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## Almatourism

Journal of Tourism, Culture and Territorial Development

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### **Shrines and Holy Places in Tuscany between Pilgrimage and Religious Tourism: the Difficult Relationship between Knowledge and Valorization**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

After an introduction to the correct classification of the relationship between knowledge and valorization as a strategic subject in territorial development policies, the article moves on to talk about the Via Francigena through historical and territorial Italian culture. In the accumulation of successful initiatives not everything has been estimated and minimised, but many occasions have been wasted, beginning with that of a systematic survey of historical testament. The Francigena, the most ancient and important European pilgrim route has frequently facilitated the biggest and most important historical-cultural subject of medieval viability which, for example could include the numerous *vie romee*. Selections made have eliminated the financial support to the basic research on cultural heritage from which knowledge inexorably derives a non-substitutable foundation for the divulgation and dispersal of knowledge. In the matter of the Tuscany, it would have been possible to highlight, not only the important historical moments of historiography, by to also make the large documentary, literary, artistic and architectural depositories available from the presence of ecclesiastical institutes on a local level. The article develops, deepening the theme of the cult of the Mother of God in the Italian Middle Ages and Renaissance with relation to narrative tradition, thus recomposing the framework of Marian exaltation to be brought to light and valorized spiritually as well as culturally.

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**Keywords:** Knowledge; Valorization; Via Francigena; Tuscany

Dopo una introduzione propedeutica al corretto inquadramento del rapporto tra conoscenza e valorizzazione come tema strategico nelle politiche di sviluppo

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territoriale, l'articolo passa a trattare il tema della via Francigena al territorio e alla storia culturale italiana. Nel coacervo di iniziative promosse non tutto sicuramente è stato approssimativo e banalizzato, ma molte occasioni sono state sprecate, a cominciare da quella di un sistematico rilevamento delle testimonianze storiche. La Francigena, il più antico e importante pellegrinaggio europeo ha sovente semplificato il più grande e importante tema storico-culturale della viabilità medievale che ad esempio poteva includere le numerose romee. Le selezioni che sono state compiute hanno eliminato di fatto il sostegno economico a quella ricerca di base sul patrimonio culturale da cui inesorabilmente discende la conoscenza, fondamento insostituibile della divulgazione e della disseminazione dei saperi. Per quanto riguarda il caso toscano si sarebbero potuti evidenziare non solo importanti momenti storici trascurati dalla storiografia, ma anche rendere fruibile il grande deposito documentario, librario, artistico, architettonico prodotto dalla presenza delle istituzioni ecclesiastiche a livello locale. L'articolo si sviluppa approfondendo i temi del culto della madre di Dio nel medioevo e nel rinascimento italiano con la relativa tradizione narrativa, ricomponendo così il quadro di un tripudio mariano ancora da riportare alla luce e da valorizzazione in dimensione tanto spirituale quanto culturale.

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**Keywords:** Conoscenza; Valorizzazione; Via Francigena; Toscana

## Introduction

The relationship between knowledge and valorization is at this point, a strategic and urgent theme in the developmental policies on any territorial level and cultural sphere it operates in. From the launch of the third millennium the phenomenon of cultural routes and pilgrimages in particular, has undertaken a marked survey in the geographic European landscape, where the Council of Europe has assumed a significant leading role. It involves a relationship not devoid of difficulties, particularly for the almost infinite complexity and richness of the historic resources and the heritage present, as is the case in Italy and Tuscany in particular.

This recent sensitivity towards pilgrimage and devotional journeys is a matter which has been dear to specialised historiography for many decades and in this context abundantly 'systematised' from a critical and methodological perspective. Nevertheless, the political action was declined by the public entities designated to valorizing the territory in accordance with the new economic category of religious tourism; from this perspective, beyond the inevitable grouping with other local cultural heritage – such as typical food and wine products recalled through a fortunate calembour, for example, '*saperi e sapori*' – the economic value dividing them, or at least sharing them, has been rediscovered, with the traditional ecclesiastical management which throughout the centuries created the map of religious devotion in the vast geographic reseau of a Europe characterised by the monumental nature of sacred 'catholic' areas.

While the argument brewed of whether the old continent had Christian-roman roots or not, dominated by the antipapal prejudice still present in the transalpine protestant

world, the 'decontamination' of the indisputable weight of this legacy from its confessional gene was provided for, drawing the cultural *latu sensu* nature in a sense of heritage, as a contemporary use of the past (Answord et alii, 2007) which would animate the polysemic space of a possible intra-European tourist route. Thus, they registered themselves in the "European Cultural Routes" project promoted by the Council of Europe in 1987, some 'Great Itineraries' of a 'religious' mark, such as the Cammini di Santiago, were launched that same year and promoted since June 2004, together with the Via Francigena in 1994.

