previous sources that describe similar practices<sup>125</sup>. Related to this is the matter of rarity: something mentioned just once has a higher probability to be a real practice than something mentioned so many times, for it could be the testimony of something with a specific and local existence. The contrary however is not an immediate sign of invention, as indeed an insistent mention of something can actually denounce its popularity and tenacity. After applying these criteria to our documents we will be able to see that some sources that are frequently criticized as devoid of relation to reality can reveal a certain degree of originality. However, as mentioned above, even the choice of writers to copy and reproduce certain formulas can reveal much of their religious and even political inclinations, their aims and what results they expected to achieve with this behavior.

As for what concerns rarity, some may argue that it in itself is not a criterion to diagnose a real practice, but the opposite, being possibly an invention, an error of copying or interpretation or even an interpolation. For this reason the comparative analyses, the confrontation with other kind of written sources and with material evidence can help to shed some light into this matter. In any case, any source cannot be taken isolated from its contexts, and when historians decide to give credit to the information that is given by a medieval author, it is based in the evaluation of a whole range of testimonies and the dialogue between them.

Since the purposes of this work have been specified, and the methodological base has

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<sup>125</sup> GUREVICH, *Op. cit.*, p. 83-4.

been clarify, we should now draw our attention to the study of each single reality separately first, starting with Gaul, the region with the most diffused and early process of Christianisation of this study.



## Gaul

*Numquam tu, Romane, quamvis haec frequenter taxes, consuetudines nostras evellere poteris, sed solemnia nostra sicut actenus fecimus, perpetuo semperque frequentabimus, nec ullus hominum erit, qui priscos atque gratissimos possit nobis umquam prohibere ludos.*

*Vitae Eligii – Episcopi Noviomagensis, Liber II, 20. (MGH, SRM 4 p. 711)*

### Introduction

The process of Christianisation along with the development of Christian religion in Gaul is a matter that has been widely studied as shown by the abundant bibliography about this subject<sup>126</sup>. The sources available for this region are equally abundant and the historian cannot but find himself spoiled for choice. From legal codes and decrees to letters, literary sources or abundant ecclesiastical material, we have a profusion of documents whose exhaustive analysis would be impossible considering the dimensions of this research. Since my objective is to undertake a comparative study between three regions through various types of sources, I am in the situation where I need to choose among numerous possibilities and determine which kind of material to examine. Consequently, I have decided to focus on sermons and study some hagiographical works. I will also analyze ecclesiastical councils when in direct relationship with the sermons and sources taken into consideration. When possible, I will concentrate my analysis on the southern part of Gaul, for I consider this region as a good starting point: compared to the other regions considered in this study, the ancient *Narbonensis* was one of the most Romanized regions of the Roman Empire outside Italy, as well as the most fertile land for the implementation of Christianity. Furthermore, this province is home to Caesarius of Arles, one of our most interesting sources for what concerns the

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<sup>126</sup> A few titles: MÂLE, *La fin du paganisme en Gaule et les plus ancienne basiliques chrétiennes*, 1950; MAGNOU-NORTIER, *La christianisation de la Gaule (VIe-VIIIe siècles). Esquisse d'un bilan et orientation bibliographique*, 1996; PIETRI, *Aux origines du christianisme en Gaule (II<sup>e</sup>-VI<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, 1997.

remaining paganism during the Late Antique and Early Middle Ages. His sermons, life and councils are a valuable source and account for the largest part of the material we will analyze here.

A work about the Christianisation in Gaul cannot leave aside Gregory of Tours and his influence to the construction of a religious thinking in Early Medieval Christendom<sup>127</sup>. Gregory was responsible to write the history of Franks, but dedicated his labors also to the stories of saints, martyrs and their miracles. Our focus here is on local religiosity and religious crafting and for this reason we need to look into Gregory's mention of popular piety and the influence of people in the religious life<sup>128</sup>. However, the accounts of paganism in Gregory of Tours are a complicated affair, since he seems to use a lot of biblical citations when talking about this matter and his descriptions of practices of idol worshiping for example are quite difficult to believe. *"Gregory had good reason to write as he did. He was little concerned with the survival of paganism in Gaul. But he was deeply worried by the ease with which alternative versions of Christianity sprang up whenever he and his Catholic colleagues relaxed their vigilance"*<sup>129</sup>. For this reason he wrote about relics, martyrs and their sanctuaries and the miracles made by saints in their cathedrals. His intent was to bring the paradise to earth and place these wonderful achievements and their "magic" into people's vicinity. He understood the importance of this kind of narrative to the ordinary faithful and when he wrote about trees that grow on saint's tombs becoming themselves sacred he was somehow appropriating those elements that were so dear to people, giving them a Christian imprint.

The focus will be then the Christianisation of the countryside and the construction of a lay religion. For this reason I will let the matter of royal conversion play a marginal role here, without of course completely neglecting it<sup>130</sup>. I have chosen to concentrate my efforts on what could be called a popular religion, according to the definition

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<sup>127</sup> See MURRAY, *A companion to Gregory of Tours*, 2016.

<sup>128</sup> See BAILEY, *Within and Without: Lay People and the Church in Gregory of Tours' Miracle Stories*, 2012.

<sup>129</sup> Idem, p. 161.

<sup>130</sup> For a broad analysis of this subject see PRINZ, *Aristocracy and Christianity in Merovingian Gaul, an essay*, 1975 and DUMEZIL, *La Royauté Franque et la christianisation des Gaules: le "moment" Chilbert Ier (511-558)*, 2009.

already discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation. When possible, archaeological material will complement the information given by the sources, but will also give insights on practices and behaviors that are not present in the written material.

## 2.1 Arriving of Christianity

The early Christianisation of Gaul was described by many, one of them being Caesarius, who believed in the precocious arrival of the new religion on this piece of land<sup>131</sup>. According to him, the first missionary to arrive in Gaul was a disciple of Paul although archaeology and epigraphy do not seem to confirm this level of antiquity of Christianity in the region. Caesarius probably based his conjectures on two documents attributed to the apostle. One of these is a letter to the Romans written in Corinth between 56 and 57 AD in which he expressed his desire to go to Spain. Before arriving, he had to pass through Jerusalem and then Rome but was imprisoned in the latter city for about five years. After this period, Paul returned to the East but we do not know if he ever made it to Spain. To reach these lands by sea, the apostle would have had to stop in Marseille or Narbonne, but these are only suppositions<sup>132</sup>.

However, the Christian presence in Gaul is doubtless older than in many other occidental provinces, although an organized church with parishes and efforts in conversion only appeared in the second part of the 2nd century, not to mention the church of Lyon built around 150, that is the first known church in the West aside from Rome<sup>133</sup>. Eusebius of Cesarea<sup>134</sup> presented a letter from 177 AD written by the Christians of Lyon and addressed to the community of Asia and Phrygia in the days following the persecutions led by Emperor Marcus Aurelius, which is indeed the first document of the Gallic church. Eusebius is also the source of information about the eastern origin of the first bishops of Lion and Vienne, and this letter also sheds light on the difficulties of Christians among pagans which would date the first

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<sup>131</sup> SC. 172. p. 138

<sup>132</sup> GRIFFE, *La Gaule Chrétienne à l'époque romaine*, v.1. p. 16.

<sup>133</sup> GRIFFE, *Op. Cit.*, p.25.

<sup>134</sup> *Ecclesiastical History*, book V, chapters I and II-

conversions between 175 and 180 AD. This document also reveals that the religiosity professed by the people was heavily based on Oriental and official Roman cults to Rome and Augustus<sup>135</sup>. Another information that we can learn from this documentation is the link between the first churches in Gaul and the Eastern Church, its first missionaries being probably attracted to the big commercial centre that was Marseille. The Mediterranean coast and the Rhone Valley were areas of widespread evangelization compared with the northern Gaul where the process of Romanization was less consistent<sup>136</sup>. Nonetheless, in the third century, the face of Christianisation in the Narbonensis changed as missionaries were coming from Rome according to Gregory of Tours. Known as the “apostles of Gaul”, these missionaries were seven bishops with the task to reestablish the Christian communities dissolved after the persecutions of Decius<sup>137</sup>.

There are not many testimonies of martyrs in Gaul during the persecutions of the 3rd and 4th centuries<sup>138</sup>. Apparently, this was due to a reduced Christian community, composed only by a small number of bishoprics. However, in August 314 a council held in Arles gathered 16 attendees among bishops and representatives of dioceses. This number gives valuable information on the religious development of Gaul and presumably, the number of bishops had doubled by the end of the fourth century. In spite of this, we know that Christians were still a minority in the region and we can assume that so far, the countryside had not been touched by a relevant Christianisation, based in an exiguous presence of rural churches. In any case, according to the number of bishops and episcopal sees from the region of the Gallia Narbonensis, it is possible to say without a doubt that the majority of the converted

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<sup>135</sup> PIETRI, *Aux origines du christianisme en Gaule (IIe-Vie siècle)*, pp. 393.

<sup>136</sup> FLETCHER, *The conversion of Europe*, 1998. p. 100.

<sup>137</sup> Gregory of Tours, *Historiae* I, 30. (...) *Ait enim: Sub Decio et Grato consolibus, sicut fidei recordationem retentur, primum ac summum Tholosana civitas sanctum Saturninum habere coeperat sacerdotem. Hic ergo missi sunt: Turonicis Catianus episcopus, Arelatensibus Trophimus episcopus, Narbonae Paulos episcopus, Tolosae Saturninus episcopus, Parisiacis Dionisius episcopus, Arvernensibus Stremonius episcopus, Lemovicinis Martialis est destinatus episcopus.*

<sup>138</sup> On the situation of Gallic church at the end of the IVth century see PALANQUE, *Les dissensions des Églises des Gaules à la fin du IVe siècle et la date du concilie de Turin*, 1953.

were concentrated in this region<sup>139</sup>.

By the end of the fifth century, the Province of Gaul was divided between Bretons and Saxons in the west, Franks in the north, Burgundians and Alamans in the east and Visigoths in the southwest, while Provence was still under the direct control of the west Roman government of Ravenna<sup>140</sup>. Among those who were not Arians, paganism was the rule until the conversion of Clovis in 508 along with 'more than three thousand of his army<sup>141</sup>'. After that, apart from the local Roman population that was already Christian, the new religion also started to grow among the so-called barbarians.

## 2.2 Christianisation of the countryside

In the second part of the fourth century, the Gallic church could count on the valuable contribution from Martin of Tours on the work of diffusion of the Christian faith. Just like any hagiographical work, the story of his life, told by Sulpicius Severus, should be interpreted with caution. It is nonetheless a valuable evidence of Martin's behavior regarding the so-called *rustici* and the matter of evangelization in the countryside. Through these writings, we discover the first accounts of the founding of rural churches, an important circumstance that provided the means to achieve the conversion of the majority of the population that lived in rural areas and still followed the old cults.

Sulpicius narrated that Martin was born in 316 in Sabaria and spent his childhood in the region of Pavia in northern Italy. The son of a tribune, he was destined to a military life that brought him to Amiens. At the age of eighteen, Martin was baptized and according to Sulpicius, his conversion was driven by a vision. He abandoned the military life at the age of forty and was called in 371 to occupy the see of Tours, where he died in 397. Since before the last quarter of the fourth century, it seems that the Christian initiative had very seldom touched the rural communities besides the

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<sup>139</sup> On the spread of Christianity in the province of Gaul, see HEN, *Culture and religion in Merovingian Gaul AD 481-751*, pp. 7-20.

<sup>140</sup> KLINGSHIRN, *Caesarius of Arles*. 2004, p.16.

<sup>141</sup> Gregory of Tours, *Historia Francorum*, II, 31.

region of Narbonensis<sup>142</sup>. Sulpicius said: *et vere ante Martinum pauci admodum, immo pene nulli in illis regionibus Christi nomen receperant* <sup>143</sup>.

Martin is known for his dedication to the destruction of numerous temples and pagan sanctuaries<sup>144</sup>. Supported by the legislation of Gratian and Theodosius, bishops and thus Martin as well could devote themselves to the destruction of ancient religions' cult places. In the *Vita Martini*, Sulpicius informs us about the villagers' resistance against Martin's destructive fury while sustaining that after the revelation of the truth and sanctity of the bishop's words, the people would inevitably accept the conversion:

*Plerumque autem contradicentibus sibi rusticis, ne fana eorum destrueret, ita praedicatione sancta gentilium animos mitigabat, ut luce eis veritatis ostensa, ipsi sua templa subverterent*<sup>145</sup>.

While his evangelizing and Christianisation work was undeniably important, Martin's character and story affected Christianity dramatically not only in this province but also in the entire Western world<sup>146</sup>. It is true that Martin's successful reputation is also due to the diffusion of the work of Sulpicius who wrote about his life in detail<sup>147</sup>. Thus, the popularity of Martin has overshadowed the other clerics of this period whose impact in the communities of Gaul is difficult to measure compared to that of the most famous bishop of Tours. Another contemporary bishop to Martin was Victricius of Rouen to whom are attributed important missionary efforts in his diocese. His life and work of evangelization is known thanks to Paulinus of Nola who also left a testimony of other members of the church of Gaul in this period<sup>148</sup>. The life of Saint Martin was also the first life of a saint written in the

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<sup>142</sup> GRIFFE, *Op. Cit.*, 284.

<sup>143</sup> Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Martini* XIII.

<sup>144</sup> On Martin's confrontation with peasants see GIARDINA, *Banditi e santi: un aspetto del folklore Gallico tra Tarda antichità e medioevo*. 1983.

<sup>145</sup> Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Martini* XV.

<sup>146</sup> See FERREIRO, *Martinian veneration in Gaul ad Iberia: Martin of Tours and Martin of Braga*, 2009.

<sup>147</sup> About the diffusion of the *Vita Martini* see FONTAINE, *Sources Chrétiennes*, 133, pp. 49-51.

<sup>148</sup> See MUSSET, *De saint Victrice à saint Ouen: la christianisation de la province de Rouen d'après l'hagiographie*, 1976.

west<sup>149</sup>, which is a further reason for its success and its role as a model for the successive hagiographies.

We know therefore that the Christianisation of rural areas was in transit in the fourth century. In 314, the Council of Arles had already mentioned the existence of clerics outside of the city's center<sup>150</sup>, but archeology has not yet provided evidence of Christian rural structures for this period. It is also assumed that most of the religious life, especially baptism, would develop in the town church in the presence of the bishop<sup>151</sup>.

The initial decision to establish a church belonged primarily to the bishop. However, the practice tells us that some small religious structures were built by landowners within the limits of their possessions, where baptisms were also performed, yet the spread of rural parishes apparently remained rather weak at the beginning of the sixth century. The majority of the faithful worship developed in private buildings and oratories, and parish attendance was exceptional and limited to the major liturgical feasts that took place during the year<sup>152</sup>. The councils, along with archeology, confirmed the existence of private oratories on the domains of landowners for the celebration of Masses for the *familia*. These were buildings of modest size whose main objective was to meet the distribution of the Eucharist, but despite their small size and private character, these altars were an important instrument for the Christianisation of the *rustici*. The fourth century was then marked by the construction of ecclesiastical structures by the laity, originally with private functions and objectives, but which subsequently served the bishops' needs. Born in this century, the phenomenon of laical patronage was to be even more pronounced along the following century.

We now need to investigate the proportion of the rural population converted at this time. There were regional variations in the sixth century during which the Provençal

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<sup>149</sup> FONTAINE, *Op. cit.* p. 19.

<sup>150</sup> « De his quoque qui quibuscumque locis ordinati fuerint ministri, in ipsis locis perseverent ». *Conciles gaulois du IV<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 44-45.

<sup>151</sup> CODOU et COLIN, *La christianisation des campagnes (IV<sup>e</sup>-VIII<sup>e</sup> S.)*, p. 59.

<sup>152</sup> Idem, p.73.

part of the province had a greater amount of devoted than the south-west. In Aquitaine for example, even if private altars attested to a high percentage of people belonging to the *élite* converted to Christianity, the conversion of the masses took place quite late between the late seventh and perhaps even the ninth century, in which period we see the development of larger structures for the reception of a wider audience. In the western regions of the province, the fact that baptisteries were almost absent is another indication of the late conversion<sup>153</sup>.

The ecclesiastical documentation in Gaul provides an important source for the struggles of the church against local religion and traditional practices as attested by the aforementioned first council held in this province in 314 in Arles<sup>154</sup>. Through its canons, we can perceive the characteristics of a widely mixed society, as indicates canon 12 that condemns the marriages between Christian women with pagan men<sup>155</sup>, the same sort of condemnation that was already present in the council of Elvira at the beginning of the century, as we may see in the next chapter.

The fourth century could be considered to be a period of transition in which Christianity was establishing its roots but was probably not the religion of the majority of the population. Indeed, paganism was officially and definitely condemned only in 437<sup>156</sup>. The council of Valence of 374 rebuked baptized Christian who practiced sacrifices but did not prevent them to participate in the Mass. The fate of those people was to endure penitence until their death<sup>157</sup>.

We also find an explicit condemnation of paganism and traditional practices in the Council of Vannes held between 462 and 468, in which the so-called *sortes sanctorum* were mentioned<sup>158</sup>. The same canon with only a few alterations is to be found in the council of Agdes in 506 that was presided by Caesarius of Arles. This council was

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<sup>153</sup> See GUION, *Les premiers baptistères des Gaules (IVe-VIIIe siècles)*, 2000.

<sup>154</sup> On Gallic church councils see CHAMPAGNE et SZRAMKIEWICZ, *Recherches sur les conciles des temps mérovingiens*, 1971.

<sup>155</sup> *De puellis fidelibus quae gentilibus iunguntur, placuit ut aliquanto tempore a communione separentur*, SC 241, p. 52

<sup>156</sup> CTh 16, 10, 25

<sup>157</sup> Canon 3, SC 241, p. 106.

<sup>158</sup> *Concilia Galliae*, A. 314–A. 506 (CCL 148:156).



mostly concerned with pastoral issues and many of its canons were just a confirmation of previous councils so as to remind the clergy and the people of the rules that are frequently neglected<sup>159</sup>. Canon 21 states that important celebrations should be held in the church<sup>160</sup> and the obligation to attend these services was probably meant to keep people from engaging in pagan festivities. Caesarius, as we will see, condemned many traditional celebrations in his sermons, such as the Calends of January or the habit of bathing in fountains on Saint John's day<sup>161</sup>, in which people would attend Christian celebrations in the church, but then would go to rivers and sources to dance and bathe. Over time, this festivity had grown even bigger and in the tenth century in northern Italy, people were still bathing in fountains as denounced by Atto of Vercelli<sup>162</sup>. It seems clear that both Christian and traditional practices were inextricably linked in the collective mind. Thus, a normal behavior would be to attend the mass for the saints' celebration to afterwards participate into the customary feasts.

Saint John's day was celebrated on the 24th of June and it was instituted close to the ancient feast of the summer solstice. Together with the birthday of Jesus Christ established near the winter solstice, the Church tried to cover the major pagan celebrations related to the seasons<sup>163</sup>. However, it is possible that even if some gestures originated on pagan practices had remained, their meaning was now different. In the countryside, people would bathe to celebrate Saint John's day so as

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<sup>159</sup> KLINGSHIRN, *Caesarius of Arles: the making of a christian community in Late Antique Gaul*. p. 98.

<sup>160</sup> 21. *Si quis etiam extra parrochias, in quibus legitimus est ordinariusque conuentus, oratorium in agro habere uoluerit, reliquis festiuitatibus ut ibi missas teneant propter fatigationem familiae iusta ordinatione permittimus; Pascha uero, Natale Domini, Epiphaniam, Ascensionem Domini, Pentecosten et Natale sancti Joannis Baptistae, uel si qui maximi dies in festiuitatibus habentur, non nisi in ciuitatibus aut in parrochiis teneant. Clerici uero, si qui in his festiuitatibus quos supra diximus, in oratoriis nisi iubente aut permittente episcopo missas facere aut tenere uoluerint, a communione pellantur.* CCSL CXLVIII, p. 202-3.

<sup>161</sup> *Sermo 33, 4 (...)* *ne ullus in festiuitate sancti Iohannis aut in fontibus aut in palandibus aut influminibus nocturnis aut matutinis horis se lavare praesumat: quia ista infelix consuetudo adhuc de paganorum obseruatione remansit.*

<sup>162</sup> *Cognoscat igitur prudential uestra malam de tam gloriosa solemnitate crebis in locis inoleuisse consuetudinem, ut quedam meretriculae ecclesias et official derelinquant, et passim per plateas et compita, fonts etiam et rura pernactantes, choros statuunt, conticula component, sortes dedicant, et quidquid alicui evenire debeat in talibus simulant augurari. Quarum superstitio adeo gignit insaniam, ut herbas uel fronds baptizare presumant, et exinde compatres commatres audeant uocitare, suisque domibus suspensas diu in postmodum quasi religionis causa student conservare* (Sermo XIII: PL 134, 859 and follow)

<sup>163</sup> HEIM, *Solstice d'hiver e solstice d'été dans la prédication chrétienne du Ve siècle*. 1999.

to remember their own baptism and that of Jesus<sup>164</sup>, while Caesarius would regard the practice as a Celtic custom celebrating the onset of summer<sup>165</sup>.

Still in the council of Agde we find canon 42, which was concerned with the consultation of auguries and the practice of divination. The condemnation is slightly different from the one present in the council of Vannes, now not only clerics but also laymen are accused of making use of these wicked practices with the intention of predicting the future<sup>166</sup>. Apparently, the first mention of the practice of reading the future using the scriptures appeared in a letter by Saint Augustine to a layman named Januarius, in which the bishop reproaches *qui de paginis evangelicis sortes legunt*<sup>167</sup>. The ecclesiastical interpretation of this practice seems to have never found consensus. To Augustine and the bishops of Gaul, the practice seemed dangerous (although Augustine found it less damaging than the pagan practices of divination), while it did not seem too harmful to Gregory of Tours. He describes how king Clovis used divination to inquire into God's will at the occasion of the war against the Visigoths<sup>168</sup>. Historiography does not reach agreement either since some interpretations considered *sortes sanctorum* and *sortes biblicae* to be the same thing while others saw it as a special kind of divinatory text<sup>169</sup>.

Divination and lots appear again in the council of Orleans of 511, the first big council of the Frankish church and called by Clovis himself. In canon 30, we see clerics, monks and laymen being reminded of the consequences of persisting in consulting

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<sup>164</sup> According to Rousselle these practices would be the same that were recommended by *Marcellus* in his book on the medication to promote hygiene and as therapy. See ROUSSELLE, *Le sage-femme et le thaumaturge*, pp. 266-267.

<sup>165</sup> See BENOIT, *Le rite de l'eau dans la fête du solstice d'été en Provence et en Afrique*. 1935.

<sup>166</sup> *Ac ne id fortasse videatur omissum, quod maxime fidem catholicae religionis infestat, quod aliquanti clerici, sive laici, student auguris, et sub nomine fictae religionis, per eas quas sanctorum sortes vocant, divinationis scientiam profitentur, aut quarumcumque scripturarum inspectione futura promittunt: hoc quicumque clericus vellaicus, detectus fuerit, vel consulere, vel docere, ab ecclesia habeatur extraneus.* SIRMOND, *Conciliorum Galliae, tam editorum quam ineditorum collectio, temporum ordine digesta. Ab anno Christi 177 ad ann. 1563.* 1789, p. 790.

<sup>167</sup> Augustine, ep. 55.20.37 (CSEL 34.2:212).

<sup>168</sup> *Historiae* 2.37, MGH SRM 1.1:86.

<sup>169</sup> In particular KLINGSHIRN, see his *Defining the Sortes Sanctorum : Gibbon, Du Cange, and Early Christian Lot Divination*, 2002.

the *sortes, quas mentiuntur esse sanctorum*<sup>170</sup>. In Eauze's council of 551, incantations are present again although the practice and its purpose are less clear<sup>171</sup>. In another council, this time held in Auxerre at an uncertain date between 561 and 605, the *sortes sanctorum* are classified together with magicians and fortune tellers in canon 4<sup>172</sup>. The synod of Auxerre provides numerous other references to practices considered as pagan inheritance, but we will get there later. The point here is that after a frequent appearance in the late fifth and sixth century, it is reasonable to regard the practice of divination using the bible or any other sort of Christian texts as a kind of hybrid religious habit. From being used by monks and lay people in their daily affairs to being used by a king in his war decisions, it seems clear that this aspect of religiosity has much to do with a general need for answers. People were used to numerous practices concerning the prediction of the future in traditional and pagan religions, so being suddenly deprived of these by Christianity might have appeared to the contemporaries as a rupture of old customs. We will see how Caesarius insisted many times in his sermons with the consultation of diviners and even provided a long list of practitioners of these magical arts. The importance and popularity of these habits seems then very clear<sup>173</sup>.

### 2.3 Caesarius and Christianity in southern Gaul

In the first century BC, Pliny wrote that the Provence was the most Romanized region of Gaul, not only for its geographical proximity to Italy, but also for the similarity shared by all areas of Mediterranean climate and geography<sup>174</sup>. Yet in the

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<sup>170</sup> *Si quis clericus, monachus, saecularis diuinationem uel auguria crediderit obseruanda, uel sortes quas mentiuntur esse sanctorum quibuscumque putauerint intimandas, cum his qui iis crediderint ab ecclesiae communionem pellantur* SC 353 p. 88.

<sup>171</sup> *De incantatoribus uel eis, qui instinctu diaboli cornua praecantare dicuntur, si superiores forte personae sunt, a liminibus excommunicatione pellantur ecclesiae, humiliores uero personae uel serui correpti a iudice fustigentur, ut si se timore Dei corrigi forte dissimulant, uelut scriptum est, uerberibus corrigantur.* SC 353, p. 332.

<sup>172</sup> *Non licet ad sortilegos uel auguria respicere nec ad caragios nec ad sortes, quas sanctorum uocant, uel quas de ligno aut de pane faciunt, aspicere, nisi, quaecumque homo facere uult, in nomine Domini faciat.* CS 353, p. 488.

<sup>173</sup> The *sortes sanctorum* are mentioned in the following penitentials as well: *Poenitentiale Bobbiense* 19,23,26; *Poenitentiale Burgundense* 20, 24, 28; *Poenitentiale Parisiense* 12, 16, 20. These references are from HEN, *Culture and religion in Merovingian Gaul*. p.184. For another discussion of these practices see FILOTAS, *Pagan survivals, superstitions and popular culture*, p. 245.

<sup>174</sup> Plinio, *Naturalis Historiae*, liber III, 31.

large and crowded sixth century Arles, Caesarius found an environment where the native culture had slowly changed under the impact of Hellenization and Romanization, and only in the fifth and sixth centuries, this culture began to alter mainly under the more stinging and direct pressure of Christianisation<sup>175</sup>. It is important to recall however, that Romanization did not imply the cancellation of local identities and religions; on the contrary, it promoted the reinterpretation and transformation of old symbols into a new concept. Starting from this principle, we can interpret Christianisation in this same light, as we will see by the end of this dissertation.

Nominated bishop of Arles in 502, Caesarius was known as a man of action. His activities as bishop would go from presiding councils and founding monasteries to writing an extended collection of treatises and sermons<sup>176</sup>, some of which we will now analyze. He wrote more than 250 sermons that were diffused by an atelier of copyists in Arles as well as by himself, who used to give collections of his sermons to fellow clerics<sup>177</sup>. From there on, his sermons saw a great success and their impact was extremely significant. He influenced preachers all over the Christendom and is often seen as a model for all his successors.

Among this enormous pastoral production, about 13 sermons refer directly and specifically to the practices that Caesarius believed to be pagan and an indeterminate number refer to them in passing<sup>178</sup>. The bishop uses several terms to define these habits, some examples being: *sacrilegas superstitiones*<sup>179</sup>, *temptationes diaboli*<sup>180</sup>, *lugenda*

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<sup>175</sup> KLINGSHIRN, *Caesarius of Arles*. 2004. p. 34.

<sup>176</sup> See BERTRAND, DELAGE, FEVRIER, GUYON et VOGUE, *Césaire d'Arles et la christianisation de la Provence. Initiations aux Pères de l'église*, 1994.

<sup>177</sup> KLINGSHIRN, *Caesarius of Arles: Life, testament, letters*. 1994. p. xi.

<sup>178</sup> Considering his entire production, the number could seem insignificant according to Hen in his *Paganism and superstitions in the time of Gregory of Tours* (Boston, 2002). The question however is not how pagan or how Christian Caesarius' community was. His listeners were undoubtedly converted Christians, and it is not my intention here to argue otherwise. What is relevant is how Christians would use traditional practices and gestures in their everyday life. The number of sermons can be small when compared with the body of his writings, but the insistence with which these reprimands are repeated cannot be dismissed.

<sup>179</sup> *Serm.* 52.1

<sup>180</sup> *Serm.* 52.2

*persuasio*<sup>181</sup>, *paganorum sacrilegas consuetudines*<sup>182</sup> and so on.

In each of these 13 sermons, Caesarius addresses numerous topics, meaning that many sermons often repeat the reprimands already present in previous ones<sup>183</sup>. However, the majority are directed against seeking advice from magicians, fortune-tellers and relate to the use of amulets and potions used for healing. In fact, 7 sermons (13, 14, 50, 51, 52, 54, and 184) mention their use. Temple attendance, sacred trees and fountains as well as idolatry are mentioned in five sermons (13, 14, 19, 53 and 54); the same number of sermons deals with the observance of certain days of the week (13, 19, 52, 54 and 193), with special reference to Thursday. The practice of sacrifices and feasts is mentioned in three sermons (13, 19 and 54), and the use of abortive methods is attested in two (19 and 52). The rebuke regarding superstitions about eclipses of the moon is found in two sermons (13 and 52), and the same number covers the celebration of the Calends of January (192 and 193). Only one sermon covers the habit of bathing in fountains in commemoration of St. John's day (33), the habit of naming saints and angels when toasting (43), dancing in front of the church (13) and the observation of bird flight as means of divination (54).

Some elements on the list of bad habits considered to be pagan and of traditional heritage seem to belong to popular customs, without necessarily being connected to religion. Such is the case of dances, toasts and eclipses of the moon. Although deriving from pagan beliefs and habits, other practices such as the use of amulets and magical remedies, the observation of bird flight or being attentive to activities in certain days of the week appear to have been devoid of religious value, being simply habits belonging to popular wisdom in the contexts specified by Caesarius. However, we should pay attention to those practices most frequently mentioned by the Bishop and we should try to see their relevance and their meaning and why these were often associated with Christian practices.

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<sup>181</sup> *Serm.* 52.4

<sup>182</sup> *Serm.* 193.2

<sup>183</sup> In this dissertation I refer to these sermons according the numbers given by G. Morin in *CCSL* 103, 104 and maintained by Delage in *Sources Chrétienne*, vol. 175, 176.

### 2.3.1 Fortune-tellers and magical remedies

Most of the sermons that mention magicians and fortune-tellers are linked to magical cures. Generally, we notice in Caesarius' sermons the constant presence of the following: *praecantatores, caraios, aruspices, sortilegos* and *divinos*.

Some of these names can be found in Isidore's *Etymologiae*, written in the seventh century by the Bishop of Seville, as it contains a classification of those he considered to be experts in performing rituals and whom he generically calls *magi*<sup>184</sup>. We will talk more thoroughly about Isidore in the next chapter, but we can already wonder whether Isidore's taxonomy and Caesarius' list were based on the knowledge of the practices present in their region during their time, or if they consisted of lists of past *magi* that no longer corresponded to reality, or even, both. Could charmers, sorcerers, soothsayers, seers or oracles have been active again in Arles, supposing that they each had a specialty? Did the population in Gaul still resort to fortune-tellers and sorcerers as witnessed not only in the sermons of Caesarius but also in many other sources<sup>185</sup>? The terms used by the bishop arouse curiosity and make us wonder whether they belonged to the pagan vocabulary of Arles or if they were simply handed down as a tradition. However, the big concern with these practices seen in the ecclesiastical legislation demonstrates that people were probably engaging in divination and sortilege to predict the future, but the high degree of specialisation detailed in the sources still needs confirmation.

Besides consulting magicians and fortune-tellers in order to know the future, these sorceresses were very often consulted in case of illness. According to Caesarius, in this case, a person had to immediately rush to the church. Indeed, the Bishop says in Sermon 13:

*Videte, fratres, quia qui in infirmitate ad ecclesiam currit, et corporis sanitatem recipere, et peccatorum indulgentiam merebitur oblitere. Cum ergo duplicia bona*

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<sup>184</sup> KLINGSHIRN, *Isidore of Seville's taxonomy of magicians and diviners*, *Traditio* vol. 58. (New York, 2003), 59-90.

<sup>185</sup> For numerous references see ROUSSELLE, *Du sanctuaire au thaumaturge: la guérison en Gaule au IVe siècle*, 1976.

*possimus in ecclesia invenire, quare per praecantatores, per fontes et arbores et diabolica fylacteria, per caraios aut aruspices et divinos vel sortiligos multiplicia sibi mala miseri homines conantur inferre?*<sup>186</sup>

The act of prescribing treatments consisting of prayers found in the sermons is confirmed in the *Vita Cesarii*<sup>187</sup>. The Christian prognosis was yet always the same: a prayer, an anointment with holy oil, consecration with holy water, the laying on of hands or making the sign of the cross<sup>188</sup>. This standardized care went against the antique traditional medical pluralism, which provided different methods depending on the illness<sup>189</sup>. In reality, Christian cures were often sought as a last resort when all traditional remedies and amulets had failed, but we will discuss more about it later<sup>190</sup>. In this passage we can also notice a recurrent reprimand in Caesarius' sermons to the *fylacteria, ligaturas* and *caracteres*. A sermon, traditionally named *De expetenda magis sanitate animae quam corporis, et vitandis sortilegis*<sup>191</sup>, talks exclusively about pagan practices and particularly their use in case of illness and repeats the usual list: *sortilegos, aruspices, divinos, praecantatores, fylacteria et caracteres*.<sup>192</sup>

Here the bishop gives an important information: "*aliquotiens ligaturas ipsas a clericis ac religiosis accipiunt; sed illi non sunt religiosi vel clerici, sed adiutores diaboli*". He then advises his community to refuse the *venenum diaboli*, even when offered by men of the church. He says:

*Etiam si vobis dicatur, quod res sanctas et lectiones divinas fylacteria ipsa contineant, nemo credat, nemo de illis sanitatem sibi venturam esse confidat: quia etiam si per ipsas ligaturas aliqui sanitatem receperint, diaboli hoc calliditas facit*

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<sup>186</sup> *Serm.* 13,3.

<sup>187</sup> For example in Book I, 49, in which a faithful was anointed with holy oil by Caesarius and was immediately cured. As his hagiographer wrote, "Christ had restores him to good health after the treatment of a physician of this world had failed". KLINGSHIRN, *Caesarius of Arles: Life, Testament, Letters*, p. 34.

<sup>188</sup> For example *Sermo* 184.5 "*Si quis infirmatur, inducat presbyteros ecclesiae, et orent super eum, ungetes oleo in nomine domini; et oratio fidei salvabit infirmum, et, si in peccatis sit, dimittuntur ei*". CCL 103, p. 751, but also *Sermo* 13.3; 19.5 and 50.1.

<sup>189</sup> KLINGSHIRN, *Caesarius of Arles. The making of a Christian community in late antique Gaul.*, p. 222.

<sup>190</sup> ROUELLE, *Du sanctuaire au thaumaturge: la guérison en Gaule au IVe siècle*. 1976.

<sup>191</sup> *Serm.* 50.

<sup>192</sup> *Serm.* 50.1.

(...) *qui enim filacteria facit, et qui rogant ut fiant, et quicumque consentiunt, toti pagani efficiuntur*<sup>193</sup>.

In another sermon<sup>194</sup> we discovered that women would use a specific sort of amulet made of amber (*arborum sucus*) in order to ease conception. Caesarius cited this material in another two sermons<sup>195</sup> but here is the only time a feminine issue is associated with it. If a woman could not give birth, she has to submit to God's wish only instead of searching *erbis, diabolicis characteribus e sacrilegis ligaturis*<sup>196</sup>. Amber has had different uses and special meanings for millennia, but its relation with fertility has not been identified so far<sup>197</sup>. Based on this apparent exclusive mention we could presume that amber amulets used by women with conception purposes were a local practice.

The term *characteres* is commonly defined as a charm in written form<sup>198</sup> and these kinds of amulets were just as popular in Christian periods as they were during pagan times. The ancient amulets protecting fields and crops were often reused and replaced by stones engraved with crosses that were then to be placed on the ground<sup>199</sup>. Most of these amulets were simple pieces of paper inscribed with passages of the scriptures or a few words containing sacred meaning. Since the quasi-monopoly of literacy belonged to the clergy, it is supposed that these amulets were produced by churchmen to be then distributed among the people. Unfortunately, due to its perishable nature, amulets made of paper from the early medieval period did not survived<sup>200</sup>. However, since their existence is so often condemned by ecclesiastical literature and they frequently appeared in later

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<sup>193</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>194</sup> *Serm.* 51.

<sup>195</sup> *Serm.* 13.5 e 14.4.

<sup>196</sup> *Serm.* 51.4.

<sup>197</sup> This use is not mentioned in MASTROCINQUE, *L'ambra e l'Eridano*. 1991. According to GILCHRIST: "the materials of amber and jet share the property of electrostatic induction, which medieval people may have perceived as evidence of the occult power of nature". p. 139, in, *Magic for the dead? The archaeology of magic in Later Medieval Burials*, 2008.

<sup>198</sup> SKEMER, *Binding words: textual amulets in the middle ages*, p.18.

<sup>199</sup> KOTANSKY, *Greek Magical Amulets: The Inscribed Gold, Silver, Copper, and Bronze Lamellae Part I Published Texts of Known Provenance*, p. 46. See also BRUYN and DIJKSTRA, *Greek Amulets and Formularies from Egypt Containing Christian Elements: A Checklist of Papyri, Parchments, Ostraka, and Tablets*, 2011.

<sup>200</sup> SKEMER, *Op. Cit.* p.30.



centuries, it is highly probable that they were actually produced and used.

### 2.3.2 Temples, Trees, Fountains, Idols

Sermon 53, called *Ammonitio ut fana destruantur*<sup>201</sup>, begins with the Bishop's saddened observation that among those present, some still followed pagan cults, (...) *contristamur dolemus et tamen, quia ex vobis aliquos cognoscimus ad antiquam idolorum culturam frequentius ambulare, quomodo pagani sine Deo baptismi sine gratia faciunt*<sup>202</sup>.

Caesarius heard (*audivimus*) that some of the faithful worship trees, springs and *auguria diabolica observare*<sup>203</sup>. These people do not just refuse to destroy the temples, they also insist on attending them and even rebuilding those that have been damaged. The Bishop continues:

*Et si aliquis Deum cogitans aut arbores fanaticos incendere aut aras diabolicas voluerit dissipare atque destruere, irascunt et insaniunt, et furore nimio succenduntur; ita ut etiam illos, qui pro Dei amore sacrilega idola conantur evertere, aut caedere praesumant, aut forsitan de illorum morte cogitare non dubitent.*<sup>204</sup>

Saint Martin and also Saint Germain d'Auxerre came across ancestral beliefs dedicated to springs and fountains, and found themselves in situations of direct confrontation against the pagans while engaging in the destruction of temples. Martin even arouses the anger of peasants and risked a violent retaliation when after destroying a temple (without finding much resistance), decided to cut down a sacred tree<sup>205</sup>. The canon 23 of the Second Council of Arles, which took place between 442 and 506, ordered the deprivation of communion for those who were caught worshiping trees, fountains and stones<sup>206</sup>, and in his 23rd canon, the council of Tours of 567

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<sup>201</sup> *Serm.* 53.

<sup>202</sup> *Serm.* 53.1.

<sup>203</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>204</sup> *Serm.* 53.1.

<sup>205</sup> *Vita Martini*, 13,2: *Et cum idem illi, dum templum evertitur, imperante Domino quieissent, succidi arborem non patiebantur.*

<sup>206</sup> *Concilium Arelatense secundum in Concilia Gallia, Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina, CXVIII, (Turnholt, 1963), 119*

condemned along with other practices the worship of the same things<sup>207</sup>. The fact is that until the seventh century, council stipulations continued to reaffirm the ban on the worship of water sources and rituals associated with them<sup>208</sup>.

Regarding the worshiping of trees and stones, these are clearly a very strong Celtic heritage for its constant presence in ecclesiastical sources and the still visible memory of their importance. In Gaul, these beliefs and the cults associated with them belonged to the rites of the Neolithic peoples. These elements were so deeply rooted in the local culture and its close relationship with nature – the main source of life in these societies – that the beliefs in the sacredness of the sources, the stones and the trees, persisted even after the arrival of the Celts and later the Romanization.

It is known that Gaul was particularly famous for the shrines built near fountains and springs<sup>209</sup>; in fact, hundreds of these sacred and healing places have been identified in this region and until recently, about 20% of them still held a sacred value<sup>210</sup>. Some studies have tried to find a symbolic link between water and healing practices, but the sacredness of water sources is more likely to have proto-historic origins. The faith in the magical power of the sources is connected to ancestral belief in the power of everything coming from the ground. In fact, through its relationship with the soil, water completes the "wonderful" event of soil fertilization and plant growth<sup>211</sup>.

Since fountains and springs were frequently associated with stones and trees in different regions of France, Christianised cults and beliefs pertaining to rocks or associated with fountains, forests and sacred trees were also present until a few

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<sup>207</sup> *Contestamur [sic?] illam sollicitudinem tam pastores quam presbiteros gerere, ut, quoscumque in hac fatuitate persistere uiderint uel ad nescio quas petras aut arbore saut ad fontes, designata loca gentilium, perpetrare, quae ad ecclesiae rationem non pertinent, eos ab ecclesia sancta auctoritate reppellant nec participare sancto altario permittant, qui gentilium obseruationes custodiunt.* SC 353, p. 384.

<sup>208</sup> SPANU, *Fons vivus. Culti delle acque e santuari cristiani tra tarda antichità e alto medioevo*, p. 1036.

<sup>209</sup> See LANTIER, *Les eaux et leur culte en Gaule*, 1962; HUBERT, *Sources sacrées et sources saintes*, 1967; SCHEID, *Epigraphie et sanctuaires guérisseurs en Gaule*, 1992, to whom it is frequently erroneously attributed by historians a quality of *sanctuaire guérisseurs* to places that originally do not carried such status.

<sup>210</sup> AUDIN, *Un exemple de survivance païenne à l'époque contemporaine: le culte des fontaines dans la France de l'Ouest et du Centre-Ouest – Partie 1*, p. 99.

<sup>211</sup> *Idem*, p. 83.

decades ago. Additionally, until the Second World War, it was not uncommon to find large centenarian trees near churches and springs. We also have knowledge of prehistoric megaliths that still conserve their sacredness and are renowned for their healing properties when associated with now Christianized aquatic sources. There are also other remains of Celtic origins, such as the ladies or fairies of springs that have kept their original meaning in today's toponyms despite their turning into saints during Christianisation<sup>212</sup>.

The prescription of water in treating certain diseases appeared in the *Medicina Plinii* in early fourth century, and in the work of Marcellus *De Medicamentis*<sup>213</sup>, the writer of Bordeaux who brought an important contribution to medicine in Gaul. Doctors and ophthalmologists worked in thermal sanctuaries and for this province, we have indeed countless archaeological and epigraphic evidence of the existence and functionality of these professionals.

Eighty-nine thermal-sanctuaries have been dated and identified, twenty of which indicate the presence of sick people searching any sort of cure. Four *thermae* are located within urban enclosures and eight sanctuaries have presented evidence of the presence of ophthalmologists<sup>214</sup>. Through the analysis of *ex-voto*, it was possible to understand that blindness was the most common problem among the sick of Gallic thermal sanctuaries while paralysis came in second place, as it is attested also by hagiography. With the study of diseases that could affect artisans and farmers, it is possible to understand the process of miraculous recoveries of most of these illnesses.

The Gallic medical literature was essentially made up of two works: that of Oribasius and that of Marcellus. The first was a Greek pagan doctor tied to Julian who lived in the fourth century. At the request of the Emperor, he wrote a long treatise on medicine that enjoyed great success in Gaul. Towards the seventh century, as the knowledge of the Greek language decreased more and more in this area, his writings

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<sup>212</sup> AUDIN, *Op. Cit.*, p. 94.

<sup>213</sup> See ANGELETTI, *Usi terapeutici delle acque nella trattatistica medica della tarda antichità (secoli IV-VII D.C.)*. 2007.

<sup>214</sup> ROUSSELLE, *Du sanctuaire au thaumaturge: la guérison en Gaule au IVe siècle*. p. 1085.

were translated into Latin, proof that his theories that aimed to facilitating and guaranteeing the diagnosis were very popular in the medical field.

Because he was a Christian, Marcellus' medicine was very different. Between 395 and 410 AD, in order to avoid his children to resort to charlatans, he wrote a treatise in which the descriptions of diseases and symptoms were accompanied by the remedies and their methods of administration. He intended his book as an instrument to give autonomy to the patients and through his mixing of science and traditional methods of cures he promised to his reader the capacity to cure himself *sine medici intercessione*<sup>215</sup>. Even though he followed a school of Latin medicine based on Pliny the Elder's studies, his being Gallic constituted a new element as he used recipes from the traditional culture of the countryside<sup>216</sup>. His Gallic specificity is visible in the vocabulary used for the fauna and flora in the composition of the remedies, but also in the Celtic words written in Greek characters and the magic formulae that contribute to its effectiveness.

The prescription of bathing in thermal waters as treatment is a sign of the introduction of purely Gallic and druidic practices in the Latin medicine. In Marcellus, we find some examples of ritual and traditional use of water in the prevention of diseases, as well as references to the effectiveness of magical plants growing close to the fountains and rivers. In aquatic sanctuaries of Gaul in the fourth century, the bathing treatment was always accompanied by amulets, ablutions and magic words. These amulets were inscribed with Latin or Greek characters, but often written in Gallic language. The amulets recommended to the patient were packaged by the doctor himself to ensure their purity: they could be objects, animals such as lizards or formulae written on varying supports that the patient had to wear around the neck or the waist<sup>217</sup>. Through his writings, we know that the use of medicinal plants in Gaul was also known across borders and these were sold either in their raw state, or prepared presumably by women<sup>218</sup>. Marcellus was a Christian but still felt

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<sup>215</sup> Marcellus, *De Medicamentis, praef.* 3, 2.

<sup>216</sup> GOUREVITCH D., *Présence de la médecine rationnelle gréco-romaine en Gaule*, p. 74.

<sup>217</sup> ROUSSELLE, *Croire et guérir*, p. 1093.

<sup>218</sup> ROUSSELLE, *Op. Cit.*, p. 92-6.

very close to the traditional practices. He perhaps continued to use them for their effectiveness without thinking about the sin that resorting to such actions allegedly constituted.

These examples demonstrate that traditional cures seem more widespread than Christian ones than Caesarius would like it to be, for even Gregory of Tours himself would make use of this kind of practice<sup>219</sup>. Gregory writes that when he was a child, he treated his father's gout attack with a small piece of wood on which he wrote the name Joshua. He had received the instructions to carve this object from a vision that also advised him to place this amulet under his father's pillow. Needless to say, the old man was cured<sup>220</sup>.

But the Gallic medicine did not live of magic and potions only. In fact, the anthropological examinations of skeletons found in that region and dating back to Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages attest to the existence of a medical practice that goes beyond the ointments, amulets and spells: there are hints of real surgeries like trepanation, dental interventions, amputations and immobilization of fractured or twisted members<sup>221</sup>.

Nevertheless, the fourth century saw the transition from a so-called rational medicine to a faith in miracle cures and those carried out through the Saints and martyrs' relics. The change began from the moment the conversion process started and the triumph of the Christian God was attested in this area. After Martin of Tours and his success as a holy healer, the belief moved from pagan places of worship to the tombs of saints and martyrs: sources and idols were no longer the sources of healing, but the Christian relics. Despite this change in mindset and beliefs, traditional treatments still had a place, as Caesarius shows us in his sermons. And the fact that many churches were erected right next to these ancient sanctuaries confirms the hybrid path assumed by the development of medicine. Indeed, the third canon of the Synod of Auxerre specified that people would place wooden *ex voto* in the shape of a foot or

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<sup>219</sup> On Gregory's accounts of magical cures see VAN DER LOF, *Gregoire de Tuours et la magie blanche*, 1974.

<sup>220</sup> MGH, SRM I, pt. 2, 772

<sup>221</sup> See BOUCHET, *Médecine et chirurgie pendant les premiers siècles du moyen âge*. 1985.

a human figure under sacred trees or sources<sup>222</sup>, the same way people used to place these objects in pagan sanctuaries.

According to Rousselle in *Croire et guérir*, the analysis of the coins thrown in aquatic shrines in Gaul shows that these temples started to pass through a process of abandonment by the end of the third century and by the fourth they were way less frequented<sup>223</sup>. However, some of these places saw a certain continuity of use and many were also Christianised and reused, whether after a period of abandonment, or not. What is important to stress here is that popular and traditional methods of cure seemed to be the dearest practices, those that people trusted as powerful, whether by habit, whether by its true efficacy. As we will see in a further chapter, it seems that, according to our sources, Christian cures were often considered the last alternative<sup>224</sup>.

### 2.3.3 On the days of the Week

Taking an example from Sermon 13:

*Et quia audivimus quod aliquos viros vel mulieres ita diabolus circumveniat, ut quinta feria nec viri opera faciant, nec mulieres laneficium, coram Deo et anglis eius contestamur, quia quicumque hoc observare voluerint, nisi per prolixam et duram paenitentiam tam grave sacrilegium emendaverint, ubi arsurus est diabolus, ibi et ipsi damnandi sunt.*<sup>225</sup>

Caesarius was concerned with people who worked on Sundays and rested on Thursdays, as well as with those who would only do certain activities on specific days of the week<sup>226</sup>. While narrating miracles along with the good work of saints and

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<sup>222</sup> *Non licet compensus in domibus propriis nec per uigiliis in festiuitates sanctorum facere nec inter santius aut ad arbores sacriuos uel ad fontes uota dissoluere, nisi, quicumque uotum habuerit, in ecclesia uigilet et matriculae ipsum uotum aut pauperibus reddat nec sculptilia aut pedem aut hominem ligneu fieri penitus praesumat.* SC 353, p. 488.

<sup>223</sup> ROUSSELLE, *Croire et guérir*. p. 40-5.

<sup>224</sup> For example, in the *Vita Martini* Gregory writes about the case of Aquilinus, who was attacked by demons and was brought to doctors and soothsayers before finally being cured in the church of Tours. *Vita Martini* 1.26.

<sup>225</sup> *Serm.* 13.5.

<sup>226</sup> For example *Sermo* 193. 4. *Nonnulli enim in haec mala labuntur, ut diligenter observent qua die in itinere excant, honorem praestantes aut soli aut lunae aut Marti, aut Mercurio aut Ioui aut Veneri aut Saturno (...); Sermo 19.4 : Nullus in honorem Iouis quinta feria observare praesumat ne aliquid operis faciat: contestor, fratres*

martyrs, Gregory of Tours often specified how people would be punished for being active on the first day of the week<sup>227</sup>. Apparently, the sources demonstrate that people were strongly against it or did not fully comply with this interdiction, mostly because ecclesiastical rules were not always in accordance with agricultural labor and life. Caesarius needed to treat his flock in order to force it to attend mass on Sundays since people could apparently not release themselves of their many obligations to attend masses on the church that was far from where they lived. However, the insistence with which the clergy preached against the work during Sundays could indicate that it was a losing battle<sup>228</sup>.

For what concerns the names of the days, in the majority of Latin languages, the struggle was lost forever and the Roman Calendar was still in use. Indeed, the ecclesiastical plea only had effect on the Portuguese language<sup>229</sup>.

### 2.3.4 Banquets and Sacrifices

In Sermon 19, we find the following reference:

*Nullus ad idolum vel ad ea quae idolis immolantur colat suadente bibat. Qui baptizatus est, debet profana vitare.*<sup>230</sup>

The bishop informs us about the persistence of idol worship and the practice of sacrifices. These practices will appear again in the second council of Orleans of 533, in which canon 20 condemns baptised Christians joining the cult of idols and eating the sacrificial meat<sup>231</sup>. Again, in the fourth council of Orleans of 541, there is a mention of sacrifices<sup>232</sup>, but this time using a metaphor that Caesarius had used in his sermons as a sort of offence to the Christians who returned to pagan practices: a dog

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*, ne hoc ullus vir aut mulier aliquando observet, ne inter paganos magis quam inter christianos a Domino iudicetur, qui, quod observari die dominico debet, in die Iovis hoc sacrilege transferunt.*

<sup>227</sup> WOOD, *How popular was early Medieval devotion?* 1997.

<sup>228</sup> Idem.

<sup>229</sup> See VON WARTBURG, *Les noms des jours de la semaine dans les langues romanes*, p. 45-60.

<sup>230</sup> *Serm.* 19.4.

<sup>231</sup> *Catholici qui ad idolorum cultum non custodita ad integrum accepti baptismi gratia reuertuntur, uel qui cibis idolorum cultibus immolatis gustu inlicitae praesumptionis untur, ab ecclesiae coetibus arceantur.* SC 352, p. 202.

<sup>232</sup> Canon 15. *Si quis post acceptum baptismi sacramentum ad immolata daemonibus, tamquam ad uomitum.* SC 352, p. 274.

eating its own vomit<sup>233</sup>. We do not know how these sacrifices could still be practiced since sources are not prolific in describing how and why they happened. Offerings to supernatural entities could be a practice mostly observed in private shrines and ceremonies, yet public sacrifices and domestic cults were prohibited by Theodosius with a law of 391-392, a deliberation that followed a long story of persecution against sacrifices and divinatory practices<sup>234</sup>. As we will see below, the banquets Caesarius talks about could probably be those related to the festivity of the January Calends. Pagan burial practices were often associated with the sacrifice of animals, mostly horses. In Gaul we know that Childeric in late fifth century was buried with a horse, but we cannot assume whether the practice was carried out by the rest of nobility<sup>235</sup>. However, it seems that the condemnations of councils and sermons do not associate sacrifices with burial practices, being then difficult to understand which practice (and even the correspondence with reality) is being referred<sup>236</sup>.

### 2.3.5 The January Calends

Although only discussed in two sermons of Caesarius' extensive work, it is possible to realize the importance of this practice thanks to the accuracy with which the bishop describes it and the presence of other sources testifying to the strength of these events<sup>237</sup>. The Christian preachers are the main source for the study of the January Calends, and we can find warnings against these celebrations from John Chrysostom, Gregory of Nice, Ambrosius, Augustine, Asterius of Amasea, Peter Crisologus, to Isidore of Seville, Maximus of Turin and of course in Caesarius of Arles<sup>238</sup>. The practice is mentioned also in many ecclesiastical councils, such as the second council of Tours (576)<sup>239</sup> and the Synod of Auxerre (561-605)<sup>240</sup>. Each one of

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<sup>233</sup> *Serm.* 54.2. (...) *et iterum revertuntur ad observationes auguriorum, velut canes ad vomitum suum.*

<sup>234</sup> CTh 16, 10, 12.

<sup>235</sup> DIERKENS, *The evidence of archaeology*, in MILIS (ed.) *The pagan Middle ages*, p. 53-4.

<sup>236</sup> For a study on the meaning of sacrifices in ancient religions and their prohibition on Christian environment see STROUMSA, *La fin du sacrifice. Les mutations religieuses de l'Antiquité tardive*, 2005.

<sup>237</sup> MESLIN, *La fête des kalendes de janvier dans l'empire romain. Études d'un rituel de Nouvel an*. 1970, 95.

<sup>238</sup> See also GRIG, *Interpreting the Kalends of January in late antiquity: a case study for late antique popular culture?* 2016.

<sup>239</sup> SC 254, canon 23, p. 384.

<sup>240</sup> Idem, canon 1, p. 488.



them describes the feast differently with some main common features, but they are unanimous in considering it foolish and scandalous. The danger of this persistence and the horror of the clergy relied on the assumption that such celebrations were not observed by pagans, but by baptized Christians who insisted on resorting to pagan practices.

Caesarius' Sermon 192, *De Kalendis Ianuariis*, begins by explaining to the community that the origin of the festival's name dates back to the celebration of a man named *Iano*. The Bishop explains that Janus, just like all other gods of the Pantheon according to Christian apologetics, was a man who became the object of worship after his death. He also says that this deity's role was to end and start the years, being thus often represented with a double face looking in opposite directions.

The Bishop of Arles provides a description of how the celebration took place, with people dressed with masks of deer, men dressed like women, grand banquets, doors decorated with laurel, exchange of gifts and much else. However, he was struck by the fact that those who engaged in these "monstruous feasts" included Christians:

*In istis enim diebus miseri homines et, quod peius est, etiam aliqui baptizati sumunt formas adulteras, species monstruosas, in quibus quidem quae primum ridenda aut potius dolenda sint, nescio*<sup>241</sup>.

Towards the middle of the sixth century, it seems that the Church had established the practice of fasting between Christmas and Epiphany, precisely during the days the Calends of January would be celebrated, and Caesarius urged his followers to fast during the feasts<sup>242</sup>. The best way to fight the persistence of these celebrations was the use of substitution: initially, there was a liturgical service on those days, but it probably was not enough to compete with this prestigious festivity, leading to the establishment of the Feast of the Circumcision of Jesus.

Despite the exhortations of the bishops and the conciliar canons that, from the sixth

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<sup>241</sup> *Serm.* 192. 2.

<sup>242</sup> 184.4: "*Ieiunemus, ergo, fratres carissimi, in istis diebus, et cum vera et perfecta caritate stultitiam miserorum hominum lugeamus*". CCSL 103, p.781.

to the eighth century, condemned the observance of the feast of Calends, history shows us that some of the ritual gestures (exchange of gifts, home decoration with tree branches, New Year's greetings) are still present today during our end-of-year celebrations.

Caesarius of Arles was considered the “great pastoral reformer in Roman and Gothic southern Gaul”, and his influence was so great that between the councils held under his authority and the later councils of Frankish kingdom, there was no big break. Even if Caesarius councils were attended mainly by southern bishops, its influence was felt all over Frankia, and the religious model established by him lasted for a long time, as well as his legacy as preacher and paladin against paganism<sup>243</sup>.

#### **2.4 Sixth and seventh century Gaul and the struggle against tradition**

In a letter by pope Pelagius I to the bishop Sapaudus of Arles in 558 a few years after Caesarius' death, he condemns a strange practice that was present in some churches. It refers to the shaping of communion bread into a human body, just like an idol, so as to give the different parts of this figurine to people according to personal needs, personal merit or dignity of the faithful<sup>244</sup>. This letter was sent shortly before the council of Tours held in 567, in which the following condemnation was made: “the body of Christ in the altar (here understood as the communion bread), should not be shaped in an imaginary form, but as a cross<sup>245</sup>”. This could be related to the letter seen above and was presumably a rebuke of a practice introduced into the most symbolic Christian celebration, probably answering a demand from the faithful or succumbing to the pressure of folk beliefs<sup>246</sup>.

It is also in the acts of the council of Tours of 567 that we find, in the same canon

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<sup>243</sup> MARKUS, *Gregory the Great and his world*, p. 169.

<sup>244</sup> MGH Ep. III 442-45, *Quis etiam illius non excessus, sed sceleris dicam, redditurus est rationem, quod apud vos idolum ex similitudine, vel iniquitatibus nostris patienter fieri audioimus, et ex ipso idolo fidei populo, quasi unicuique pro merito, aures, oculos, manus ac diversa singulis membra distribui?*

<sup>245</sup> *Ut corpus Domini in altari non imaginario ordine, sed sub crucis titulo componatur*, SC 354, p. 352. Robert Markus proposes an alternative translation in which *imaginario ordine* should be understood as “exposition of images”. In MARKUS, *Gregory the Great and his world*, p. 286, footnote 57.

<sup>246</sup> All these references from VON HEFELE et LECLERCQ, *Histoire des conciles d'après les documents originaux, Tome III, livre 1*, pp. 185-6.

number 23, a rebuke of a certain celebration on the day of Saint Peter, during which people would offer food to the dead after the mass<sup>247</sup>. It is known that on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February, the Romans celebrated the *Parentalia*, a festivity in memory of the dead during which a banquet was offered in honor of the deceased. In the next chapter, we will see how the same sort of persistence would annoy the Spanish church, which demonstrates that the institution of the apostolate of Saint Peter in the same day was an attempt to prevent people from attending these gatherings in cemeteries. Canon 12 of the council of Auxerre (561-605) talks about the offering of communion and the kissing of corpses<sup>248</sup>, a practice that was first mentioned in the council of Hippo of 393<sup>249</sup>. The offering of Eucharistic was a sort of *viaticum*, or else a provision for the journey into the other world. The practice is presumably linked to the placing of a coin into the mouth of the deceased as a payment to Charon, according to the Greek belief and later Roman as well<sup>250</sup>. However, the Christian meaning of this practice, despite having a pagan origin, was different: *"the Eucharist received at death was a sign of the full membership of the recipient in the community of Christians and of the saving grace first received by baptism. Nevertheless, the importance of its reception must be related to the comfort derived from a ritual action that maintained a connection with the practices of generations of men and women in antiquity"*<sup>251</sup>. What is important here to notice and will be discussed in another chapter, is how people appeared to value more some matters, such as practices regarding the ancestors and the memory of a community. As we will see, memory and tradition were some of the most valuable assets of early medieval communities.

The concern with these practices regarding the dead would continue to be mentioned in councils in the following centuries and the *Indiculus superstitionum et paganiarum* is

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<sup>247</sup> *Sunt etiam qui in festiuitate cathedrae domni Petri intrita mortuis offerunt et post missas redeuntes ad domos proprias ad gentiliu reuertuntur errores et post corpus Domini sacratas daemonei escas accipiunt.* SC 353, p. 384.

<sup>248</sup> *Non licet mortuis nec eucharistiam nec osculum tradi nec uela uel pallas corpora eoru inuolui.* SC 353, p. 492.

<sup>249</sup> Concilium Hipponense, c. 4: "partem Corporis sancti cum exanimi cadauere comunicare arbitror prohibendum". Concilia Africae a. 345-a. 525, ed. C. Munier [Turnhout, 1974], 21.

<sup>250</sup> PAXTON, *Christianising death*, 1990. P. 33.

<sup>251</sup> Idem.

an interesting example<sup>252</sup>. This is a document attached to the acts of the council of Estinnes of 744 in which there is a general canon against pagan practices not better specified<sup>253</sup>. The so called Germanic synod of 743, the synod of Estinnes of 744 and the synod of Soissons of 744 are generally considered as one coherent meeting due to their vicinity in time and the matters addressed in all these councils. The *Indiculus*, attached to the last of these meetings must be then related to the concerns of these two years of discussions, which means that the list of practices that it contains are not exclusive from one of these regions, but are probably issues shared by most of the clerics that adhered to the three synods.

The *Indiculus* introduces itself as a list of thirty pagan and superstitious practices<sup>254</sup>, among them the omnipresent rebuke to the cult of nature<sup>255</sup> and stones<sup>256</sup>, the use of amulets<sup>257</sup>, consultation of auguries<sup>258</sup> and diviners<sup>259</sup> among many other practices already mentioned in previous councils and in Caesarius' sermons. However, two topics of this list are particularly interesting for us here: sacrileges by the tomb of death<sup>260</sup> and *De sacrilegio super defunctos, id est dadsisas*, being *dadsisas* commonly interpreted as funerary banquets or libations<sup>261</sup>, but also understood as funerary chants<sup>262</sup>.

The problem of the *Indiculus* is its lack of explanations and commentaries, since it is supposed to be only the cover of a longer capitulary that now is lost, which means that all the practices listed are not better specified and many of these are difficult to

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<sup>252</sup> On the discussion of the chronology of the text see DIERKENS, *Superstition, christianisme et paganisme a la fin de l'époque mérovingienne. A propos de l'Indiculus superstitionum et paganiarum*, specially notes on page 11 and 12.

<sup>253</sup> MGH. LL., Conc, II.

<sup>254</sup> MGH, Tomus III, Karlomani Capitularia, Forma abrenuntiationis diaboli. *Indiculus superstitionum et paganiarum*, p. 19-20.

<sup>255</sup> *De sacris silvarum quae nimidas vocant.*

<sup>256</sup> *De hiis quae faciunt super petras.*

<sup>257</sup> *De filacteriis et ligaturis.*

<sup>258</sup> *De auguriis vel avium vel equarum vel bouum.*

<sup>259</sup> *De divinis vel sortilegis.*

<sup>260</sup> *De sacrilegio ad sepulchra mortuorum.*

<sup>261</sup> DIERKENS, *Op. cit.* p. 18.

<sup>262</sup> KÜNZEL et CHEVY. *Paganisme, syncrétisme et culture religieuse populaire au haut Moyen Âge. Réflexions de méthode.* In: *Annales. Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations*. 47e année, N. 4-5, 1992, p. 1061, who also stress the fact that this document present many words in vulgar language that could attest for the legitimacy of its practices.

interpret. However, due to the abundant presence of other mentions in our sources, in what concerns the two specific topics regarding funerary practices, we can suppose a diffuse and strong attachment to this kind of gestures.

The cult of relics and saints is another topic worth being mentioned. In Gaul, we can find certain identifications of devotion to local saints and martyrs around 400 BC, as for example Genesius of Arles<sup>263</sup>. The Gallic church however continued to recur to Rome and Milan in search of relics, as to concede credit and fame to its churches relying on the presence of these objects seen as wonder makers. The truth is that, mostly in the first centuries of Christianity, people were attracted to these miracles as a proof of the power of the Christian religion and the relics provided an element of vicinity with the good the new religion brought. Pope Gregory praised the many miracles that his missionaries accomplished in Britain as an important tool in the process of Christianisation<sup>264</sup>, but not only were miracles important to gain people's trust, the existence of local saints was also essential. The importance of having a saint who came from the community symbolized the need for people to have their own patrons and martyrs, namely individuals who were part of the social group and confirmed their connection to sanctity and holiness. In this context the saint could be someone people could identify with, a local hero who reflected local identity. Martin of Tours was probably the first saint to acquire fame outside Gaul as he reflected values shared by all Christendom and his relics were taken elsewhere in order to bring prestige and sanctity to newly established sees and churches. There were many local saints who could attest to the importance of local identity as to religious aspects, but it is also true that 'international saints' also enjoyed a lot of prestige. Indeed, Columbanus and other Irishmen have been quite successful exactly because of their condition of outsiders<sup>265</sup>.

However, the building of local cults was influenced by the abundance of relics produced in those days and the proximity of communities of holy men and women

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<sup>263</sup> The Oxford dictionary of saints, p. 179.

<sup>264</sup> WOOD, *The mission of Augustine of Canterbury*, p. 15.

<sup>265</sup> See O'HARA and WOOD, *Jonas of Bobbio Life of Columbanus, Life of John of Réomé, and Life of Vedast*, 2017.

also described as local “celebrities” yet still members of the local society. In our analysis of the ecclesiastical councils and of Caesarius’ sermons, we saw that people were happy to attend the festivities in churches, particularly to commemorate saints and martyrs. Some elements could explain this undeniable popularity. First of all, these feasts presented a rare opportunity for ordinary peasants or even city inhabitants to enjoy themselves. In a routine filled with wearisome work and many religious restrictions, people made the most of any good occasion to celebrate. Secondly, religious events were also social gatherings in which the community could meet and discuss general affairs<sup>266</sup>. After the mass, the festivities were usually followed by a sort of feasting with chants, dances, singing and drinking<sup>267</sup>. Despite official condemnation, this kind of celebration was maintained, certainly thanks to the positive effects it had on people. Indeed, they willingly attended these festivities, and the saints’ days were so appreciated that they were even more popular than the temporal feats of the Church. People cherished the local saint and celebrated him almost as an illustrious member of the community, which can be said that the cult of saints developed as a response to popular demand, being not only religious but also cultural<sup>268</sup>.

But many saints or holy men were not always approved by the church authorities. Gregory wrote about a man named Desiderius, *qui se magnum quendam esse dicebat, adserens se multa posse facere signa*<sup>269</sup>. Yet, he was worshiped and followed by people who respected him and sought his intervention in cases of illness such as blindness, disability and paralysis. According to Gregory, Desiderius was very popular in Tours and used necromancy to promote his cures. Gregory also mentions another man who claimed to have saints’ relics and gathered many people around him such as prostitutes and women of lower classes. When contested and inspected by the priest,

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<sup>266</sup> HEN, *Culture and religion in Merovingian Gaul*, p. 87.

<sup>267</sup> Caesarius, besides the dancing, chanting and strange bathing in occasion of these celebrations was also concerned with drunkenness. Drinking without moderation is mentioned 21 times in his collection of sermons, being three of those dedicated entirely to this subject: *Serm.* 46, 47 and 55, of which the last two associate drunkenness with pagan practices. See VOOG, *Le péché et la distinction des péchés dans l'œuvre de Césaire d'Arles*, Pp. 1072-74 and BAILEY, *These are not men': Sex and drink in the sermons of Caesarius of Arles*, 2007.

<sup>268</sup> HEN, *Op. cit.* p. 120; BROWN, *The cult of saints*, p. 27.

<sup>269</sup> *Historia francorum* IX, 6: MGH SRM t.I, pars I, fasc II p. 417.

this man was found carrying with him roots, moles' teeth, mice bones, claws and bears' fat, several objects that were used to practice sorcery<sup>270</sup>. These two pseudo-saints represent only small examples of the kind of men who would frequently appear in cities and fool people with their lies<sup>271</sup>, but the truth is that these men were often very charismatic, sometimes even more so than "official" priests. Another example is Aldebert in the eighth century who considered himself a saint and distributed his own hair and nails as relics among the Franks, also performing ceremonies and placing crucifixes and oratories in fields and fountains<sup>272</sup>. Saint Boniface himself was not as loved as this man and he presumably faced hostility after seeking Aldebert's condemnation<sup>273</sup>. Being a sort of combination between a magician and a Christian priest, these clerics or pseudo clerics would link the non-Christian past with the Christian present. They, (if it is possible to say), understood how popular piety worked and took advantage of their knowledge to give people what they wanted and what they needed.

## 2.5 Conclusion

After this analysis, it seems possible to say that a sort of lay piety was nurtured and practiced in Gaul. The arrival of Christianisation did not easily prevail over the traditional way of dealing with illness, the attachment to memory and kinship, the reverence to nature, and more generally how people confronted everyday life problems. This feeling was so powerful that it even involved some clerics who were probably led by their personal beliefs as well as popular pressure. We should point out that what was called the "low clergy" was most of the time composed of men coming from the same social and cultural environment as that of their parishioners. This behavior could then even be observed in early and intensively Romanized – later Christianised – Provence, but also in the rest of the province. As for the

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<sup>270</sup> MGH SRM t.I, pars I, fasc II p. 419, *Perscrutatisque cunctis quae habebat, invenit cum eo sacculum magnum plenum de radicibus diversarum herbarum, ibique et dentes talpae et ossa murium et ungues atque adipos ursinos. Vidensque hec maleficia esse, cuncta iussit in flumine proici.*

<sup>271</sup> MGH SRM t.I, pars I, fasc II page 420. *Multi enim sunt, qui, has seductiones exercentes, populum rusticum in errore ponere non desistunt, de quibus, ut opinor, et Dominus in euangelio ait, consurgere in novissimis temporibus pseudochristus et pseudoprophetae, qui, dantes signa et prodigia, etima electos in errore inducant.*

<sup>272</sup> MGH, Concilia, 2, 5. Pp. 35.

<sup>273</sup> BROWN, *The rise of western Christendom*, 2013. p. 422.

Merovingian regions of Frisia, northeastern Austrasia and Thuringia they remained pagan for many centuries despite the arrival of missions mainly from British Isles. These partially Romanized areas remained pagan after the more diffused conversion of Gaul until the eighth century<sup>274</sup>. Indeed, the missionaries are said to have had a difficult time in these lands<sup>275</sup>.

Paganism was officially banned by a law drafted in Childebert's *Praeceptum*, in 533<sup>276</sup>, and although the sources are silent on the successive kings, it is not difficult to imagine this policy was followed in the period onwards. As it is, paganism was generally abhorred by lay and ecclesiastical legal instances which yet encountered a lack of compliance from common people. Caesarius, concerned with the piety of his flock often exhorted landowners to punish their servants and peasants if caught worshipping altars or pagan idols. He did not hesitate to propose the use of violence in order to prevent people from resorting to the pagan faith<sup>277</sup>:

*Et si non corriguntur, si potestis, caedite illos; si nec sic emendator, et capillos illis incidite. Et si adhuc perseverat, vinculis ferries adligate: ut quos non tenet Christi gratia, teneat vel catena. Fanum ergo reparare nolite permittere; immo magis, ubicumque fuerit, destruere et dissipare contendite. Arbores etiam sacrilegas usque ad radicem incidite, aras diaboli comminuite. Et hoc scitote, fratres carissimi, quia omnis homo, quando baptizatur, de grege diaboli et ab exercitu illius separatur.*<sup>278</sup>

The destruction of temples in Gaul mostly after the fourth century is well attested by archaeological studies<sup>279</sup>, and we can associate this behavior with the first laws

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<sup>274</sup> HEN, *Culture and religion in Merovingian Gaul*, p. 17.

<sup>275</sup> See WOOD, *Pagan religions and superstitions east of the Rhine from the fifth to the ninth century*, 1995.

<sup>276</sup> "*Credimus hoc, Deo propitio, et ad nostram mercedem et ad salutem populi pertinere, si populus cristianus, relictam idolorum culturam, Deo, cui integram promissimus fidem, in quantum inspirare dignatus fuerit, purae deservire debeamus. et quia necesse est, ut plebs, quae sacerdotes praeceptum non ita ut oportet custodit, nostro etiam corrigatur imperio, hanc cartam generaliter per omnia loca decrevimus emittendam, praecipientes ut quicumque admoniti de agro suo, ubicumque fuerint simulacra constructa vel idola daemonei dedicata ab hominibus factum, non statim abiecerint vel sacerdotebus hoc destruere prohibuerint, datis fideiussoribus non aliter discedant, nisi in nostris obtutebus praesententur*". *Capitularia Regnum Francorum I.i*, ed. A. Boretius, MGH, Capit. (Hanover, 1881), no. 2, Childeberti I. Regis Praeceptum, p. 2.

<sup>277</sup> The promotion of the use of violence is explicit in the sermons 14, 53, 54 and 192.

<sup>278</sup> *Serm.* 53.2.

<sup>279</sup> See SOTINEL, *La disparition des lieux de culte païens en occident*, 2004.



against pagan religion and the growth of parishes all over the province. However, as we know, the destruction of structures and objects does not necessarily mean the destruction of belief or memory.

After the death of Caesarius, his writings met a great success in Gaul. One of his most notorious copiers was Eligius of Noyon whose life was written by Adonius of Rouen, Eligius' close friend, after the middle of the seventh century. The *Vita Eligii* continued to be re-written and re-edited, therefore changing in a remarkable way during the Carolingian period and after<sup>280</sup>. This text is supposed to follow the tradition of anti-Merovingian propaganda with the aim to discredit the Merovingian dynasty while legitimating the Carolingian usurpation<sup>281</sup>. In this project, the previous period was to be seen as dominated by paganism and sin by means of the construction of a narrative meant to serve this purpose, in which paganism seemed to be the order of the day. The *Vita Eligii* was then full of references to pagan practices and ferocious heathen opposition to Christianity. In fact according to Hen, “the exaggeration of the degree of paganism and the heroic fights against it which appear mainly in Carolingian saints' lives may well be in order to make the saints' achievement more notable. But Carolingian religious propaganda is a far more crucial factor. It was part of the Carolingian attempt to undermine the Merovingians by stressing their supposed carelessness in religious matters, and by describing their culture as mainly pagan. Furthermore, these descriptions present the Church and the people as opposing each other”<sup>282</sup>.

Should the *Vita Eligii* then be dismissed as a document deprived of any accuracy and reliability in what concerns pagan practices? It is indeed difficult to identify what had remained from the first version of this life and what could really be a less partial account of the life of the saint, but it is known that the see of Noyon at the times of Eligius was indeed a place where paganism was still strong among Franks, Frisians

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<sup>280</sup> See HEN, *Martin of Braga's De correctione rusticorum and its uses in Frankish Gaul*, p. 39 and WESTEEL-HOUSTE, *Quelque remarques sur la Vita Eligii, Vie de saint Eloi*, 1999.

<sup>281</sup> HEN, *Culture and religion in Merovingian Gaul*, p. 196-8. According to this author, one of the effects of the Carolingian propaganda against Merovingian dynasty is the common notion between scholars that Merovingian society was not Christian, but pagan in practice. He then says that this propaganda was so efficacious that fooled scholars until today, still believing that paganism was a major force among society. Wood seems to agree with this opinion, see *The pagan and the other: varying presentations in the Early Middle Ages*, p.4.

<sup>282</sup> Idem, p. 199-200.

and other peoples<sup>283</sup>. A document is however built on various decisions from selecting a specific vocabulary, or choosing to highlight certain circumstances or using a certain tone. These choices reflect the author's own preferences but also the characteristics of his time, his daily life, his readings, and of course his opinion. Assuming that the majority of *Vita Eligii* is a Carolingian construction<sup>284</sup>, and that most of what is written there and in Eligius' own writings take many liberal influences from mainly Caesarius and Martin of Braga, I still think that some choices are significant and reflect in some way facts that belonged to the reality of its author – I am thinking for example of the opening citation of this chapter. This passage narrates the visit of the saint to a parish in the diocese of Noyon in which people would celebrate the day dedicated to Saint Peter with dances and chants in front of the church. As we have seen, this festivity was indeed very popular and Eligius tried to convince people they were making a mistake. However, his preaching was not well received for the people answered that what belonged to tradition was too precious to be overpowered by the priest. This passage is far too powerful to simply be a convenient invention; moreover it meets many conformances with previous sources. After all, are not the combining of practices and what is known as a lay piety a keenly attachment to the traditions of the ancestors and a powerful value that cannot be easily abandoned?

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<sup>283</sup> See FOURACRE, *The work of Audoenus of Rouen and Eligius of Noyon in extending episcopal influence from the town to the country in seventh century Neustria*, p, 79-80.

<sup>284</sup> Bayer suggested that it is possible to identify in the *Vita Eligii* four different phases of edition and interpolation during the seventh century. In 'Vita Eligii', 2007.

## Hispania

*(...) praeterita recordare. Nam qui nihil de praeterito cogitat perdit vitam (...)*

*S. Martin of Braga, Formula Vitae Honestae*

### Introduction

Hispania offers a particular scenery to study and analyze the cultural and religious development of populations from Late Antiquity to early Medieval times. Here, a whole different political, cultural and historical conformation allowed the existence of a religious development that finds no parallel in the Medieval West. This development created a sort of lack of a strong political and ecclesiastical control of the religious practices that led to the development of a particular sort of religiosity that owes much to traditional and local identity. This could be perceived for many centuries after the period of Christianisation, possibly even today. The rise and spread of a particular heresy has also a role in this process, and the pagan and traditional traces found in the Priscillian doctrine were condemned by the ecclesiastical council for at least two centuries after the official downfall of its leader and main supporters.

The heterogeneity of the political and cultural background in the whole Peninsula creates a variety of situations that would make this study impractical. For this reason, I decided to concentrate on relevant written sources and on how they dealt with paganism and the difficulty of converting people, as well as the references to local Christian practices that carry with them much of tradition and cultural identity. Thus, the most consistent part of this study will focus on the region of Galicia – home of the headquarters of the Suevic kingdom and a place prolific due to a variety of written sources that provide a multitude of interpretations of the religious life in this area. In order to match written sources with material testimony, my analysis of archaeological information will also look on most of the cases and when the

information is available, to this piece of land. Here, as for the rest of this study, information from other parts of this province will not be neglected and will be mentioned and analyzed when possible.

In Catalonia, the Meseta and the southern regions of the Peninsula and the river valleys, it is possible to see a large degree of assimilation of the Roman culture. However, the same cannot be said about the northern regions, Galicia<sup>285</sup>, Cantabria and the lands of the Basques, where scholars tend to see the acceptance of Romanization as a more limited process<sup>286</sup>. According to Hydatius, bishop of *Aquae Flaviae* (Chaves) on the first half of fifth century, this region was *finis terrae*, an allusion not only to its geographical remoteness but also to its cultural and religion otherness<sup>287</sup>. Furthermore, in these regions Christianisation spread at a much lower speed specially in rural environment, and a link between this fact and a presumably weak adhesion to *Romanitas* could be established. We will point out at the end of this chapter the main differences between north and south of the province in what concerns their relationship with Christian religion and their further development of religiosity.

However, we must start with a general and short overview of the period of the third and fourth centuries in order to provide a brief introduction to the situation of the first Christians in *Hispania*, in order to be able to understand how local religiosity was built.

### 3.1 The Arrival of Christianity

In the Neolithic period, the Northwestern part of the Peninsula was characterized by a megalithic culture<sup>288</sup>, which is in this region associated with a matriarchal social

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<sup>285</sup> See TRANOY, *La Galice romaine. Recherches sur le nord-ouest de la péninsule Ibérique dans l'Antiquité*, 1981, how believes in an general inaccurate evaluation of the level of romanization of the region. According to him, the level of absorption of the Roman culture in Galicia was in reality higher then normally interpreted by scholars.

<sup>286</sup> HILLGARTH, *Popular religion in Visigothic Spain*, p. 7.

<sup>287</sup> Idatius *Aquae Flaviensis Episcopus*, *Chronicum*, pref. 1. PL 51: "*Verum Idatius provinciae Galleciae natus in Lemica civitate, mage divino munere, quam proprio merito, summi praesul creatus officii, ut extremus plagae, ita extremus et vitae, perexiguum informatus studio seculari, multo minus docilis sanctae lectionis volumine salutari*".

<sup>288</sup> See CUEVILLAS, *La época magalítica en el Noroeste de la Peninsula*, 1959.

organization. It is argued that the legends and myths of the “*Moura encantada*”, a sort of nymph who inhabits the megaliths, stones, springs and is known as a goodness of fertility, has its origin in this culture. The name *moura* started to be used much later, probably in association with the *mouros* or Islamic occupants of the seventh century. The name acquired connotations of paganism and magical powers in association with the strangeness and mystery inspired by the culture of Islamic populations, and these entities seem to have passed through the succession of beliefs until the roman period, and as we shall see, even after the Christian conversion<sup>289</sup>.

According to epigraphic testimonies, the most frequent deities mentioned in the inscriptions in Spain were Jupiter, Liber Pater, and Diana<sup>290</sup>. It seems that the divinities from the woods were very popular as shown by the frequency of inscriptions, and besides Diana and Liber Pater, other names that appear in the sources and are related to the natural environment are Faun, Ceres, Cupid, Silvanus and Venus<sup>291</sup>. Most of the inscriptions referring to native deities were found in western and northwestern Spain, showing that whilst in this region native religions were really strong, in the rest of the peninsula the religion of the Romans spread and surmounted the old beliefs<sup>292</sup>, or even mixed with them.

As for many provinces of the Roman Empire, it is impossible to know when exactly Christianity arrived in *Hispania*. We can presume that the arrival of this religion was not so different from other places in the continent: it probably came from the south and certainly landed in urban centres first, possibly dependent on a considerable trade flow and also on the presence of Jewish communities. We know so far two early testimonies of the presence of Christianity in Iberia in the second and third centuries. The first is from Irineus of Leon who talks about churches in Iberia in his *Adversus Haeresis* written in the second century<sup>293</sup>. The second is from Tertullian who

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<sup>289</sup> An useful summary about the diverse social organization of the region is given by DÍAZ y MENÉNDEZ BUEYES, *Romanos, vidigodos e indígenas: las comunidades del norte de Hispania en los inicios de la Edad Media [cuarenta años después]*, 2016.

<sup>290</sup> A complete study on the matter of native religion in this region is given by BLAZQUEZ, *Religiones primitivas de Hispania*, 1962 and *Últimas aportaciones a las religiones ibéricas*, in Ilú, 1995. p. 33-43.

<sup>291</sup> NASCIMENTO, *A religião dos rústicos*, p. 330, note 26.

<sup>292</sup> MACKENNA, *Paganism and pagan survivals in Spain up to the Fall of the Visigothic kingdom*. p.7.

<sup>293</sup> Irineus, *Adversus haerensis* I, 10,2.

in his early third century treatise *Adversus Iudaeos*, mentions Christian communities all over the borders of *Hispania* to demonstrate the inexistence of geographical boundaries to the new religion<sup>294</sup>. These two testimonies are nevertheless deprived of any further indication that could confirm their veracity. It is also argued that Christianity was first introduced in Spain from Africa, which liturgy may have played an important role on the development of that of the Peninsula; yet there is again too little information about this fact<sup>295</sup>.

Another early information about the first steps of Christianity in the Peninsula is given by Saint Paul who as we saw in the previous chapter, had expressed the desire to evangelize Spain in his letter to the Romans, but we cannot know again if this really happened<sup>296</sup>. Effective evidence of the existence of Christian religion can be found only around the second half of the third century during the persecution of the Christians by Decius in the years 249-251 and the persecutions of Valerian in 257-259. One of the martyrs in Spanish lands was saint Fructuosus of Tarragona, who was so popular that was loved not only by Christians but also by the rest of the people<sup>297</sup>. The great persecution of Diocletian (303-5) engendered martyrs also in this province, and for these early centuries of Christianisation, these are the only sources we have.