Also open to 'laic' themes, the Great Routes of the Council of Europe had often favoured historical-religious figures and moments considered 'identities' in the formation of the culture of the continent, such as one dedicated to Saint Martin of Tours from September 2005, or to the influence of monastic tradition (The Cistercian route of 1990, The Cluniac site network of May 2004, promoted to Great Cultural Route of the Council of Europe as of June 2006), without neglecting, in the politically correct management of the confessional balances, the recalling of others: such as L'Eredità Al-Andalus of April 1997, admitted among the Great Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe as of June 2004) or the European Jewish Heritage Routes of May 2004, which became the Great Cultural Route of the Council of Europe as of December 2005.

Founded on very solid historiographic settlings, this historical cultural valorization of European territories has been declared in a very differentiated manner in local projects, generating forcing and approximations induced by decidedly external promotional needs – when not unfavourable – of historical correctness in the 'construction' of the routes and their communication; this reading highlighted the lack of serious scientific coordination capable of making the centrifugal energies of local entities synergistic in their different institutional afference and within a substantial 'political' indifference to the correctness of communication and historical divulgation. In the accumulation of initiatives 'implemented' in the framework of a managerial desire 'excited' by the possibility of access to funds or ad hoc contributions, not everything has certainly been approximate and trivialised, but many occasions have been wasted, starting with that of a systematic survey of historical evidence (documentary, archival, artistic, monumental, environmental) which would have allowed that collective level of knowledge that remains an indispensable preliminary tool for any form of dissemination of culture.

## **1. The Via Francigena**

Divided into themes in turn altered to a local perspective of administrative interests and partial management, the great project of historical valorization of European territories has often generated, and not only in Italy, mice who have gnawed the resources necessary to set up a system of territorial participatory awareness founded on the effective valorization of the vast existing documentation. It has remained in the shadows, an unnecessary tool, almost disadvantageous, in a short-term and low-profile project. The Via Francigena, the most ancient and important European (or global?) pilgrimage, with its fragmentations, has often overwritten, simplifying and trivialising

the largest and most important historical-cultural theme of medieval viability which, for example could include the numerous 'romea' thanks to which it was possible to reach, through the national territory and its innumerable local "memories", the combination of villages, castles and walled lands, steps, bridges, churches, convents and monasteries. Excessive and many were the spaces equipped with a camino which was not only of pilgrims towards the omphalos of the western Christian world: the Rome of the apostles and the pulpit of Peter in which the 'medieval' spirit of the Jubilee was renewed in the extraordinary amplification of contemporary media communication, but where, however, the confessional weight of the Catholic papacy still dominated in a politically compromising way. Rome was and remains the most significant and central destination compared to the peripheral finis terrae where the astute bishops of Compostela had 'built' the cult and fortune of Saint James. The same choice of the term 'Francigena' instead of Romea, as well as certain 'centrifugal' valorization options – e.g. that of recognising the 'English' route of the Archbishop Sigeric of Canterbury<sup>1</sup> among the many others – seems to underlie some hindrance in recalling the central role of Rome in the history lived by the Christian ecumene, with the consequent, implicit necessity to resize the meaning of a quintessential 'meta', a characteristic that the eternal city has long shared and shares with Jerusalem. On the other hand, the Rome of today is the destination of tens of millions of tourists with a "consistent carelessness" towards the pilgrims who arrive on foot after the "Storta, la città di San Pietro" (Figure. 1)!



**Figure 1:** Via Francigena o Romea – X sec.

Source: Archivio Regione Toscana

The Francigena of the third millennium is in any case proposed as a spiritual route, sometimes an uncertain evocation of poorly digested commonplaces of medieval saints

and knights, a Francigena which evolved into a media route, thanks also to the radio success of Sergio Valzania (Rai-Via Francigena, 2014) and 'logged' with the Roman jubilee, in an attempt to share at least part of the important financial income ensured by mobility (even devotional mobility), fully enrolling itself in the traditional sanctuarial geography managed by the Church: from Monterotondo with the prodigies of Padre Pio in Monte Sant'Angelo to Santa Maria di Collemaggio, Assisi, Pompei, Loreto and so on.