Still, the fourth century is the period when we start noticing an organized church, allowing us to suppose that during the third century these structures were built and strengthened. The most important testimony of it is the Council of Elvira, held between 306 and 313. Nineteen bishops from the five provinces into which the Iberian Peninsula had been divided by Diocletian along with 24 priests were present. The provenance of the clerics attending the council was diversified, but it is noticeable the concentration of priests that came from the southern part of the province. In spite of that, there are a few members of other distant dioceses, such as León or Zaragoza, but the higher attendance from southern clerics was probably due

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<sup>294</sup> Tertullian, *Liber adversus Iudaeos*, chap. 7.

<sup>295</sup> COLLINS, *Early medieval Spain*, 1995. p. 58.

<sup>296</sup> Further development of this subject on: MORENO, *El Cristianismo en las Espanas: los origens*. In SOTOMAYOR y FERNÁNDEZ, *El concilio de Elvira y su Tiempo* Pp. 173 ss.

<sup>297</sup> J, RUINART, *Acta martyrum*, p. 265: "*Et cum duceretur Fructuosus episcopus cum diaconibus ad amphitheatrum populus... condolare coepit, quia talem amorem habebat non tantum a fratribus sed etiam ab ethnicis*".

to the proximity to the venue of the Council in a Roman city near Granada. If we give credit to the theory of Christianisation first coming to Spain from Africa and establishing mostly in places where Romanization was strong, it makes sense to find the first Council and most of its attendees in this region. We also know from archaeological testimonies that in the Peninsula, the areas with an established urban web and high quantities of rural *villae* could be found for the most part in the south. These were the places with the strongest and oldest presence of Christianisation<sup>298</sup>.

Out of the 81 canons of the council, over 20 regarded pagan practices indicating that the Christian religion still struggled to prevail over the attachment to traditional beliefs<sup>299</sup>. The first four canons of this council concern people who after being baptized, continued to sacrifice to idols in pagan temples. It is interesting to notice that the second canon tells about the existence of *flamines* who had received the Christian sacrament but needed to perform their duties as public officers in a still pagan Empire. In civil Roman life, religious and political duties were inseparable. As a result, the problem of the office of *flamen* was contemplated in three canons of this council and the major question was to decide if someone could cover his civil duties while remaining a Christian<sup>300</sup>.

Other traditional practices mentioned by this council are the use of spells with evil aims and the practice of idolatry. In canon 36, the presence of pictures on the walls inside churches was forbidden, fearing that they might inspire idolatry<sup>301</sup>.

The thirty-fourth canon forbade the lightening of candles in cemeteries during the day<sup>302</sup>. It is believed that this practice came from a pagan tradition of lightening candles before the tombs. It seems that this canon tried to fight a resistance that was being incorporated by the people into Christian practices, for the lightening of

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<sup>298</sup> WOLFRAM, *Uma síntese sobre a cristianização do mundo rural no sul da Lusitania: Arqueologia – Arquitectura – Epigrafia*. Tese de doutoramento, 2011.

<sup>299</sup> See UBIÑA, José F. *Le concile d'Elvoire et l'esprit du paganisme*, 1993.

<sup>300</sup> See DUCHESNE, *Le Concile d'Elvoira et les flamines chrétiens*, 1887.

<sup>301</sup> Canon 36: "Placuit picturas in ecclesia esse non debere; nec quod colitur et adorantur, in parietibus depingatur". VIVES, *Concilios Visigóticos e hispano-romanos*, p. 8.

<sup>302</sup> Canon 34: *Ne cerei in coemeteriis incendatur. Cereos per diem placuit in coemeterio non incendi, inquietandi enim sanctorum spiritus non sunt. Qui haec non observaverint arceantur ab ecclesiae communione*. VIVES, p.7.

candles was also mentioned in Martin of Braga's sermon in the sixth century, as we will see in this chapter.

Canon 41 exhorted landowners to prevent their workers from keeping idols on their property, yet if this action was to lead pagans to violence, the owner must keep the images<sup>303</sup>. In this canon, the cautious attitude that Christianity still needed to adopt is very clear. Indeed, even if the new religion was spreading fast in the province, the official cult was still Roman paganism.

However, we saw in the first chapter how the Imperial legislation brought civil benefits and protection to the Christian religion, leading later to the persecution of pagan practices. The consequence of this legislation is obvious in Spain through the few pagan inscriptions that were found from the fourth century on. In fact, as epigraphic studies demonstrate, no pagan inscriptions were commissioned in Spain after the year 388<sup>304</sup>. In a letter to bishop Himerius of Tarragona in 385, pope Siricius rejoiced by the fact that many people were seeking baptism, yet in the same letter, he also talked about apostasy as a practice carried out by "certain Christians" who persist in the cult of idols and the practice of sacrifices.<sup>305</sup> As we may expect, Christianity was struggling to find its way through people's lives.

### 3.2 The Priscillian heresy

Considerations must be made about the Priscillian heresy and its impact on Spanish society during these first centuries of Christianity. This heresy was rebuked in several ecclesiastical councils for centuries on, and in these surces some of the doctrines present in Priscillian theories were considered as related with pagan and traditional heritage. The appearance and spread of this doctrine at this specific

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<sup>303</sup> Canon 41 : *Admoneretur placui fideles, ut in quantum possunt prohibeant ne idola in domibus suis habeant. Si vero vim metuunt servorum vel se ipsos puros conservent ; si non facerint, alieni ab ecclesia habeantur.* VIVES, P. 9.

<sup>304</sup> HANDLEY, *Death, society and culture: inscriptions and epitaphs in Gaul and Spain*, 2003.

<sup>305</sup> *Epistola ad Himerium*, 3. PL 56, 556. " *Adjectum est etiam, quosdam Christianos ad apostasiam (quod dici nefas est) transeuntes, et idolorum cultu ac sacrificiorum contaminatione profanatos, quos a Christi corpore et sanguine, quo dudum redempti fuerant renascendo, jubemus abscindi. Et si resipiscentes forte aliquando fuerint ad lamenta conversi, his, quandiu vivunt agenda poenitentia est, et in ultimo fine suo reconciliationis gratia tribuenda, quia, docente Domino, nolumus mortem peccatoris, sed tantum ut convertatur, et vivat*". *Epistolae Romanorum pontificum* (Paris, 1721; reprint Farnborough, 1967), 623-638.



moment in history can tell much about the general feelings in a place struggling to conciliate the new ideas with the pagan past in a moment of change.

Some different versions of the early life of Priscillian are known, and according to Sulpicius Severus – a major source for Priscillian History – he was probably born in 340. While praising his virtues as an educated and ascetic man, Sulpicius said that Priscillian was proud of his profane learning and even practiced magic at some point in his life<sup>306</sup>. Another source of information about his life and the polemics of his doctrine is the Chronicle of Hydatius – a Galician monk who defined himself as a man poorly versed in the profane sciences (which tells probably more about his modesty than his real ignorance). His chronicle was written around 468 and aimed, as Hydatius explained, to be a continuation of the story written by saint Jerome that ended in 378. However, Hydatius concentrates on the state of affairs in Spain, specifically his native Galicia, where he lived and was bishop of *Aquae Flaviae*. He describes how the Priscillian heresy persisted in the region even after the death of Priscillian, and mentions the first two synods against it.

Priscillian apparently followed the teachings of an Egyptian named Marcus, versed in the theories of Gnosticism and Manichaeism. Inspired by these ideas Priscillian, who was a gifted orator, started to preach a sort of mystical teaching in secret societies strongly influenced by oriental doctrines. Priscillian and his followers were meeting at night and these gatherings presumably started to proliferate around 378, the year we found the first notice about Priscillianism in Lusitania – in a denounce by Hyginus, bishop of Cordoba, and bishop Hydatius of Emerita Augusta (Mérida) to Pope Damasus demanding that measures should be taken against Priscillian<sup>307</sup>. As we know, in this period a decree of Theodosius instituted heresies and non-Christian practices as crimes, and the popularity of this kind of secret society likely arose the suspicions of the clergy in Spain. In 380, after a deliberation of pope Damasus, ten bishops of the province and two from Aquitania assembled in Saragossa to discuss

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<sup>306</sup> *Sed idem vanissimus et plus iusto inflator profanarum rerum scientia quin et magicas artes ad adolescentiam eum exercuisse creditum est. Chronica, II, 46.*

<sup>307</sup> *"Nemo illic nostrum inter illa reprobos tua potissimum epistula contra improbos praevalente, in qua iuxta euangelica iussa praeceperas, ne quid in absentes et inauditos decerneretur."* - Liber ad Damasum episcopum, Opera Priscilliani, CSEL, XVIII, 35.

Priscillian's doctrine. The council presented some general canons against what was presumably part of this heresy. In a synod held later in 385 in Bordeaux, Priscillians were accused of using magical rituals related to the weather, using spells to propitiate the harvest and consecrate ointments to the sun and the moon<sup>308</sup>.

The nightly meetings followed the same model as that of Mithraism and Montanism<sup>309</sup>. Therefore, rumors on the immoral acts, orgies and nudity of Priscillianism were diffused by people such as Augustine of Hippo and St. Jerome. As Moisés do Espírito Santo writes, "*em tudo o Priscilianismo se assemelha ao montanhismo, e em muito com o mitraísmo, como se fosse uma fusão ecuménica desses dois sistemas: astrologia, elitismo e secretismo, purismo e penitências públicas, êxtases colectivos pela acção do Espírito Santo, repúdio do casamento e abstinência da fruição da natureza, aversão á ortodoxia romana e ao poder episcopal, confrarias de monges giróvagos e de pregadores peregrinos, importância das mulheres nas sessões de êxtase e na pregação, etc*"<sup>310</sup>. It is often argued that Manicheism has many pagan elements in its doctrine, and during his trial, Priscillian was explicitly accused of being a Manichean, although this might already have become the standard term for everything heretic – as it was in later times. Manichaeism and Priscillianism are not the same thing and Priscillian even condemned the doctrine of Mani in one of his treatises. Apparently he do not even knew important aspects of the Manichaean creed, despite the fact that authors such as Orosius, Augustine and Pope Leo I would think both heresies as the same thing.

However, the comparison between both doctrines shows a number of similarities for example an eclectic approach to non-canonical texts into their seek of revelation; Priscillian for instance would resort to occultism, whereas Mani would consult the teaching of prophets of other religions<sup>311</sup>. As pointed out by König "*On the one hand, Manichaeans and Priscillianist accepted Christ, and, tried to infiltrate the Catholic Church.*

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<sup>308</sup> Sulpicius Severus, *Chronica*, p. 332-346. (SC 441).

<sup>309</sup> See NASRALLAH, *Prophecy, the periodization of History, and early Christian identity: a case from the so-called Montanism controversy*, 2006.

<sup>310</sup> ESPÍRITO SANTO, *Origens do cristianismo português*, p. 256.

<sup>311</sup> KÖNIG, *Motives and justifications for enforcing religious conformity – a Manichaean-Priscillianist case study (302-572)*, p. 2.

Therefore, neither of them can be classified as being completely estranged from orthodox Christianity. On the other hand, pagan and magic practices attributed to both groups, the dualistic elements inherent in their doctrine, as well as their interest in astrology, show that their doctrine contained elements alien to Christianity. They appear to oscillate between orthodoxy, heresy, and a non-Christian movement altogether<sup>312</sup>. For this reason the many attackers of Priscillian's heresy were unanimous about his affinity with Manicheism and astrology and accused him of mixing pagan practices with Christian doctrine<sup>313</sup>. Furthermore, the doctrine represented a menace not only for its propagation of mixing practices but also for its attacks against the episcopal authority<sup>314</sup>.

According to our sources, it seems that the persecution of Priscillianism was not a consensus among the clergy for even after the first council against this doctrine, the number of its supporters continued to grow. In spite of that, the persecution continued, finally leading to Priscillian's imprisonment and torture, followed by his confession of practicing magic. Priscillian was sentenced to death together with his followers, and was executed in Treves in 385. Nonetheless, his condemnation was not for heresy but for his presumable practice of magic, a civil crime long confronted by Imperial legislation<sup>315</sup>. Priscillian's death caused a huge commotion in Spain where he was considered a martyr by some people. As a result, his doctrine spread further in Galicia and the secret meetings became even more popular.

Until at least the first half of the fifth century Priscillianism was still practiced, as attested by the struggle against this doctrine in Spain in the following centuries after his death. In 397-400, nineteen bishops of the Peninsula assembled at Toledo to deliberate against Priscillianism. During this meeting, the refusal of the dogma of trinity<sup>316</sup> and the belief in astrology<sup>317</sup> were condemned, among other things. After

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<sup>312</sup> Idem.

<sup>313</sup> For a wider description of Priscillian's ideas and doctrine see CHADWICK, *Priscillian of Avila*, 1976; ARDAZ, *Religiosidad cósmica y simbología pagana en Prisciliano*, 1990, from page 225 on; BURRUS, *The Making of a Heretic. Gender, Authority, and the Priscillianist Controversy*, 1995.

<sup>314</sup> To Priscillian, "the Spirit's activity is not confined to the episcopate and the clergy [...], but is found in all who aspire to holiness and to an understanding of the deeper meaning of scripture." In CHADWICK, *Op. cit.*, p. 79.

<sup>315</sup> MCKENNA, *Paganism and pagan survivals in Spain up to the Fall of the Visigothic kingdom*. 1938. p. 56.

<sup>316</sup> II: Si quis dixerit atque crediderit Deum Patrem eundem esse Filium vel Paraclitum, anathema sit. VIVES, p. 27.

the Suevic establishment at the beginning of the fifth century in Galicia, it seems that the ecclesiastical authorities forgot about this heresy and its practices continued to gain power and influence. Two centuries after the doctrine appeared, it was still discussed in the first council of Braga in 567. It repeated the same canons as those of the council of Toledo with some other specifications, such as the belief in the influence of stars in man's lives and of the Zodiac signs in man's body<sup>318</sup>. As McKenna says, "*the practice of astrology had disastrous effects in the moral order, for if the stars exercised a decisive influence upon man's life and conduct, the individual was no longer responsible for the sins he had committed*"<sup>319</sup>. As a matter of fact, it seems that the clergy struggled in this century and beyond, even though we cannot find any other mention of Priscillianism after the second council of Braga. We can speculate that much of the struggle of the Church with paganism and traditional practices in these first centuries may have been due to the popularity and strength of Priscillianism in Spain, especially in Galicia.

Many had interpreted the Priscillian doctrine as a revitalization of indigenous traditions, yet according to Priscillian's own testimony, he left his father's tradition for he considered them as vane and corruptible<sup>320</sup>. According to him, God would manifest himself in everything, such as nature, trees, mountains, rivers and woods. This way of thinking could have been influenced by either mysticism and Manichaeism, but we cannot neglect the fact that these philosophies were in consonance with indigenous beliefs and practices. It is not surprising that Galicia, where Romanization was apparently not strong<sup>321</sup> and pre-Roman religion was much alive, was the very place where Priscillian doctrine developed and where it had much success. Modern interpretations agreed that the real direct relationship between paganism and Priscillianism, as pointed by the judges of this heresy, was

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<sup>317</sup> XV: Si quis astrologiae vel mathesie extimat esse credendum, anathema sit. VIVES, p. 27.

<sup>318</sup> IX. Si quis animas et corpora humana fatalibus stellis credit astringe, sicut pagani et Priscillianus dixerunt, anathema sit. X. Si quis duodecim signa de sideribus quae mathematici observare solent, per singulas animi et corporis membra disposita credunt et nominibus patriarcharum adscripta dicunt, sicut Priscillianus, dixit anathema sit. VIVES, p. 68.

<sup>319</sup> MCKENNA, *Paganism and pagan survivals in Spain up to the Fall of the Visigothic kingdom*. 1938. p. 73.

<sup>320</sup> 224, *Tractatus*. I:16,3 CSEL, 18 ed. Georg Schepss, Vienna 1889.

<sup>321</sup> See TRANOY, *Romanisation et monde indigène dans la Galice antique: problèmes et perspectives*, 1981.

not crucial or was even inexistent. Priscillian's approach to astrology however is undeniable, as well as a pre-roman imprint based in its close relationship with nature and natural phenomena. We could probably say that he indeed interpreted the indigenous beliefs in a Christian light, which would have suited the needs of the people in this crucial moment of transition.

### 3.3 Sueves in Spain and their conversion

Hydatius, the Galician chronicler, is also the one who narrated about the entering of the Visigoths and Suevic people in the Iberian Peninsula<sup>322</sup>. In 408, Alaric drove his army to Italy in order to reclaim payment and supply according to the agreements established with the Roman Empire that were not honored. After the sack of Rome in 410 and the death of Alaric, his successor led his people to southern Gaul where they first established in Aquitania. They then went to Spain and found a definitive home after a period of instability of Roman rulers. The definitive establishment occurred around the years 417-18 and the region of Baetica was occupied by the Siling Vandals while Lusitania and the Carthaginiensis were taken by the Alans. The north-west and Galicia was occupied by Hasding Vandals and Sueves. The latter attempted an expansion of their territory towards the south but were eventually driven back to their initial territory in the far north by the Visigoths<sup>323</sup>. In 480, Sidonius Apollinaris bore witness on how he saw the transition to a Visigothic ruler in a period when Roman administration was falling apart. Through his testimony, we can presume that in Spain, as well as in Gaul, a general feeling of cooperation was shared among the aristocracies concerning Germanic rulers<sup>324</sup>.

Much of the scholarship about the Suevi is highly repetitive because of the very few literary sources about their history<sup>325</sup>. However, what we know is that they entered in Spain between 409 and 411. These people survived independently until 585, when

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<sup>322</sup> Hydatii Episcopi Chronicon, XV: "Alani, et Wandali, et Suevi Hispanias ingressi aera CCCCLVII, alii quarto kalendas, alii tertio idos Octobris memorant die, tertia feria, Honorio VIII et Theodosio Arcadii filio III consulibus".

<sup>323</sup> See COLLINS, *Early Medieval Spain. Unity in diversity, 400-1000*. 1995.

<sup>324</sup> Sidonius Apollinaris, *Epistolae*: XVII. In MGH *Auctores Antiquissimi*. t. VIII, 1. Berlin, 1877.

<sup>325</sup> KULIKOWSKI, *The Suevi in Gallaecia: an introduction*, in D'EMILIO, *Culture and society in Medieval Galicia*, p. 131-2.

the Visigoths conquered their territory. We know that the conversion to Christianity first reached them as Arian doctrine in 465 with a monk named Ajax from Asia Minor<sup>326</sup>. Ajax was a sort of exponent of the Arian church in Gaul and was apparently encouraged by the Gothic king, Theoderic II, to go from Gaul to Galicia and start his work of conversion. Thompson affirms that Theoderic “may have been the first European sovereign to think that there was some political value in converting a foreign people to his own religion<sup>327</sup>”.

The later conversion of Suevi to the Catholic faith is a more obscure matter. Gregory of Tours narrates that the conversion occurred under a king named Chararic, who had a leper son and had heard about the miraculous power of Saint Martin of Tours. In the hope of healing his son, the king had sent envoys to Gaul in order to bring some relics from the saint to his kingdom. Apparently, the relics worked the desired miracle and from this day on, his kingdom and himself were converted to the catholic faith<sup>328</sup>. According to Gregory, as a fortuity, the relics arrived on the day in which Martin, later known as Dumienensis, reached Galicia.

### **3.4 Martin of Dume and the two councils of Braga**

Martin was born around 518 or 525 in Pannonia, where he lived, studied and learnt Latin and Greek<sup>329</sup>. About the year 550, after a peregrination to the Holy Land Martin decided to go to the West, even though there are no testimonies to elucidate his choice<sup>330</sup>. As previously mentioned, Gregory of Tours linked the conversion of the Suevoic kingdom from Arianism to Catholicism to the arrival of Martin, although the latter presumably did not have much responsibility in the conversion of the

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<sup>326</sup> Hydatii episcopi Chronicon, VIII. III: *Reversi legati Suevorum obiisse nuntiant Severum imperii sui anno quarto, qui supra remittuntur ad Conimbricam. Ajax natione Galata, effectus apostata et senior Arianus, inter Suevos regis sui auxilio hostis catholicae fidei et divinae Trinitatis emergit. Ad Gallicanam Gothorum habitationem hoc pestiferum inimici hominis virus advectum.*

<sup>327</sup> THOMPSON, *The conversion of the Spanish Suevi to Catholicism*, p. 81.

<sup>328</sup> Gregory of Tours, *De virtutibus S. Martini*, i. II pp. 114-6.

<sup>329</sup> On Martin's erudition see FONTÀN, *Martin de Braga, un testigo de la tradición clásica y cristiana*, 1974.

<sup>330</sup> Some argue that he was an envoy from Constantinople that was interested on having a link with the Visigothic kingdom. See DIAZ, *El reino Suevo de Hispania y su sede en Bracara*, p. 412 and respective bibliography. Maria João Violante Branco gives a general overview of the diverse interpretations of Martin's background and his connections with Rome and the Gallic church, in *St. Martin of Braga, the Sueves and Gallaecia*, pp. 77-85.

kingdom. We do not know why Martin decided to establish himself in Galicia, but he did so and became abbot and then bishop in 556. He later founded a Monastery in Dume, became Archbishop of Braga and was known as the apostle of the Suevi<sup>331</sup>. The two most important sources for this period, Gregory of Tours and Isidore of Seville, are very discrepant on attributing responsibility to Martin in the process of conversion of the kingdom from Arianism to Catholicism<sup>332</sup>. We can only be sure of Martin's labor in his fight against paganism and his dedication to preach moral values to the clergy, based on his participation in councils and his writing works, the most famous the *De correctione rusticorum*. He is then to be seen more as a reformer and educator than as a converter.

In 561, Martin participated in the first Council of Braga along with other seven bishops. As we previously saw, the main subject on this occasion was Priscillian heresy. As mentioned above, two of its canons condemned the belief in the attachment of human bodies and souls to stars that determined their fates, as well as the belief in the twelve zodiac signs and its effect on parts of the body.

In 572, a second Council was held in Braga, this time attended by twelve bishops with Martin as the leader. The main subjects were the ecclesiastical discipline and the heterogenic and pagan elements infiltrated into the Christians lives. A list of canons from oriental councils were translated from Greek to Latin, selected and ordered by Martin<sup>333</sup>. Among these canons, we can find some very interesting references to

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<sup>331</sup> For a broad analysis of political affairs of Braga during the Suevic kingdom see DIAZ, *El reino Suevo de Hispania y su sede en Bracara*, 2000.

<sup>332</sup> According to Isidore of Seville in his History of the Sueves the conversion of this people happened differently. It was the work of a king named Theodemir and it had nothing to do with the relics of Martin of Tours. According to Isidore Martin of Braga was responsible to strengthening the conversion with the construction of monasteries (even if Isidore write in plural it is improbable that Martin had founded another monastery besides the one in Braga). The differences between the story told by Gregory and the one of Isidore are big and it is interesting to note that the king that each one mentions is unknown to one another. Theodemir is mentioned in the chronicle of John of Bliclarum, but he says that king Miro succeed Theodemir in 570.

<sup>333</sup> *Canones ex orientalium antiquorum partum synodis a venerabile Martino episcopo vel ab omni Bracarensi synodo excerpti vel emendati tituli, ubi de clericorum seorsum et laicorum sentential restauravit, ut quod translators a graeco in latinum obscurius dixerunt vel scribtorum ignavia depravaverat aut inmutaverat simplicius et emendatius omnia uno hoc continentur in loco, unde quo capitulo quis scire voluerit possit celeries invenire*. VIVES, p. 86. According to Martínez Díez Martin's collection is not a mere translation since it is possible to identify several modifications made in order to adapt the text to local reality and environment. In *La colección canónica de la iglesia sueva: los capitula martini*, 1967.

pagan and traditional practices – as for example canon 59 that forbade bishops and clerics to make amulets<sup>334</sup>, as well as canon 68, forbidding the celebration of mass at tombs<sup>335</sup>. The implication of members of the clergy in a sort of coming to terms with the adaptability of the Christian religion is obvious. We will further see how the traditional way to deal with death was still so strong that it forced the introduction of some of these practices into the Christian life. Indeed, the following canon admonishes Christians about the practice of “picnics” in cemeteries<sup>336</sup>.

From canons 71 to 75, we see a series of names and practices that we will find in many other sources and in other councils in Visigothic Spain too. In canon 71, we are introduced to diviners (*divinos*) and sorcerers (*sortilegos*) who were apparently consulted by common people as finders of *maleficia* in private houses (*in domo sua*).

The following canon summarizes a group of apparently very popular practices according to our sources. At first, it establishes a general prohibition of pagan practices (*Non liceat christianis tenere traditiones gentilium*), such as the observation of the moon and stars, and their influence on activities like building a house, planting trees or celebrating marriages. It seems to be a clear allusion to the ever strong practice of astrology, yet the explicit mention of it could be a characteristic of Iberian religion, since we know that Priscillianism was famous for its astrological facet, which was always present in people’s beliefs.

Canon 73 deals with some non-specified *kalendas*, but according to the description that is given, we can certainly presume that it is about the January calends. As described by previous testimonies such as Caesarius of Arles, people were accused of giving themselves to pagan entertainment and to the decking of houses with bay and branches<sup>337</sup>. The following canon states a peculiar rule: it is forbidden to collect

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<sup>334</sup> LIX: *Non liceat clericis incantatores esse et ligaturas facere, quod est colligation animarum. Si quis haec facit, de ecclesia proiciatur.* VIVES, p. 101.

<sup>335</sup> LXVIII: *Non oportet clericos ignaros et praesumptores super monumenta in campo ministeria portare aut distribuere sacramenta, seda ut in ecclesia aut in basilicas ubi martyrum reliquiae sunt depositae ibi pro defunctis oblationem offerre.* VIVES, p. 102.

<sup>336</sup> LXIX: *Non liceat christianos prandia ad defunctorum sepulcra deferre et sacrificia reddere mortuorum Deo.* Idem.

<sup>337</sup>LXXIII: *Non liceat iniquas observationes agere kalendarum et otiis vacare gentilibus neque lauro aut viriditate arborum cingere domos. Omnis haec observatio paganismi est.* VIVES, p. 103.



medicinal herbs with the intention to use them in superstitions or charms. It was however allowed to use these medicines only with the scope of honoring God<sup>338</sup>.

Canon 75 introduces the practice of some sort of spell observed among women in their labor of weaving. The canon actually uses the word *vanitas* to describe what was said by these women, meaning that they practiced some foolishness<sup>339</sup>. As this practice will appear again in Martin's treatise, we will come back to it later.

There are some features we cannot neglect before proceeding. Martin was a Pannonian by birth and when he moved to Galicia, he became involved with many ecclesiastical activities. The canons that we just saw were a sort of selection from Oriental councils, and we can thus ask ourselves whether we should rely on these to assume that they reflected the reality in Galicia. How could Martin have known the practices that he was describing here and in his *De correctione rusticorum*, knowing that he was not a native and that he was engaged in many activities most probably not frequently in touch with his community? Did he get his references from what he knew from Pannonia, what he had read from previous authors (such as Caesarius of Arles) or what he had really seen or heard in Galicia? We need to investigate other sources in order to give credit to what these canons and Martin himself said.

### 3.5 *De correctione rusticorum*

A few years after the second Council of Braga, in 573, Martin wrote a treatise in epistolary form known as the *De correctione rusticorum*<sup>340</sup>. As Martin lets us know in the introduction of this work, his fellow bishop Polemius from Astorga requested him to provide information about the origin of idolatry in order to correct the faith of the *rustici*. He described these *rustici* as "*those who still adhere to the old superstitions*

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<sup>338</sup> LXXIII: *Non liceat in collectione herbarum, quae medicinales sunt, aliquas observations aut incantations adtendere nisitantum cum symbolo divino aut oratione dominica, ut tantum Deus creator omnium et dominus honoretur. Idem.*

<sup>339</sup> LXXV: *Non liceat mulieribus christianis [aliquam] vanitatem in suis lanificiis observare, sed Dominum invocent [adiutorem] qui eis sapientiam texendi donavit. VIVES, p. 104.*

<sup>340</sup> This title is not unanimously attested by the textual tradition. Isidore of Seville calls it *Pro castigatione rusticorum*. "*De correctione rusticorum*", however, is the name traditionally associated with this work.

and who, in their heathen cults, worship demons more than God”<sup>341</sup>. We know that Polemius was among the attendees of the council and it is probable that he asked Martin on this occasion to provide further instructions on how to put into practice the canons of the aforementioned council.

In Martin’s interpretation the *rustici* are not literally those who live in the countryside, but those who divinize nature and its manifestations and could possibly be either country people or people from urban centers. In any case Martin attributed a low cultural level to his recipients, which determined his discourse<sup>342</sup>. In fact, he even says that he will be brief and use a simple language to suit the needs of his audience (“*cibum rusticis rustico sermone condire*”). Throughout his treatise that in form and discourse is similar to a sermon, Martin repeated more than once that he considers as ignorant those who still fall into superstitious practices<sup>343</sup>. It is possible that his main inspiration regarding his use of language was the *De catechizandis rudibus* of Augustine who, as we mentioned in the first chapter, uses *rustici* as a cultural definition to describe those who lived in the countryside and are not yet Christians<sup>344</sup>. It is important to stress this feature for when talking about popular religion, Augustine, as well as Martin, were not necessarily referring to a religious behavior exclusive of rural inhabitants<sup>345</sup>.

Martin knew the sermons of Caesarius of Arles and some scholars even argued that he had copied from the former and from other sources not only structures and concepts, but also many of the pagan practices that he mentions<sup>346</sup>. However, there are some differences in the way Martin and Caesarius deal with pagan practices, for Caesarius is more severe while Martin’s attitude could be even called tolerant. One

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<sup>341</sup> DCR 1.1: *Epistolam tuae sanctae caritatis accepi, in qua scribis ad me ut pro castigatione rusticorum, qui adhuc pristina paganorum superstitione detenti cultum venerationis plus daemoniis quam deo persolvunt.*

<sup>342</sup> NALDINI, *Contro le superstizioni, di Martino di Braga*. 1991. p. 20-1.

<sup>343</sup> As in 10.1 he calls *ignorantibus et rusticis* those who take part in the Kalends of January, or as in 11.1, in which he says that dedication to certain practices is a *stultissimo errore*.

<sup>344</sup> Augustine, *De catechizandis rudibus*, 16 : *Sed tamen faciamus aliquem venisse ad nos, qui vult esse christianus, et de genere quidem idiotarum, non tamen rusticorum, sed urbanorum, quales apud Carthaginem plures experiri te necesse est.*

<sup>345</sup> See AUBIN, *Augustin et la rhétorique à la fin du IVe siècle : quelques liens entre le De doctrina christiana et le De rhetorica*, 2014.

<sup>346</sup> As states Meslin in his *Persistances païennes en Galice, vers la fin du VI siècle*. 1969.

example is the different interpretation that both give regarding the sign of the cross: while Caesarius rebuked his community for using it indistinctively<sup>347</sup>, Martin seemed to boost this practice and its apotropaic use, almost as a sort of protective magic. There are also practices that are absent in Caesarius' sermons but are mentioned by Martin, as we may see further.

We notice a certain agreement between the pagan practices mentioned in the *De correctione rusticorum* and those that we just saw presented in the so called *Capitula ex Orientalium Patrum Synodis*, collected and presented in the second Council of Braga. This can therefore indicate that Martin's reprimands were directed to local and contemporary practices, which is confirmed by the fact that he mentions many practices in the *De correctione rusticorum* that are not mentioned in the Council and not even by Caesarius. Such as, as we will see, the practice of lighting candles and throwing stones at crossroads, offering bread to sources or celebrating a feast to mice and moths. Some of these appear only in Martin's writings and nowhere else, while some are more detailed described by Martin than by Caesarius, which could be a further indication of his authenticity. If there is a certain resemblance between what was current in northwestern Spain and southeastern Gaul, it is due to a common origin of a largely diffused paganism<sup>348</sup>. We can then presume that Martin was dealing with his own people's problems, suggesting solutions based on his personal experience, his knowledge of these very people, as well as their needs. We can presume that the details gave by Martin about pagan practices were based on genuine information, more or less directly acquired and not exclusively literary.

Martin's admonition against paganism is structured in three major theological subjects: the first is the affirmation of the transcendence of God's power and the dependence of his creatures; the second is a discourse on the predominance of

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<sup>347</sup> *Sermo* 13.1. "Magna res est signum Christi et crux Christi : et ideo de isto tam pretioso signaculo res magna et pretiosa signari debet. Quid enim prode est, si de aureo anulo sigillum facias, et pútridas paleas intus recondas? Quid prode est, si signum Christi in fronte et in ore ponimus, et intus in anima crimina et peccata recondimus? Qui enim male cogitat, male loquitur, male operatur, si se emendare noluerit, quando se signat, peccatum illius non minuitur, sed augetur. Multi enim, dum ad furtum aut ad adulterium vadunt, si pedem inpegerint, signant se, et tamen de malo opere non revocant se; et nesciunt miseri, quia includunt in se magis daemones quam excludant". SC 175, pp. 416-418.

<sup>348</sup> NALDINI, *Op. cit.* p.23-4.

Christian institutions over pagan ones, finishing with the confirmation of human free will and the reward for its prayers<sup>349</sup>.

Martin starts with Genesis and how men began to adore nature and pagan gods. His story goes on, defining pagan practices and explaining their origin. He then talks about the coming of the son of God, the one who should release mankind from the power of the devil. The problem is that many still persisted in using pagan practices after the revelation of Christ and his teaching. Martin continues naming several Roman gods such as Juno, Jove, Minerva, Venus and so on, explaining how evil they were. Mars, also known as Mercury, received from people offers of stones whenever they passed through crossroads (*in quadriviis transeuntes, iactatis lapidibus acervos petrarum pro sacrificio reddunt*<sup>350</sup>).

The practice of forming mounds with stones on crossroads can be found in the testimony of Strabo<sup>351</sup>. Mercury, the father of the *Lares* who protected crossroads, was considered the divinity that protected travelers. In Martin's paragraph, the stones were thrown, possibly indicating a ritual of purification with a propitiatory meaning. Some could interpret the stones mounds as an offering to Mercury in his facet of divinity who protects business and trade, while others think that it was his role as the guide of the dead that was being evoked<sup>352</sup>. The placing of these mounds on crossroads is a sort of very popular *topos* in ancient religions; as said by Filotas "crossroads and forks are quintessential transition point with special significance in the beliefs of many societies. Is there where the living can encounter the dead and other spirits, good or evil, where they can look into the future and find healing for man and beast, where they can take malign spirits in order to confuse and lose them"<sup>353</sup>.

It is known that this practice of making stone mounds arrived until the present day in places of peregrination. The definition of 'morcuero' in the Spanish dictionary of the Spanish Royal academy is "*Del lat. Tardío Mercurius, 'montón de piedras al pie de los*

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<sup>349</sup> MEIRINHOS, *Martinho de Braga e a compreensão da natureza na alta Idade Média*. 2006. p. 408.

<sup>350</sup> DCR 7.3.

<sup>351</sup> Strabo, *Geography*, VIII, 343.

<sup>352</sup> FILOTAS, *Pagan survivals, superstitions and popular culture*. 2005. p. 202. Se also BELTRÁN, *Culto a los caminos, límites y fronteras: diócesis protectores*, 2010.

<sup>353</sup> FILOTAS, *Op. cit.*, p. 201.

*caminos dedicado a Mercurio'*, que se formaba con las que iban depositando los viajeros en honor del dios", confirming the persistence of this memory even in modern language. However, numerous evidences attest to the existence and popularity of the cult of Mercury in the peninsula, such as small statues, objects and inscriptions<sup>354</sup>.

Martin then goes on explaining that these demons hide themselves in the woods, in springs, in rivers or at the sea. People offer them sacrifices and worship them, not being able to defend themselves making the sign of the cross<sup>355</sup>. Martin says that people invoke *Lamias* in rivers, a cult of entities that seems to have spread from classic and Nordic mythology, until the Iberian culture<sup>356</sup>. In some legends, this creature is half woman, half snake, and in other versions, she can seduce travelers. The *Lamias* can be associated with the myth of *Xanas* in Spain and the beliefs in forest and their nymphs is still present in the Iberian peninsula in many different forms, such as the above mentioned "*Moura encantada*" or *Dianas* in plural, called in the same way by Martin. Constantino Cabal says that the *Xanas* concentrate in them the fountain's nymphs, the *Lamias* of the rivers and the *Dianas* of the woods<sup>357</sup>. Toponymy can attest to the presence of the belief in *Lamias* in Spain, such is the case of: Lamiano (place of *Lamias* - Navarra); Lamiaran (channel of *Lamias* - Viscaia); Lamiareta (stone of *Lamias* - Navarra); Lamietegui (spot of *Lamias* - Guipuzcoa); Lamien lezea (cave of *Lamias* - Navarra); Laminazulo (well of *Lamias* - Serra da Viscaia) among others<sup>358</sup>.

According to the literary tradition, *Lamiae* were evil women, very near to the later notion of witches. In fact, this description appeared in the so-called first Synod of St. Patrick (5<sup>th</sup> century)<sup>359</sup>, while Isidore of Seville said that these creatures were known

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<sup>354</sup> See BARATA, *Il culto di Mercurio nella Penisola Iberica*, 2001.

<sup>355</sup> DCR 8.4: *Et in mare quidem Neptunum appellant, in fluminibus Lamias, in fontibus Nymphas, in silvis Dianas, quae omnia maligni demones et spiritus nequam sunt, qui homines infidels, qui signaculo cruces nesciunt se munire, nocent et vexant.*

<sup>356</sup> See SANTOS JÚNIOR and CARDOZO, *Ex-Votos às Ninfas em Portugal*, 1953.

<sup>357</sup> PIRES DE LIMA, *São Martinho de Braga e as mulheres demônios*. In *Bracara Augusta*, 1958. p. 108 ss.

<sup>358</sup> *Idem*, p. 113.

<sup>359</sup> *Christianus qui crediderit esse lamiam in saeculo, quae interoretatur striga, anathemazandus quicumque super animam famam istam inposuerit, nec ante in ecclesiam recipiendus quam ut idem creminis quod fecit sua iterum voce revocat et sic poenitentiam cum omni diligentia agat.* The bishops' synod, a symposium with text translation and commentary. Ed. By M. J. Faris. 1976.

as children abductors<sup>360</sup>. It seems however that both interpretations are very different from what Martin knew about these entities and from what was possibly the current belief in Galicia.

In the previous chapter we looked at the popularity and meaning of the cult of sources and springs, a very prominent belief in Roman religion, particularly in Gaul. The cult of water was spread all over the Empire and could often find its origins in beliefs present before the Roman domination for it was very common to find votive offerings in these places<sup>361</sup> and the epigraphic testimonies attested to the worshipping of several entities related to water in *Hispania*<sup>362</sup>. Indeed, divinities and nymphs, most of them of indigenous origins, but also the cult of water and especially its medicinal properties, present an impressive cultural continuity from the Neolithic to our days<sup>363</sup>. An example is the church of *Santa Eulalia de Bóveda* in the Lugo province, where it is still possible to see a *nymphaeum* with a spring of Roman period later Christianised<sup>364</sup>. It is believed that the Christian consecration of the place was made only in the 11th century, but the sacred importance of the sanctuary seems to have persisted from the Roman period until the transformation of the place into a Christian church<sup>365</sup>.

Another heritage from pagan religions mentioned by Martin is the names of the days of the week with each day being named after a pagan divinity. As we have previously seen, this was also a concern for Caesarius of Arles, but it seems that Martin's preaching was stronger in his region as shown by the fact that the Portuguese language was the only one to adopt ecclesiastical names (*segunda-feira*, *terça-feira*, *quarta-feira* and so on). It seems that the use of ecclesiastical names started

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<sup>360</sup> Isidorus, *Etymologiae* VIII, 11.102. *Lamias, quas fabulae tradunt infantes corripere ac laniare solitas, a laniando specialiter dictas.*

<sup>361</sup> See VELASCO, *Divinités des eaux thermales dans le nord-ouest de la provincia Tarraconensis et dans le nord de la provincia Lusitania : une approche au phénomène du thermalisme romain dans l'occident des provinces ibériques*, 1992.

<sup>362</sup> See CUEVILLA, *O culto das fontes no noroeste Hispânico*, 2002.

<sup>363</sup> For some archaeological testimonies of the cult of sources in Portugal see LEITE DE VASCONCELOS, *Religiões da Lusitânia*, vol. II, 1913 pp. 255 ss.

<sup>364</sup> See BLÁZQUEZ MARTÍNEZ, *Le culte des eaux dans la Péninsule Iberique*, p. 209-233.

<sup>365</sup> See ARMADA PITA, *El culto a Santa Eulalia y la cristianización de Gallaecia: algunos testimonios arqueológicos*, 2003.

to spread in the seventh century as attested by a funerary inscription found in Braga in which *secunda feria* is specified as the day of the decease<sup>366</sup>.

Although mentioning the Calends of January, Martin does not argue against the celebrations that presumably took place during these festivities, but only against the belief of some ignorant people (*ignorantibus et rusticis*) that this celebration should mark the beginning of the year. According to the Scriptures, the beginning of the year is on the eighth day of the calends of April (the 25<sup>th</sup> of March) that is when happen the equinox and the duration of day and night are the same. We cannot know if the Calends of January were celebrated in Galicia the same way they seem to have been in Gaul and other regions. As we have previously seen, the second council of Braga described some practices that were popular during these festivities but we cannot know why Martin decided not to repeat this reprimands in the same way in his sermon. However, another description given by Martin can attest to a certain specificity of the way to celebrate this date in Galicia. He talks about a certain *Dies tinearum et murium*: the day of mice and moths which was celebrated at the beginning of the year. In this celebration, bread and cloth were offered to these creatures and, to Martin, people did it to have prosperity along the year. The only other mention of this festivity is found in the *Life of Eligius of Noyon* and it is possible that the hagiographer copied this reference from Martin, since this commemoration appears to be so peculiar and is mentioned only by these two sources. Indeed, as we saw in the previous chapter, it is argued that the *Life of Eligius* was mostly based in previous authors. The bishop of Braga wrote that people normally did this sort of vane things either hidden or openly. He declared this practice to be stupid since when God is angry he sends mice and other plagues anyway. This celebration has some similitudes with the Roman festivity held in January of *Paganalia* in honor to Tellus and Ceres, during which these divinities are asked to protect the crop with small cakes being placed in the fields in order to insure a good harvest<sup>367</sup>. We can presume that Martin had misunderstood the meaning of this celebration, and that, instead of

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<sup>366</sup> Dated year 618 and placed in the Sacristy of Saint Vincent Church in Braga. See VIVES, *Inscripciones cristianas de la Espana romana y visigoda*, 1942. n. 183.

<sup>367</sup> Ovidio, *Fasti*, I, 685-686.

worshiping mice and moths, people would invoke a sort of *augurium* whose purpose was to preserve the future<sup>368</sup>. It could even be an offer to these creatures as an apotropaic practice in order to prevent them from threatening their harvests. There is also a possibility of an even more ancient association with totemic cults of animal divinities such as the mice-Apollo or grasshopper-Apollo<sup>369</sup>. However, being the only testimony of this practice (considering that the information present in Eligius' *Vita* was most probably copied from Martin) can possibly vouch for its authenticity<sup>370</sup>.