A whole series of new tourist-popular themes have thus come to be defined, thanks also to the possibilities offered by the web – just consider the Vie micaliche linked to the 'revival' of cult sites dedicated to the Archangel Michael in Italy and Europe (Bouet, P., Otranto, G., Vauchez, A., (edd.), 2007) of strong communicative impact but conditioned, as a 'cultural product', by the economic logic of their possible impact on the territories concerned. The increasingly close economic tie between culture and valorization has therefore led to choices that have excluded much of what could be non-productive; effectively eliminating economic support for the basic research on the cultural heritage from which knowledge inexorably derives from, an irreplaceable foundation of the divulgation and dissemination of knowledge.

### *1.1 Gaps in the research in Tuscany*

Many cultural topics and as many "possible routes" that constitute the great material and immaterial heritage produced through centuries of history are destined to remain buried in the dust of the archives and under the covering of an ever-increasingly widespread and nurtured basic unawareness, and not only to the general public. An example is the unknown Tuscan 'sacred mountains' that saw the birth of important regular analysis, such as in Vallombrosa or Camaldoli, not to mention La Verna, Monte Senario or Monte Uliveto, then launched for an institutional development that would interest all of Europe, in the interactive osmosis of a polycentric society whose current boundaries have little to do with the fluid political continent of the past. With the 'valorization' of routes tied to the diffusion of religious orders – or, on the basis of the Lombard and Piedmontese 'sacred mountains', thanks to the emphasis on the monumental emergences produced by certain devotional choices<sup>2</sup> – they could have highlighted not only important historical moments neglected by historiography, but also given access to the large documentary, literary, artistic and architectural deposit produced by the local ecclesiastical institutions, not excluding the many environmental repercussions due to the presence of subjects also active in property and land management. Suffice to say that most of the archival repositories in Tuscany are made up of documentation produced by ecclesiastical entities: a fundamental biography of heritage also for the knowledge of civil history which was formed starting from the season of Leopardine reforms (Benvenuti, 2011) reaching its peak with the suppressions and indemnities of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Ciuffoletti, 2008; Ciuffoletti, Corradi, 2014). There is still no map of the regular settlements in the region, just as there is no 'modern' graphic restitution (i.e. capable of interfacing with databases and digital archives) of the whole system of ecclesiastical distribution and its diachrony in said territory so densely populated by religious people up to the Leopardine age: a representation of that 'sacred Tuscany' without which neither the

population nor the overall historical viability of the region can be understood and therefore nor the 'particular' case of the Francigena. If any effort on a historiographical level was launched, for example with the census of the regulars or the sanctuaries (Benvenuti, 2008), it does not appear that the acquired data was the object of attention of the institutional subjects called to oversee the projects of cultural valorization of the territory.

The 'laic' reception of the idea of religious tourism, sometimes referred to the experience of the pilgrimage, has declined, on a planning level, only after the 'admission' of the existence of an important religious sediment in the territorial history; an admission that has not yet entirely overcome the qualms of a consolidated anti-clerical tradition which pushes to look at all that is known of the church and priests with suspicion. Then compromised by the specialised lesson of academic disciplinary competences, the 'valorization' of cultural heritage declared by some regions (Tuscany) was also reified in the identification of specific fields which were recorded with important initiatives of cataloguing and description in which little importance was given to the historical and institutional contexts of which they were the product. Eradicated from their humus, these 'documents' (whatever their nature) have become, like works of art, 'objects of conservation', deprived of their contextual memory with an operation not unlike that of conserving them in museums, which uproots and delivers a number of now unrecognisable works in their lost contextual identity to the warehouses of museums.

Similarly, the touristic re-formation of the pilgrimage phenomenon in the context of a deeply secularised society has forgotten its most intimate spiritual reason; for some the perception is limited to the only 'signage' of the main routes identified by the local impact of European planning, in a marginalisation of all the sacred geography that characterised the societies of the ancient regime generating a vast network of specialised religious spaces (mainly dedicated to the Virgin Mary) that offered a valid local alternative to the most difficult experience of pilgrimage to distant or dangerous destinations. Thus they became traditional points of Christian devotional voyage between the Middle Ages and the modern age in many corners of Europe together with the holy places of abroad.