The practice of divination through the singing of birds<sup>371</sup>, celebrating the day of Jovis and the Kalendas with tables decorated and laurel hanged, paying attention to signs of the devil like birds and sneezes<sup>372</sup>, observing the day of Venus to celebrate weddings or dedicating a certain day to go out in the street (*quo die in via exeatur adtendere*) - these are all diffused practices that had been mentioned by previous sources and particularly by Caesarius. Martin also repeated what he had endorsed in the second council of Braga: the condemnation of the observation of divination, of auspices and of the day of the idols; the rebuke of women who invoked Minerva during the weaving work (*Mulieres in tela sua Minervam nominare*), the casting of evil spells with herbs and the invoking of demons with magical words. Some other practices are yet somewhat particular such as the lighting of candles (*cereolos*) on stones, trees, springs and crossroads (*trivi*); the celebration of Vulcanalia; taking care of the feet (*pedem observare*); spreading wheat and wine in fireplaces (*fundere in foco*) and putting bread in springs (*panem in fontem mittere*). The bishop affirmed that there were also many other things, but it would be too long to tell them all (*Et alia multa quae longum est dicere*). This formula would be found in other sources such as the 16<sup>th</sup> council of Toledo in 693 and would reflect a stereotypical phrase also found - in a positive sense, dedicated to the large numbers of miracles performed by a saint - in hagiographical writings. However, it could also be interpreted in this context as an

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<sup>368</sup> MESLIN, *Persistence Paiennes em Galice*. 1965. p. 519.

<sup>369</sup> NASCIMENTO, *Instituição pastoral sobre superstições populares*. De correctione rusticorum, p. 68.

<sup>370</sup> Indeed, Strabo, when talking about the region of Galicia mentioned the "especially great number of mice" (Geography, 2:III, 4, 17), a problem that could have threatened peasants motivating this kind of ritual.

<sup>371</sup> DCR 12.1: *divinationes et auguria vana sunt (...) per avium voces*.

<sup>372</sup> DCR 16.4: *et alia diabolic signa per avicellas et sternutos et per alia multa adtenditis*.



allusion to the ignorance of the narrator on the whole range of traditional practices still alive in his region, or as a lack of interest on his part in going deeper in the description of such superstitions. As we discussed in the first chapter, monks and bishops most of the times were ignorant to the real state of popular practices and as we saw, Martin was an outsider himself and could not know entirely the ancestral practices of his community.

Let us all the same analyze the practices that Martin describes. Some may say that according to the Suevic mythology, the god Wotan lived in granite blocks while the god Thor or Donar was worshiped in trees<sup>373</sup>, which could be the origin of the habit of lighting candles in these places, but there are not enough proves of a Germanic culture in Galicia. It is also known that a similar practice was mentioned by Burchard of Worms in his *Decretum* much later in the eleventh century<sup>374</sup>. However, it is well known that the cult of Silvanus was very popular in Hispania and particularly in the north of the peninsula. This divinity, related with woods and trees was probably incorporated after the roman occupation in a sort of syncretism with the Celtic forest entities venerated in this region. The popularity of the cult of trees, woods and the natural environment in general was apparently steady from the pre-roman period to the Christianisation as attested by the toponomy and epigraphic sources, and of course, the mention of our sources<sup>375</sup>.

The theme of crossroads appears again: this time, a *trivium* is mentioned instead of a *quadrivium* as we have seen in the second council of Braga. We have already noticed the importance of this kind of cult in Spain as it seems that worshipping divinities of crossroads was particularly popular in the whole peninsula, especially in the northwestern part<sup>376</sup>. In fact, the worshipping of the *Lares Viales* in Spain was very strong and according to the roman scholar Marcus Terentius Varro, these were the

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<sup>373</sup> JOVE CLOLS, *Sermon contra las supersticiones rurales*, p. 64.

<sup>374</sup> Burchard of Worms, *Decretum libri XX* PL 140, 960-976 n.7.

<sup>375</sup> MUÑOZ, *El culto al dios Silvano en Hispania ¿Innovación o sincretismo?* 1981. See also HOYS, *Algunas consideraciones sobre Silvano en Hispania*, , 1991 and DORCEY, *The cult of Silvanus, a study in Roman folk religion*, 1992.

<sup>376</sup> See PORTELA, *Los dioses lares en la Hispania romana*, 1984 and YANGUAS, *El culto a los Lares Viales en Asturias*, 2014.

entities who inhabit the roads and sacrifices could be made where these roads met<sup>377</sup>. Today in Portugal, it is possible to observe a Christian religious practice which Leite de Vasconcelos had identified as a memory of this practice condemned by Martin, the so called *alminhas*<sup>378</sup>. These monuments consist in small niches or altars placed on the edge of roads or most frequently on the vicinity of crossroads, containing images of souls (the *alminhas*) in the purgatory. Popular belief says that people should pay respect to these souls, light a candle and say a prayer in order to help them escape their fate. It seems that the popular and spontaneous introduction of this practice follows the Council of Trento in the sixteenth century<sup>379</sup>, although the inspiration for this manifestation apparently is much older.

Martin also mentions the celebration called *Vulcanalia* without giving any sort of description on its characteristics. As a Roman harvest and storage festival, the *Vulcanalia* were celebrated in late August (on the 23<sup>rd</sup> to be precise). If the festival was still observed, the meaning could be the same. The other Christian mentions of this celebration are a ninth century continental penitential known as *Poenitentia Quadripartita*<sup>380</sup>, and Burchard of Worms<sup>381</sup>, yet all these references lack of a ritual description.

Another practice mentioned in the *De correctione rusticorum* is the offering of bread to water (*Panem in fontem mittere*) as the first possible mention of this kind of practice in Christian literature<sup>382</sup>. What is more, it is possible that this practice is analogue to a ritual described by Gregory of Tours<sup>383</sup>, in which people offered every sort of goods as bread, cheese and many other things to a lake divinity. The offering of bread to sources and the entities who lived there were in some areas of Spain reinterpreted with Christian purposes, and were found to be practiced until very recently<sup>384</sup>. The

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<sup>377</sup> Marcus Terentius Varro, *De lingua latina*, 6, 25.

<sup>378</sup> LEITE DE VASCONCELOS, *Religiões da Lusitânia III*. 1913. p. 595

<sup>379</sup> RODRIGUES, *As alminhas em Portugal e a devolução da memória*. Tese de mestrado. 2010.

<sup>380</sup> 140, Richeter, 18 (*Antiqua canonum collectio qua in libris de synodalibus causis compilandis usus est Regino*).

<sup>381</sup> *Decretum* 10, 11, PL 140:835

<sup>382</sup> NALDINI, *Contro le superstizioni*. p.112.

<sup>383</sup> Gregorii Turonensis, *Liber de gloria confessorum*, 2. In MGH *Scriptorum Rerum Merovingicarum* tomi I, pars II. 1885. p. 299

<sup>384</sup> BLÁZQUEZ MARTÍNEZ, *Le culte des eaux dans la Péninsule Ibérique*, p. 231.

same could probably be said about the observation of propitious days for the celebration of weddings or the start of a travel (*Veneris diem in nuptias observare et quo die in via exeatur adtendere*) as well as the observation of signs such as the flying of birds and sneezes as auguries.

*Pedem observare* was a very common superstition in Roman times about the question of which foot entered a house (or left it) first, or which shoe should be worn first as a sort of augury. This, however, had probably not much to do with religion in the time of Martin and even after, since this practice is still noticed in many cultures. Nonetheless, Caesarius of Arles also admonished against this practice, which seems to demonstrate the hostility of the Church towards this apparently harmless habit.

The only reference that appeared in the Second Council of Braga but is absent from Martin's sermon is the practice of eating in cemeteries. We cannot know why Martin omitted this practice, but we can still presume its existence since its popularity can be attested by a collection of rules elaborated by the bishop of Porto in 1585, in which it is said that no one should eat or drink in churches, not even on the graves<sup>385</sup>. We will see further how this practice was also attested archaeologically.

Martin believed that people ignored the sign of the cross and thus allowed the devil to harm them with self-invented signs. Martin's conception of the sign of the cross is very different from what Caesarius thought, for as we saw the former stimulated its use almost as a protective charm against evil while the latter considered this practice as a sign of the clergy succumbing to the hybrid behavior or mixing practices. However, it is clear that Martin considered the tendency of baptized Christians to turn on pagan practices as utterly abominable, for one cannot adore God and the devil at the same time<sup>386</sup>.

Martin's treatise goes on exhorting people to repentance while it is still time to abandon the devil and give their lives to God. As a final consideration, we must agree that the *De correctione rusticorum* cannot be isolated from the rest of the sources

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<sup>385</sup> "Nenhuma pessoa coma nas igrejas nem beba, nem nos adros delas nem sobe as covas em algum dia". Cited by CUNHA E FREITAS in *Costumes e tradições do século VI e da actualidade*, p. 289.

<sup>386</sup> DCR 16.7. (...) *non potest deus simul et diabolus coli*.

and intellectual production of this time, and in this way should not be taken as a proof that Galicia was a semi-pagan society. Indeed, Martin's treatise is often criticized as a production of a foreigner who knew little or nothing about the local culture and practices. As it was mentioned before, when he describes traditional practices we cannot properly know whether he is recalling something that he knew from Pannonia, or rather he is describing something learnt in Galicia. A third hypothesis is even possible, that he was merely copying previous authors and his descriptions have nothing to do at all with Galician religiosity. Either way, I believe that what Martin's writings show is how Christianity was shaped and interpreted by its followers, how religiosity was lived and interpreted by his contemporaries. He says that his treatise was the answer to a fellow bishop in need of advice on how to prevent people to resort to paganism. What could be the reason of such request if not the necessity to face a real problem? Anyhow, the comparison shows us a similar situation in other regions and the behavior spread among Christendom was one of hybridity of religion conceptions, so that people were taking what was useful from both sides. Martin's sermon is indeed a testimony of this process and was even possible to observe that most of the practices that he mentions found a parallel in other sources, thus attesting for his credibility. It is also important to acknowledge that effectively, people were being active in building their own religiosity.

However, as it was possible to individuate, many of the practices that he describes are mentioned either only by him or are attested by later sources. Other practices can find correspondence in archeological material as we will soon see or have a strong likeness with practices that became traditional and for many centuries were attested in the area. According to the criteria presented on the first chapter in order to judge the authenticity of the sources, I believe that Martin, although with some misinterpretations and vague descriptions, can be considered as a reliable source.

Martin, the most highly educated man of his days as recalled by Gregory of Tours, died in 580 and, still according to Gregory, everyone mourned his death<sup>387</sup>. His teaching quickly spread along the Peninsula but his veneration was sensed mostly in

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<sup>387</sup> *Historia Francorum* V,37.

Galicia<sup>388</sup>. However, the devotion to this saint seemed to be more difficult to document, and we found public attestation of his cult only in the 12<sup>th</sup> century<sup>389</sup>. On the other hand, the textual tradition of the *De correctione rusticorum* enjoyed a big dispersion around Europe, as shown by the number of manuscripts and the variation between them<sup>390</sup>. Not long before Martin's death, it was probably widely diffused in France and probably also in Britain, as attested by an anonymous sermon from France and its respective copies produced most probably in Irish milieu<sup>391</sup>.

It is also important to point out that Martin established a close relationship with the Suevic dynasty. Indeed, it was king Ariamir who presided the first council of Braga, and the *Formula vitae honestae* was dedicated to king Miro, with whom Martin had a lively correspondence. This strategy to seek the sponsor of rulers proved to be important to secure the conversion of people in many other kingdoms. Isidore of Seville wrote that the process of conversion started under king Chararic (550-558) and was completed under Theodomir (560-570), a process that would have lasted roughly a decade according to the bishop of Seville. According to Ferreiro, the strategy used by Martin to secure Catholicism in the Peninsula was the creation of an ecclesiastical organization, since immediately after his arrival in Galicia Martin founded a monastery in Dume<sup>392</sup>. As the residence of the court of Suevic kingdom and head of the ecclesiastical see, the place was favorable to enjoy both the influence of the already established church and the royal power.

### 3.5.2. The *Parochiale Suevorum*

During Martin's lifetime a very important document was compiled in Suevic environment which should now be briefly analysed for its crucial information on the diffusion of the Christian faith in the Suevic kingdom. The document known as the

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<sup>388</sup> See FERREIRO, *Veneration of Martin of Tours and Martin of Braga in northern Portugal*, 2001, in which the author argues that the cult of Martin of Braga was replaced by the most popular cult of Martin of Tours, both being latter eclipsed in Galicia by the cult of Santiago of Compostela.

<sup>389</sup> See FERREIRO, *Martinian Veneration in Gaul and Iberia: Martin of Tours and Martin of Braga*, p. 7-32

<sup>390</sup> NASCIMENTO, *Instrução pastoral sobre as superstições populares*, pp. 87 ss.

<sup>391</sup> See LEVISON, *England and the continent in the eighth century*, 1946.

<sup>392</sup> FERREIRO, *The missionary labors of St. Martin of Braga in 6th century Galicia*, p. 18.

*Parrochiale Suevorum*<sup>393</sup> was elaborated at the end of the sixth century, between 573 and 582, and it is a list of thirteen episcopal sees, each one with respective churches (*ecclesiae*) in the region of the Suevic kingdom. According to this document the foundation of dioceses is related to the existence of *pagi*, *vici* or *castra*.

This document shows the development of the episcopal organization of the kingdom and it can say much also about the political, social and economic asset of the kingdom. It is also a valuable source to the study of the strategies of conversion in rural areas, showing that the responsibility to spread the faith and to impose the episcopal discipline was also (and probably mostly) of private landowners<sup>394</sup>. This document is also the only document available that provides information about a 'Suevic geography' in its physical extension as well as in its political implementation. More than half of the churches listed in the *Parrochiale* are located between Minho and Douro, the heart of Suevic kingdom, showing the influence of the rulers in the foundation of churches and strength of Christian religion.

This document aimed probably to collect the information about the establishment of the dioceses throughout the Suevic kingdom and it offers many important information about the Christianisation of the territory. For example, the scarcity of churches in the south of the reign compared with the north could mean that probably, most of the churches were under control of private owners<sup>395</sup>. The *ecclesiae* present on the list would be, according to Pierre David, independent Christian communities organized around a place of cult<sup>396</sup>. These structures would be then different from the *basilicae* and the monasteries that have a private foundation. This is an important distinction because the *Parrochiale* do not include the churches of private foundation in *villae*, which were not allowed to perform baptism or function as cemeteries. In this way, we can only presume that the Christian web was much more extensive, if we consider the importance of these private churches according to

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<sup>393</sup> A name that is somehow deliberate, since the word *parrochia* is never cited in the text, which is also known as *Divisio Theodomiri*.

<sup>394</sup> DÍAZ, *El Parrochiale Suevorum: organización eclesiástica, poder político y poblamento en la Gallaecia tardoantigua*, p. 39.

<sup>395</sup> DIAZ e MENÉNDEZ-BUEYES, *Gallaecia in Late antiquity. The Suevic kingdom and the rise of local powers*, in D'EMILIO, *Culture and society in medieval Galicia*, p. 160.

<sup>396</sup> DAVID, *Etudes historiques sur la Galice et le Portugal du VIe au XIIIe siècle*, 1947.

the mention in the ecclesiastical councils. Furthermore, with a lack of control from the bishops, it is probable that these churches of private patronage and the community around them were subjected to different rules. Less surveillance would mean more liberty to local religious interpretations.

Another important piece of information is that the churches of the *Parrochiale* are placed in the areas of Roman circumscription and the ecclesiastical organization basically continues to follow the late Roman division of the territory, which means that the Suevic churches adapted and used the previous administrative organization<sup>397</sup>. According to this consideration, the many interpretations of a possible “archaic” culture of the northern part of Galicia due to a great quantity of toponyms of an indigenous origin are considered to be a bit misleading. These names probably have little to do with an attachment to pre-roman culture and resistance to Romanization, since this region would be mainly integrated into the Roman dynamics and culture. According to José Carlos Sánchez Pardo, “*estos topónimos ‘étnicos’ probablemente permiten alguna lectura sociohistórica en los primeros momentos de la conquista romana. Pero a finales del siglo VI, el origen de estos nombres no era más que un ‘fósil’ toponímico mientras que la realidad arqueológica indica que la mayoría de estos supuestos ‘pueblos indígenas’ del Norte de Gallaecia tenían una cultura material y un poblamiento típicamente romano (o más bien, galaicorromano). Las ecclesiae de topónimo «étnico» no presentan ninguna diferencia arqueológica con las que poseen un topónimo latino*”<sup>398</sup>.

### **3.6 Seventh century, Isidore of Seville and Valerius of Bierzo**

Pagan and traditional practices were not forgotten after the death of Martin, and 589 is the year the third council of Toledo was convened, namely the first council summoned after the second council of Braga. This meeting was attended by sixty bishops from Spain and Gaul (*totius Spaniae vel Galliae*) and was held in the second year of the reign of king Reccared in celebration of his conversion to Catholicism. It is possible to deduce the importance of this council not only from its meaning as an

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<sup>397</sup> SÁNCHEZ PARDO, *Organización eclesiástica y social en la Galicia Tardoantigua. Una perspectiva geográfico-arqueológica del Parroquial Suevo*, p. 461.

<sup>398</sup> SÁNCHEZ PARDO, *Op. Cit.*, p. 463.

important mark on the conversion of Visigothic kingdom, but also from its capacity to conjoint a great number of bishops from Spain and Gaul. As we have seen, the Suevic kingdom was converted probably around the time Martin arrived in Galicia, but the Visigothic dynasty remained Arian until Reccared. Although 589 is the date of the official conversion, we can assume that individuals or small groups had been adhering to Catholicism far earlier as attested by some famous individuals such as St. Saba, John of Biclano and Masona of Mérida, who were exponents in their societies under Visigothic rule before the official conversion. It is John of Biclano himself who informs about the conversion of the king in his first year of reign (587) while the conversion of his people was announced in occasion of the third council of Toledo<sup>399</sup>. However, the relation of the Arian kings with the Catholic Church seems to have been quite tolerant and under Arian rule, Catholics could freely build churches and monasteries. Nevertheless, when the Visigothic kingdom became catholic, Arians did not enjoy the same freedom in Spain.

What is relevant for us here<sup>400</sup> is that according to Gregory of Tours, there were three meetings between the sovereign and bishops before the third council of Toledo. The objective of all of these meetings was to prove to the King (he also may have wanted to prove himself) the power and advantages of the Catholic faith. Although we are dealing with a conversion from Arianism to Catholicism here, this behavior is similar to that adopted by some sovereigns who needed to receive proofs of the real power of the Christian religion in order to initiate their own conversion and that of their kingdom.

In the introduction of this council, we are informed that it was not possible to celebrate councils under Visigothic rule subjected to the Arian heresy for many years. The whole corpus of the acts of this council is a condemnation of Arianism and an affirmation of previous councils such as the Nicaean where the unity of the Church was preached. However, our attention should be focused on canons 16, 22 and 23.

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<sup>399</sup> Iohanes Biclarenensis Chronicum V and VIII.

<sup>400</sup> On the political motives that probably prompted the conversion of Reccared, I will indicate further readings. For a broad analysis of the historical process see THOMPSON, *The conversion of Visigoths*, 1960 and *The conversion the of the Spanish Suevi to Catholicism*, 1980; FONTAINE, *Conversion et culture chez les wisigoths d'Espagne*, 1987.



The former starts saying that idolatry is deeply present in all Spain and Gaul which is why bishops, together with judges and landowners, were exhorted to destroy idols, survey their servants and use violence if necessary<sup>401</sup>. In the previous chapter, we saw how landowners were exhorted to control the religious behavior of their subordinates, and were instructed to use violence if needed. Judging by the tone used by Martin in his treatise, it seems that he was adept of a more bland way of persuasion, different from what seems to be the general behavior of the clergy represented in this canon. However, we will see in the next chapter that violent behaviors were not always the rule, and people's difficulty of accepting the new faith might have inspired a more permissive missionary strategy. Indeed, this behavior can be seen in the Gregorian missions in Britain and the pope's own attitude towards the remaining paganism in the island. Canon 22 on the other hand forbade people from singing during the funeral of clerics<sup>402</sup>, while canon 23 rebuked the dances in the commemoration of saints<sup>403</sup>, a rebuke that seemed to be very present in Christian literature and was condemned by Caesarius.

The following council, summoned in Narbonne only one year after the council of Toledo, mentions the consultation of diviners and magicians, affirming that this is a practice diffused among any kind of people (*gothi, romani, syri, graeci vel iudaei*)<sup>404</sup>. It confirms the idea that although the persistence of pagan practices could be observed

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<sup>401</sup> *Quoniam pene per omnem Spaniam sive Galliam idolatriae sacrilegium inolevit, hoc quum consensu gloriosissimi principis sancta synodus ordinavit, ut omnis sacerdos in loco suo una cum iudice territorii sacrilegium memoratum studiose perquirat, et exterminari inventa non differat; omnes vero, qui ad talem errorem concurrunt, salvo discrimine animae, qua potuerit animadversione coerceant. Quod si neglexerint, sciant se utriusque excommunicationis periculum esse serbituros. Si qui vero domini extirpare hoc malum a possessione sua neglexerint vel familiae suae prohibere noluerint, ab episcopo et ipsi a comunione pellantur.* VIVES, p. 130.

<sup>402</sup> *Religiosorum omnium corpora qui divina vocatione ab hac vita recedunt cum psalmis tantummodo et sallentium vocibus debere ad sepulcra deferri; nam funebre carmen, quod volgo defunctis cantare solet, vel peccatoribus se proximos aut familias cedere, omnino prohibemus.* VIVES, p. 132-3.

<sup>403</sup> *Exterminanda omnino est inreigiosa consuetudo quam vulgus per sanctorum sollemnitates agree consuevit, ut populi qui debent officiali divina adtendere saltationibus et turpibus invigilent canticis, non solum sibi nocentes sed et religiosorum officiis prestrepentes: hoc enim in omni Spania depellatur, sacerdotum et iudicum a concilio sancto curae committitur.* VIVES, p. 133.

<sup>404</sup> XIV: *Hoc itaque propter ampliandam fidei catholicae disciplinam elegimus finiendum vel tenendum ut si qui viri ac mulieres divinatores, quos dicunt esse caragios atque sorticularios in quuiuscumque domo gothi, romani, syri, graeci vel iudaei fuerint inventi aut quis ausus fuerit amodo in eorum vana carmina interrogare et non publico hoc voluerit annuntiare, pro hoc quod praesumpsit non solum ab ecclesia suspendatur, set etiam sex auri untias comiti civitatis inferat. Illi vero qui tali iniquitate replete sunt et sortes et divinationes faciunt et populum praevaricando seducunt, ubi inventi vel inventae fuerint sen liberi seu servi vel ancillae sint, gravissime publice fustigentur et venudentur, et pretia ipsorum pauperibus erogentur.* VIVES, p. 149.

more frequently among rural communities, the practice of adopting some traditional gestures and behaviors and incorporating them into the new religious life is not particular to any social group.

The other mention of a presumably pagan practice is the observation of Thursday, the day of Jupiter (*Iovis*). It is interesting to notice that the canon says the information arrived to them, or else, it was learned in an indirect way<sup>405</sup>. This formula is widely found in Christian literature and was used by Caesarius in his sermons, which could be interpreted as a sign of ignorance on the matter of paganism or a lack of intimacy with the behavior of the community (if not both).

An ecclesiastical council will mention pagan practices again only in 633 at the fourth council of Toledo presided by Isidore of Seville, attended by 66 bishops from Gaul and Spain. Canon 29 denounces the existence of clerics who consult magicians and divines, with the mention of many practitioners we have already found in our literature<sup>406</sup>. This sort of canon could indicate a practice that represents a recognition of members of the clergy (particularly those who are probably closer to their communities) of the power of certain beliefs. We also should remember the fact that many members of the clergy could be individuals who came from these communities, and would thus be acquainted to this kind of behavior even before their ordinance. With the exception of most of our bishops, we tend to forget that many of the clerics who worked in small parishes were themselves people who grew up in an environment that was most probably filled with hybrid cultural and religious influences.

Isidore of Seville, a fundamental character in the religious scene of seventh century

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<sup>405</sup>XV: *Ad nos pervenit quosdam de populis catholicae fidei execrabili ritu die quinta feria, quae dicitur Iovis, multos excolere et operationem non facere: quam rem pro Dei timore execrantes et blasphemantes quicumque ab hac die praeter festivitibus in eo die venientes ausus vel ausa fuerit vacare et operam non facere, si ingenuus est aut ingenue, de ecclesia repellendum et sub poenitentia mittendi anno uno, et elemosina et fletu satisfaciat ut eos Dominus ignoscat: si servus aut ancilla fuerit, centena flagella correcti domino consignentur ut ultra talia eos observare non permitant.* VIVES, p. 150.

<sup>406</sup>XXIX: *Si episcopus quis aut presbyter sive diaconus vel quilibet ex ordine clericorum magos aut aruspices aut ariolos aut certe augures vel sortilegos vel eos, qui profitentur artem aliquam, aut aliquos eorum similia exercentes, consulere fuerit deprehensus, ab honore dignitatis suae depositus monasterii curam eccipiat, ibique perpetua[e] poenitentia[e] deditus scelus admissum sacrilegii luat.* VIVES, p. 203.

Spain, left us a very important collection of some of the *artes magicae* mentioned in the ecclesiastical councils and in Martin of Braga's writings. In his *Etymologiae*, Isidore gave a wide range of names of practitioners related to magical arts, arguing that some of these people and practices were still present in places close to him while many others were presumably merely citations of previous authors such as Tacitus, Pliny or Lactantius. In this encyclopedic work, among many other subjects, Isidore dedicated one part of his eighth book to a classification of what he considers "ritual experts", or the so called *magi*, a limited name to a very broad category. Under this label, he describes *praecantatores, divini, arioli, haruspices, augures, astrologi, matematici, sortilegi* along with specification of their special arts.

The most interesting aspect of Isidore's taxonomy is his accuracy and the specificity of his descriptions, which could either reflect the high level of specialization of Mediterranean *magi* or only the specificity of Isidore's sources<sup>407</sup>. He also describes *caracteres* as being magical symbols and objects belonging to the same category of charms and healing amulets, whose popularity we already attested in the previous chapter and also in Spain due to a mention in the second council of Braga on the manufacturing of these objects by priests. It is possible to find even in modern days such amulets, as showed by Leite de Vasconcelos in his book about religion in Portugal<sup>408</sup>.

A very good analysis about the accuracy of these descriptions is given by Klingshirn who says that "like all taxonomies, Isidore's taxonomy of the *magi* is an ideal construct, composed mainly of fragments of other ideal constructs (...). [However, the] shaping of his material is so careful and deliberate, that in its very broadest outlines it does reflect the beliefs and practices of his own day, at least as perceived by the ecclesiastical elite to which he belonged"<sup>409</sup>. Isidore himself presided the fourth council of Toledo in 633, which, as we have seen, contained a canon against the consultation of *magos aut aruspices aut ariolos aut certe augures vel sortilegos vel eos, qui*

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<sup>407</sup> KLINGSHIRN, *Isidore of Seville's taxonomy of magicians and diviners*, p. 73.

<sup>408</sup> VASCONCELOS, *Religiões da Lusitânia*, livro III, p. 603-4., According to Vasconcelos, these amulets were kept in the National Archaeological Museum in Lisbon. However, it was not possible to obtain any information about such objects, apparently they were lost inside their collection.

<sup>409</sup> KLINGSHIRN, *op. cit.* p. 75.

*profitentur artem aliquam*. Numerous sources from the sixth and seventh century present some or many of the magicians and diviners who are described by Isidore, and the reliability of his description is often questioned. Nonetheless, what is important inquiring is whether or not he was copying from Christian tradition or reflecting the religious practice of his community. Some specificity and even the insistence of the sources on certain matters could indicate that some magical practices of any sort were still present, and what is even more probable, were being mixed with Christian religion. Indeed, as we saw in the previous chapter, practices dedicated to inquiring about the future were very popular among former pagans and also converted Christians. However, Isidore's writings and his work as bishop in general should be considered in a broader optic, in the context of the long process of conversion of the Visigothic kingdoms. As stated by Fontaine, "*l'œuvre entière d'Isidore de Séville (...) est justement à considérer comme une contribution patiente et de grande envergure à l'œuvre de la 'conversion continuée', et simultanément poursuivie, des Wisigoths et des Hispano-Romains* »<sup>410</sup>. Indeed, his treatise *De natura rerum*, for example, was dedicated to fight not only Arianism but also paganism.

The seventh century saw only two other councils in which traditional beliefs were remembered and condemned, both in Toledo and both mentioning almost the same things. The first one in the thirteenth council of Toledo of 681, and the second is the sixteenth council held in 693, both mentioning practices such as the cult of idols, stones<sup>411</sup>, sources and trees<sup>412</sup>. We fall back again on the insistence with which these beliefs are mentioned not only in councils but also in sermons and letters, imposing a strong indication of the power of these particular practices, related to nature and the

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<sup>410</sup> FONTAINE, *Culture et spiritualité en Espagne du IV<sup>e</sup> au VII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, p. 132.

<sup>411</sup> A strong cult of stones is attested in Northwest Iberian Peninsula in the Iron age period, in which these natural elements would even suffer anthropogenic disturbances with a religious significance. See GARCIA QUINTELA y SEOANE VEIGA, *Entre naturaleza y cultura: arquitectura ambigua en la Edad del Hierro del NO peninsular*, 2013.

<sup>412</sup> Council of Toledo XII, canon XI: *Præceptos hæc Domini non in ultione sed in terrore delinquentium adponentes non mortis per hanc sententiam promulgamus, sed cultores idolorum, veneratores lapidum, accensores faculum et excolentes [sacra] fontium vel arborum admonemus, ut agnoscant quod ipsi se spontaneae morti subiciunt qui diabolo sacrificari videntur*, VIVES, p. 398-9; Council of Toledo XVI, canon II: *illi diversis suadellis decepti cultores idolorum efficiuntur, veneratores lapidum, accensores facularum, excolentes sacra fontium vel arborum, auguratores quoque seu præcantatores, multaque alia quae per longum est enarrare*. VIVES, p. 498-500.

most ancestral religiosity<sup>413</sup>. In this century another example on how Christianity was still struggling against traditional practices and religion comes again from Galicia. In one of his autobiographies the hermit Valerius of Bierzo tells how a pagan altar was destroyed by Christians that build in the same spot a church dedicated to the martyr St. Felix<sup>414</sup>. This is probably the only testimony of an aggressive behavior towards pagan buildings in this region.

Some further words should be said about this important source of the seventh century. Valerius of Bierzo lived between 625 and 695 and was a member of the Visigothic aristocracy. His writings included three brief accounts of visions of the afterlife, a description of Egeria's pilgrimage to the Holy Land at the end of the fourth century, short works of monastic instruction, poetry and three short so called autobiographical works<sup>415</sup>. These latter are very interesting for their account of Valerius struggle with local clergy and the populace<sup>416</sup>, what he would consider as "personal persecution" against his ideas and way of life<sup>417</sup>. In his accounts his enemies are always qualified as tools of the Devil, and among other things, he was dedicated to describe matters of social and cultural conflict in Visigothic society<sup>418</sup>. In one of his autobiographies Valerius gives testimony of paganism still practiced in Galicia on the seventh century<sup>419</sup>, but it is known that in his accounts of his personal life there are many parallels with other works, such as a version of the Athanasius' *Vita Antonii* that Valerius probably possessed. This means that some of his references and accounts should be considered very carefully.

At the second half of the seventh century that was an increase on the process of Christianisation on Galicia due to the foundation of monasteries on the region, a process that had Fructuosus of Braga as it's pioneer. In a rural environment where

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<sup>413</sup> See SERÉN, *Pedras, montes e protecções, a religião do norte pré-cristão*, 2012.

<sup>414</sup> COLLINS, *The "autobiographical" works of Valerius of Bierzo: their structure and purpose*, 1986.

<sup>415</sup> On the diffusion of Valerius' manuscripts and the versions of it see COLLINS, *Op. cit.*, p. 426 ss.

<sup>416</sup> COLLINS, *Early Medieval Spain*, p. 85.

<sup>417</sup> See DIAZ y FERNÁNDEZ ORTIZ, *Valerio del Bierzo y la autoridad eclesiástica*, 1997.

<sup>418</sup> See FRIGHETTO, *Sociedade e cultural no NO Peninsular Ibérico em finais do século VII segundo o De Genere Monachorum de Valério do Bierzo*. 1999.

<sup>419</sup> Valerius of Bierzo, *Replicatio sermonum*. 1,6-10: ... *Cumque in exelsi montis cacumine stulta populi sacrilega caecitatis dementia profana daemonum delubra impieatque insipienter paganorum ritu excoleret, fidelium Christianorum ope tandem probosa obscenitas destruitur...*

paganism and traditional practices were still strongly lived by population, the establishment of monasteries was an important weapon on the process of Christianisation<sup>420</sup>. In this context, this kind of foundation would present some advantages compared to the placement of churches. As stated by Pablo Diaz, *a diferencia de la parroquialización, que en una primera fase a duras penas podría sino 'evangelizar', en el sentido más superficial del término, el monacato, por ser fundamentalmente un mecanismo de organización, era capaz de integrar las formas de vida tradicionales en un nuevo esquema de valores. En la organización monacal era más viable reducir a un elemento de unidad tanto el sistema de creencias, como el marco socio-económico y el horizonte institucional.*<sup>421</sup> For this reason these rural monasteries would have an important role on the construction of local religiosity. They would also reflect the social and economic rural organization, being thus more efficacious instruments of religious conversion in these areas. The testimony of Valerius of Bierzo is here a good resource that attest the implication of these monks in reproachable and non-canonical behavior.

According to Valerius, many landowners dedicated their efforts to such foundations. These private monasteries became centers of confluence of local devotion, which most probably had some level of influence into people's religiosity. The problem, according to Valerius, was actually the lack of control of these monasteries from the ecclesiastical authorities<sup>422</sup>, as well as the poor monastic preparation of their monks. He believed that the members of these private monasteries were not only unprepared men but also *rustici*, practitioners of paganism. These men, forced by their landowners to convert to a monastic life were, in Valerius' words, lovers of the lay world<sup>423</sup>.

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<sup>420</sup> On the influence of the Visigothic rulers in monastic organization see VALVERDE CASTRO, *La monarquía Visigota en Valerio del Bierzo*, 2011.

<sup>421</sup> DIAZ, *El monacato y la cristianización del NO hispano. Un proceso de aculturación*, p. 533.

<sup>422</sup> Idem, p. 367.

<sup>423</sup> Valerius of Bierzo *Regula communis* 1, 25-38. (...) *Et hoc agunt ut sempre cum saecularibus et huius mundi principibus commune consortium habeant. et amatores mundi cum mundo diligant; qualiter inmundi cum mundo pereant, tali se saepe exemplo taliter alios uiuere imitant.*

### 3.7 Some archaeological remarks

The council of Elvira had some canons regarding temples, but these are mostly against sacrifice to idols and did not stimulate the destruction of these structures at all<sup>424</sup>. We cannot know whether this was motivated by a certain tolerance or even respect, or a coherent fear of retaliation from pagans in a period when Christians were not yet a majority. Even so, the later possibility seems more plausible. The fact is that almost none of our Spanish sources promoted the destruction of temples, contrary from what was seen in southern Gaul and other parts of the Roman Empire. As ecclesiastical sources were not concerned with the incitement of destruction, so the archaeological sources also indicate that there is no evidence of violent destruction of temples in Hispania after the Imperial legislation against these structures or even before.

Many interpretations have been given by historians and archaeologists on the meaning of the reuse of pagan temples or material took from these structures in the construction of churches<sup>425</sup>. Some temples in the Iberian Peninsula were even completely preserved, without a precise explanation for that, as for example the so-called temple of Diana in Evora that stands in the city's center until today<sup>426</sup>. The reuse of these places with Christian connotation could be a matter of simple convenience of taking advantage of a structure already existent, or maybe, the advantage of a place that enjoyed a sacred value, being easier to the faithful to go to a place where the collective memory recognized an ancient sacrality<sup>427</sup>.

The study of toponyms helps to reconstruct the passages of a continuity of cult or sacredness in places. However, it is not always possible to assume the existence of

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<sup>424</sup> Canon 60 says that if a Christian, out of personal zeal, destroyed a temple and was then killed by a pagan for having done so, should not be seen as a martyr. (Si quis idola fregerit et ibidem fuerit occisus, quantum in evangelio scriptum non est neque inveniatur sub apostolis umquam factum, placuit in numerum eum non recipit martyrum. VIVES, p. 12).

<sup>425</sup> For a concise analysis of the variety of interpretation and an original opinion see LENK, *Iberian Christians and the Classical Past. The Baptistery of Milreu/Estói (Algarve) at the End of Late Antiquity*, (forthcoming)

<sup>426</sup> The denomination "*Templo de Diana*" is a wrong assumption, since probably the temple was dedicated to the Emperor Augustus.

<sup>427</sup> CABALLERO ZÓREDA y SÁNCHEZ SANTOS, *Reutilización de material romano en edificios de culto Cristiano*, 1990.

this continuity, since there is sometimes a spatial, temporal and ideological gap between the pagan and the Christian period. “*Mesmo atravessando um período de ausência, os referentes simbólicos associados às vivências anteriores dos espaços enformaram e conduziram as motivações cristãs para atribuições hagionómicas específicas, funcionando como marcadores referenciais da paisagem global. E nesse sentido não devem ser ignorados, até pela existência de padrões recorrentes, embora seja necessário confirmar a existência de ocupações anteriores nos locais e a evolução da designação ao longo da diacronia*”<sup>428</sup>. The symbolic pagan references left in places could have guided Christians to take advantage of this when deciding to put somewhere their churches as a way to try to cancel the pagan value of a place, not always trying to take advantage of its sacredness.

In this direction, it is possible to find a connection between certain saints and the place where they were honored. Toponyms such as Saint Bartholomew who was martyred by skinning, could be invoked in places where a primitive pagan divinity was converted to Christianity, as a symbol of “changing skin”. The same happened with toponyms of Saint Martin (who changed his tunic to no longer be pagan), Saint Romanus (in places of Roman origins) and Saint Peter in places of transit as a meaning of transference.

Through archaeological and documental evidence, it seems that it was not a concern of the church to physically supersede the pagan past, the exemption is made by spring sanctuaries, which is more an evidence of the power of this kind of practice than a direct effort to Christianise the past. Even one of the most important examples, the church of *Santa Eulalia de Bóveda* built on a *nymphaeum* and pagan spring sanctuary went through a long gap between pagan and Christian periods: from its abandonment in pagan period to its Christian consecration, some centuries had passed<sup>429</sup>.

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<sup>428</sup> CARNEIRO, *Sobre a cristianização da Lusitânia: novas reflexões a partir dos dados históricos e das evidências arqueológicas*, p. 210.

<sup>429</sup> For a complete description of the different phases of construction see BLANCO-ROTEA, BENAVIDES GARCÍA, SANJURJO SÁNCHEZ y FERNÁNDEZ MOSQUERA, *Evolución constructiva de Santa Eulalia de Bóveda (Lugo, Galicia)*, 2009.



The mechanism of obliteration of the past seems to have been seldom practiced in Hispania, and the behavior of priests and ecclesiastical legislation is generally less violent and with less asperity compared to other areas. Nonetheless, in the region of Galicia the story of the martyrdom of Santa Marina is a good example of a sort of obliteration. The legend is deeply linked with the territory, with passages of her martyrdom taking place in important landmarks of the region of *Augas Santas de Allariz*. Some of these are in fact old rocks with a sacred value that persisted from the bronze age until the Christian period and even later. It is not certain if the use of those places followed a sort of continuity, but what is certain is the persistence of the memory, a common knowledge that lasted in time through different religions. According to the legend, the young Marina was martyred in the second century. Episodes of her life like her imprisonment, torture and finally decapitation have reputedly taken place in an old fortress, a crypt and sacred stones, all presumably sacred places that enjoyed a long memory and religious prestige in the region.

The Basilica of Ascensión and the crypt known as *Os Fornos* or *O forno da santa* (the saint's oven) in Allariz is one of these places. The architectural transformation of the building into a Christian church can be dated to the sixth century, but four constructive phases of the building can be identified, characterizing different moments of its use and consequently of its interpretation during the centuries. The crypt is the most ancient part of the building dating to the Iron Age and was initially used as a sauna, as these structures were typical in Galicia in this period<sup>430</sup>. The structure was later Christianised, as attested by crosses engraved in the stones. Probably these carvings were made during the second phase of transformation of the building, in which the Christian structure is built<sup>431</sup>. The connection between these landmarks and the legend of Saint Marina seem to be a mythological construct in order to Christianise certain places that carried a strong memory related to heathen sacrality. "*En Augas Santas la pasión de Mariña fue necesaria para transformar la*

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<sup>430</sup> See GARCÍA QUINTELA, M., GONZÁLEZ-GARCÍA, C. and SEOANE VEIGA, Y., *The iron age saunas of the northwest Iberian peninsula: an archaeoastronomical perspective*. In *Mediterranean Archaeology and Archaeometry*, Vol. 14, No 3, 2014. pp. 133-141.

<sup>431</sup> See BLANCO-ROTEA, GARCÍA RODRÍGUEZ, MATO-FRESÁN y SANJURJO-SÁNCHEZ, *La Basílica da Ascensión y Os Fornos (Allariz, Ourense) y la cristianización de la arquitectura en la Antigüedad Tardía*, 2015.

*orientación religiosa de los habitantes de la zona. Y si no fue un acontecimiento histórico, su ideación y narración constituyeron un hecho histórico necesario para esa transformación*"<sup>432</sup>.

Some other examples of the use of pagan sacredness in Christian context can be the tombs carved in the rock, an archaeological vestige abundant in the Iberian Peninsula. These tombs can date from the sixth to the eleventh century, when presumably the ecclesiastical authority started to perform a more active control over funerary practices<sup>433</sup>. In the region of the Alto Mondego in central Portugal, it was for the moment discovered more than 100 tombs cut into the rocks, and these graves are one of the most abundant vestiges of medieval society in the region<sup>434</sup>. In the sixties, when scientific interest in these burials started to grow, there was several problems of interpretation, since no bones or grave goods can be associated with these burials (the characteristics of the soil would not allow the survival of these vestiges) and the apparent independence of the burial sites to any settlements around them gave no clue of their meaning. However, modern research discovered that these burials were in fact associated with a typical early medieval model of territory occupation in the region, with small rural villages dispersed mostly in Portuguese territory<sup>435</sup>.

As it seems, these burials could be linked to families or communities in which the choice of a certain place to build them could be connected with a memory from a meaningful previous occupation, Roman or pre-Roman with the maintenance of a territorial or sacred importance. The burials could also be a symbol, a family memory, a sort of landmark of property in a certain territory related to the kin<sup>436</sup>. In any case, memory plays an important role in this situation. The habit to spread these tombs in the natural environment could have a lot to do with the close relationship of paganism and nature. The choice of these materials denounce a desire of eternity, to

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<sup>432</sup> GARCÍA QUINTELA y SEOANE-VEIGA, *La larga vida de dos rocas orensanas*, p. 262.

<sup>433</sup> See more in BLANCO GONZÁLEZ y MARTÍN VISO, *Tumbas, parroquias y espacios ganaderos: configuración y evolución del paisaje medieval de la sierra de Ávila*, 2016.

<sup>434</sup> See TENTE e LOURENÇO, *Sepulturas medievais escavadas na rocha dos concelhos de Carregal do Sal e Gouveia: estudo comparativo*, 1998; VALDEZ, PINTO e NISA, *Sepulturas escavadas na rocha do Monte do Biscaia (Gáfete, Crato)*, 2008; BARROCA, *Sepulturas escavadas na rocha de entre Douro e Minho*, 2010-2011.

<sup>435</sup> See TENTE, *Tumbas rupestres en el Alto Mondego (Guarda Portugal). Patronos de distribución, significados y construccions de paisaje rural altomedieval*, 2015.

<sup>436</sup> MARTÍN VISO, *Enterramientos, memoria social y paisaje en la alta edad media: propuestas para un análisis de las tumbas excavadas en roca en el centro-oeste de la península ibérica*, 2012.

mark in an indelible way the landscape and in this way put the perpetual mark of a social identity in the territory<sup>437</sup>. As Martín Viso writes, “*los espacios funerarios funcionaban como instrumentos que generaban y administraban la memoria de los antepasados, una memoria que servía para crear una identidad familiar o comunitaria. Los análisis de la memoria campesina muestran la relevancia de dos grandes marcadores interculturales: por un lado, una importancia recurrente de la geografía local como estructura para el recuerdo y, por otro lado, su vinculación al individuo, a su familia y a la colectividad más cercana*”<sup>438</sup>.

The rock carved tombs could have a deep link with memory and the past, but the traditional religious value of these structures is less clear. For other modalities of burial this link seems more evident, as is the case of the funerary *mensas*. proper structures placed beside the tombs used for consumption of meal. Along with archaeological data, iconography of funeral banquets demonstrates how this practice was diffused in the Roman world, and the persistence of some structures in cemeteries tells us about the continuity and Christianisation of these practices probably thanks to popular imposition. The second council of Braga admonished against the celebration of masses, the distribution of sacraments and the consumption of meals at cemeteries, which confirms this hypothesis. There are four necropolises in the Iberian Peninsula where this practice can be attested archaeologically in Christian contexts, and these are Tarragona at the northeastern coast of Spain, Cartagena, at the southeastern coast, Italica, not far from Sevilla and Troia de Setúbal at the southwestern coast of Portugal. As we can see, the archaeological testimony is disperse in the Peninsula, and has almost certain association with the same practice in northern Africa<sup>439</sup>. The dates of these funerary structures used for banquets are from 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries in Africa and also in Spain, and the former supposedly influenced these practices in the Peninsula, or at least

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<sup>437</sup> See also MARTÍN VISO y BLANCO GONZÁLEZ, *Ancestral memories and early medieval landscapes: the case of Sierra de Ávila (Spain)*, 2016.

<sup>438</sup> MARTÍN VISO, *Enterramientos, memoria social y paisaje en la alta edad media*. p. 169.

<sup>439</sup> An interesting description of the Spanish sites is given by BARAL I ALTET, *Mensae et repas funéraire dans les nécropoles d'époque chrétienne de la péninsule ibérique : vestiges archéologiques*, 1978.

with most certainty in Tarragona<sup>440</sup>. Nevertheless, the mention of this practice in our sources could indicate a latter persistence of such practices, maybe not with specific structures in cemeteries, but maintaining the libations and adding Christian celebrations to the whole range of funerary practices. Could we suppose an evolution of the syncretism of funerary practices from the evidently pagan structures of *mansae* to a more Christian setting involving masses, vigil and candle lightings? Anyhow, the mixing of beliefs is evident here<sup>441</sup>.

Saint Augustine in his *De moribus ecclesiae catholicae* I, 34 (PL 32, 1342) and in a sermon attributed to him mock people who went to cemeteries and offered libations to the dead<sup>442</sup>. The Roman practice of eating around the tomb is one of the most essential elements that compose the celebration of death in this culture<sup>443</sup>, and the *refrigerium* was a banquet held beside the tombs during celebrations of death held on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February, known as *Parentalia*. As the popularity of this celebration persisted even after the conversion period, the church instituted the ecclesiastical celebration of Saint Peter on the same day in order to Christianise the pagan festivity<sup>444</sup>. Indeed, the second council of Tours in 567 expressed the concern that after the mass celebrated on this day, people would go to the cemeteries to offer libations and food to the dead<sup>445</sup>.

### 3.8 Conclusion

The new religion brought not only a new god, but also a whole new way of seeing the world, life, social relations, social structure and so on. In this new perspective, everything belonging to the ancient world was meant to be cancelled, and the

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<sup>440</sup> BARAL I ALTET, *Mensae et repas funéraire*, p. 66.

<sup>441</sup> See RIPOLL e CAPELLA, *Cura mortuorum en el nordeste de la Península Ibérica, siglos IV al XII d.C.*, 2014.

<sup>442</sup> *Miror cur apud quosdam infideles hodie tam perniciosus error increverit, ut super tumulos defunctorum cibos et vina conferant; quasi egressae de corporibus animae carnales cibos requirant. Epulae enim et refectiones caro tantum requirit; spiritus autem et anima his non indigent... Cessate ergo, fratres, ab hoc gentili infidelitatis errore.* Sermo CXC in PL 39, 2101.

<sup>443</sup> BARAL I ALTET, *Mensae et repas funéraire*, p.302.

<sup>444</sup> The celebration of Saint Peter however, is not the Christian substitute of a celebration of the death, as stated by Rebillard in *The care of the dead in Late Antiquity*, p. 141-2.

<sup>445</sup> *Sunt etiam qui in festiuitate cathedrae domni Petri intrita mortuis offerunt et post missas redeuntes ad domus proprias ad gentilium reuertuntur errors et post corpus Domini sacras daemioni escas accipiunt* in MGH. *Concilia aevi merov.*, t. 1, c. 23, p. 133.

confrontation between these two worlds can be seen in the person of Priscillian. His doctrine, which cannot be interpreted as a mere religious matter, is a whole social movement that regarded all instances of life in a changing world. Ardanaz says that “*lo que es más fundamental, [la doctrina de Prisciliano] afectó a los modos con que el hombre hispano captaba el sentido – y misterio – de las cosas, de su propia vida; así afectó al sentido de sus prácticas religiosas y sociales tradicionales, sus dioses, sus ritos, sus costumbres. Todo esto hirvió en el calderón que la historia conoce como ‘priscilianismo’.* Es la misma problemática que conoció la Hispania Romana en la segunda parte del s. IV entre aculturación y cristianismo”<sup>446</sup>. Indeed, it is striking that in the first council of Braga the major concern was not Arianism, but Priscillian doctrine, which can attest to the power of this doctrine in the region and how it menaced official religion.

Some recent studies of Priscillianism dedicate to investigate if the members of this heresy were Manicheans and why Priscillian was condemned for sorcery and not heresy. Although the answer to the first matter is no, it is undeniable that both doctrines bears many things in common, enough to accuse Priscillianism and his followers of magic practices and make them suffer the same penance imposed by imperial legislation to practitioners of magic, which explains his apparently unfitting condemnation<sup>447</sup>. In Trier, where he was judged, his case was placed as a *maleficium*, which, according to the legislation, was punishable by death. Nicole Zeddies writes that indeed, after the trial of Priscillian the borders between heresy, Manichaeism and pagan practices became less clear<sup>448</sup>. Moreover, it seems that the case of the Priscillian’s trial was also a matter of personal rivalries inside the Spanish church, as well as a problem of insubordination against episcopal authority.

Among the audience of Martin, there were the Sueves with their native and Arian beliefs as well as the indigenous Hispano-Romanic population. The environment that Martin found was then of a people with apparently low Roman influence and steeped in pagan practices, touched by Arianism, Catholicism and familiar with

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<sup>446</sup> ARDANAZ, *Religiosidad cósmica y simbología pagana en Prisciliano*, p. 209.

<sup>447</sup> ESCRIBANO, *Heresy and orthodoxy in fourth-century Hispania: Arianism and Priscillianism*, p. 123.

<sup>448</sup> See ZADDIES, *Religio et sacrilegium. Studien zur Inkriminierung von Magie, Häresie und Heidentum (4.-7. Jahrhundert)*. 2003.

Priscillianism, which created a scenario that most probably influenced his caution, being himself a sensible man rather than one who imposes violence and coercion<sup>449</sup>.

Here, as much as was possible, we concentrated on the situation in Galicia that had a particular cultural and religious evolution, as was characterized by a great diversity of peoples and cultures even before the arrival of the Sueves<sup>450</sup>. We know that things evolved differently in the south of the Province where Romanization was notably more influential. Archeological vestiges show the diffuse presence in this region of numerous rural *villae*, around which small settlements would be formed later in the period of Visigothic occupation. Whereas in the north of the province, where this sort of settlement was not common, there were only an exiguous number of towns founded<sup>451</sup>. Christianisation took advantage of these villages spread in the south, and in this situation the parishes could flourish<sup>452</sup>. In the north, particularly in Galicia, the environment seemed to promote a fertile ground for hybridization, and the further political and social evolution would allow local religious to “run free” or to evolve according to very specific needs and following local identity. However, this does not mean that in the south a certain hybridization of religious practices did not happen.

The particular history of the north continued after the Muslim occupation of the Peninsula in the eighth century. During the whole period of the Arab domination the region of the north, namely Galicia and Asturias seem to have enjoyed a relatively long independence from the newcomers. The Pyrenees were a limit for the Arab conquest that concentrated their force and political attention to the south, where the Roman province of Baetica formed the heart of *Al-Andalus*<sup>453</sup>. This situation allowed the Christian reigns of the north to organize and plot what lately would become

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<sup>449</sup> Which, I may say, is a most plausible explanation for his general tolerance instead of the appreciation that he would have had of pagan literature, as stated by FERREIRO in his *St Martin of Braga's policy toward heretics and pagan practices*. In *American Benedictine Review*, 1983. See also FOLLIS, *St. Martin of Braga: sources for his tolerance toward the rustici in sixth century Galicia. A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts*, University of British Columbia, 1992.

<sup>450</sup> VIOLANTE BRANCO, *St. Martin of Braga, the Sueves and Gallaecia*, p. 63.

<sup>451</sup> COLLINS, *Early Medieval Spain*, p. 8-9.

<sup>452</sup> See WOLFRAM, *Uma síntese sobre a cristianização do mundo rural no sul da Lusitania*, tese de doutoramento apresentada na Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Lisboa em 2011.

<sup>453</sup> COLLINS, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

known as the *Reconquista*. The debate on the impact of Muslim domination to the Spanish culture, as well as the condition of minority that presumably the Christians should have is long and it is not my intention to touch this matter here<sup>454</sup>. However, until the final expulsion of the Umayyads from Granada in 1492, there were seven centuries of Muslim presence in the Peninsula, whose influence cannot be neglected<sup>455</sup>. Beyond the cultural and artistic impact of these people, what interests us here is how Christianity and the *Mozarabes* - as the Christians under Muslim dominance became known - lived under the Islamic rule and continued to develop in a context of lesser ecclesiastical control.

It is more or less agreed that at least at an initial moment the Arab conquerors would adopt a tolerant behavior towards the religion of the inhabitants of the Peninsula. This means that we can observe continuity in the Hispanic-Roman culture, as attested by the great number of churches and monasteries founded during the Mozarabic period<sup>456</sup>. The ecclesiastical organization as well as the bishoprics were maintained and the so-called Mozarabic liturgy, compiled probably in the seventh century, was used in Spain until the tenth century when it was substituted with Roman Catholic liturgy. Among its list of benedictions we can find prayers to the seeds, to the wheat, to the first cut of the vineyard, the first harvest, the land that will be sown among others<sup>457</sup>. The hybrid religiosity resulting of this cauldron of influences and references has a notable peasant imprint, as the beliefs appertaining to the rural world, with its deep links with nature and the passage of time are evident. Ecclesiastical authority developed a fundamental role in the negotiations with the conquerors, and it is evident that a part from the financial and political control, no sort of religious limitation was made. Differently from what happened under other reigns, here the political instances of power did not interfere in doctrinal matters. In this way the Spanish church was able to take its own decisions, which can justify the

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<sup>454</sup> For a wider discussion with vast bibliography see ACIÉN ALMANSA, *La herencia del protofeudalismo visigodo frente a la imposición del Estado islámico*, 2000.

<sup>455</sup> A few references are QUADRADO, *La influencia musulmana en la cultura hispano-cristiana medieval*, 2002; AZUAR, *De arqueología Mozarabe*, 2015, with respective bibliography.

<sup>456</sup> GOMEZ, *Los problemas para explicar la pervivencia del cristianismo durante la dominación Musulmana en Murcia*, in *Mozárabes. Identidad y continuidad de su historia*, 2011. p. 52.

<sup>457</sup> FEROTIN, *Le Liber Ordinum en usage dans l'église Wisigothique et Mozarabe d'Espagne du cinquième au onzième siècle*, p. 167.

existence of a particular liturgy that lasted many centuries. Furthermore, this particular liturgy would urge to attend what presumably was a popular demand, or else, the benediction of the fields, the most important economical source of people in these days, the same way as it was made in pagan times.

Memory and tradition, as we could observe were huge enemies of Christianity, at the same time that played a crucial role in the process of appropriation and construction of a local religiosity. Since people would defy the ecclesiastical authority in the name of their personal beliefs it is almost an irony that Martin of Braga, with whom we had opened this chapter, praised memory but condemned its use by his community. Should they remember the past or cancel it as a source of mortal sin?



## Britain

*I utter in words my thanks to the Ruler of all, the King of Glory, the everlasting Lord, for the treasures which I here gaze upon, in that I have been allowed to win such things for my people before my day of death! Now that I have given my old life in barter for the hoard of treasure, do ye henceforth supply the people's needs, – I may stay here no longer. Bid the war-veterans raise a splendid barrow after the funeral fire, on a projection by the sea, which shall tower high on Hronesness as a memorial for my people, so that seafarers who urge their tall ships from afar over the spray of ocean shall thereafter call it Beowulf's barrow.*

*Beowulf, Line 2795*

## Introduction

In this chapter, I will present an overview of the process of the Christianisation of Britain and the Anglo-Saxons from the fourth to the seventh century. I shall take account of the fact that Christianity was already present in Britain before the main process of Christianisation started in 597 and the probability that the Anglo-Saxons were familiar with at least some aspects of Christianity. I will draw on written sources as well as archaeological data in order to build a wider notion of this period of change, not only on what concerns religion but also politics and culture. Indeed, as we know, Christianisation in Britain and elsewhere was more than just the imposition of a new religion: it involved the transformation of a way of life that influenced every aspect of social organisation. I will sometimes provide examples of religious hybridity in the subsequent period until the eleventh and twelfth centuries, because I believe that the specific cases analysed can be related to the process of Christianisation, which is the main focus of this chapter and the dissertation in general. Since we know that religious conversion is a long and complex process, its development and consequences cannot be restricted to a specific period of time. Indeed, some traces of this process of transformation and adaptation can still be seen

in our days.

First of all, I will start with a short introduction to the situation of Christianity in Britain in the fourth century, a period when the religion is presumed to have arrived on the island. I will then, secondly, present a short overview of the Anglo-Saxons, although much of what we know about the origin and composition of these migrating groups is still under discussion. The Anglo-Saxons arrived in a place where Christianity was already practised with some level of organisation; the mission sent from Rome in 597 – the third topic in this chapter – demonstrates that they were not completely ignorant of Christianity despite being practitioners of paganism. I will examine the Christianisation process in the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, relying on the main sources for this period: Bede and Gregory the Great. The former wrote the most important book about the origins and history of the English people, while the latter was the sponsor of the “definitive” process of conversion. I will then proceed with some considerations about the development of the Christian religion and how society dealt with the new faith, before concluding with some thoughts about local religiosity and religious identity.

#### **4.1 The Christianisation of Britain before the Anglo-Saxon migration**

The arrival of Christianity in Britain is a matter of debate and, as for every other region, there are legends that claim the new religion reached the island early, with the apostle Paul as its first missionary<sup>458</sup>. However, it can be presumed that the first Christian influence was a consequence of trade contacts between Britain and Gaul, which along with the trading of goods also encouraged the exchange of ideas. As Gaul was characterized by an important Christian presence from the first century AD on, it can easily be supposed that this region was the main source of early British Christianisation. Nevertheless, as is commonly understood, the Roman presence in Britain formally introduced Christianity towards the end of the second century when the influence of the army was probably extremely important. That said, as there were

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<sup>458</sup> For a detailed narrative of this legend and the early arrival of Christianity in Britain, see GODFREY, *The church in Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 9-11. See also YORKE, Barbara. *The conversion of Britain: religion, politics and society in Britain c. 600-800*, 2006.

so few faithful, their impact on the dynamics of the religious population did not leave many testimonies of their presence.

In this way, Britain was a latecomer to Christianisation compared to the other regions dominated by the Romans. The first testimony of a martyr on the island is provided by Gildas in his *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae*, written around 540. He recounts that Alban was killed during Diocletian's Christian persecution on the island in the third century<sup>459</sup> and the veneration of this saint was attested also by Bede, who described the great sanctuary dedicated to him in St. Albans. Indeed, it was "a beautiful church worthy of his martyrdom"<sup>460</sup> build in Roman times, a place where miracles took place and where sick folk were healed<sup>461</sup>. The existence of a martyr attests to the presence of a reasonably large Christian community and Gildas also describes a certain clerical organization. Nevertheless, the Church described by the monk was still apparently too weak to engage in missions towards the pagans of the island, or rather, as was apparently Bede's opinion, was not interested in it.

From the fourth century on there was clear evidence of Christian religion in iconography such as mosaics and paintings, as well as the ever-increasing presence of Christian symbols on various everyday objects and tombs such as the Chi Rho Christogram. For instance, the centre of the famous fourth-century mosaic in a villa at Hinton St Mary in Dorset features a depiction of a man in a tunic with a Chi Rho symbol on the back of his head. This motif is accompanied by pagan scenes such as Bellerophon fighting the Chimera. The bust, along with the monogram of Christ, is escorted on the sides of his head by two pomegranates as a symbol of immortality, therefore identifying the man as Christ himself. There are many different interpretations of this portrayal that justify the coexistence of pagan and Christian motifs<sup>462</sup>. However, it is assumed that during the fourth century pagan motifs were used in paintings with allegorical connotations and did not necessarily imply faith in

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<sup>459</sup> Gildas, *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae*, chapter 11.

<sup>460</sup> HE, I, 7.

<sup>461</sup> See LEVISON, *St. Alban and St. Albans*, 1941, p. 337-359.

<sup>462</sup> See LAMBERT, *Christian and pagans - The conversion of Britain from Alban to Bede*. Pp. 17 et seq.; FRENCH, *Roman Britain, a failed promise*, pp. 83 et seq. and BRANDENBURG, *Bellerophon christianus? Zur Deutung des Mosais von Hinton St. Mary und zum Problem der Mythenarstellungen in der kaiserzeitlichen dekorativen Kunst*", pp. 49-86.

the mythology represented<sup>463</sup>. Aside from the allegorical meaning, it is possible to think of the aristocratic values of Roman men of culture. As Lambert explains, *'it could be that these wealthy men, imbued with the literature of the Roman world, enjoyed displaying their knowledge to visitors and took pleasure in commissioning a miscellany of myths, probably chosen from a pattern book with an eye to color and ornamentation and no thought of particular religious significance'*<sup>464</sup>. Nevertheless, the spirit of the first period of conversion is visible, where Christian and pagan religions coexisted without major conflicts. Indeed, on the basis of archaeological evidence, Christian practices are reminiscent of traditional religious ones in many respects. The so-called leaf-shaped silver plates are another example of objects frequently found in pagan environments<sup>465</sup>. They were used as offerings in pagan temples and could still be seen in the fourth century, although this time in Christian settings. Indeed, the famous treasure of Water Newton, now at the British Museum, features 27 objects, including silver leaves exactly like those found in pagan temples. However, the hoard was identified as belonging to a Christian, since the silver leaves feature the Chi Rho symbol despite the typically pagan shape and meaning. The treasure dates back to the fourth century, when the custom was probably to absorb and coexist<sup>466</sup>. These leaves thus represent a *"consistency in the repertoire of the underlying structuring principles of religious activity in Roman Britain that transcends notions of pagan or Christian"*<sup>467</sup>.

Therefore, it seems that Christianity in this period was still steeped in pagan and traditional influences. The conversion was indeed still in its infancy and probably not sufficiently organized to ensure the elimination of all traces of previous religions. This seems to indicate a rather flexible religious identity that is consequently extremely difficult to define. Indeed, pagan religions have always had a multitude of practices, myths and gods that could effortlessly coexist with Christianity. In this

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<sup>463</sup> There is an alternative opinion in LENK, *Iberian Christians and the classical past – The baptistery of Milreu/Estói (Algarve) at the end of late antiquity*, (forthcoming), who believes in a deliberate choice to associate the old art motifs with the new religion in order to confer prestige.

<sup>464</sup> LAMBERT, *Christians and pagans, the conversion of Britain from Alban to Bede*, p. 20.

<sup>465</sup> See CRERAR, *Votive leaves from Roman Britain*, 2006.

<sup>466</sup> See PAINTER, *The Water Newton early Christian silver*, 1977.

<sup>467</sup> PETTS, *Pagan and Christian, Religious change in early medieval Europe*, p. 64.

way, the Christian religion was shaped by its followers based on their habits and needs in the first period of the conversion, a behaviour that – as we shall see – seems to have been widespread.

It is possible to assert that Christian presence in the island started to increase during the period of Roman domination and even more after Constantine's Edict of 313. Sulpicius Severus attested that four British bishops were present at the council of Arles in 315, while three others attended the Council of Rimini in 359<sup>468</sup>. However, after the retreat of the Roman army that started in 383 and was finished in c.410, Britain suffered a power vacuum and after 440 the Saxons began to settle throughout most of the island. The Christian buildings erected during the Romano-British era were abandoned or destroyed by the invading Germanic populations, allowing traditional religions to regain strength even in parts of the island where the Roman presence had been strong<sup>469</sup>. It seems that Christianity still existed in some places though, contradicting Bede's account of the same localities. In his *Ecclesiastical History*, Bede ignored certain information about the West Midlands, where some continuity between the British and Anglo-Saxon Churches can be found<sup>470</sup>, as well as a probable British contribution to the English Church. He might have wanted to highlight the influence of the Roman mission in Britain as a way to stress the importance of this event in the ecclesiastical history of his island. We can say that his account of English Christianity is "an elaborate construct"<sup>471</sup>, for which the study of place names and archaeology provide widely differing information. Pockets of surviving Christian communities were present in many places, but apparently at the end of the sixth century there were no active clerics or ecclesiastical structures. However, it is important to avoid the trap of assuming that the few information that we have about the British church at this period attests for its unremarkable

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<sup>468</sup> Sulpicius Severus, *Chronica* (*Sourche Chrétienne* 441, 1991). 318-20.

<sup>469</sup> LAMBERT, *Op. cit.*, p. 38.

<sup>470</sup> BASSET, *Church and diocese in the West Midlands: the transition from British to Anglo-Saxon control*. 1992.

<sup>471</sup> BROOKS, *From British to English Christianity: deconstructing Bede's interpretation of the conversion*, p. 14.

existence<sup>472</sup>. It is most probably a case of non surviving or not yet discovered sources.

What is certain, however, is that there is little to suggest a strong continuity between Roman Christianity and the religion brought by the mission of 597, to which I will return later. This could be explained by the feeble establishment of Christianity in the first place and latter the impossibility of blocking the Saxon advance and its successive imposition of paganism for five generations. We could also say that, based on Bede's above-mentioned presumed intentions to highlight the mission sent by Pope Gregory, the Canterbury Church wanted to create a religious identity that was completely new and detached from any heathen legacy.

#### **4.2 The so-called Anglo-Saxons and their religion**

It this time now to turn our attention to these "invaders" known as Anglo-Saxons, a name that was given to a people who came from continental Germanic tribes and migrated to Britain at the beginning of the fifth century. The comprehensive name was first found in sources such as Paul the Deacon and Bede, although there is no evidence to confirm that these people actually called themselves this way<sup>473</sup>. Rather, they identified with one of the kingdoms, or as Saxons or Angles.

According to Bede, "the new-comers were from the three most formidable races of Germany, the Saxons, Angles, and Jutes"<sup>474</sup>, and each one of these peoples was at the origin of the many kingdoms and regions of England<sup>475</sup>. There is an extensive discussion about the variety of people who migrated and settled in Britain<sup>476</sup>, but the numerous different cultural influences are attested by the archaeological evidence in inhumations in England during the Anglo-Saxon period, particularly in Kent<sup>477</sup>.

Angles and Saxons were brought to Britain by the British in the fifth century as

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<sup>472</sup> STANCLIFFE, *The British church and the mission of Augustine*, p. 116.

<sup>473</sup> Always a valid reference on this topic is CAMPBELL, JOHN and WORMALD, *The Anglo-Saxons*, 1991.

<sup>474</sup> HE, I,15. *Aduenerant autem de tribus Germaniae populis fortioribus, id est Saxonibus, Anglis, Iutis.*

<sup>475</sup> For a discussion of the many peoples that populated Britain see POHL, *Ethnic names and identities in the British isles: a comparative perspective*, pp. 7 et seq.

<sup>476</sup> See WOOD, *Before and after the migration to Britain*, pp. 41 et seq.

<sup>477</sup> WOOD, *Op. Cit.* p. 42.

confederate soldiers and received lands after the Roman army had retreated. Gildas asserts that in the fifth century the Romano-British lords decided to reach an agreement with the Saxons to provide protection for the East and South against the threat of the Picts<sup>478</sup>. As the Saxons did not honour the agreement, they formed an alliance with the enemies of the British and started looting the island. In the sixth century, the Anglo-Saxons started to establish their kingdoms in the south-east of the island after a series of victories and defeats.

The term 'Anglo-Saxon' only became common around the eighth century, as it was first used to distinguish the inhabitants of Britain from the Saxons, who had stayed on the continent. It was not until the end of the ninth century that the term became a distinctive name that marked the end of the many ethnic units after the rise of King Alfred<sup>479</sup>.

Many aspects of the Anglo-Saxon religion are difficult to identify with absolute certainty, since very few sources describe their practices<sup>480</sup>. For example, at the beginning of his *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae*, Gildas announces that he will not talk about paganism:

*Igitur omittens priscos illos communesque cum omnibus gentibus errores, quibus ante aduentum christi in carne omne humanum genus obligabatur astrictum, nec enumaerans patriae portenta ipsa diabolica paene numero aegyptiaca uincentia, quorum nonnulla liniamentis adhuc deformibus intra uel extra deserta moenia solito mores rigentia toruis uultibus intuemur, neque nominatum inclamitans montes ipsos aut colles uel fluuios olim exitiabiles, nunc uero humanis usibus utiles, quibus diuinus honor a caeco tunc populo cumulabatur (...).*

The same decision was also made by Bede in his *Expositio Actuum Apostolorum*, saying that those who ignore God should in turn be ignored<sup>481</sup>. Despite the lack of

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<sup>478</sup> Gildas, *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae*, IVth paragraph.

<sup>479</sup> POHL, *Ethnic names and identities in the British isles: a comparative perspective*, p. 22.

<sup>480</sup> This problem is faced by any scholar attempting to study Anglo-Saxon paganism, as mentioned by PAGE, *Anglo-Saxon paganism, the evidence of Bede*, 1995.

<sup>481</sup> *Qui ignorat ignorabitur* (ad v. XVII, 23 ; éd. M. L. W. Laistner, Turnhout, Brepols, 1983 [CCSL 121], p. 71 l. 31).

written sources, we can assume that the pagan religion practiced by Anglo-Saxons in Britain was not too different from that of the Germanic peoples on the continent. However, it is conceivable that traditional practices in the island might have differed slightly from those of the continent. Indeed, as Ian Wood writes in his *“Pagan religion and superstition East of the Rhine”*, these practices were implanted in what once was a Roman province whose temples and Christian churches still stood. Sources such as Bede and Gregory the Great provide some indirect information about the worshiping of idols and the existence of temples, but we can rely only on toponymy for some evidence of these structures and the gods who were worshipped there; these sources offer some evidence that their origins might lie in Roman or Germanic paganism.

As far as Bede is concerned, we know that he was probably born in 672 in Northumbria, where conversion only arrived in around 627 according to his *Ecclesiastical History*. There were probably still reminiscences of pagan traditions during Bede’s lifetime and although he was sent to the monastery of Monkwearmouth at the age of seven, he had probably at least heard something about paganism from his old relatives or from the oral tradition. He does not provide a detailed description of paganism, but it is mentioned in his *Ecclesiastical History*, the *De Temporum Ratione* and also in the *Vita Cuthberti*, although his comments on paganism are nothing more than what is needed to complete his narrative.

Nevertheless, his writings feature some extremely important pieces of information. In his book *De Temporum ratione*, Bede describes some ancient calendars, including the one used by the Anglo-Saxons. In chapter XV, *De mensibus Anglorum*, Bede analyses the calendar and explains the origin of the names of the months related to pagan festivities celebrated during the year. He also mentions some festivities such as the “Night of the Mothers” that took place on the day of the celebration of Christ’s birth. Naturally, in addition to giving no indication of the kind of ceremonies, he fails to discuss the month *Solmonath* – meaning “the month of cakes” offered to the gods<sup>482</sup>

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<sup>482</sup> De temporum ratione VX. *Sol-monath dici potest mensis placentarum, quas in eo diis suis offerebant.*



- and the month *Hretha*, a goddess to whom people offered sacrifices<sup>483</sup>.

We know that much of the information bequeathed by Bede was copied or inspired by Orosius's *Historia adversus paganos*, and as he was brought up by monks, we can question whether his knowledge of paganism was only based on stories or on facts. Nonetheless, we can presume that in his day there were still many people who knew about these practices and divinities, not to mention that a lot of people probably still occasionally practised gestures or celebrations with a strong pagan heritage<sup>484</sup>. For example, the Cotton Collection in the British Library features the well-known "Aecerbot charm" used in a ceremony to bless the fields in the tenth or early eleventh century<sup>485</sup>. It contains instructions to take a number of herbs, pieces of trees, milk, honey, oil and yeast, mix the dough with holy water and pronounce a sort of enchantment both in the vernacular and Latin, evoking the benediction of the Trinity and Mother Earth while dripping the mixture into the soil. The ceremony proceeds with some extremely complex gestures such as a priest celebrating mass over the sod where the mixture has been dripped, moving around the church and the field according to the orientation of the sun, chanting other charms, baking loaves using holy water, milk and flour and then burying them in the fields<sup>486</sup>. It is said that this type of ceremony was performed between January and February, when the fields were sown and prepared for the coming agricultural year. *Solmonath* was the second month in Bede's calendar and the buried cakes loosely described by him might well be related to the loaves in the Aecerbot ritual<sup>487</sup>, demonstrating how ritual pagan

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<sup>483</sup> *Rhed-monath a deo illorum Rheda, cui in illo sacrificabant, nominatur.*

<sup>484</sup> Much has been said about the fact that the pagan names of days and months could be evidence that paganism was alive among Anglo-Saxons. Fell argues very convincingly that keeping the pagan names does not make this society a pagan one. After all, these names are still in use and our society is not considered pagan! Relying on the maintenance of pagan names as an indicator of "surviving" paganism is indeed exaggerated and even naive. See FELL, *Paganism in Beowulf, a semantic Fairy-tale*, 1995.

<sup>485</sup> On the symbolism of this ritual, see HILL, *The aecerbot charm and its Christian user*, 1977.

<sup>486</sup> A transcription of this ritual and an enlightening interpretation can be found in JOLLY, *Popular religion in late Saxon England*, pp. 6-8 and ss.

<sup>487</sup> MEANEY, *Bede and Anglo-Saxon paganism*, p. 6-7.

practices were successfully incorporated into the Christian world and vice versa<sup>488</sup>.

#### **4.3 Christianisation of the Anglo-Saxons: the Roman mission of 597 in the testimony of Bede and Gregory the Great.**

The study of the Christianisation of Britain cannot overlook Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English people*. Bede wrote this work in 731 as a monk at the monastery of Saint Peter at Jarrow (Northumbria). It is considered to be the most important source, not only in terms of ecclesiastical history, but also for its political and social history of the island, as it covers the period from the arrival of Caesar's first Roman troops to the years of Bede's life<sup>489</sup>.

The historiographical models followed by Bede are Eusebius, Orosius and Gregory of Tours, while his main sources for historical affairs are Pliny, Solinus and Gildas. For more recent events, the sources he collected himself consisted of tales told by clerics or information from correspondents who visited archives, for instance in Rome, seeking papal letters regarding England. He mainly focuses on religious events, whereas political issues are often left in the background. The tone used is instructive and moralizing, since his history has to provide the sovereigns of his time with a lesson. Bede's objective is to demonstrate through examples from history that kings had to submit to both God and the Church if they did not want to fall into disgrace. Indeed, Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* is full of examples of kings who were ruined by their lack of faith.

Unlike Gregory of Tours, who devoted an extensive part of his work to the period closest to him, Bede devoted more attention to events following the official arrival of Christianity in Britain in 597, while the events of his own lifetime are narrated less accurately. It is also known that his interest in political history is only relevant when it touches religious issues. His attention is more directed to the conversion of kings

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<sup>488</sup> More detailed and substantial studies of Anglo-Saxon paganism are WILSON, *Anglo-Saxon paganism*, 1992 and CARVER, SAMMARK and SAMPLE (eds.) *Signals of belief in early England : Anglo-Saxon paganism revisited*, 2010.

<sup>489</sup> There is an extensive bibliography on the life and writing of Bede. Some of the most important titles are: FARRELL (ed.), *Bede and Anglo-Saxon England*, 1978; DE GREGORIO, (ed.), *The Cambridge companion to Bede*, 2010.

and nobles than the political events affecting these conversions. Thus, Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* is the story of the conversion of the Anglo-Saxon aristocracy; the involvement of other social strata in this process can only be inferred. His book tells the story of how Christianity needed the sponsorship of kings in Britain and the main topics of his text is "what expectations the royal courts had of religion in general, and their previous experience in absorbing new cultural influence"<sup>490</sup>.

However, we can understand that, for political reasons, there was a process for converting the aristocracy and a process that involved the general population that had different causes. This affected the ease with which Christianity was absorbed by all social strata and thus the way they understood and practised religion<sup>491</sup>.

Bede describes how Christianity arrived in 597 with a mission led by the monk Augustine sent by Pope Gregory the Great, who felt compelled to further the evangelization of the British following divine inspiration<sup>492</sup>. The anecdote of Gregory meeting Angle slaves in the market and being compelled to invest in their land's conversion by their angelic features is the reason, according to him, to send the mission. However, it is retained that more than a fortuitous experience, Pope Gregory was guided by an indirect request of the kingdom of Kent, probably motivated by their relationship with the Merovingian dynasties<sup>493</sup>.

As attested by the numerous letters sent by Gregory to Gallic clerics and members of the Frankish royal families, not only the involvement and influence of the Gallic church was an important issue for his mission to the Anglo-Saxons, but were also a way to strengthen the papal influence in Frankia<sup>494</sup>. However, what seems apparent from Gregory's letters is that the Gallic church made little to support the missions. As it is apparent in a letter sent by Gregory on 596 to Theoderic II and Theodebert II kings of Burgundy and Austrasia that was delivered by Augustine in his passing through these lands, the *gentes anglorum* asked to be converted by *sacerdotes e uicino*,

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<sup>490</sup> YORKE, *The reception of Christianity at the Anglo-Saxon royal courts*, p.152.

<sup>491</sup> RICHTER, *Practical aspects of the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons*, p. 376.

<sup>492</sup> MARKUS, *Gregory the Great and his world*, 1997.

<sup>493</sup> See WOOD, *The mission of Augustine of Canterbury to the English*, 1994.

<sup>494</sup> WOOD, *Augustine and Gaul*, p. 68.

who failed to send missionaries to Britain. Ian Wood interpret this mention as a sort of accusation, since this passage would refer to the Gallic church and their inability to fulfil the request of their neighbors<sup>495</sup>. However, this passage is not always interpret in the same way by scholars, and some see in this reprimand a testimony instead of the inactivity of the British church in their role of evangelizers of their fellows Anglo-Saxons<sup>496</sup>.

Through the epistology register of Gregory we can see that his mission involved not only the papacy but also the Gallic Churches who supported the missionaries as they passed through these lands, and Gregory's interest in the mission in Britain cannot be separated from his concerns with the Frankish church, as it is clear from his letters. On the 596 Gregory wrote to the bishops of Tours, Marseille, Arles, Vienne, Autun and Aix to ask them to support the mission of Augustine. For the second mission he wrote again to Vienne, Arles and Marseille, and also to Lyon, Toulon, Chalons-sur-Saone, Metz, Paris, Rouen, Angers and Gap. Through all this correspondence we can understand how important was the logistic role that the church provided to Gregory's missions, but we can also learn through these documents (according to Woods' interpretation) that Gregory accused the Frankish kingdoms of not being successful in providing the means for the conversion of the Kentish kingdom when they asked for it<sup>497</sup>. Nevertheless, If the Frankish kingdoms had not helped the English when they asked for conversion, they were keen to do so when Gregory asked them to support his missionaries. Not only for piety but also for political interest.

When the mission arrived in Britain the following year, the most powerful kingdom was Kent under King Aethelberth. The missionaries arrived on an island that was part of Kentish territory and with the aid of interpreters who had joined them in Gaul, they asked the King for the right to settle on his lands and to preach the gospel. The choice of Kent was not a coincidence, as the kingdom had great regional power

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<sup>495</sup> Ep, VI,51.

<sup>496</sup> See FLECHNER, *Pope Gregory and the British: mission as a canonical problem*. 2015. 47-65.

<sup>497</sup> WOOD, *The mission of Augustine of Canterbury to the English*, p.7.

and influence over the neighbouring kingdoms<sup>498</sup>. The King's response to the missionaries was positive and he agreed to all their demands as long as they remained where they were until he had decided his course of action. Aethelberth was already familiar with the new faith through his wife, who came from the Christian Merovingian. She had been given in marriage provided that she could practise her faith freely with a personal bishop named Liudhard.

After a few days, the King went to meet his guests on the aforementioned island. According to Bede, King Aethelberth took the precaution to meet the missionaries on open land because the mysterious men might have been able to defeat him with their magical arts in an enclosed space<sup>499</sup>. The monks received the King with a silver cross, singing and preaching. In response, Aethelbert said:

*Pulchra sunt quidem uerba et promissa, quae adfertis; sed quia noua sunt et incerta, non his possum ad sensum tribuere, relictis eis, quae tanto tempore cum omni Anglorum gente seruauit. Uerum quia de longe huc peregrini uenistis, et, ut ego mihi uideor perspexisse, ea, quae uos uera et optima credebatis, nobis quoque communicare desiderastis, nolumus molesti esse uobis; quin potius benigno uos hospitio recipere, et, quae uictui sunt uestro necessaria, ministrare curamus; nec prohibemus, quin omnes, quos potestis, fidei uestrae religionis praedicando societis<sup>500</sup>.*

After this first meeting, the monks received a piece of land in Canterbury, where they were free to preach and practice their faith.

In Bede's testimony, the first conversion of a king in Britain is full of meaning. The King to whom the mission was sent was considered one of the most powerful on the island and this was a considered choice: the conversion strategy tried to enlist the king's support, since it was known that Christianity could develop more easily through political domination. Also, Christianity was not unknown to Aethelberth,

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<sup>498</sup> For some theories on the choice of Kent as the initial destination of the mission, see LAMBERT, *Christians and pagans*. p. 166-8, in which the author writes about ties between the dynasty of Kent and the Frankish kingdom dating back much longer than the marriage of Aethelbert and Bertha.

<sup>499</sup> HE I, 25.

<sup>500</sup> Idem.

who probably had the opportunity to see some Christian rites first-hand. According to Bede, King Aethelberth was initially reluctant, but it is not known whether this was Bede's invention to embellish his story or a narrative tradition of Canterbury<sup>501</sup>. The King had some doubts, therefore he could not abandon his ancient beliefs and as we will see, a king's conversion was frequently preceded by reflection and consultation with councilors. This demonstrates that rather than being a matter of faith, potential converters first considered the political situation and the interests of the kingdom.

The presumed discourse of Aethelbert speaks of uncertainty towards the new and confidence in tradition. We can find this behaviour in almost every narrative about the conversion of pagans, sometimes with opposition to the new religion. In the Kentish King's discourse, we find elements that could be the key to explaining the maintenance of many traditional gestures and the habit of resorting to customary practices in moments of need.

Nevertheless, what is important here is that Bede himself recognized the potential difficulty faced by a first attempt of conversion. Even though the King adhered to the Christian religion, it did not necessarily mean that his kingdom or descendants would also accept the new faith. Indeed, following Aethelberth's death, the kingdom of Kent faced a period of apostasy when his son refused to accept conversion. This also happened among the East Saxons where, after the death of the Christian King Saeberth, his three pagan sons were proclaimed sovereigns. They then instigated the people to apostatize and even went so far as to expel the bishops from the kingdom<sup>502</sup>.

It is important for us to dwell on this story further. As mentioned above, the will of common people in the matter of conversion is seldom addressed in the narrative of Anglo-Saxon conversion and even in these few mentions there is only indirect information about their relative willingness to receive Christian teachings. In the account given by Bede about the flight and return of Mellitus, then bishop of London

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<sup>501</sup> WOOD, *The mission of Augustine of Canterbury*, p. 3.

<sup>502</sup> HE II, 5.

and Justus, Bishop of Rochester, after their expulsion by Saeberth's pagan sons, we can see one example of what people said on the matter of forced religious conversion. The clerics first fled to Canterbury and then to Gaul, but when they were called back by the Bishop of Canterbury a year later, Mellitus was prevented from returning to London, as the people preferred to be under their idolatrous priests (*idolatriis magis pontificibus seruire gaudentes*)<sup>503</sup>.

Back to Kentish conversion, the missionaries' conversion work seems to have been very passive, for they remained in the lands conferred by the King to pray and lead a pious holy life. According to Bede, the first conversions were inspired by their lifestyle, which motivated many pagans to follow the faith and be baptized. Indeed, the missionaries' good example, holiness and many miracles convinced the King to be baptized too. However, despite having accepted the new faith, the King knew that he could not force conversion upon others:

*Quorum fidei et conuersioni ita congratulatus esse rex perhibetur, ut nullum tamen cogeret ad Christianismum; sed tantummodo credentes artiori dilectione, quasi conciuēs sibi regni caelestis, amplecteretur. Didicerat enim a doctoribus auctoribusque suae salutis seruitium Christi uoluntarium, non coacticiū esse debere*<sup>504</sup>.