## **2. The Marial exhaltation of the Italian medieval and renaissance period**

The proliferation of shrines on the turn of the Italian medieval period affected the entire peninsula, flanking and more frequently replacing new architectural structures with the previous spatial arrangement of local devotion. The transition from 'saints to shrines' (Cracco, 1981) was a true revolution in the sacred structure of the territories, drawing on the Marian cult all the devotional expectations and miraculous hopes of an exhausted population, between the fifteenth and the sixteenth century, by the pandemic assaults and local spread of war. Also present in the memory of the chroniclers – such as that of Luca Landucci<sup>3</sup>, a devoted follower of Savonarola, who in his memoirs recalled with great detail the 'cases' of Bibbona (Pacciani, 2002 pp.81-95) and Prato (Guerrieri, 1977; Bardazzi, Castellani, Guerrieri, 1978; Morselli, Corti, 1982; Benvenuti, 2005) – this period of miracles and prodigious theophany of the Virgin which animated old street tabernacles scattered in the cities as in the countryside –

prelude of an imposing renaissance in sacred buildings which affected the whole region between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (Benvenuti, Gagliardi 2002; Benvenuti 2002)<sup>4</sup> - was inscribed a long-term Marian cult tradition, as the novelist, Franco Sacchetti, effectively proves again in the fourteenth century (Sacchetti, 1957). The extraordinary sanctuarial turmoil of this period presided many factors, beginning with an overall adjustment of the residential morphology – for example as a result of the progress of the reclamation process of many marsh areas (Benvenuti, Romby, 2004) or the abandonment of settlements – from which derived the need for an update of ecclesiastical fabric. The renewal of pastoral care and its tools was also decisive – beginning with the period of great popular preaching and the mutation that it induced in the forms of religious communication – in order to remove those archaic sediments that still connoted much of devotional life in the cities as well as the countryside. In 1428, San Bernardino himself officiated the inauguration of an ancient source in Arezzo, in which traces of an ancient therapeutic ritual persisted (Montesano, 1995; 1994a); between 1435 and 1444 in its place the church sanctuary of *Santa Maria delle Grazie* was built from which the devout Franciscans (Montesano, 1999; 1996) administered this substitute devotion in the city. In 1480 in Boccadirio, on the Emilia-Romagna side of the Tuscan-Emilian Apennines, the Madonna appeared to two shepherds (Guidotti, 1979; 1982; 1983); in 1484 in S. Brigida, the Virgin gave a 'new' sanctuary to a place formerly marked by the memory of the Irish saints of the Fiesole diocese (from Sant'Andrea to San Donato). In Arezzo, in February 1490, a pilgrim from Loreto saw tears flowing on the face of the Annunziata that stood in a small aedicule built many years earlier, in 1439, during a plague. The miracle justified the creation of a new shrine, since then called '*Madonna delle lacrime*'<sup>5</sup>. In around the same period, a painting of Mary began to drip sweat in the church of *S. Maria Foris Portam* in Pistoia, justifying the birth of the shrine of the *Madonna dell'Umiltà*, while apparitions in Bibbiena (Verde, Zaccaria, 2000)<sup>6</sup> and Stia (Pasetto, 2000) consecrated the new shrines of some 'stones' of *Casentino* or of neglected aedicule. A few years earlier, in 1484, in Cortona, the homage given by some working oxen in front of the Virgin painted in a small rural aedicule sanctioned the birth of the sanctuary of the *Madonna del Calcinaio* (Matracci, 1991; Mancini, 1868) (Figure 2); and again, in the diocese of Arezzo a small majesty built near an oak tree had been the site of prodigious demonstrations, while new miracles brought cult areas of the remotest Marian tradition back to devotional use, such as *Santa Maria delle Vertighe*<sup>7</sup>, near San Savino (Figure 3), or images valued by civic devotion, like the Madonna painted on one of the gates of the castle of San Giovanni Valdarno (Casciu, 1993; Del Grifo, Bonci, 2004).



**Figure 2:** Church of Santa Maria delle Grazie in Calcinaio, Cortona (AR).

Source: ARVO Archive, Lucca.



**Figure 3:** Margarito and Ristoro di Arezzo, Madonna with Child on the throne and four stories of the Virgin, 13th century. Sanctuary of Santa Maria delle Vertighe, San Savino (AR).

Source: ARVO Archive, Lucca.



Triumphant over the archaic rituals that conveyed the memory of the water cults, which for the Virgin was overwritten on the sacred places characterised by the presence of sources which were attributed therapeutic virtues and in particular a *galattofore* quality (Dini, 1995), winning the patronage of one of the most critical in the age of man: the neonatal and infantile one. Almost everywhere the springs useful to the post-natal as well as livestock, also subject to the risks of reproduction and birth rate, would have overlapped a Marian cult that re-founded places consecrated in the Christian sense by millenary pastoral and transhumant traditions.