We can understand from this passage that the first missionary period in Britain was not led by the intentional indoctrination of pagans. Unlike the example of Martin of Tours, who was a missionary pilgrim in the countryside seeking pagans to convince them of their errors, the Canterbury monks preferred to teach and persuade through their example, which, however, could be only a *topos* of conversion, as seen in many other examples. The King's behaviour concerning those that remained pagan was a strategic choice: acting with coercion would not bring sincere conversions, but preaching and baptizing would.

In Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, there are at least twenty-six descriptions of individual

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<sup>503</sup> HE II, 25.

<sup>504</sup> HE I.27.

or group conversions<sup>505</sup> and seven testimonies of apostasy, of which at least four are an explicit refusal to embrace the new faith by a sovereign<sup>506</sup>. Refusal and apostasy are different things, but it seems that Bede considered the first as a sort of apostasy for it implied that a reign that was previously converted, after the death of the Christian king, would turn back to paganism for different reasons, therefore would be apostate due to the heirs refuse to embrace Christianity. These figures indicate the relatively widespread shallowness of the conversions, but Bede gives no further information on the reason for these apostasies<sup>507</sup>. Could it have been a conversion motivated by politics in the first place that had nothing to do with personal piety? It is hard to maintain this for every available example, but not impossible in some cases.

In Wessex, Cenwealh, the pagan son of the Christian King Cynegisl, refused baptism<sup>508</sup>. Soon after that he repudiated his wife, sister of the King of Mercia, which led to war against Wessex and Cenwealh fleeing his kingdom. In his account, Bede gives no reason why the King refused baptism. The monk only tells about his conversion while Cenwealh was in the kingdom of the East Angles, a choice that allows him to take back the throne through this new alliance. The tale leads us to think that the King's conversion was strongly motivated by politics. We can therefore presume that political reasons were at the root of the Christianisation of the Anglo-Saxons, while the cases of apostasy attest to the tendency to return to ancient practices when there was no more political motivation.

We can thus understand that in Kent and other kingdoms the presence of Christianity depended on the sponsorship of a strong governor able to defend the

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<sup>505</sup> This figure, followed by a list of the converts and the names of those responsible for their conversions, can be found in ORTON, P. *Burning Idols, Burning Bridges: Bede, conversion and Beowulf*. 2005. 5-46.

<sup>506</sup> These are the son of Aethelbert, the three pagan sons of Saebert of Essex; King Cenwealh of Wessex and the people from the reign of the East Saxons. An account of all the cases of heirs of Christian kings refusing baptism can be found in ANGENENDT, *The conversion of the Anglo-Saxons considered against the background of the early medieval mission*, p. 749 et seq.

<sup>507</sup> See also YORKE, *The reception of Christianity at the Anglo Saxon royal courts*, 1999 and TYLER, *Reluctant Kings and Christian conversion in seventh-century England*, 2007.

<sup>508</sup> HE III. 7. *Coinualch, qui et fidem ac sacramenta regni caelestis suscipere rennuuit, et non multo post etiam regni terrestri potentiam perdidit.*



new religion against the persistence of paganism, which as we saw in Bede's narrative, could easily happen. The political link is fundamental and the *Ecclesiastical History* provides other examples, such the story of King Edwin of Northumbria, who required many signs from God and had to deliberate with his councillors before finally accepting baptism. Edwin, the King of the North, married Aethelberth's daughter, and like this king he agreed to allow his wife to profess her Christian faith freely, as well as not hinder the activities of the bishops in her entourage<sup>509</sup>. Still, Edwin did not promised to convert, as he needed to deliberate with his councillors about the best choices for him and his kingdom.

Edwin's conversion seems to follow a certain model also seen in Gregory of Tours's narrative. In his *Historiae*<sup>510</sup>, Gregory describes the conversion of Clovis, who only changed his mind after the war against the Alamanni. He found himself in trouble during the battle and promised Christ to convert to the Christian religion if he was victorious. According to Gregory of Tours, after the defeat of his enemies, the King was still afraid of the negative reaction of his army that was probably mainly pagan. However, Bishop Remigius advised him to consult his soldiers, who immediately recognized the superiority of the Christian religion and decided to adhere to the new faith together with their King. Gregory wrote that Clovis was baptized in 496 with his sister and a great number of soldiers<sup>511</sup>. In this excerpt, we can see the similarity between the two stories regarding the conversion of a sovereign, another literary *topos* that shows the ruler acting with caution, fearing the loss of political and military support<sup>512</sup>.

Nonetheless, the conversion of Edwin is even more complex: despite his victory over his enemies, the letter from the Pope and a vision promising him glory if he accepted conversion, the King was still in doubt. King Edwin wanted to summon a council with his friends and councillors to discuss the matter and in chapter 13 of the second book of the *Ecclesiastical History* we can read about this council at which a high priest

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<sup>509</sup> HE II.9.

<sup>510</sup> Gregory of Tours, *Historia Francorum*, II, 30.

<sup>511</sup> *Historia Francorum*, II, 31.

<sup>512</sup> FLETCHER, *The conversion of Europe*, p. 111.

(*primus pontificus*) named Coifi states that pagan religion is without virtue and benefit (*nihil omnino uirtutis habet, nihil utilitatis*). He asks Bishop Paulinus to allow further lessons about the new religion, after which he admits that only Christianity can bring salvation and eternal happiness. After the comparison between both religions, Coifi fails to find any advantages in paganism<sup>513</sup> and Edwin finally convinces himself to renounce the idols and accept the new faith. After that, it is Coifi who asks for permission to destroy the temples and idols of the old religion, since he believes to be the right person for the job<sup>514</sup>.

This passage has been debated by many scholars<sup>515</sup>, not only regarding the accuracy of the events narrated but also the very existence of high priests in the Anglo-Saxon religion. However, Bede's choices of content and mode are again revealing. For example, the fact that a pagan priest is responsible for the destruction of temples and is a keen defender of the advantages of Christianity may mean that according to Bede the revelation of God's words allowed pagans to understand immediately how futile their practises were, leading them willingly to Christianity. His exaggerated picture of a long-term sinner who finally learns about his mistake – and tries to do everything to improve – was an important example to those that should eventually still be in error.

After the apparent success of the first mission, Gregory sent a second one in 601 with the aim of consolidating the evangelization work begun by Augustine. According to Bede, the new mission brought items of ecclesiastical celebration, books, relics and letters from Pope Gregory to the king, the queen, Augustine and the head of the second Christian expedition, Mellitus.

Bede first copied the letter sent to Abbot Mellitus. There has been a discussion

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<sup>513</sup> *Iam olim intellexaram nihil esse, quod colebamus; quia vicelicet, quanto studiosius in eo cultu veritatem quaerebam, tanto minus inueniebam, Nunc autem aperte profiteor, quia in hac praedicatione veritas claret illa, quae nobis vitae, salutis, et, beatitudinis aeternae dona valet tribuere.*

<sup>514</sup> See BARROW, *How Coifi pierced Christ's side: a re-examination of Bede's Ecclesiastical History, II, Chapter 13*, 2011. 693-706, who interprets this passage as an allegory of Saint John's Gospel.

<sup>515</sup> Some studies are: MEANEY, *Bede and Anglo-Saxon paganism* (1985); PAGE, *Anglo-Saxon paganism, the evidence of Bede* (1995); WOOD, *Pagan religions and superstitions east of the Rhine from the fifth to the ninth century* (1995); CHURCH, *Paganism in conversion-age Anglo-Saxon England: the evidence of Bede's Ecclesiastical History reconsidered* (2008).

around Bede's mistake in considering this letter to have been sent before the one addressed to King Aethelberth<sup>516</sup>; the content of both letters is substantially contradictory regarding the position to take on pagan practices. It is believed that Bede's mistake was not intentional, as he probably only learnt about the letter sent to the King after he had already written about the instructions for Mellitus.

The first letter written and sent was then that addressed to King Aethelberth, urging him to make the conversion of the people his priority. The Pope asked him to destroy temples, abolish the worship of idols and set an example to the people through his own way of life. He was to encourage, inform, persuade and correct.

*Et ideo, gloriose fili, eam, quam accepisti diuinitus gratiam, sollicita mente custodi, Christianam fidem in populis tibi subditis extendere festina, zelum rectitudinis tuae in eorum conuersione multiplica, idolorum cultus insequere, fanorum aedificia euerte, subditorum mores ex magna uitae munditia, exhortando, terrendo, blandiendo, corrigendo, et boni operis exempla monstrando aedifica (...).*<sup>517</sup>

Only a few weeks passed between this letter and the one sent to Mellitus. The Abbot was not asked to destroy temples, but only idols. In fact, if the buildings were well constructed, they were to be converted into churches, while sacrifices and banquets were to be made in honour of martyrs<sup>518</sup>.

It is notable that Gregory's considerations begin by stressing his reflections on the issue of the Angles (*dicite ei, quid diu mecum de causa Anglorum cogitans tractavi*),

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<sup>516</sup> MARKUS, *The chronology of the Gregorian Mission to England: Bede's narrative and Gregory's correspondence*. 1963.

<sup>517</sup> HE I.32.

<sup>518</sup> *Gregorii I papae Registrum epistolarum. Librum XI, 56. In MGH, Ep. Tomus II (1890) p. 331. (...) dicite ei, quid diu mecum de causa Anglorum cogitans tractavi, uidelicet quia fana idolorum destrui in eadem gente minime debeant, sed ipsa, quae in eis sunt, idola destruantur. Aqua benedicta fiat, in eisdem fanis aspergatur, altaria construuntur, reliquiae ponantur, quia, si fana eadem bene constructa sunt, necesse est, ut a cultu daemonum in obsequio veri Dei debeant commutari, ut, dum gens ipsa eadem fana sua non videt destrui, de corde errorem deponat et Deum verum cognoscens ac adorans ad loca quae consuevit familiariter concurrat (...) Et quia solet in sacrificio daemonum multos occidere, debet eis etiam hac de re aliqua sollemnitas immutari, ut die dedecationis vel natalicii sanctorum martyrum quorum illic reliquiae ponuntur tabernacula sibi circa easdem ecclesias, quae ex fanis commutatae sunt, de remis arborum faciant et religiosi conviviis sollemnitatem celebrent; nec diabolo iam animalia immolent, sed et ad laudem Dei in esu suo animalia exterius gaudia reseruantur, ad interiora gaudia consentire facilius valeant.* Use the new edition

demonstrating thorough reasoning on the situation. The letter sent to Aethelbert had the same tone of those he sent to the landowners of Sardinia, that were supposed to support bishop's conversion of heathen and act with a firm hand against their stubbornness. Apparently, the letter written to Mellitus took into account information on the difficulties faced in Britain, which were learned after the Abbot had left Rome and were different from all the previous experiences of Gregory with partially heathen lands.

Gregory had great expectations for the King of Kent, since he believed he was powerful and influential among his people and the surrounding kingdoms. With this idea in mind, Gregory thought that a powerful king had to adopt a forceful position by using a policy of coercion that was very different from the tolerance and flexibility normally attributed to him. *"[Gregory] had no experience of a totally heathen land and it was natural to him to apply to Anglo-Saxon England the model he was accustomed to elsewhere. Aethelberth was to coerce the sluggish and unwilling just as secular authorities were expected to do in parts of Italy, Sardinia and Corsica where the pope exerted pressure"*<sup>519</sup>.

Contrary to what was expected from the King, the intention of the letter to Mellitus was to adapt the doctrine to reach pagan hearts more easily. This letter seems to contradict the missive sent to King Aethelberth, but it was actually more in line with the position of a missionary who had neither the energy nor the power expected from a sovereign. As we saw previously, Gregory's change in attitude was the result of a pondered reflection on the subject and the knowledge that the tenacity of the ancient religion demanded perhaps a more cautious procedure. It is also important to take into consideration the role of the missionary who, unlike the king, had a closer relationship with the people and knew exactly what their difficulties and strengths were. The missionaries were therefore entrusted with a thorough conversion: once the King had been converted and the official religion was Christianity, they were given the task of inculcating, educating, overseeing and censoring the depth and sincerity of the converts. To achieve this, the strategy had to be non-violent and

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<sup>519</sup> MALCOLM, *Christians and Pagans*. p. 177.

peaceful, in some ways even "tolerant"; closeness to the people was a fundamental condition to reach the objectives. We can find an example of this close relationship between a missionary and the people in Bede's account of the vicissitudes of Wilfrid, who is refused by the Northumbrians when travelling back from Rome and forced to flee to the kingdom of the South Saxons. There, he finds a pagan population that is also suffering from severe famine. Wilfrid decides to teach them how to fish in order to earn their trust: *Quo beneficio multum antistes cor omnium in suum conuertit amorem, et libentius eo praedicante caelestia sperare coeperunt, cuius ministerio temporalia bona sumserunt*<sup>520</sup>.

Through fishing, Wilfrid manages to gain the esteem necessary for his evangelization work. In the next chapter, we will see other examples of the relationship between missionaries, priests and people, and how this closeness allows the development of a number of practices that, in trying to make people familiar with Christianity, ended up incorporating some typical traditional practices and gestures.

#### **4.4 Analysing the process of conversion**

All the evidence offered by Bede indicates that converts, as it is expected, initially had reluctant feelings towards the new religion. According to the information provided by the monk, we can estimate that the conversion process of British dynasties lasted for about ninety years, given that Caedwalla of Wessex was the last king of Britain to accept the new faith in 689. Aethelbert's grandson, Eorcenbert, whose reign can be placed between 640 and 664, was the first sovereign to order idols to be abandoned and destroyed<sup>521</sup>. This information leads us to the conclusion that a considerable amount of time elapsed between the first arrival of Pope Gregory's mission and the official order to destroy pagan religion. The information given by the monk of Jarrow continues to focus on the conversion of kings and nobles<sup>522</sup> while the rest of the population is mentioned almost as a consequence of the conversion of

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<sup>520</sup> HE IV,13.

<sup>521</sup> HE III, 8.

<sup>522</sup> BROOKS, *From British to English Christianity: deconstructing Bede's interpretation of the conversion*, p. 7.

their rulers<sup>523</sup>. Indeed, there is a tendency among authors to give no credit to the popular initiative in shaping religion. While dismissing completely any importance of pagan and traditional practices they are saying that people would accept the imposition of Christianity without questioning. At this point we can say that after the careful analyses of the sources it became clear that people were not passive during this process, being rather active in building their own personal religiosity. In chapter five Bede talks about the attempting of converting the Old Saxons by two English missionaries: Hewald the Black and Hewald the White. When the people heard that these men were trying to convert their ruler they started “fearing that if [the missionaries] went to their lord and spoke to him, they might turn him from his gods and convert him to the new practice of the Christian faith, so that the whole province would gradually be compelled to change its old religion for new”<sup>524</sup>. The villagers decided to kill the English monks, in a gesture that can be seen, according to the narrative provided by Bede, as an act of defense of the old beliefs against the menace of cultural change. Although this passage should be read with the usual care dedicated to ecclesiastical sources, it is doubtless an account of a very plausible attitude towards change that very often can be seen in these delicate moments of crisis. To cope with the new, to understand what could not be explained, these were all issues that worried early medieval men and women. After all, as Ian Wood put it, “*pagans and Christians alike had to make their peace with an environment which they did not understand, and their solutions were not so very dissimilar. Indeed pagans would even exploit what they must have regarded as Christian magic when necessary*”<sup>525</sup>.

We know that Bede’s vision of the conversion of Britain was conditioned by his ecclesiastical expectations and he believed that the initial period of conversion was highly important, as it was when the episcopal sees were established. After this period of ultimate adhesion to Christianity, if a king declared himself pagan, Bede

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<sup>523</sup> A few examples: King Edwin with nobles and a large number of humble folk (*Igitur accepit rex Aeduini cum cunctis gentis suae nobilibus ac plebe perplurima fidem et lauacrum sanctae regenerationis anno regni sui XI*) (HE II 14); King Eorpwold from East Anglia converted with his people (*cum sua provincia*) (HE. II 15); Sigbert, the king of the East Saxons and *gentem suam ad fidem Christi conuerterent* (HE III 22) among others.

<sup>524</sup> HE V, 10

<sup>525</sup> WOOD, *Pagan religions and superstitions east of the Rhine from the fifth to the ninth century*, p. 261.

considered it as an example of apostasy. He believed that a kingdom could only be either Christian or pagan; the combination of the two was intolerable<sup>526</sup>. However, it is likely that the king would require the support of people from both religions, as suggested by the fact that a large number of nobles and councillors remained pagan in this first phase of conversion. It is even possible that converted kings maintained some public aspects of pagan cults<sup>527</sup>. The unconditional adherence to the belief in one God was gradual and the act of official recognition can be noted from the mid-seventh century on with the first laws prohibiting the practice of pagan religions. In light of this information, we can assume that it was the power of tradition rather than the indulgence of missionaries that characterized the initial period of the conversion with the co-existence of both religions.

A prime example is that of Raedwald, King of East Anglia, who, according to Bede, was baptized in Kent but after returning home was persuaded to return to the ancient cults by his advisers and his wife. It is therefore believed that he practised both religions. Bede wrote that the King had a sanctuary with two altars side by side: one for the Christian religion and one for sacrifices to pagan gods<sup>528</sup>. This reminds us that the various pagan religions were always characterized by a natural pluralism which allowed for the adoration of a multitude of divinities. It would therefore seem natural that this basis of plurality would also accept a Christian god within its pantheon. However, Bede's conclusion on King Raedwald's attitude shows that Christianity would not compromise or accommodate the needs of pagans. Still, Raedwald's personal beliefs were very different from the doctrine practised by priests and defended in the councils, which shows that the adoption of some gestures and practices was inevitable<sup>529</sup>. It is known that Anglo-Saxon kings claimed to have pagan gods in their genealogic tree, and as attested by Bede, Kentish kings descended from Woden<sup>530</sup>. As Barbara York well states, "*if kings were obliged to*

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<sup>526</sup> YORKE, *The adaptation of the Anglo-Saxon royal courts to Christianity* In *The cross goes north*. p. 244.

<sup>527</sup> YORKE, *From pagan to Christian in Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 247.

<sup>528</sup> HE II. 15.

<sup>529</sup> According to Wood, Raedwald's temple was probably a church and he was a Christian who presumably continued to practise some pagan rituals. See WOOD, Ian. *The pagan and the others: varying presentations in the Early Middle Ages*, p.5.

<sup>530</sup> HE, I, 15.

*concede that acceptance of Christianity meant the worship of only one god, the missionaries had to recognize that there could be no clean break with the pre-Christian past which was so essential for validating the status of these royal houses (...). Links with the ancestors, whether real or acquired from the prehistoric past, involved more than just sentiment for they were one of the means through which royal houses claimed their right to rule. The church found ways to accommodate them*"<sup>531</sup>.

Oswald was the king responsible for the return of Christianity to the kingdom of Northumbria and was considered by Bede as the "favourite of God"<sup>532</sup>. The cult of Oswald became very popular after his death when he was considered a saint, but his miraculous powers manifested themselves even while he was alive. Bede writes that Oswald took a large wooden cross onto the battlefield before his confrontation with Cadwallon, King of Northumbria, and after achieving a miraculous victory, the place where the King placed the cross became the scene of several miracles, while the cross itself was linked to miraculous healings<sup>533</sup>.

After the death of King Oswald, the place where he had been killed began also to be associated with miraculous events. For example, many people mixed the sand found there with water to heal the sick who drank it. In addition, the soil at the place where Oswald fell was able to withstand fire<sup>534</sup> and people could be cured of demonic possession on his tomb. Bede then writes about the miracles performed by the King's mortal remains, the earth that touched his bones and the water that washed them, his relics and so on.

The cult of relics of martyrs recalls a widespread *topos* in pagan mythology – the magical power of blood and amulets<sup>535</sup>, a power that was not only to heal the sick but also animals and nature. The popular initiative to take earth and produce potions is probably a traditional practice, certainly not encouraged by the Church, but useful in order to strengthen the faith of these people. In this way, I believe that certain

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<sup>531</sup> YORKE, *The reception of Christianity at the Anglo-Saxon royal courts*, p. 167.

<sup>532</sup> *virī Deo dilecti*, HE III.2.

<sup>533</sup> HE III.2.

<sup>534</sup> HE III.10.

<sup>535</sup> BOZOKY, *Paganisme et culte des reliques: le topos du sang vivifiant la végétation*. p. 151-6.



practices have been tolerated by the clergy for their strength and service to Christianity itself. A faith much closer to the needs and mentality of people could only be built by the people themselves and, therefore, hybridity and local religiosity stemmed from this approach.

It is important to emphasize that Bede speaks almost exclusively about the conversion of the aristocracy, in other words about how kings and nobles received the new religion and about the process that put the Christian Church in a privileged position in the social dynamic of kingdoms. The prosperity of the new religion was supported by donations made to monasteries and dioceses by nobility. As a result, the conversion of the upper classes is crucial in his account. It is possible, however, to perceive in his testimony that the adherence to Christianity was not perfect and that, despite their proximity to the clergy, the elite practised a form of Christianity that was not exactly what bishops expected.

Raedwald, the unconventional religious king, is often associated with the famous archaeological discoveries of Sutton Hoo, where a monumental tomb was found containing Christian and Roman elements within a structure whose characteristics are uncontestedly pagan<sup>536</sup>. The funerary complex of Sutton Hoo is located in modern-day Suffolk to the north-east of London. The site, which is believed to have been an elite East Anglian cemetery, was discovered in the early twentieth century, and seventeen funerary structures dating from the seventh century were identified<sup>537</sup>. Some of these structures, known as mound burials, presented simple or elaborate burials and are presumably associated with graves containing unaccompanied bodies thought to be examples of ritual killing<sup>538</sup>. Mound number 1, known as the "tomb of the warrior" is the most famous finding on this site and presented an impressive boat that served as a burial chamber. In this mound, along

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<sup>536</sup> On the association between Sutton Hoo and Raedwald, see KENDALL and WELLS, *Introduction: Sutton Hoo and early Medieval Northern Europe*. In WELLS and KENDALL, eds. *Voyage to the other world. The legacy of Sutton Hoo*, 1992.

<sup>537</sup> For a detailed description, see: WELLS and KENDALL, eds. *Voyage to the other world. The legacy of Sutton Hoo*, 1992; CARVER, *The age of Sutton Hoo: the seventh century in north-west Europe*, 1992 and respective bibliography.

<sup>538</sup> CARVER, *Kingship and material culture in early Anglo-Saxon East Anglia*. In *The origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms*, 1989. p. 150.

with several valuable items such as weapons, armour and vessels, two silver spoons were found marked with the Christian symbol of the Chi Rho. The burial mounds of earth, as well as burials within boats, have never been found in Christian contexts, which means that this conformation and its association with other burials of this kind attest to the undiscussed religious affiliation of the deceased to the pagan faith. Martin Carver states that "*[a burial] reveals both the corporate and the personal agenda of the members of the burial party, and constitutes the fossilization, in a moment, of a political viewpoint*"<sup>539</sup>. The analysis of the findings in Sutton Hoo enabled an understanding of the burial rites of the Anglo- Saxons as an "index of cultural or ethnic affiliation or social difference or belief"<sup>540</sup>. The rich funerary kit and the way in which the mounds are placed as markers on the landscape attest to the social meaning of a display of wealth and power. Ornaments and objects from distant places are characteristic to rich male burials of Scandinavian and Nordic people from prehistoric to early medieval Europe. Common features in these burials are weapons, a horse or vehicle, vessels and objects used in the consumption of beverages, a wooden chamber and a large covering mound. A purse with thirty-seven coins all minted in Merovingian Gaul in the late sixth and early seventh century demonstrate not only wealth, but also the existence of commercial and political contacts. The Christian silver spoons, of probable Byzantine origin, might therefore have the same purpose as the coins and other objects in the burial: to show the affluence and power of the person buried in that place to the audience or even to the after world. Regardless of whether the deceased was Raedwald or another noble warrior, the message conveyed by these burials concerns the preservation of memory, tradition and social status<sup>541</sup>. Indeed, if we accept the role of a burial as a deliberate statement, we can interpret the findings of Sutton Hoo as a people striving to keep their ancestral allegiance with their native lands across the North Sea. Still, according to Carver, "*the context in which such signals become necessary can only be where the protagonists are threatened by their converse: Christianity, the adoption of which reaches beyond the tonsure and the church to fealty to the*

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<sup>539</sup> CARVER, M. *Conversion and politics on the Eastern seaboard of Britain; some archaeological indicators*, p. 19.

<sup>540</sup> CARVER, *Conclusion, the future of Sutton Hoo*. In *Voyage to the Other World*. p. 189.

<sup>541</sup> See CRAWFORD, *Votive Deposition, Religion and the Anglo-Saxon Furnished Burial Ritual*, 2004.

*Franks and their imperial echoes. Sutton Hoo is therefore a theatre in which the longest running theme is the defiant pagan politics of an arriviste monarchy*"<sup>542</sup>. As an act of defiance against the threat of Christianity, the cemetery of Sutton Hoo is extremely significant in the matter of how important it was to preserve memory and tradition as a way to maintain a cultural and religious identity, in the face of the imminent change that Christianity would bring<sup>543</sup>.

Indeed, one of the greatest Saxon concerns was the traditional burial. We know of a late eighth-century deliberation regarding Saxon burial practices on the continent that says: "we order that the bodies of Christian Saxons be taken to the church cemeteries and not to the burial mounds of the pagans"<sup>544</sup>, in an obvious attempt to prevent people from continuing with their ancestors practices. It seems obvious from the information offered by documents and archaeological findings how traditional burials play an important role in the affirmation of a local and cultural identity in this period of transformation in the seventh and eighth centuries. These structures and all their meanings and rituals provided a link with the past and their ancestors as a sort of legitimation of a group and social history.

A document exhaustively studied and attesting to the hybrid religious identity of the British aristocracy in the early days of Christianity is the epic poem *Beowulf*<sup>545</sup>. This poem of more than 3000 lines, was for a long time generally accepted as being written in Britain in the eighth century, but according to Roberta Frank, the date is to

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<sup>542</sup> CARVER, *The Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Sutton Hoo: an interim report*, in *The age of Sutton Hoo*, p. 365 and CARVER, *Ideology and allegiance in early East Anglia*, 1992.

<sup>543</sup> A different point of view is expressed by David Petts, who thinks that rather than a message with a religious connotation, Sutton Hoo is about "the establishment of new discourses about power, rank and status within their social milieu". In *Pagan and Christian. Religious change in early medieval Europe*, p. 104. Another interpretation is given by Barbara York, who thinks that the objects found in mound one of Sutton Hoo can also be a symbol of how Germanic dynasties would see themselves as heirs of Rome. "Like the Frankish king Childeric, the man buried in mound one of Sutton Hoo wished to signal that he was both a traditional Germanic king and an heir of Rome". In *The reception of Christianity at the Anglo-Saxon royal courts*, p. 158.

<sup>544</sup> *Iubendus ut corpora christianorum Saxanorum ad cimiteria ecclesiae deferantur et non ad tumulus paganorum*. MGH Capit. 1.26.22:69

<sup>545</sup> A vast bibliography is available about this poem, but some of the most influential studies are: NEWTON, *The Origins of Beowulf and the pre-Viking Kingdom of East Anglia*, 1993; NORTH, *Origins of Beowulf*, 2006.

be placed actually somewhere between the tenth and the eleventh century<sup>546</sup>. It tells the story of a mythical hero set in Scandinavia between the fifth and sixth centuries. The universe on which the story is based is still filled with pagan attitudes and values, but is first and foremost imbued with Christian morals<sup>547</sup>. The audience of this story was Christian and it is easy to identify how its pagan tradition and Christian morality merge to influence the values of heroic Beowulf<sup>548</sup>. We should thus bear in mind that Beowulf is the product of an undoubtedly Christian society and should not associate the vocabulary found in the poem with any presumed belief of its author or audience. If appreciation of Germanic heroic values is expressed, it only means “that the *mores* of the heroic code [that] pervade much Christian literature is a survival of these secular values (...), not to be confused with a survival of paganism”<sup>549</sup>.

The poem tells the story of Beowulf, a hero who belongs to an aristocratic family in Denmark, who frees his friends and kingdom from horrible monsters thanks to his warrior skills. Despite the purely pagan backdrop with monsters and mythological allusions to the gods, there are several Christian notions in this work such as the concepts of heaven, hell and the Last Judgement, as well as allusions to biblical passages of the tales of Cain, Abel and the flood. The poem was written by a Christian to an audience that was fully Christian, not partially or superficially converted. A superficial Christian audience would not have been able to understand all the references; indeed, the author “expects them to understand his allusions to biblical events without his troubling to be explicit about them”<sup>550</sup>. We can therefore assume that the text reflects the values of the warrior aristocracy who, despite being Christian, could not simply abandon the customs and traditions that characterized and distinguished their group. In this way, social identity encroached strongly on religious identity and once again we see the

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<sup>546</sup> FRANK, “A scandal in Toronto: “The dating of Beowulf” a quarter century on, 2007. See also CHASE (ed), *The dating of Beowulf*, 1997. More recently NEIDORF (ed), *The dating of Beowulf: a reassessment*, 2014, which turn back to the theory of an earlier date of the poem, going roughly around early eight century.

<sup>547</sup> WORMALD, *The times of Bede. Studies in early English Christian society and its historian*, pp. 30 ss.

<sup>548</sup> MAYR-HARTING, *The coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England*, p.236.

<sup>549</sup> FELL, *Paganism in Beowulf*, p.21.

<sup>550</sup> WHITELOCK, *The audience of Beowulf*, p.5.

power of traditions prevailing to maintain practices for which Christianity did not offer a suitable alternative. In *Beowulf*, as Mayr-Harting notes, “*despite its Christian environment the narrator is still looking back to pagan traditions, because he knows that ‘all glory ends in night’*”<sup>551</sup>.

We have already mentioned King Oswald and the cult created around him after his death. It is thought that Bede’s testimony about Oswald is an example of how Christianity adapted to the needs of sovereigns in England. The kings were deprived of their gods, who in many cases were part of the family tree as remote ancestors. Instead, the dynasty received a saint or hero who was killed nobly<sup>552</sup>. As a result, until the end of the seventh century, local saints that were objects of worship in Britain were noble warriors such as Oswald or King Edwin, or even virgins also belonging to the nobility<sup>553</sup>. The cult linked to the figure of King Oswald seems to have started from a popular initiative, perhaps immediately after his death. One theory about the popularity of the aforementioned wooden cross that he carried to the battlefield, which gained fame as a miraculous object, is that it recalled the wooden poles placed in pagan temples as a totem for offerings. It can therefore be supposed that the origins of devotion to the King owe a lot more to paganism than to the Church<sup>554</sup>.

The benefits that local saints brought to the prosperity of the Church helped these cults to be tolerated and incorporated into the "official" religion. The above-mentioned example of the cult of Oswald reflects the relationship with local identity, as it is probable that people turned to saints that possessed qualities they could identify with and that seemed more accessible to ordinary people<sup>555</sup>.

Poundbury cemetery, near Dorchester in Dorset, offers some significant features with

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<sup>551</sup> MAYR-HARTING, *Op. cit.*, p. 236.

<sup>552</sup> Idem, p. 44. See also YORKE, *The conversion of Britain: Religion, politics and society in Britian. C. 600-800*, 2006 and LAMBERT, *Christians and pagans: conversion of Britain from Alban to Bede*, 2010.

<sup>553</sup> THACKER, *Loca sanctorum: the significance of Place in the study of the saints*. In *Local saints and local churches in the early medieval west*, p. 39.

<sup>554</sup> THACKER, *Membra disjecta: the division of the body and the diffusion of the cult*, p. 98-100.

<sup>555</sup> PLUSKOWSKI, and PATRICK, “*How do we pray to God?*” *fragmentation and Variety in Early Medieval Christianity*, p. 38-9.

regards to the veneration of local saints<sup>556</sup>. With the largest number of *mausolea* in a Romano-British cemetery, it was used continuously from the late Roman period to Anglo-Saxon times. Excavations discovered a number of special tombs that may have belonged to men that enjoyed religious prestige and attracted people to this sacred place. As we know, a saint's tomb or shrine was a prestigious place that would attract not only the peregrination of the living, but also the dead with an *ad sanctos* burial<sup>557</sup>. In these contexts, according to Merrifield, "[holy] Christians would act as patrons of the less perfect dead that surrounded them, and ensure that they too shared the blessings of Paradise, as a powerful earthly patron could ensure that his clients received their share of worldly benefits"<sup>558</sup>.

Another example is in Cannington, near Bridgwater in Somerset. Like Poundbury cemetery, it is located near an Iron Age hillfort, probably benefitting from the ancestral sacredness of the place. The cemetery was used from the late third to the seventh or eighth centuries, and as with the previous example, two special graves were discovered on this site as a testimony of the veneration of a local saint<sup>559</sup>. The exact dimension of the site is not known, since it was completely destroyed by quarrying, but it is estimated that over 2000 rock-cut inhumations were present. One of these graves belongs to a young girl, whose tomb was covered by a mound and its position marked with stones. A clear path shows that there were regular visitors for a long period, but her identity and the Christian community that started her veneration were probably absorbed by the Anglo-Saxons<sup>560</sup>.

Another cemetery with similar features (near a Roman settlement and an Iron Age

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<sup>556</sup> See SPAREY-GREEN, *Living Amongst the Dead: From Roman Cemetery to Post-Roman Monastic Settlement at Poundbury*, 2004.

<sup>557</sup> As stated by Peter Brown in *The rise of western Christendom*, monasteries and saints' shrines were "Powerhouses of prayer", attracting people to their vicinity as if they could be touched and benefit from the sacredness that emanated from these places. Placing tombs in their vicinity probably had the same meaning, as the *ad sanctos* burial could mean that on the day of the final judgment these souls would definitely have some sort of advantage over others. Augustine, however, was not fond of this practice, as in his answer to Paulinus of Nola regarding burials next to the graves of martyrs (*De cura pro mortuis gerenda* 4, CSEL 41. 629-30).

<sup>558</sup> MERRIFIELD, *The archaeology of ritual and magic*, p. 79.

<sup>559</sup> See RAHTZ, HIRST, and WRIGHT, *Cannington Cemetery: Excavations 1962-3 of Prehistoric, Roman, Post-Roman, and Later Features at Cannington Park Quarry, Near Bridgwater, Somerset*, 2000.

<sup>560</sup> MERRIFIELD, *The archaeology of ritual and magic*. 1987, p. 81.

hillfort) is Llandough in Glamorgan, near Cardiff, used from the fourth to the eighth century<sup>561</sup>. The 1000-plus burials were all oriented towards a tomb dated from the Iron Age period, suggesting a cult that lasted until the Christian period<sup>562</sup>.

Burial rites and the treatment and perception of the dead are important features for recognizing local religiosity and the hybridity embedded in it. We know that identifying a cemetery or burial in religious terms is a very complex affair in the first period of Christianity, not only in Britain but in every region reached by the religion, and an identification is almost impossible without epigraphic vestiges. In the first centuries of the Christian religion, there were no rules regarding funerary practices; the only distinctive sign was the habit of locating cemeteries within urban limits, unlike the Roman custom. It was believed that a burial kit was a clue to differentiate Christian from pagan burials, but since there were no impediments to these objects, Christian tombs could also feature a burial kit: *“Christianity had no specific condemnation of grave goods; nonetheless, the display forcibly proclaims the continuance of pagan customs and gives a glimpse of the old religion’s passive power with which missionaries and converts long had to grapple”*<sup>563</sup>. In the Anglo-Saxon context, an interesting point is that female burials include funerary kits more often, while male bodies seldom bring any kind of goods to the grave apart from their weapons. In a Christian environment, these customs probably had a very different meaning: instead of being useful also as objects in the journey to the other world, Christian kits only maintained the meaning of objects of social distinction. Burials in Britain changed considerably from the fourth to the seventh century<sup>564</sup>; the fourth-century fashion included cremation or inhumation accompanied by grave goods and obeying

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<sup>561</sup> See HOLBROOK and THOMAS, *An Early-Medieval Monastic Cemetery at Llandough*, 2005.

<sup>562</sup> A Christian cult could have been created to legitimise the ancient veneration, as suggested by Ian Wood for a cemetery in Dijon in his *Early Merovingian Devotion*, 1979. This is also more or less the same behavior of Gregory the Great when answering Augustine on behalf of the cult of a local saint named Sextus. Augustine wanted to place in the shrine venerated by Britons relics of the roman martyr Sextus, probably as a way to legitimize the local cult and assimilate it into “official” Christianity. Although Gregory had decided to send the relics, he is more skeptical and preferred that a clear distinction between both saints should be drawn. In DOENESLY and GROSJEAN, *The Canterbury edition of the answers of Pope Gregory I to Augustine*, at pp. 28-9. I must thank Dr. Michael Garcia for all the references and reflections about the cults of local saints through the study of funerary practices.

<sup>563</sup> MALCOLM, *Christians and Pagans*, p. 183.

<sup>564</sup> See GEAKE, H. *The use of grave goods in conversion period*. Vol. 1 and 2, 1995.

a certain type of orientation.

In Britain, burials with grave goods, both inhumations and cremations, are found predominantly in the south and east, while unaccompanied burials are found primarily in the west. This geographical distribution reinforces the idea that grave goods were related to Germanic practices, while bare tombs were found in Romano-British areas. Burials from the late sixth and early seventh centuries present a number of objects identified as amulets, items made of minerals (such as amber, amethyst, quartz, crystal balls), different kinds of metal, pendants of various forms and materials, coins, animal and vegetal amulets and even relic boxes. The criteria to determine if an object can be considered an amulet include references in written sources and the context in which it was found. For example, a simple animal tooth or seashell found in a grave does not necessarily mean an amulet, but a hole in it could indicate that it was hung; special polishing or being placed together with other similar objects are other clues. The majority of these objects are found in pagan contexts, but they also exist in the early Christian period and are even found in the tenth or eleventh centuries and beyond<sup>565</sup>. As expected, during the Christian period cross pendants appear in graves in place of other types of amulets associated with apotropaic and other meanings<sup>566</sup>. Bede mentions *filacteria* and *ligaturas* in his life of Saint Cuthbert<sup>567</sup> and in the *Ecclesiastical History*<sup>568</sup>, while archaeology confirms its use among Anglo-Saxons<sup>569</sup>. These objects are more frequently associated with women than men, but they continued to play a significant role well into the conversion era; during this period, they were very often influenced by heathenism but sometimes amulets are interpreted as lucky charms, without a direct connection with traditional religions. However, their striking importance and pervasiveness allow us to understand that they were highly significant in the Anglo-Saxon community, not only in life but also in death<sup>570</sup>.

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<sup>565</sup> See GILCHRIST, *Magic for the dead? The archaeology of magic in Later Medieval Burials*, 2008.

<sup>566</sup> See MEANEY, *Anglo-Saxon amulets and curing stones*. 1981.

<sup>567</sup> *Vita Sancti Cuthberti*, chapter IX.

<sup>568</sup> HE IV. 27.

<sup>569</sup> GEAKE, H. *The use of grave goods in conversion period. Vol. 1 and 2*. University of York, 1995.

<sup>570</sup> MALCOLM, *Op. cit.* p. 70.



Even centuries after the first period of Christianisation, the influence of ancient religion could still be felt within Christianity, because conversion was a long and complex process<sup>571</sup>. An interesting source of popular wisdom and traditional practices mixed with Christianity can be found in some eleventh-century magical manuscripts<sup>572</sup>. In these documents, we can find a compilation of charms and wortcunning, or else, the knowledge of plants and their magical powers to cure. One example is the text known as *Lacnunga* or “treatments” in Old English, that contains medical recipes, prayers and many sources of Anglo-Saxon magical material of different purposes. This text is retained to be a product of the tenth century, out of an interest to preserve “aspects of vernacular culture that had previously been handed down orally”<sup>573</sup>. Presumably, these traditions, since derived most probably from the mixing of Christianity and Anglo-Saxon culture, were circulating in Britain for many centuries and probably started to be developed in the period of Christianisation. The manuscript includes a charm “Against Dwarfs”, where the practitioner is instructed to write the name of the Seven Sleepers in communion wafers that should then be hung around the patient’s neck accompanied by a chant<sup>574</sup>. According to Mayr-Harting, “by the time it was written down this material was heavily overlaid with medical and plant knowledge derived from the late classical writers on medicine, possibly with some recent elements of Scandinavian paganism, and certainly with a great deal of Christian theology and prayer, without which it would have been unacceptable in the monastic libraries which housed these manuscripts”<sup>575</sup>. These Christian influences actually represent hybrid practices, which demonstrate the mix of religious concepts in the manuscripts as a faithful interpretation of contemporary practices. We can say that during the period of Christianisation, religious identity was built in accordance with tradition, personal needs and habits; in other words it was complementary with personal and social identity.

Our sources reveal that cultural and social aristocratic values played an important

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<sup>571</sup> ORTON, *Burning Idols, Burning Bridges: Bede, conversion and Beowulf*, p. 6

<sup>572</sup> See PETTIT, *Anglo-Saxon Charms in Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Barlow 35*, 1999.

<sup>573</sup> BANHAM, *The old English nine herbs charm*, p. 191.

<sup>574</sup> See GRATAN and SINGER, *Anglo-Saxon Magic and Medicine Illustrated Specially from the Semi-Pagan Text 'Lacnunga'*, 1952.

<sup>575</sup> MAYR-HARTING, *The coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 28.

role in the process of constructing local religiosity. Another example can be seen in the Anglo-Saxon term *hlaford*, lord in modern English, which literally means ‘bread-source’. The Germanic logic of a lord who provides all means of subsistence and to whom loyalty is due entered into their concept of the Christian religion, as God became “the source of life, the giver of bread (his body), in whom faith was placed”<sup>576</sup>. This is related to the values of society, its identity (or more specifically an aristocratic identity) and how Christianity had to come to terms with this identity. For instance, the ninth century Saxon poem *Heliand* is a reading of the Bible with pagan warriors and noble values. Another example of the Germanic warrior ideology mixed with Christian beliefs is the tenth century Anglo-Saxon poem *The dream of the Rood*, in which the cross presents itself as a warrior standing in battle for its Lord (Jesus)<sup>577</sup>. In this narrative, Christ is also described as a warrior, brave, strong and resolute while confronting his own death<sup>578</sup>.

#### 4.5 Conclusion

As a conversion process clearly marked by a strong political guise, we can presume that this factor would also influence the way that Christianity was adopted and reframed, with a strong warrior imprint in religious practices and the aspect of victory in battle having a crucial role in the process of conversion and conviction. Indeed, “in their presentation of Christianity the missionaries seem to have tried to promote it as a religion that was compatible with the needs of a warrior society, that is if we can accept the testimony of Bede’s conversion narratives. Time and time again it was a victory in battle which is said to have persuaded a hesitant king to accept Christianity – and sometimes disappointment at a defeat which swayed matter the other way”<sup>579</sup>. When considering the process of conversion of Anglo-Saxon dynasties as most and foremost a political turn, we have to consider the crucial meaning of a mission sent directly by Rome. Angenendt points out that “when the emperor became sponsor of a newly converted king,

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<sup>576</sup> JOLLY, *Popular religion in late Saxon England. Elf charms in context*, p. 28-9.

<sup>577</sup>See SCHAPIRO, *The Religious Meaning of the Ruthwell Cross*, 1944 and BURROW, *An Approach to The Dream of the Rood*, 1959.

<sup>578</sup> JOLLY, *Op. cit.*, p. 31.

<sup>579</sup> YORKE, *The reception of Christianity at the Anglo-Saxon royal courts*, p. 166-7.

*the baptized ruler then became not only his 'spiritual' but also his 'political' son*"<sup>580</sup>. For this reason, an hypothesis on why the priests from queen Bertha's entourage had done nothing towards the conversion of the king and the kingdom is because the king, by accepting Christianity by the hands of a Merovingian priest, would be then subjected to that royal power. Accepting a mission from Rome on the other hand was a way to not being politically bonded, since a mission sent directly from the pope would have a meaning of being from an allegedly neutral place.

While the influence of aristocratic values and beliefs is visible in our sources, aspects of "popular" religiosity are more difficult to identify<sup>581</sup> and the documents only provide some indirect traces that allow us to glimpse what may have been a so-called popular religion. Archaeology helps us to fill some gaps left by documentation, but a large part of the interpretation depends on speculation. Local saints, as we have seen, reflect popular beliefs and religiosity, and the first cults devoted to these individuals were probably initiated by lay people<sup>582</sup>. The functionality and benefits that these saints brought to the prosperity of the Church enabled these cults to be tolerated and incorporated into the "official" religion. We have mentioned the example of Oswald, but there were probably many more according to the archaeological findings in some early medieval cemeteries. We can only imagine that the wide range of beliefs and number of saints was much greater than hagiography suggests, as the memory of saints not venerated in monasteries and unrelated to a noble lineage has not survived to the present day<sup>583</sup>.

Therefore, the analysis demonstrates that memory and tradition were too precious for local identity to be simply put aside. In the citation that opens this chapter, we see Beowulf praising the Lord for his achievements and thanking him for his victories. It is time, however, to rest and the hero then asks for a funeral, much in the same

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<sup>580</sup> ANGENENDT, *The conversion of the Anglo-Saxons considered against the background of the early medieval mission*, p. 755.

<sup>581</sup> WATKINS, "Folklore" and "popular religion" in Britain during the Middle ages. 2004.

<sup>582</sup> BERTRAM, *The early saints lives written in England*, 1958; THACKER, *Membra disjecta: the division of the Body and the diffusion of the cult*, 1995; THACKER and SHARPE (eds.) *Local saints and local churches in the early medieval*, 2002.

<sup>583</sup> PLUSKOWSKI, A. and PATRICK, P. "How do we pray to God?" *fragmentation and Variety in Early Medieval Christianity*, p. 38-9.

fashion as old Anglo-Saxon funerals, in order to be remembered by those that knew him long after his death. It has been argued that the burial practices described in the poem are not archaeologically related to any previously identified pagan burial practice<sup>584</sup>. There are, however, several obvious similarities with Northern pagan burials, most notably those at Sutton Hoo<sup>585</sup>. It is possible that the poem's author only had a "vague awareness" of pagan funerary practices<sup>586</sup>, which would make the burials described in the poem "*imaginative attempts to reconstruct half understood half-forgotten customs of an earlier age*"<sup>587</sup>. However, what the poem and its ideas express is that even if the Christian religion was part of day-to-day life and its doctrine was successfully incorporated into the cultural and social logic, tradition was still a crucial value and funerary practices were one of the instruments recognized as carriers of the importance of remembering and revering the past, which had a key role in building a local religious and cultural identity. Indeed, as far as the landscape and related memory are concerned, the poem "*provides a vision of the burial mound as a focus of commemoration at a number of levels but also as a mnemonic structural element within the oral performance of the poem, and perhaps also as a material anchor for aristocratic memories of pagan and heroic past*"<sup>588</sup>.

The popularity, cultural and social importance of epic narratives such as *Beowulf* can also be extremely revealing about the way they were constructed and passed to posterity. It is known that the interest in heroic sagas was also shared by Anglo-Saxon priests and monks, as shown by the Synod of Cloveshoe (747), which found it necessary to prevent priests from using the tragic intonation of the poets while reciting sacred texts in church<sup>589</sup>. Also Alcuin, the Northumbrian scholar at Charlemagne's court that wrote to Hygebald, Bishop of Lindisfarne, in 797, took the trouble to rebuke his fellow monks for their enjoyment of heroic sagas, saying that Christian

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<sup>584</sup> For an analysis of the burials described on the poem see BRADLEY, *Beowulf and British prehistory*, 2009.

<sup>585</sup> On the association between Sutton Hoo and *Beowulf*, see FRANK, *Beowulf and Sutton Hoo, the odd couple*, 1992.

<sup>586</sup> See FELL, *Paganism in Beowulf*, p. 27-8.

<sup>587</sup> Idem, p. 28.

<sup>588</sup> WILLIAMS, *Death and memory in early medieval Britain*, p. 200.

<sup>589</sup> MAYR-HARTING, *The coming of Christianity to Anglo Saxon England*, p. 223; see also WORMALD, *Bede, Beowulf and the conversion of the Anglo-Saxon Aristocracy*, In *The times of Bede*, p. 40.

doctrine could not tolerate the influence of paganism still present: “*Let the word of God be heard at the meals of the brethren. There it is proper to hear a reader, not a harper, the sermons of the Fathers, not the songs of the pagans. What has Ingeld [a Germanic hero who is mentioned in Beowulf] to do with Christ? The house is narrow; it cannot hold both of them*”<sup>590</sup>.

We will see in the next chapters how memories of the past and cultural values played a vital role in the process of constructing local religiosity<sup>591</sup>. Attachment to these sagas and even the way in which it evolved confirm this assumption and our remaining analysis has a similar orientation.

After a period of reinforcement of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms until the eighth century, Britain found itself once again threatened by Northern invaders. The Viking invasions in the ninth and tenth century triggered a new growth of paganism, leading to a new Christianisation process<sup>592</sup>. With this particular history of constant migrations and “re-paganisation”, we can see an environment where practices were widely mixed. Although the process of the construction of local Christianity continued until later centuries, the tenth century is the period in which this blending of practices was most evident. Indeed, many sources that attest to the hybrid identity of local religiosity are later than the period analysed in this study. From the tenth century on, there are a number of documents with charms and magical formulae interwoven with Christian prayers and words, as well as poems and sagas to satisfy the tastes of a Christian aristocracy that still praised their traditional values. The tenth and eleventh centuries also saw the increasing development of small, local churches controlled by private owners that could engage more closely with local needs. As our sources have demonstrated exhaustively, local priests were the mediators between Christian ideas and local necessities<sup>593</sup>. Even great Christian centres could feature traces of this behaviour, as demonstrated by the work of Aelfric

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<sup>590</sup> Alcuino ep. 124, p.183. See KENDAL L and WELLS, *Introduction: Sutton Hoo and early Medieval Northern Europe*. In WELLS and KENDALL, eds. *Voyage to the other world*, p. xii.

<sup>591</sup> WORMALD, *Bede, Beowulf and the conversion of the Anglo-Saxon Aristocracy* In *The times of Bede*, p. 68.

<sup>592</sup> It is not my aim to give an exhaustive account of this period. For more information on this topic, see: CAMPBELL, *Essays in Anglo-Saxon History*. 1986.

<sup>593</sup> JOLLY, *Op. cit.* p. 46

and Wulfstan, who in tenth-century Winchester dedicated themselves to the development of a sort of popularized homily in which Christianity accommodated popular demands. As Jolly reveals, "*despite the obvious conflicts between paganism and Christianity, and magic and miracle, in popular homiletic sources, the accommodations in ritual allowed in between these extremes reveal the most about how Christianity came to be established popularly in late Anglo-Saxon England*"<sup>594</sup>.

As for the practices, although we cannot go so far as to imagine that in the sixth and seventh centuries people behaved in exactly the same way, it is right to suggest that religious concepts and ideas were not so different from those in the tenth and eleventh centuries, since the late centuries should probably present a continuation of behaviour, a consequence of what started as soon as the Christianisation process took place. Indeed, as we will see, people crafted their own religion regardless of the historical period or the geographical location. In the next chapters, we will identify a certain pattern of behaviour that can be observed in every example of religious conversion. This pattern, however, is not restricted to religious matters, but also concerns any situation in which there is cultural contact and exchange.

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<sup>594</sup> Eadem p. 72.

## Comparative analysis

*Si observasti traditiones paganorum, quas, quasi haereditario jure diabolo subministrante,  
usque in hos dies semper patres filiis reliquerunt?*

*Burchard of Worms, Decretum 19, 5. 61*

### Introduction

In the three examples that were analyzed in the previous chapters it was possible to individuate a diffused behavior of mixing practices and worldviews. From the first centuries AD until at least the fourth century the hybridity of religious conceptions was widely lived, as it is understandable in a society passing through a period of transition, with pagan memory still very close and consequently a great number of people still practicing the old faith. Indeed, in this period there was not much that could differentiate a Christian from a pagan<sup>595</sup>. After all, art, values and culture were still steeped in the pagan past, and the example of iconography is literally the picture of this moment of transformation. After the fourth century the visible mixing starts to fade but acquires more developed features, not simply images that melt with each other but practices and ways of conceive religion that blend into a sort of religious crafting. After the first centuries of conversion people seem to be ever more confident to build their own religiosity, taking from each one of their religious experiences what was useful, what reflected their cultural identity.

As it was mentioned in the first chapter and it was possible to see in the previous ones, we dealt with many different kind of sources. In Gaul ecclesiastical councils provided a type of testimony that would make us think of a more diffused lay culture. If associated with the testimony of Gregory of Tours we can notice that amulets, medical cures and incantations were not privileges of peasants, but practiced by every sort of people. As we mentioned previously, the council of Narbonne of 589 declared that the consultation of diviners and magicians was a

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<sup>595</sup> MARKUS, *The end of ancient Christianity*, p. 27-8.

diffused practice among *Gothi, Romani, Syri, Graeci vel Iudaei*<sup>596</sup>. It is tempting to consider the deviation from the “official” doctrine as the fault of *rustici* and simple minded people, but it was not quite this way. Martin of Braga introduces his treatise affirming that he was talking to the *rustici* and for this reason he would use a simple language. Nonetheless, it is our misperception that sometimes associates ignorance with low strata of society. Agobard of Lyon wrote in his *De grandine et tonitruis* that “nobles and commoners, townsmen and country folk, old and young” believed that hail and thunder were caused by the will of certain people in his diocese at the beginning of the ninth century<sup>597</sup>. This testimony shows us that most of the times it is unfruitful to make a distinction between ‘popular’ and high or elite culture. It is true however, that any social class can possess its cultural marks, which sometimes would reflect a certain choice in religious practices and beliefs. In Britain for example, our documents seem to give more detailed information about the influence of aristocracy in religious practices, but our interpretation is in any case conditioned by the quantity and quality of sources. We must not think that other sectors of society were not influencing religion. Indeed, their impact can be more widely noticed in the tenth century in charms and incantations with a clear rural imprint. This, however, is not determining to affirm that folk or ‘popular’ culture are specificities of a single layer of society. What is more relevant, as demonstrated in the first chapter, is to make a distinction between lay and ecclesiastical culture. Still, even this classification is not ideal, since it supposes a contraposition between a popular religion ignorant of Christian doctrine and an erudite ecclesiastical environment, an assumption that not necessarily is real. Indeed, our sources were eloquent in attributing a significant role to priests in the development of this unwanted lack of religious purity, being the clergy an important element in the process of its creation and development. We saw how, presumably thanks to popular pressure, members of the clergy were engaged in funerary celebrations, in the performance of rituals of blessing of the fields, in

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<sup>596</sup> 14. Hoc itaque propter ampliandam fidei catholice disciplinam elegimus finiendum uel tenendum, ut si qui uiri ac mulieres diuinatores, quos dicunt esse caraios atque sorticularios, in quiusque domo Ghoti, Romani, Syri, Greci uel Iudei fuerint inuenti, aut quis ausus fuerit amodo in eorum uana carmina interrogare, et non public hoc uoluerit anuntiare, pro hoc quod presumpsit non solum ab ecclesia suspendatur, sed etiam auri uncias comiti ciuitatis inferat (...). CCSL, 148 A, p. 256-7.

<sup>597</sup> Agobardi Lugdunensis *Opera omnia*, ed. L. Van Acker Turnhout 1981, CCCM 52: 3-15.



performing curing rites and liturgies, even in sort of hybrid celebrations inside the church and in the production of potions and amulets.

Furthermore, it seemed that very often not even the ecclesiastical authorities were able to establish a neat frontier between what was sacred and what was profane<sup>598</sup>. Gregory of Tours considered auguries made with sacred texts legitimate in contrast to those of soothsayers<sup>599</sup>. As mentioned previously, Caesarius of Arles and Martin of Braga would not agree about the use and meaning of the sign of the cross. As a matter of fact, both Martin and Caesarius fought against paganism, but each one had a different opinion on how to make people change their habits and embrace sincerely the Christian faith. It is retained that Caesarius was less tolerant than Martin: while the first defended a violent approach the latter believed in persuasion and reasonable arguments<sup>600</sup>. Therefore, if the church itself was not consistent in its interpretation of Christianity and practices, it is not at all surprising to find such variety in everyday practices and in local religious conceptions.

On this matter of the implication of the clergy in the development of local religiosities and the complicated distinction between what was the official doctrine and what was supposed to be creation of Christians themselves there is much to be said. Canon 36 of the council of Laodicea held in the 363-4 in Asia Minor was already warning against members of the clergy who manufactured amulets<sup>601</sup>. The fourth council of Toledo informs us that bishops, priests, deacons and other clerics could be condemned by their attendance and consultation of soothsayers, demonstrating how popular the magical practices were and how deeply absorbed inside Christian practices. In England in the middle of the eight century we could find the same reprimands to clerics in the *Dialogues of Egbert*, in which the condemnation comes from Archbishop Egbert of York<sup>602</sup>. In a letter of 748 from pope Zacharias to Boniface,

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<sup>598</sup> ABRAMS, *Germanic Christianities*, p. 114.

<sup>599</sup> *Historiae* IV, 16; v,14.

<sup>600</sup> FERREIRO, *Early Medieval Missionary Tactics: The Example of Martin and Caesarius*, p. 233.

<sup>601</sup> HEFELE, *Histoire des conciles d'après les documents originaux*, I tomo 2, p. 1018.

<sup>602</sup> *Succinctus Dialogus Ecclesiasticae Institutionis*, 1 Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents, ed. Haddad and Stubbs, II. See also RYAN, *Archbishop Eberht and his Dialogus*, 2012.

it seems that Christian priests were engaged in “sacrifices to the dead”<sup>603</sup>.

Amulets are important examples of this lack of consistency, because they were extremely popular and, therefore, widely mentioned in our sources. Condemned by many early medieval councils it is also in the *Capitularia regum Francorum* in which Charlemagne condemns the use of phylacteries as well as *auguria, sive incantations, sive hostias immolatitias, vel omnes spurcitas gentilium*<sup>604</sup>. Amulets were an important feature of lay piety in Britain as attested by the reprimands of ecclesiastical councils and confirmed by the archaeological evidence, its use going as far as the fifteenth century and even further<sup>605</sup>. The line between what was considered pagan and what would have been superstition is however very difficult to draw. Would Gregory of Tours, a maker of amulets himself have been reproached by Caesarius of Arles? Also Pope Gregory the Great was an enthusiast of relics and amulets, being known to have sent to his friends, to kings and queens some of these objects<sup>606</sup>. It is hard, relying only on our sources, to distinguish the phylacteries used by Pope Gregory from the *ligaduras* that were considered pagan and with apotropaic meaning used by people.

Lack of consensus is also found in the practice known as the *sortes sanctorum*, which was, as mentioned in chapter two, a kind of lot in which a person would open the Bible in a random page having in mind a specific question; the first sentence read would be the answer. It seems evident that this practice was a sort of hybrid between pagan practices of divination and Christianity, but according to Augustine it was better than some of the habits that people had. “*Hi qui de paginis evangelicis sortes legunt, etsi optandum est, ut hoc potius faciant, quam ad daemonia consulenda concurrant; tamen etiam ista mihi displicet consuetudo, ad negotia saecularia et ad vitae huius vanitatem*

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<sup>603</sup> Pro sacrilegis itaque presbiteris, ut scnpstisti, qui tauros et hyrcos diis paganorum imrnolabant manducantes sacrificia mortuorum habentes et pollutum minysterium ipsique adulteri esse inventi sunt et defuncti, modo vcro incognitum esse, utrum / baptizantes trinitatem dixissent an non, et timent illi qui vivi sunt, quod in tali minysterio non sint baptizati, quibus respondens iussisti omnes baptizare (Zacharias to Boniface [748]Ep. 80, MGH EpSel 1, 174- 175).

<sup>604</sup> MGH I, n10 c.5 page 25, n19, c. 6 page 45.

<sup>605</sup> See JONES, *Amulets and charms*, 2009.

<sup>606</sup> GIORDANO, *Religiosidad popular en la alta edad media*, pp. 160-1.

*propter aliam vitam loquentia oracula divina velle convertere*<sup>607</sup>. Yet, to him the problem was not the practice *per se*, even if reproachable, but the use of the words of the gospel in such trivial subjects of the domestic and everyday life.

In the ninth century, pope Leo IV wrote to the bishops of Britain condemning completely this practice as *divinationes et maleficium*<sup>608</sup>. The practice however continued to be held and was widespread as attested by the council of Agde and by other sources through all the Christendom. Indeed, in the fourth century the practice was also attested in the east, as shown by John Chrysostome when reproaching his community for its use of *ligaduras* or *filacteria* and by their constant recourse to the service of enchanter. His audience, faced with these rebukes would answer: *“Thou dost not only have amulets always with thee, but incantations bringing drunken and half-witted old women into thine house, and art thou not ashamed, and dost thou not blush, after so great philosophy, to be terrified at such things? And there is a graver thing than this error. For when we deliver these exhortations, and lead them away, thinking that they defend themselves, they say, that the woman is a Christian who makes these incantations, and utters nothing else than the name of God”*<sup>609</sup>. Here we touch a crucial point of our analysis, which is the religious conception diffused in this period of conversion related with a natural desire of blending and incorporating, without the awareness of doing any harm to religion and doctrine. In a recent book Eric Rebillard discusses about the multiple identities of North African Christians from the third to the fifth century<sup>610</sup>. In his analysis Christians were living substantially in a pagan world, with civic and social obligations related with pagan practices that were still the official norm. According to him this people then needed to “activate” each of their multiple identities according to their exigencies, without conceiving any sort of social and religious conflict in doing so. It seems that Christians in this period, and I venture to say even in later centuries, did not think that Christianity should interfere in work or

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<sup>607</sup> Ep. 55, 37 ad Ianuarium: PL 33, 222.

<sup>608</sup> Ep. VIII: PL 115, 668.

<sup>609</sup> John Chrysostome, ad illuminandos catechesis II, PG 49, 240, *Non ligaduras vero tantum, sed atiam excantamenta tibi circumducis, vetulas ebrias et titubantes domum ducens: nec confunderis, nec erubescis, post tantam ad haec trpidans disciplinam: et quod gravius est errore, quando haec admonemus et dissuademus, putantes se excusari, dicunt, Christiana est mulier haec excantans, et nihil aliud loquitur, quam nomen Dei.* Translation by Rev. T. P. Brandram

<sup>610</sup> REBILLARD, *Christians and their many identities*, 2012.

social duties. One very important thing is that being Christian in these first centuries was not something that concerned all instances of one's life. People considered that some aspects of their lives had nothing to do with their "Christianness", and for this reason they were allowed to do things like attend festivities, consult magicians and auguries, making use of spells and amulets<sup>611</sup>. All of this, in those people's minds, were everyday gestures that belonged to social and traditional behavior. Christian identity, as was expected by the clergy, should be the prevalent identity of a Christian. Instead, people had several other identities, such as family, neighborhood, social position and ethnic identities. In each of these circumstances and social environments people could "wear" the most convenient identity according with necessity and framework. Sometimes, however, these multiple identities were not compatible with each other. In any case the ecclesiastical authorities requested that someone's Christianity should be priority over all the rest, and Christian rules and principles should govern people's attitudes over other behaviours not necessarily connected with religion. The problem is that people did not see things this way and were not acting consciously. In my opinion, it was not a matter of conceiving their "Christianness" as not relevant in some situations as stated by Rebillard<sup>612</sup>, but people thought rather that they could easily conciliate their many identities, beliefs and traditions, although, instead of an issue of multiple identities that should be periodically "activated", it was a matter of a multilayered identity, fluid and mutable, not separate strata<sup>613</sup>. Indeed, identity is a "situational construct" that can be seen in moments of conflict and confrontation<sup>614</sup>. According to Petts, *"Christianity is just one new identity out of many identities available for individuals in the early middle ages. The extent and the manner in which Christianity operates within a society reflects the way in which religion is used as a marker of social identity. As well as offering a new overarching identity as a member of the Christian faith, it also offers a series of clustered*

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<sup>611</sup>See also MARKUS, *The end of ancient Christianity*, pp. 34.

<sup>612</sup> Idem, p. 75.

<sup>613</sup> Or, "identity is constituted by serial acts of identification on several levels: of individuals or small groups with a larger social group, the collective self-representation of a group as such and outside perceptions. Which of these three elements comes first may vary, and is usually hard to tell". POHL, *Comparing communities – the limits of typology*, p. 22.

<sup>614</sup>GEARY, *Ethnic identity as a situational construct in the Early Middle Ages*, 1983. See also POHL, *Social language, identities and the control of discourse*, 1999.

*identities: such as membership of a diocese, devotion to a particular saint, or affiliation to an ecclesiastical community*"<sup>615</sup>.

Apparently the sources are telling us that, for people, it was possible without conflict, to be Christian and to do magic, or use amulets, or continuing to value and praise traditional practices at the same time. As a matter of fact, as neatly expressed by Gurevich, "medieval man was not an isolated individual, facing the world on his own; he was a member of a group in which the moods, sentiments and traditions of his consciousness were rooted"<sup>616</sup>. This means that what we see as a result of crafting religion is a collective behavior, not the act of isolated groups but a more general trend. As stated in the first chapter, not a product of low or high strata, but of all of those that shared a common past and belief.

### **5.1 Saints, Christian magicians and curing practices**

Peter Brown considers the cult of saints as a new creation of Late Antiquity, not a sort of pagan survival or substitute to the multiplicity of pagan gods<sup>617</sup>. The saints, martyrs and holy men and women had a fundamental role in the process of Christianisation, not only on bringing people to the new faith through their pious examples and miracles, but also for their ability to adapt and compromise. In Britain the local saints would act as patrons of community in spiritual matters as the same way that landlords would do for economic and political affairs.

We mentioned how our sources described numerous men and women that would presumably fool people with a mixing of Christianity and traditional beliefs, producing potions and amulets, constantly associated with magicians and other specialists of traditional practices, mostly performing cures or investigating the future, gathering a great number of followers, apparently providing a crucial service to common people in the matter of relief of pain and solace. Not approved by the

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<sup>615</sup> PETTS, *Pagan and Christian*, p. 36.

<sup>616</sup> GUREVICH, *Medieval popular culture. Problems of belief and perception*. 1990, p. 55.

<sup>617</sup> Gurevich has a different opinion, as for him "it is completely clear from the lives that in the person of the saint the people venerated a nimbus-crowned magician filled with goodness and compassion. Such a figure was all the more intelligible to the people; this belief completely responded to their own magical ideas and customs". *Op. cit.*, p. 53. On the association of the cult of martyrs and local saints with local pagan practices in the east see FRANKFURTHER, *Beyond magic and superstition*, p. 262-3.

ecclesiastical authorities, these charismatic anonymous men had probably a much greater impact on society than we are able to individuate in our sources due to their clandestine character. These individuals, like Priscillian in Galicia, were a menace for the ecclesiastical organization not only for their unorthodox behavior, but also for their insubordination to the official religious order, as independent preachers not submitted to religious control. This menace is made even greater when we think of the importance that this kind of people had and how popular their practices and services would have been to early medieval people. Indeed, "*whenever communities were faced by threats with which the conventional therapeutic systems could not cope (...), their immediate response to the situation was a reassertion of the 'horizontal' model of healing if now in a new, Christian form. Soothsayers appeared, empowered by visions of the saints, to circulate new forms of remedies and to enunciate new rituals of propitiation. Prophets established penitential rituals, based on their ability as diviners to detect thieves, to recover stolen goods, and to read thoughts*"<sup>618</sup>. Oronzo Giordano makes a parallel between these pseudo-priests such as Desiderius and Aldebert described by Gregory of Tours, and the so called *dabtara* in Ethiopia, men that are often called by the population in case of need, in a place where Christianity has a markedly syncretistic nature<sup>619</sup>.

It is often found in hagiography, as it was previously mentioned, that a sick person would first try secular therapy before resorting to an ecclesiastical cure<sup>620</sup>. This could be a dramatic narrative strategy, a method that aimed to reach the effect of stressing that people would always make mistakes before doing what it is right because miracles and hagiography usually had a didactic function. Thus, if in these stories people would go immediately to seek the saint's cures and advices, there would be little to be learnt about repentance, the error of resorting to traditional practices and the power and superiority of Christian healers. Indeed, people are first shown doing wrong, trying magic and dying, or suffering for a long time before going to seek the

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<sup>618</sup> BROWN, *the cult of saints*, p. 123.

<sup>619</sup> GIORDANO, *Religiosidad popular en la alta edad media.*, p. 145-6. In modern Brazil, the *Benzedoiras* are the equivalent of these traditional hybrid link between pagan and Christian, as these mostly elderly women, known among their community as possessors of supernatural powers (emanated from God) are called to bless (*benzer*) and anoint children and sick people using Christian symbols as well as herbs and special stones.

<sup>620</sup> For many examples see WOOD, *How popular was early medieval devotion?* 1997.

church, and just after that they would know that superstitious practices should be abandoned. The result achieved by the saint would be greater if he obtained success after the traditional cures had failed. However, it is also true that this mode of acting could represent an actual picture of a true situation, since people were more confident with traditional cures, had always trust and used them, and only in desperate and impossible cases would sought the church (after all, a miracle could only be made if the situation was surely difficult). Indeed, the sorcerer or magician was presumably a more accessible professional, as they were probably more numerous and cheaper than physicians. The list repeated constantly by Caesarius and the description of different specialties of traditional healers given by Isidore of Seville could attest to that. A sort of marketplace for healing presumably existed in the early medieval world, with a plurality of specialist offering specific cures and techniques<sup>621</sup>. Being acquainted with this kind of magic and healing practiced for generations, it is only natural that what was familiar and retained to be effective was generally the first choice.

However, it is a misconception to think that Christians would dismiss medicine as a purely secular profane practice. Indeed, the views regarding the use of medicine and the healing of disease apparently were not much different from those that were widely taken for granted in the Greco-Roman world, and physicians or home traditional remedies were ordinarily employed<sup>622</sup>. In fact, Bede tells a story of eighth century northern England, when John, the bishop of Hexham, cured a dumb man performing a miracle, but asked a physician to help him curing the man's scabs and scales<sup>623</sup>.

## 5.2 Analyzing different process of diffusion of the faith

As it became clear, the arrival of Christianity in the three areas studied was very different. In southern Gaul we can talk of a more fluid spreading of the new faith.

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<sup>621</sup> HORDEN, *Sickness and healing*, p. 418

<sup>622</sup> FERNGREN, *Medicine and health care in early Christianity*, p. 13.

<sup>623</sup> HE V,2. *Cuius sanitati congaudens episcopus praecepit medico etiam sanandae scabredini capitis eius curam adhibere. Fecit, ut iusserat, et iuuante benedictione ac precibus antistitis, nata est cum sanitate cutis uenusta species capillorum, factusque est iuuenis limpidus uultu et loquella promptus, capillis pulcherrime crispis, qui ante fuerat deformis, pauper, et mutus.*

According to Garipzanov, this kind of conversion would be characterized by a “cultural osmosis” that happens in process of Christianisation that follows the “bottom-up” model. This osmosis can be seen as “causing a gradual levelling in ‘the cognitive underpinnings of paganism and Christianity’, and making the transition from ‘pagan’ to Christian identities less dramatic on the level of religious cognition”<sup>624</sup>. Very important in this kind of process is the role of peer pressure, as if first the own converters were turned into missionaries. Indeed, the household is believed to be the environment of the first process of Christianisation and retained a very important platform of conversion<sup>625</sup>. As we saw in the first chapter, according to Stark, the huge increasing of conversions is due more to the influence of people already converted than to the labor of preachers and missionaries and the inspiration of miracles. In this way the conversion process would be responsibility not only of the clergy but also of common people that talking with friends and family would be able to convince them of the benefits of the new religion<sup>626</sup>. That means that Christians themselves needed to be thanked by their participation into the growing of Christianity<sup>627</sup>. There is no reason to think that these domestic spaces and networks would lose all their power and influence in the process of conversion after the spreading of churches and ecclesiastical authority. In fact, modern studies on religious conversion attest the role of family and neighbors and the importance of intimate social contacts to the success of a new religion<sup>628</sup>. Considering the fact that ecclesiastical councils and sermons continued to preach over the control that landowners should have on their family and entourage, we can agree that the power and authority of these people sometimes overlapped the ecclesiastical one. In fact, “heads of households are assumed to have worked hand-in-hand with bishops, the secular aristocracy naturally cleaving to the episcopacy and eventually becoming its spiritual counterpart”<sup>629</sup>. The community itself should act as “police of faith”, surveying their peers or their subordinates as the

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<sup>624</sup> GARIPZANOV, *Introduction: Networks of Conversion, Cultural Osmosis, and Identities in the Viking Age*, p. 3.

<sup>625</sup> COOPER, *The household as a venue for religious conversion: the case of Christianity*, p. 189.

<sup>626</sup> STARK, *The rise of Christianity – a sociologist reconsiders history*, 1996.

<sup>627</sup> COOPER, *Reti di famiglia, reti di evangelizzazione: la famiglia tra paganesimo e cristianesimo nella Passio Sebastiani*.

<sup>628</sup> See BUCKSER and GLAZIER (eds.) *The anthropology of religious conversion*, 2003.

<sup>629</sup> BOWES, “Christianization” and the rural home, p. 152.



church was not omnipotent and could not be everywhere all the time. This caused some holes of control that would allow, among other reasons, the development of local and particular versions of Christianity.

Although being allies in the fight against paganism, ecclesiastical authorities also spent time trying to impose regulation to small and private parishes, fearing the danger of these isolated religious environments and the deviations from the official doctrine and practices that they could fall on<sup>630</sup>. It is a matter of vicinity, physical but social and cultural too. The family also held the responsibility and control over the care of the death during the first centuries of Christianity<sup>631</sup>, a practice that remained private, dominated by the kin and presumably stayed imbued by traditional values and local memory. We will see further that in this first period the church had no control over funerary practices, which probably gave space to people to craft their own ceremonies and traditions.

With this background we can expect to find that the conversion of the population in Gaul was more homogenous and it is possible to see here a discrepancy between the religious faith of people and that of their rulers. As we know, when the Visigoths settled in southern Gaul in the fifth century they were Arians, but the population maintained their own catholic belief. In a place where Christianisation spread “from the bottom” it is not possible to identify a specific cultural and social imprint in the religious practices. Indeed, in Gaul what we can identify as a typically local religiosity owes much to the pre-Roman heritage and the attachment to the natural entities and the relationship between men and the land. However, since between the Celtic occupation and the arrival of Christianity there was a long and well-established period of Roman presence, this pre-Roman substratum is not that evident as in Galicia. There the condition of a not so widely Romanised region has led to an even more evident pre-Roman identity, apparently a condition that offered the perfect environment for the development of Priscillianism, which maintained its

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<sup>630</sup> For a broad analyses of the phenomenon of private cults and the relationship between those and ecclesiastical authority see BOWES, *Private worship, public values, and religious change in late antiquity*, Cambridge, 2008.

<sup>631</sup> See REBILLARD, *The care of the dead in late antiquity*, 2009.

popularity for many centuries. As we know, Christianity stood primarily on the basis of Roman political, social and bureaucratic structures. When these structures were lacking the new religion had trouble to find its way to the biggest amount of people that could be possible, unless it had the support of a ruler. This is the case in Britain, where the Roman presence was not enough to promote the spreading of the new faith and the Anglo-Saxon dynasties provided the sort of initial sponsorship necessary to the establish, spread and flourishing of Christianity. Boniface in a letter to his friend Daniel says that “without the patronage of the Frankish prince I can neither govern the faithful ... nor protect the priests ... nor can I forbid the practice of heathen rites and the worship of idols in Germany without his orders and the fear he inspires”<sup>632</sup>. Indeed, we know that his activities concentrated in the northern part of Gaul, where we know that Romanization was feeble<sup>633</sup>. In this kind of situation conversion was established according to the model “top-down” and the cultural and social imprint of religious identity is evidently aristocratic. It is a common behavior that religious concepts can be used to reinforce existing social structures<sup>634</sup>. However, as mentioned above, it is a mistake to suppose that the common people would have not contributed to the crafting of their religious practices. An example is in Spain, where the Visigothic liturgy presented rituals of blessing of the fields that recall much of traditional practices, and in Britain the same can be seen in later centuries in popular remedies and field charms.

Thietmar of Merseburg in his *Chronicon* (viii, 4), gives an account of the conversion of Hungarians in the eleventh century, in which the king Geza had an understanding of Christianity that allowed him to believe that a powerful king might have as many gods as he can afford<sup>635</sup>. We saw how, according to Bede, king Raedwald had a pagan and a Christian altar placed side by side, presumably guided by the same spirit of king Geza. For a pagan mentality it seemed natural to suppose that the Christian God was just another divinity to be incorporated into the pantheon. To overcome this way of conceiving religion it was necessary to use as an argument the

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<sup>632</sup> Boniface, Letter 51 [63], p. 115 (MGH, *Epistolae selectae*, I)

<sup>633</sup> FLETCHER, *The conversion of Europe*, , p. 100.

<sup>634</sup> BOURDIEU, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 1991.

<sup>635</sup> WOOD, *What is a mission*. p. 139.

fact that the Christian God was more powerful, using the people's own logic and in this way "translating" Christianity into a language that could be better understood and accepted. The rhetoric of conversion used different languages but basically the message was the same: to evince the superiority of Christianity over native religion. Anyway, "what pagans saw in Christianity (in the sense of being drawn to it) depended greatly on what they saw of it. Self-evidently, their first allegiance could be inspired only by those parts and aspects of the faith that were openly displayed"<sup>636</sup>. In other words, what was shown to pagans should be something not only that they were able to understand but also something that could somehow have pleased them<sup>637</sup>. For the people miracles were the most efficient instrument, their narratives full of extraordinary episodes, always with an edifying message showing how a saint defeated adversities and demons resorting only on the power of God<sup>638</sup>. On the other hand, kings were convinced by more practical and tangible promises such as victory in battles and political agreements.

However, it is important to stress that the political influence is not considered the only merit of Christianity here <sup>639</sup>. Indeed, the new religion presented a whole way of seeing life and the afterlife, yet, Christianity was not able to provide for every single necessity that people had. After all, the new religion was guided by an universal dogma that at the beginning did not contemplate local and specific necessities. These needs, motivated the creation of local variations that adapted the new religion to distinct environments and cultural backgrounds.

On the matter of a support from above, it was not exclusive to British conversion. Martin of Braga also had the support of Suevic dynasty, but we cannot know the impact of this partnership in terms of conversion and direct diffusion of the faith<sup>640</sup>.

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<sup>636</sup> MACMULLEN, *Two types of conversion to early Christianity*, p. 174.

<sup>637</sup> It is always good to remember the encounter of the apostle Paul with the Athenians, in which he was invited to speak as an envoy of foreign divinities. Using a language that his hearers could understand he says: "Men of Athens, in general I observe that you are rather superstitious. For as I passed along and surveyed your objects of cult, I found an altar on which was inscribed, 'To an Unknown god.' The one therefore whom you venerate without knowing, him I announce to you". Acts of the Apostles, 17:16-34.

<sup>638</sup> See also BOESCH-GAJANO, *Uso e abuso del miracolo nella cultura altomedioevale*, 1991.

<sup>639</sup> PETTS, *Pagan and Christian. Religious change in early medieval Europe*, p.26.

<sup>640</sup> See FERREIRO, *Early Medieval Missionary Tactics: The Example of Martin and Caesarius*, 1998.

What is certain is the material aid received, in donation of lands and providing means to the foundation of monasteries and churches. We saw that the so called *Parrochiale Suevorum* listed dioceses and churches mostly in places of influence and importance to the Suevic dynasty, showing a neat relationship between royal support and Christian growth and diffusion.

We could say that there were different kinds of aristocratic support, that would be in some cases directed to the immediate needs of parishes and bishoprics, or else the material needs, and in other cases would have a more pastoral imprint, with stress in missions and conversion and also in people's spiritual necessity. However, the ultimate goal of both is the same, as the spreading of ecclesiastical structures and the change of the landscape's identity contributed either way to the process of conversion of communities.

We mentioned in the first chapter a problem of traditional historiography that it tends to see the shift from paganism to Christianity as a mere passage from one thing to another, as if people would just substitute the pagan altar with the Christian shrine, or the seasonal rituals with the saints' feasts<sup>641</sup>. This model follows the narrative that some sources present us, such as the instructions that pope Gregory the Great gives to his missionaries not to destroy the temples and to convince people to place their offers and sacrifices to the saints and martyrs instead of the idols. Gregory of Tours tells a story with a similar moral, when he narrates the vicissitudes of a place that he identifies as *Helarius*, where people used to go to a lake and offer libation to its divinity and celebrated banquets and sacrifices for three days in order to propitiate rains, and as a consequence, a good harvest. This annual celebration went like this from immemorial times until a priest named by the local bishop arrived and watched in horror this display of ancestral paganism. His prayers and admonitions resulted inefficacious until his cunning led him to build in the vicinity of the lake a church dedicated to saint Hilary of Poitiers where some of the saint's relics were placed. After that the people were finally convinced and converted to the

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<sup>641</sup> BOWES, "*Christianization*" and the rural home, p. 152.

new faith started to bring their offers to the church abandoning the lake cult<sup>642</sup>. This model of conversion that displays a simple substitution and shifting of beliefs as a mere changing of clothes is abundant in the sources and presupposes a level of indifference that is hard to believe. Some scholars see in this behavior an important stage of the process of religious conversion, or else the obliteration and substitution, the second phase of this process that starts with destruction and ends with denaturation<sup>643</sup>. Here the replacement is almost literal, *Hilarius* that substitutes *Helarius* as if with simply substituting one thing for another, conversion would be successfully made and everyone would be satisfied with the results, as if we were assuming the existence of a “tacit teleology”<sup>644</sup>. The sort of commitment expected by the church to their faithful is even a contradiction to this behavior and we can only presume that in these kind of story we are confronted with one of those models of narratives that not necessarily stick straight to reality but intend to transmit a message<sup>645</sup>. The message here is again the unwavering conviction that the simple demonstration of Christian superiority would make people change their beliefs, but the careful observation of the sources shows the contrary.

### 5.3 Funerary practices

One of the most significant changes imposed by Christianity during the conversion period was the place of death in society<sup>646</sup>. Roman legislation instituted the place of burials outside the city walls<sup>647</sup> while every household was provided with domestic altars used for celebrating and remembering the deceased of the family<sup>648</sup>. Christianity on the other hand attributed a new meaning to death, as a mere change of state that sometimes even provided a better condition, desirable among the most

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<sup>642</sup> Gregorii Turonensis, *Liber de gloria confessorum*, 2. In MGH Scriptorum Rerum Merovingicarum tomi I, pars II. 1885. p. 299.

<sup>643</sup> See BOGLIONI, *Du paganisme au christianisme. La mémoire des lieux et des temps*. In *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, p. 76. Bognioni takes this tripartite classification from LeGoff, in *Culture cléricale et traditions folkloriques dans la civilisation mérovingienne*, in *Pour une autre Moyen Âge*, 1977.

<sup>644</sup> BOWES, *Op. cit.*, p. 153.

<sup>645</sup> However, Bowes believes that this swapping from paganism to Christianity evidenced by the sources reflected a real social reality, which, in any case, is not the only aspect of this picture.

<sup>646</sup> See REBILLARD, *The care of the dead in late antiquity*. Cornell University Press, 2009.

<sup>647</sup> Cicero, *De legibus* 2.58 (Twelve Tables: *Hominem mortuum in urbe ne sepelito neve urito*.)

<sup>648</sup> See MORRIS, *Death-Ritual and social structure in classical antiquity*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge: 1992.

pious<sup>649</sup>, and another great change was the placement of cemeteries inside the limits of the city. Nonetheless, what remains the same is the concept of funerals and mortuary ceremonies as rites of passage<sup>650</sup>.

Death is the process in which people pass from a social or cosmic world to another. In this process, according to Van Gennep, there are three subsets of ritual actions: a preliminal rite of separation, a liminal rite of transition, and a postliminal rite of incorporation<sup>651</sup>. The rites of separation normally include washing or anointment, as a form of social and ritual detachment from an earthly and social environment. The liminal state is normally characterized by something that remembers a portal, a physical limit that would symbolize a crossing through a door or between worlds (namely the burial or cremation). The final stage of incorporation often imitates the separation rites as a sort of closing the void between the world of the dead and the world of the living and replace the normality of life often by means of communal meals<sup>652</sup>.

Rituals are social actions that have the function to “reveal, enhance, and sometimes even alter the relations among members of the society in which they are acted out”<sup>653</sup>. As social and anthropological activities, these gestures transcend religion and it is not a surprise to find common gestures and behaviors in rituals of death in different religious practices, cultures and beliefs. Not only the functionality of these practices but also their “naturalness”, or else, the fact that these practices were part of the inevitable cycle of life<sup>654</sup>, are the reason why it is possible to individuate the

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<sup>649</sup> REBILLARD, *The care of the dead in late antiquity*, p. 131.

<sup>650</sup> See the classical works of VON GENNEP, *The Rites of passage*, 1961 and MAUSS, *Effet physique chez l'individu de l'idée de mort suggérée par la collectivité*, 1926; more recently PAXTON, *Christianizing death*, 1990.

<sup>651</sup> VAN GENNEP, *Op. cit.* pp. 146 ss.

<sup>652</sup> PAXTON, *Op. cit.* p. 6.

<sup>653</sup> Idem, p. 8. See also BELL, *Ritual theory, ritual practice*, 1992; BUTTITTA, *Verità e menzogna dei simboli*, 2008.

<sup>654</sup> As Peter Brown says, “[Burial customs] are also an element in the religious life of a society that is splendidly indifferent to the labels usually placed upon forms of religious behavior by the tradition of religious history (...). They cannot be neatly categorized as “pagan” or “Christian”, “popular” or “superstitious”. This is because, whatever their origins may appear to have been to a modern scholar, the customs surrounding the care of the dead were experienced by those who practiced them to be no more that part and parcel of being human”. *The cult of the saints: its rise and function in Latin Christianity*, p. 24.

hybridity in these rituals during the conversion period. In saying so, even if the way to see death has changed, some rites were more difficult to extinguish because useful and somehow connected with local identity. The ecclesiastical sources give us indications of how people were dealing with death and were celebrating it, and thanks to ecclesiastical councils, sermons and archaeological data we can have a glimpse in the way people of this period of transition were building their own piety, celebrating their heritage and their identity through the ceremony of final goodbye to their loved ones.

### 5.3.1 Pagan or Christian?

During the conversion period in the provinces of the Roman Empire, the identification of a burial as pagan or Christian is tricky without epigraphic vestiges. It is commonly accepted that the three main features of Christian burials are inhumation with absence of cremation, the deposition of the dead deprived of grave-goods, and a west-east orientation, while the opposite features should be indicators of a pagan burial. According to some scholars cremation was a practice that could not be tolerated by Christianity while it promoted the destruction of the body preventing its possibility to resurrect on the day of the final judgment<sup>655</sup>. Indeed, although the practice is now accepted by the church (only since 1963), the remains must be kept intact and complete<sup>656</sup>. However, according to Rebillard the Christian preference for inhumation had nothing to do with the belief of resurrection, but with a new developed respect for the body<sup>657</sup>.

Nevertheless, on the first centuries of Christian religion there were no rules with regards to funerary practices. Pagans and Christians were buried in the same places<sup>658</sup> and it is believed that a burial kit was a clue to differentiate Christian from pagan burials, but since the former had no impediments against these objects,

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<sup>655</sup> REBILLARD, *The care of the dead in Late antiquity*, p. 82 ss.

<sup>656</sup> HOGGETT, *Charting conversion: burial as barometer of belief?* who also believes in the possibility to identify the religious appurtenance of the buried body by the characteristic of its grave.

<sup>657</sup> REBILLARD, *Op. Cit.*, p. 88.

<sup>658</sup> See JOHNSON, *Pagan-Christian burial practices of the fourth century: shared tombs?* 1997.

Christian tombs could indeed present grave goods<sup>659</sup>. Exclusively Christian cemeteries seem to come into existence only in the tenth century<sup>660</sup>, but inhumation continued to be practiced alongside cremation during the early period of Christianisation in many places. The latter was gradually substituted by the former, which was accompanied by the decreasing of deposition of grave-goods, but not its extinction.

### **5.3.2 Funerary banquets and meals, mass, candles by the tombs and Eucharist to the dead – conviviality and pagan heritages**

Although a proper rule concerning funerals and the treatment of the dead appeared only later, the concern with these practices is as old as Christianisation and continued to be mentioned in councils until at least the eleventh century. Yet, burial rituals were seldom mentioned in the first synods. The Apostolic Constitutions, a late fourth-century compilation, gives only a prayer for the deceased at the same time that declares that people should celebrate the third, ninth and thirtieth days after the death<sup>661</sup>. This practice however carries a tight link with pagan traditions that believed in the division in three steps of many phases of human life. The Christian practice however ended celebrating the third, the seventh and the thirtieth day, differently from what was the pagan mores, but trying to adapt the popular practice to the teachings of the scriptures<sup>662</sup>. One of the first examples of Christian regulation regarding funerary practices in my sources is the already mentioned thirty-fourth canon of the council of Elvira of 313 that forbade the lighting of candles in cemeteries during the day<sup>663</sup>. The third council of Toledo of 589 also deliberates about funerary practices in its twenty-second canon that forbade people from singing during the funeral of clerics, allowing only the singing of psalms. The nature of these songs however are obscure, but we can suppose that they were probably from ancient (and as a consequence pagan) source.

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<sup>659</sup> LAMBERT, *Christians and Pagans: the conversion of Britain from Alban to Bede*, p. 183.

<sup>660</sup> ZADORA-RIO, *The Making of Churchyards and Parish Territories in the Early-Medieval Landscape of France and England in the 7th- 12th Centuries: A Reconsideration*, 2003.

<sup>661</sup> JOHNSON, *Pagan-Christian burial practices of the fourth century: shared tombs?* p. 43.

<sup>662</sup> CUMONT, *La triple commémoration des morts*, p.282.

<sup>663</sup> Rebillard interpret this canon as a form of regulation of worship on martyr's tombs. *The care of the dead in Late Antiquity*, p. 144.



The second Council of Braga of 572 mentions a prohibition of celebrating masses close to tombs in one of the Oriental canons translated to Latin<sup>664</sup>, while the third canon admonishes Christians about the practice of eating in cemeteries<sup>665</sup>, a practice that, as we saw, seems to have been so popular in the region that it was still practiced in 1585. In several of his writings Saint Augustine rebuked people who went to cemeteries and offered libations to the dead<sup>666</sup> and the popularity of this celebration persisted long after conversion. The institution of the ecclesiastical celebration of Saint Peter on the same day was apparently an attempt to “Christianise” the pagan festivity<sup>667</sup>.

Nonetheless, people were still lighting candles at the tombs, more particularly women, who were accused in the councils of spending the night in cemeteries. We can presume that these were part of customary mourning practices. Iconography of funeral banquets<sup>668</sup> as well as archaeological data attested to the continuity and Christianisation of these practices.

The archaeological findings associated with the council’s testimony allow us to consider the incorporation of this practice into Christian celebrations as a popular initiative which imposed itself into the new religion until it got the support of some clerics, those who were accused of conducting masses in cemeteries. In the Iberian Peninsula and North Africa the material confirmation of the aforementioned libations practiced in cemeteries are the *mensae*, described in the third chapter. In Gaul, the tradition of funerary feasting is observed in cemeteries by the deposition of dishes, drinking utensils and food in sepulchers. According to Halsall this practice

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<sup>664</sup> LXVIII: *Non oportet clericos ignaros et praesumptores super monumenta in campo ministeria portare aut distribuere sacramenta, sed ut in ecclesia aut in basilicas ubi martyrum reliquiae sunt depositae ibi pro defunctis oblationem offerre.*

<sup>665</sup> LXIX: *Non liceat christianos prandial ad defunctorum sepulcra deferre et sacrificia reddere mortuorum Deo.*

<sup>666</sup> *Miror cur apud quosdam infideles hodie tam perniciosus error increverit, ut super tumulos defunctorum cibos et vina conferant; quasi egressae de corporibus animae carnales cibos requirant. Epulae enim et refectiones caro tantum requirit; spiritus autem et anima his non indigent... Cessate ergo, fratres, ab hoc gentili infidelitatis errore. Sermo CXC in PL 39, 2101. See also QUASTEN, ‘Vetus superstitio et nova religio’: *the problem of refrigerium in the ancient church of North Africa*, 1940.*

<sup>667</sup> The celebration of Saint Peter however, is not the Christian substitute of a celebration of the death, as stated by Rebillard in *The care of the dead in Late Antiquity*, p. 141-2.

<sup>668</sup> See VOGEL, *Le banquet funéraire paléochrétien*, 1976; JASTRZEBOWSKA, *Les scènes de banquet dans les peintures et sculptures chrétiennes des III<sup>e</sup> et IV<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 1979.

would be a form of “gift giving in Merovingian contexts, that heightened the status of a family in a community”<sup>669</sup>. Food and drinks were placed in these vessels and such vestiges can be more often found in fourth century cemeteries. In Cologne under the Cathedral and in the church of Saint Severin, ready-prepared meals and the remains of meat and meal vessels were found in rich graves<sup>670</sup>, but by the sixth century the practice had declined and the sole vestige found in this period that could be associated with funerary feasting is the deposition of a single vessel by the feet of the diseased<sup>671</sup>. About this time and mostly in the seventh century we can also notice the decline in the deposition of grave goods. According to Bonnie Effros, the abandonment of these practices was because they were not effectively expressing people’s social identity. The author believes that this change is not related with the religious transformation, but I wonder what could have caused it if not a change in culture and mentality brought by this very religious change. If people’s identity should be expressed in other ways it is most probably because their cultural and social identity had changed or their conception of it. Or else, from a pagan or strongly hybrid Christianity to a more developed Christianity (which however does not mean a “better” Christianity, only a further stage of development of religiosity, more adapted to people’s needs). So when some practices disappear while others remain it only has to do with how these same practices were relevant to the contemporary identity, were following the trends and current necessities of people.

### **5.3.3 Tombs as landmarks (Mound burials, rock carved tombs) – Death as memory and identity**

Burial attributes could indicate many elements of identity distinction such as gender, age, ethnicity, social appurtenance and religious affiliation in complex ways. However, grave goods, if considered a social display of distinction, would be useful only for a reduced audience during a short period of time, or else the funeral. External displays of distinction would have a much more efficient communication

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<sup>669</sup> HALSALL, *Burial, ritual and Merovingian society* In *Cemeteries and society in Merovingian Gaul, selected studies in History and Archaeology*, 2009.

<sup>670</sup> DIERKENS, *The evidence of archaeology*, p. 44 and 52.

<sup>671</sup> EFFROS, *Merovingian mortuary archaeology and the making of early middle ages*, p. 165.

purpose, and for this means a tomb landmark could work better. In this context the rock carved tombs and mound burials that we saw in the Iberian Peninsula and Britain respectively could have been successful reminders of a social meaning or the vehicle to spread a message: these people lived here and their memory was intrinsically connected with this land. Apparently there was a shifting on giving priority to above ground displays instead of goods beneath the ground between the seventh and tenth century. The grave goods, if not an efficient display of wealth, could then represent the necessary objects that would allow a continuation of the life in the other world. Furthermore, grave goods should be understood as well as an idealized idea and image of the deceased<sup>672</sup>.

A common feature in Early Medieval cemeteries in Gaul was their vicinity to ruins of long-abandoned structures such as prehistoric dolmens, villas, baths, civic buildings, temples, and fortresses<sup>673</sup>. Apparently, the amenities of the closeness with building materials was not the only reason for this choice but maybe also a social and cultural meaning that motivated these preferences. It could be, as for the examples already studied, a way to link the memory of that community with the memory of the landscape as a way to legitimate their presence and culture. A similar behavior was seen in some cemeteries in Britain, where a vicinity to a Roman settlement and an Iron Age hillfort seemed to be desirable features, probably imbued with the same meaning that cemeteries in Gaul would have.

One of the greatest preoccupations among the Saxons was with the traditional burial. We know of an eight century deliberation regarding Saxon burials that says: “we order that the bodies of Christian Saxons must be taken to the church cemeteries and not to the burial mounds of the pagans”<sup>674</sup>, in an obvious attempt to prevent people to continue a practice of their ancestors. It seems obvious from the information offered by documents and by archaeological findings how traditional burials in this period of transformation have an important role to the affirmation of a local and

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<sup>672</sup> EFFROS, *Op. cit.*, p. 124 ss.

<sup>673</sup> Eadem, p. 190-1.

<sup>674</sup> Council of Paderborn held in 785: *Iubendus ut corpora christianorum Saxonorum ad cimieria ecclesiae deferantur et non ad tumulus paganorum*. MGH Capit. 1.26.22:69

cultural identity, indeed, our interpretation of Sutton Hoo is that of an act of defiance against the menace of Christianity. In this same line is paganism in Lombard society for example, which should not be considered as a residual trace, but something with a deep meaning to the maintenance of collective memory and tradition. It could be interpreted as an element of cohesion of this gens, in an environment in which their cultural identity was menaced by the many other peoples with which they entered Italy and even Italian culture as well. Since we know that in a context of cultural encounter exchanges are inevitable, paganism and traditional practices were one of the ways that Lombards found to preserve a certain level of common identity<sup>675</sup>, or at least, what it is most probable, of an invented identity. This, in some degree could have been a conscious decision.

The rituals related to death have a profound link with the past and the ancestors. To preserve certain gestures and practices is a way to keep this memory of local identity alive despite religious conversion, since memory and tradition are connected with communal or domestic local identity. In the context of religious conversion the memories of the past need to be submitted to a shift of perception conditioned by the change of belief. This gives new meanings to objects but also practices in order to preserve the memory and the social value that they had to people. Indeed, social identities need to be continuously communicated in order to exist and to keep functioning<sup>676</sup>. During a funeral people had the opportunity to revisit the memories of the past acting and passing them to others<sup>677</sup>. Even if Christian religion was part of the daily life and its doctrine was successfully incorporated into the cultural and social logic, tradition was still a crucial value and funerary practices were recognized as instruments that carried the importance of remembering and revealing the past, which had a key role in the building of a local religious and cultural identity.

Due to the institution of the commemoration of the dead by abbot Odilo of Cluny, it is possible to say that the official participation of the Church in the funerary rites was

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<sup>675</sup> GASPARRI, *La cultura tradizionale dei Longobardi. Struttura tribale e resistenze pagane*, 1983.

<sup>676</sup> POHL, *Introduction – Strategies of identification: a methodological profile*, 2013.

<sup>677</sup> DEVLIN, *Social memory, material culture and community identity in early medieval mortuary practices*, p. 42.

established around the tenth century. From France this commemoration spread all over Europe soon and became part of the official liturgical celebrations in a clear demonstration of how monastic and popular piety were evolving, influenced by one another<sup>678</sup>.

The funeral is the moment in which past, present and future interact with each other through the process of social memory, a process that through its selectiveness is constantly remembering as well as forgetting the past<sup>679</sup>. These memories therefore are never static but are constantly reshaped to fit contemporary needs. As Devlin says: “*this means that archaeological material represents only the starting point of the remembrance, never the finished product. Memories would have continued to be formed and reformed in response to other rituals and community cries*”<sup>680</sup>. The consequence or the meaning of preserving a social memory is the understanding of the world and the place of the community in it and adapting the practices to these new realities and demands.

Through the examples analyzed we can conclude that the rites of death have an ancestral meaning that defied time and religious doctrines. The written sources give us the means to understand that. Conviviality and memory were so important that even the clergy was involved in “popular” demonstrations of piety, probably answering to a strong necessity to fulfill people’s needs. After all, only people knew better what they needed, and the Church very often was forced to head for that crying. Furthermore, materiality is proved to be an integral dimension of culture that can be used to convey a message<sup>681</sup>.

Conditioned by the available quantity and quality of material vestiges, archaeology is able to provide only a partial picture. Funerary structures and everything related

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<sup>678</sup> ORONZO, *Religiosidad popular em la alta edad media*, 1983, p. 121.

<sup>679</sup> See WILLIAMS, *Death and memory in early medieval Britain*, 2006.

<sup>680</sup> DEVLIN, *Op. cit.*, p. 43.

<sup>681</sup> As stated by Halsall, the funeral is “an important space for the writing of a symbolic ‘text’. The artifacts placed in the grave were significant vessels for the storage and transmission of social information”. In *Cemeteries and society in Merovingian Gaul, selected studies in History and Archaeology*, p. 205. See also CARVER, *Burial as poetry: the context of treasure in Anglo-Saxon graves*, 2000 and HALSALL, *Burial writes: graves, text and time in early Merovingian Northern Gaul*, 2003.

to them represent the most abundant archaeological data, only because from the moment it was produced, their ultimately ambition was to last and reach eternity. The material available depended also on the choice of the people involved in the rite, the conditions of its preservation, their culture, social values and even their means to produce or not a monument destined to endure the centuries. We tend to concentrate more in the practices of elites because this social group provided more material such as grave goods and funerary structure that allow the archaeologist to evince any sort of interpretation. Most of the times the common people's tombs remain anonymous because of its lack of material evidence. This, however, is not the case every time and the funerary *mensae* and rock carved tombs are an example, since these kind of structures were not retained to be privileges of a reduced group of society. We can then say that funerary practices provided a form of non-verbal communication that was intended to deliver a message to the attendees of the funeral, but also a message to the afterlife<sup>682</sup>. Its message, however, is a reflex of their deliberate choice and we cannot know how much of ordinary life we can see in it. Nevertheless, centuries after their final voyage they continue to communicate with us<sup>683</sup>. Is the task of historians to try to interpret this message, with the awareness that our own interpretation and our answers are indeed a reflection of our beliefs and our own times.

## 5.4 Conclusion

The fourth century in Gaul and Spain, as attested by the ecclesiastical documentation, shows a highly mixed society where Christianity was growing rapidly but still needed to cope with the predominance of paganism. However, the sources demonstrate a still relevant presence of paganism, but archaeological data suggest that pagan structures and epigraphic evidence of traditional cults started to suffer a decrease of use and frequentation already in the third century. In spite of that, what material vestiges do expose, besides the decline of paganism, is the growth of mixed motives, such as iconography of Christian patronage that nonetheless

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<sup>682</sup> On the relation between linguistics and material culture see TILLEY (ed), *Reading material culture. Structuralism, hermeneutics and Post-Structuralism*, 1990 and RICHARD, *Anglo-Saxon symbolism*, p. 131 ss.

<sup>683</sup> I rely on the concept of a "social life of things" as coined by APPADURAI in the volume edited by him: *The social life of things. Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, 1986.

depicted pagan scenes and symbols. A mixed society is indeed represented in these structures.

In this same period in Britain Christianity was making its first steps towards a broader diffusion in the Island. It is known that the Britons maintained their Christian faith since the period of Roman domination, but the sources apparently point to the existence of small and restricted communities where the direct confrontation between both religions was apparently of disadvantage to Christians. We will have to wait until the sixth century to see an important growth of the new religion, with a very different feature and instruments of conversion compared to the other two realities. Almost everywhere in Western Europe the sixth century is the moment of implementation and the growth of kingdoms and the necessity among these to affirm their power and local authority to their neighbors. Christianity enters this environment as the means to permit the achievement of these goals, and for this reason the setting of conversion changes radically. The response of people was different everywhere but their features are somehow alike, not a proper religious resistance, but an awareness that the new doctrine could not fail to encompass traditional values and local identity. Centuries later Burchard of Worms would ask his community if they handed down traditional behaviors to their sons as if for their hereditary right, and I think that this assumption is very close to reality. What we see as a hybrid religion is not a matter of resistance, “surviving” of paganism or stubbornness of peasants. It is rather a direct consideration of memory and identity, an affirmation of the importance of history and tradition and a reasonable attitude in times of change.

As we go towards west, and as the time passes, it seems that austerity in the behavior of converters fade. We can see a sort of shading in demanding violence and coercion if we move from Gaul to Britain: darker in the first, clearer in the last with a “gray area” in Iberian Peninsula. We saw how councils in Gaul were strict with religious deviances and Caesarius of Arles is the expression of this strong surveillance. In his sermons we can see the explicit incitation of violence against those that are caught in pagan reminiscences. In sermon 53 he invites landlords to be the arm of the church in

the fight against superstition: to punish, shave the hair of the weak and even chain them if necessary. Hagiography in this region corroborates this behavior with numerous examples of destruction of temples and sacred trees, which is very often conformed by archaeology<sup>684</sup>. In Spain, on the other hand, violent coercion is seldom mentioned and the tone of Martin, our major source, has to be considered often as mild. An ambiguous attitude is found in Britain, where at first Pope Gregory would incite the king of Kent to use force to direct his kingdom towards conversion. Then, maybe influenced by his learning of the difficulties faced by the missionaries, or maybe acknowledging that different ways to deal with reluctant converters should be expected from a king and from priests, the pope's position changed towards a conciliating opinion. The general pattern of Gregory's missionary strategy is present in his letters to bishops in Italy, mostly Sardinia and Corsica and in this correspondence he expected that these priests would work with local authorities to promote conversion or to correct those baptised Christians that insisted into resort to superstitious behaviour. Gregory resorted to an ancient pattern of coercive regime where the use of force was accepted. However, when he took knowledge of the situation in Britain he changed his mind and his strategy, a behaviour that continued to be followed by the missionaries at the far limits of Frankish kingdom<sup>685</sup>. The new setting there seems to be of a more experienced Christianisation, its missionaries knew better than using force and coercion. Indeed, missions in other parts of Europe needed to explicitly acknowledge a compromise, as for example Ulfila among the Goths. However, the adaptation of Christianity to local needs would not only rely on local specificity but could also depend on the judgement of the missionary. For example, Ulfila himself, who in his mission to convert the Goths translated the Bible into gothic language but omitted the Book of kings from it because he believed that gothic aristocracy and kings "being lovers of war, were in need of something to restrain their passion for fighting rather than to incite them to it"<sup>686</sup>. But of course, an

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<sup>684</sup> See MÂLE, *La fin du paganisme en Gaule et les plus anciennes basiliques chrétiennes*, 1950; PAGOULATOS, *The destruction and conversion of ancient temples christian churches during fourth, and sixth centuries*, 1964; VAN ANDRINGA (dir.), *La fin des dieux. Les lieux de culte du polythéisme dans la pratique religieuse du IIIe au Ve siècle apr. J.-C. (Gaules et provinces occidentales)*, 2014.

<sup>685</sup> MARKUS, *Gregory the Great and his world*, p. 82.

<sup>686</sup> FLETCHER, *The conversion of Europe*, p. 77.



imposed adaptation is not actually much in conformity with local identity (or is actually rather against it), and this change reflects more the willingness of missionaries to deny cultural variety than to accept it. In Britain where the warrior identity was very strong, this characteristic was exploited by Christianity in order to make the new religion more acceptable, or maybe, it was just a resigned acceptance of the power of tradition and the awareness that compromise was the key to the success of the new religion.

As for Boniface, although his desire to be a missionary among the Saxons was never fulfilled, he was more concerned with the contaminations than with the Christianisation of pagans and he would be specially troubled with the “depaganization” of people<sup>687</sup>. Indeed, in the councils in which he took part the stress is put on the fact that compromises would not be accepted. An interesting point about interpretation of sources can be seen in Boniface’s writings in which he, describing the religious organization of the areas of east Frankia, Bavaria, Hesse and Thuringia, would exaggerate the paganism of these societies to please his Carolingian masters that desired to blur the legitimacy of these peoples for having defied their authority. In this way Boniface would depict them as “inadequate supporters of the church”<sup>688</sup>.

A completely different behavior is seen among priests and monks, who very often have little or insufficient education, who were supposed to translate the writings of the high educated bishops to the folk. In this process, many were accused of being contaminated by pagan culture. Alcuin for example accuses the monks of an English monastery to listen to traditional tales during their meals<sup>689</sup>. In thirteenth century Germany, folktales were also a matter of reprimands among clergy members. Caesarius of Heisterbach once tricked the monks of his Cistercian monastery by starting to tell Arthur’s story, only to show them that they were more interested in profane tales than in the word of God<sup>690</sup>. The interest of the low clergy could reflect

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<sup>687</sup> BROWN, *The rise of western Christendom*, p. 423 ss.

<sup>688</sup> WOOD, *The northern frontier: Christianity face to face with paganism*, p. 236.

<sup>689</sup> MGH Epp. Kar.. 2: 183.

<sup>690</sup> DM IV, 36.

the interest of lay people and we can presume that an important amount of their personal identity was linked with popular identity. While the pseudo-saints would be the unofficial link between people and the sacred, the low clergy was the official one, responsible to manufacture amulets and perform the rituals in cemeteries and fields to answer popular needs.

These needs have a strong link with nature and the land. We saw that one of the most numerous mentions in the sources in Gaul and Spain, but also in other places are about the cult of sources, trees and stones, apparently a heritage of Celts that also reflects a common human trait<sup>691</sup>. The peasant imprint of religious practices bears similitudes with these ancestral beliefs for their link with nature and the natural cycles, that after all were those that governed people's lives. We saw how in Britain and Spain rural rituals would have a marked hybrid character, in the ritual of cakes described by Bede and the Visigothic liturgy with its blessing of fields that underline the traditional gestures that incorporated Christian words and symbols<sup>692</sup>. In the same fashion was the mid-eighth-century *Indiculus Superstitionum*, which presented offerings made at trees, at springs, and at crossroads denouncing a marked rural setting of beliefs<sup>693</sup>. The same structure, a pagan ritual imbued with Christian words can be found in a ninth-century Carolingian manuscript in which instructions are given in order to produce seventeen remedies derived from the body of a freshly killed vulture. This text, found in a blank page in the middle of a Latin version of the *Materia Medica* of first-century pharmacologist Dioscurides is found in a medical manuscript of the *Bibliothèque Nationale* in Paris. Among other indications to produce a number of remedies for a variety of health issues we can find instructions to, before decapitating the vulture to make a remedy, the reader should say 'Angel, Adonai, Abraham'. "Such a ritual utterance, with its implied coercion of hidden powers, its air of mechanical efficacy, bears all the hallmarks of the magical"<sup>694</sup>. Furthermore, this treatise, known as *Epistula vulturis*, is found in another two

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<sup>691</sup> See SAUER, *Religious rituals at springs in the late antique and early medieval world*, 2011.

<sup>692</sup> See also ANDERSON, *Blessing the fields? A study of the Late-medieval Ampullae from England and Wales*, 2010.

<sup>693</sup> ANGENENDT, *Sacrifice, gifts, and prayers in Latin Christianity*, p. 464.

<sup>694</sup> HORDEN, *Op. cit.*, p. 419.

manuscripts: in an eleventh century version from Bonn, and in a fifteenth century Italian version. In both later copies the treatise was complemented by additional recipes, probably attesting the widespread and continuous popularity of the vulture as a source of magic<sup>695</sup>.

To conclude, when talking about the kind of practices that present the most marked hybrid character, we notice a predominance of those that were related to things that people cannot govern and needed supernatural help, or else funerary rituals, practices related with agriculture and medicine and the knowledge of the future, things that had either much to do with memory and social identity and with practical functionality.

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<sup>695</sup> MACKINNEY, *An Unpublished Treatise on Medicine and Magic from the Age of Charlemagne*, p. 494.

## Conclusion

*Nemo dicat: ad idola quidem vado, arreptitios et sortilegos consulo: sed tamen Dei ecclesiam non relinquo; catholicus sum.*

*St. Augustine, Enarrationes in Psalms, 88, II, 14.*

Being a Christian had different meanings in different places and in different periods, it could vary according to personal background and culture, but most of all, it had different connotations to clergy and to lay people. The same can be said about conversion<sup>696</sup>, and as the study of the sources and the comparison between them demonstrate, it is not possible to talk about a straightforward definition of what was Christianity and not even of what it was not. At the dimension of everyday practices and beliefs, the boundary between both sides could often be blurred, as it seems clear from the quote that opens this chapter. This assumption became evident when we consider hybrid practices as Christians by all means but somehow “translated” into a sort of discourse that could be easily understood and accepted by people. Indeed, as it was possible to observe, conversion is not a binary process, in which one can be either Christian or pagan. The sources demonstrate a multitude of shades that characterize the period of religious transition but it is also a feature of cultural interaction: the tendency to always form a hybrid final product with elements of both (or more than two) sides involved.

The notion of conversion, as it was established by Christianity was about renouncing the old faith and beliefs, turning a converter instantly into an apostate. In this way, the entire life of a the new Christian should be a continuous renunciation and perpetual conversion. Yet, as Peter Brown said, the past was still the source of all

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<sup>696</sup> FLETCHER, *The conversion of Europe*, p. 9.

evils, while the past would forever remain a pagan place<sup>697</sup>. In this respect we should bear in mind the famous story of the Frisian king Radbod, who refused baptism and would rather go to hell instead of being deprived of his ancestor's company after his death<sup>698</sup>. Memory, tradition, cultural identity, these are all elements that are too powerful to be simply erased by a foreign religion. Christianisation was a process that forced a break with the past, a break for which people were not prepared or with which they often disagreed. For this reason, people would shape the new religion according to their own needs, in such a way that it would also include their culture, their past, and the teachings of their ancestors. Indeed, Martin of Braga, Caesarius of Arles and most of our sources were directing their reprimands to a community that was Christian by all means, but whose members, nonetheless, still saw the need to find a place for their traditions and their religious interpretations.

In this constellations of various interpretations, the problem of how to establish a limit between extremes was indeed very complicate. Even what was permitted as part of Christian practices and doctrines and what was sin, heresy or paganism was matter of great and constant discussion. The clergy itself would never agree on how to interpret some gestures or even on how to spread and consider its own doctrine. Heresies and numerous ecclesiastical councils demonstrate a plurality of interpretations that just supports the thesis that a variety of "Christianities" was possible. Adaptable, malleable, serving people's needs and demands, not meaning however that these multiple interpretations were not Christian, something incomplete or in the middle between two realities or word views. Cultural and religious crafting or else hybridity, presupposes that one can be in both, or more than two, conditions. As specified in the previous chapter, there were a number of other identities that a person could relate to, and to all these social identities certain behaviours and duties were expected. Sometimes these identities were in conflict with each other, nonetheless, cultural identity engulfed all of these layers, allowing a person to have multiple identities simultaneously but resorting to each one of them

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<sup>697</sup> BROWN, *Aspects of the Christianisation of the Roman world. The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*. p. 139.

<sup>698</sup> MGH, *SRM*, v. 668. See also MEENS, *With one foot in the font: the failed baptism of the Frisian king Radbod and the 8th-century discussion about the fate of unbaptized forefathers*, 2015.

in specific situations, or what Pohl defines as 'saliency'<sup>699</sup>. After all, the complexity of religious identity cannot be defined easily and the only way to see it, is as a kaleidoscope.

As we mentioned in previous chapters, the huge increase in the progress of conversion in the first period of Christianisation is due more to the influence of people already converted than to the labour of preachers and missionaries or even to the influence of miracles. Consequently, the conversion process was the responsibility not only of the clergy but also of common people as they were able to convince their friends and family members of the benefits of the new religion based on personal experience. Furthermore, landowners or the *pater familiae* received the responsibility to survey on those places where the clergy not always was able to reach. In these contexts of religious conversion the role of common people is seen as clue and they act as cultural transmitters or catalysts of transformation that are considered responsible for the introduction of new ideas into alien cultures<sup>700</sup>. These characters work as mediators, sometimes "translating" the foreign culture in the receivers' language. However, it is difficult to identify these agents in Late Antiquity and the direct impact of their doing in the religious life. A part from those members of lay community aforementioned, missionaries were sometimes performing this role when spreading the gospel in pagan communities, trying to approach people in their own environment using local communication.

In this respect we can recall the general tendency denounced in our documentation of placing private churches and places of worship in rural areas in order to promote the conversion of these regions. This behaviour could have a lot in common with pagan private altars and small shrines, as if people were used to a domestic sphere of devotion that was crucial to their religious experience. Most probably these practices in a Christian environment were devoid of official control, which means that such structures and places could reflect more directly popular piety. Indeed, in the Iberian

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<sup>699</sup> The term 'identity' is much more open and flexible than the logic of belonging. It implies that an individual may be related to several groups to different degrees (or 'saliency'), and that the identity of these groups in turn may be rather complex and dynamic. POHL, *Archaeology of Identity: introduction*, p. 11.

<sup>700</sup> See KÖNIG, *Caught Between Cultures? Bicultural Personalities as Cross-Cultural Transmitters in the Late Antique and Medieval Mediterranean*, 2012.

peninsula we have unprecedented sources that provide testimony of the process of diffusion of the faith in the countryside by means of foundation of private churches and monasteries. The *Parrochiale Suevorum* and the writings of Valerius of Bierzo prove that a strategy considered efficacious was that of changing the features of rural landscape. Nonetheless, only changing physically this landscape is not enough, and most probably the vicinity of monks and clerics would probably do as much good to the improvement of popular religiosity. However, I believe that this same vicinity was also crucial to the development of local piety. We observed that these religious organizations would very often be devoid of a more substantial control, which means more flexibility on interpreting religious rules and practices. If the last frontier of Christianity was the countryside, it was precisely in this place that religious hybridity would flourish due to its special condition of isolation.

For this reason I think that local priests, monks and local saints could also function as cultural transmitters, being the link between both cultures and actually translating Christianity into more approachable terms<sup>701</sup>. However, this assumption does not neglect the active role of people into crafting their own religiosity. Indeed, the acknowledgement of the necessity to translate Christianity comes from the realization that a certain resistance to the imposition of an alien culture was possible and to first attempt a successful approach, some trust must be conquered. It is useful here to remember the letter of pope Gregory the Great to Mellitus, in which he basically acknowledge that some habits or gestures, as well as their influences in people's lives were so important that could not just be simply erased or neglected.

In the contexts of religions conversion, a change of perception is conditioned by the change of belief that provides new meanings to old objects but also practices, which can be associated with a conscious as well as unconscious selection of memories<sup>702</sup>. While people would defy ecclesiastical censorship to preserve some of their memories that were considered functional and expression of local identity, this same

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<sup>701</sup> Or, they could be "cultural brokers". Jezewski defined the culture broking as "the act of bridging, linking or mediating between groups or persons of differing cultural backgrounds for the purpose of reducing conflict or producing change". See JEZEWSKI and SOTNIK, *The rehabilitation service provider as culture broker: Providing culturally competent services to foreign born persons*, 2001.

<sup>702</sup> WILLIAMS, *Death and memory in early medieval Britain*, p. 2.

identity was changing. When Effros states in her *Merovingian mortuary archaeology* that some practices were abandoned because they were not anymore an expression of current identity, it is based on the assumption that identity is a mutable and adaptable thing. Just as religion and culture, identity was influenced by contacts and social changes. These three elements, intrinsically connected with each other are, as we have been saying through this dissertation, not static notions, but mutable and fluid, and people had an active choice in this matter<sup>703</sup>. Indeed, “*understanding the elements of popular religion and the continuities in religious practice that it necessarily involves require the recognition of indigenous agency in accepting some religious forms and rejecting others, asserting the preeminence of local spirits in one domain and the hegemony of Christ or a saint in another*”<sup>704</sup>.

An object, a practice, in short, a memory, has only reasons to exist if it has a meaning in the present. The case of how people would continue to preserve their collective memory regards the fact that these memories are related with their cultural identity. In a changing world people needed to attach themselves to their certainties, and the only certain things in life are one’s past and one’s death. These elements are not only a matter of cultural and social importance, but also have a practical concern. Many times traditional practices and gestures were the result of a long elaborated heritage, such as medical and curing practices. Other practices, like funerals, were important to the notion of a group identity. Conversion then would not mean necessarily a complete rejection of the past.

Accordingly, nothing survives, but continues. As it was pointed out by Schmitt, « *la théorie des ‘survivances’ du paganisme devient caduque: rien n’est ‘survécu’ dans une culture, tout est vécu ou n’est pas. Une croyance ou un rite ne sont pas la combinaison de reliquats et d’innovations hétérogènes mais, une expérience n’ayant de sens que dans sa cohésion présente* »<sup>705</sup>. Religious crafting is somethings that people would actively do, not something that simply happen. The religious persistence of certain practices could be a voluntary act of effectively wanting something to be kept, for social or

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<sup>703</sup> See BAILEY, *The religious worlds of the laity in Late antique Gaul*, 2016.

<sup>704</sup> FRANKFURTHER, *Beyond magic and superstition*, p. 268.

<sup>705</sup> SCHMITT, “*Religion populaire*” et culture folklorique (note critique), p. 496.



cultural reasons. What we saw here was not resistance of surviving of paganism, fruit of people's stubbornness as interpreted so often by our sources and many authors would agree<sup>706</sup>. What we see is rather a prove of the power of people's action, their religious crafting and their willingness to influence cultural transformation. Moreover, finding traditional and pagan practices inside Christianity means that this religion was successful enough to incorporate (admittedly under pressure) some gestures. This demonstrates that the pagan past could be somehow successfully Christianised and the new religion proved to be flexible and ready to be moulded according to necessity. As I hope it is evident by now is that the clergy did not own the monopoly of faith, in the sense that they were not the sole entity that could interpret it. However, in their constant attempt to do so, they were only trying to be consistent with what we saw in the first chapter as being the ideal notion of a Christian, or else, to be member of a uniform group, with an uniform doctrine.

The problem however is the fact that hybrid practices and people's agency represented a menace to ecclesiastical authorities because it meant an alternative to the official doctrine and as a consequence to official control. When people acknowledged that religious authorities did not have all the answers, a sort of dangerous insubordination took place. Hybridity is then a sort of subversive behavior, a menace to the utopic unity at the same time that it is an inevitable process. Hybridity is then the living proof that Christianity was at the end somehow defeated by people's silent resistance.

The matter of Priscillian and his heresy could be taken as a maximum example of the subversion inherent to religious hybridity. He positioned himself clearly against ecclesiastical authority, against the monopoly of bishops to dictate the rules of faith and its interpretation. Religious hybridity is then another feature of this insubordination, a silent unconformity with pre-moulded rules, an opposition that manifested itself not only ideologically but practically. On the situation of being

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<sup>706</sup> Just to cite a few titles: MESLIN, *Persistances paiennes en Galice vers la fin du VI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 1969; MANSELLI, *Resistenza dei culti antichi nella pratica religiosa dei laici nelle campagne*, 1982; BINAZZI, *La sopravvivenza dei culti tradizionali nell'Italia tardoantica e altomedievale*, 2008 and NILES, *Pagan survivals and popular belief*, 2013.

imposed certain religious rules, people sometimes consciously, sometimes not, just gave religious practices their own identity and interpretation.

As for Anglo-Saxon Britain, the findings of Sutton Hoo are often associated with a conscious desire to preserve memory in a sort of “defiant pagan politics”. Here the character of subversion seems clear, if considered Christianity as a menace to traditional and cultural values. After all, the whole behaviour of Anglo-Saxon aristocracy to preserve their values can be in general interpreted as defiant to the unconditional acceptance of a foreign religion.

In any case, although being considered as a subversive behaviour, hybridity had an undeniable positive role in promoting the growth of Christianity. These amendments to the “official” faith and practices were the very reason why this religion succeed in its complete and unquestioned victory. The reason why Christianity prospered is to be found in its flexibility. It was addressed in the first chapter how the level of absorption of Roman culture could be considered an important clue to understand the process of religious conversion. Romanization did not imply the cancellation of local identities and religions; on the contrary, it promoted the reinterpretation and transformation of old symbols into a new concept. Starting from this principle, we can interpret Christianisation in this same light, as the vehicle that promoted the reinterpretation and transformation of Roman culture, but also of local cultures, just as Romanization had done with previous cultures in places where it arrived. If such feature was achieved voluntarily or not is a matter still to investigate, each case is however distinct from one another. Yet, the frequent reprimands to people found performing non-canonical behaviour as well as to the clerics that participated in hybrid behaviour, can attest to a non-properly intentional surrender. A proof that resistance and subversion can sometimes bring the expected results.

To summarize, what the analysis allow us to conclude is that officially, compromises are not accepted, since they would subvert the logic of unity that was so dear to the high instances of Christian Church. However, the very conception of *Church* as a unity is a mistake. Seeing it as a monolithic institution is misleading and incoherent with the account given by the ecclesiastical documentation. A multitude of

interpretation was possible, as saw on the previous chapter in which great exponents of Christianity would most probably not be in accordance with each other. What it was possible to understand is that the great utopia of unity has always been this, an utopia. However, this would not prevent ecclesiastical authorities to try to maintain the monopoly of religious interpretation and the condemnation of paganism and people's religious crafting is the proof of that.

For what concerns local particularities, they indeed demonstrate different features to each region here studied. Gaul has always demonstrated a strong vocation to water sanctuaries related to cures and Christianity would then take advantage of this peculiarity. In *Hispania* Priscillian doctrine bears much in common with traditional practices related to nature and astrology, at the same time that presents itself as a new interpretation of Christianity. In Britain the warrior identity is the most salient trace of pre-conversion culture that mingled with Christianity to construct a religious narrative that bears much in common with local identity. All these features however are related to the specific processes of conversion that each place was subjected. In Gaul, as well as in Spain, the bottom-up model of religious conversion seemed to be prevalent. Without ignoring the particularities of each region, it was possible to see that generally, in this kind of process the agency of people is apparently more evident as demonstrated by the ecclesiastical legislation that was frequently concerned with the non-canonical behaviour of the faithful. People were performing numerous rituals probably based in traditional behaviour but assembled with the Christian environment. From basic beliefs in natural entities such as stones, trees and sources, to complex funerary rituals, the imprint that we see in these two regions is a peasant one. The bottom-up model gives people the opportunity to play with their own beliefs without a major control that would happen on the eventual existence of a superior source of imposition of the faith. Based on the model of conversion in which family and neighbours are responsible to the diffusion of the Christianity, it is possible to interpret the great many examples on the sources of religious hybridity as a bigger liberty that people would have in crafting their own religiosity based in interpretations that were conditioned by memory and cultural identity.

In Britain, the same behaviour cannot be observed due to the lack of sources that provide an account of common people's interpretation of the faith. We cannot say that it does not exist solely based on the absence of sources. However, the top-bottom model gives a different account that, although with different features, proves a similar path. Here the faith arrived by hands of missionaries that first dedicated themselves to the conversion of kings and the aristocracy. In such environment this behaviour is motivated by very practical interests: to better and more rapidly achieve religious conversion, it was necessary to have the support of a ruler. The latter could provide not only material sources, such as money and lands to churches and monasteries that changed the landscape, but also legal support. In this scenery, people's agency becomes more difficult to individuate, on the other hand, some sort of agency do exist. In Britain, besides the different kind of sources available respect the other two examples, it is still possible to observe religious crafting and hybridity, but here the promoters are the aristocracy. According to the sources available, religious interpretation had a noble imprint, with saints coming from the nobility and practices being filled with noble values, as seen on the examples of sagas and funerary practices. Anyhow, in a process that first started among rulers and aristocracy, this features are coherent, at the same way as in Gaul and Spain it is expected to have a "popular" identity of religious practices when Christianity started being spread among common folk.

At this point it is important to state that hybridity, as understood throughout this study, presupposes a mixing that is indeed an attachment to tradition and memory, but also a process of building new traditions and memories. The way in which Christianity arrives and spread conditions the major features of religious identity. Furthermore, it evidenced how people's agency was crucial into building different religious interpretations, conditioned by cultural identity and historical background. It also demonstrated how religious crafting was an unavoidable process, and hybridity was the determining feature of this crafting, crucial not only to the success of the new religion but also to the development of new religious identities.

Local religiosities are then the reflex of how people responded to what was offered

(or imposed) to them, and is the direct result of their interpretation of this religion, their unsubordination to foreign imposition, which however was never uniform. Local religiosity presupposes that its practices are deeply related with social experiences<sup>707</sup> and despite different historical and cultural backgrounds, the pattern of behaviour is rather the same: of crafting and hybridity. And now the bad Christian presented by Saint Augustine at the opening of this chapter seems to dialogue with Dominga de Adviento, García Márquez's African slave from the introductory chapter: both taking from their multiple religious experiences what better suited their necessities, as for being a Christian but still resorting to traditional practices is indeed not a uncommon behavior, it was like this in Late Antiquity, it was this way in Early modern times and it is definitely the same in our days.

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<sup>707</sup> MILIS, *The pagan Middle ages*, p. 279.

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