The association with childbirth and puerperium encouraged the diffusion of particular relics, such as the Virgin Milk, which in some cases - as in Montevarchi<sup>8</sup> (Tartaro, 2004) - gave rise to new shrines, favouring the proliferation of a number of legends related to the protection of the very first childhood. The real risks of this delicate moment of existence, decimated by mortality, produced a number of protective practices and also attributed to the Devil, responsible for every evil, a sort of envy towards human babies who, it was believed, he tended to replace with his own creatures. This superstition generated the patron of the "*Vergine del soccorso*" (Virgin of the rescue) who, armed with a cane, would protect children against the assaults of the devil: in this function Mary was associated with the cults of St. Lawrence and St. Stephen, also invoked, as well as St. Nicholas of Bari, in the protection of childhood (De Gaffier, 1967; Schmitt, 1979; Doulet, 2003).

This Marian exaltation not only touched the neglected sacred places of the rural world but also involved the urban ones, renewing ancient devotional customs, such as in Fiesole, around the miraculous Santa Maria Primerana (Ciardi Dupré Dal Poggetto, 1988); or in the nearby town of Impruneta<sup>9</sup> (Rondinelli, 1634; Casotti, 1714); or in Pisa, where 'under the organs'(Cappelli, 1979; Baggiani, 1998) a Madonna was venerated charged with memories of the anti-Moorish epic of the Tyrrhenian coast; or in Pistoia, where an image of Mary came alive in front of the bed of a sick person, creating the shrine of the Madonna del Letto (Porrettano, 1905; Bargellini, 1961); not to mention Siena, the Marian city par excellence, which with the cult of the Madonna del Voto (Butzek, 2001-2002) the city recalled its gratitude for the danger escaped in Montaperti (1260). Even in Florence, which had lived a "dugento mariano" (a Marian 13th Century) in the name of liberation from the Ghibelline oppression, the Madonna dominated the cultic and cultural universe. In the fifteenth century the Virgin was by now the dominant 'symbol' in the Florentine republic's sanctum: her mother, Saint Anne, had defended her against attempts of tyranny by redeeming her freedoms jeopardised by the harsh lordship of the Duke of Athens (Benvenuti, 1995); patron saint of municipal abundance and security, the Madonna stood in the grain market of Orsanmichele since it had become a treasure chest of one of the first and most important miraculous images of the city's cultural history (Verdon, 2002); venerated in the archaic traits of Santa Maria Primerana, as many "archetypes" of the town of Impruneta were, devotees and subordinates would address her, in times of plague and famine, of flood or drought. While in the second half of the fifteenth century the countryside and the most remote rural areas were also Marianised in the name of a new Christian catechesis aimed at definitively eliminating the superstitions which were gathered around ancient sacred natural sites (Montesano, 1994).

The devotional 'Marianisation' which began in the 13th century thanks to the anti-Ghibelline party choices, during the fifteenth century drew to the composite path of re-emergence which, promoted by humanism, brought the 'origins' of Christian culture to the foreground. The long process of theological definition of Theotókos had profound repercussions also in the form of ecclesiological awareness: Mary, through patristic reflection and scriptural exegesis, had become the emblem and figure of the Church, mater and matrix of the Christian people (Figure 4).



**Figure 4:** Master of Monteflorescoli, Madonna enthroned with the child between the Holy Face of Lucca and the Saints Cornelius and Cyprian. About 1440 Pieve dei Ss. Cornelio and Cipriano, Codiponte (MS). Source: ARVO Archive, Lucca.

[www.archiviovoltosanto.org/it/iconografia/madonna-trono-con-il-bambino-tra-il-volto-santo-di-lucca-e-i-ss-cornelio-e-cipriano](http://www.archiviovoltosanto.org/it/iconografia/madonna-trono-con-il-bambino-tra-il-volto-santo-di-lucca-e-i-ss-cornelio-e-cipriano)

In this key, the Virgin was persistently eponymous of the same organisational structures of the care of souls, so much so that parishes were mostly dedicated to her, in turn 'matrixes' of other churches. Beyond the adjustments produced by the arrival of devotion, the Marian title was therefore, for a long time a conceptual synonym of 'ecclesia', and therefore also of the physical place where Christian people gathered to mark the fundamental stages of earthly life: from baptism with which spiritual birth was established at the spring of the *plebs*, up to the parting rituals with which the dead were accompanied to their final resting place. In this way the entire human journey was carried out '*sub tutela Matris*', in the shadow of the symbolic '*maphorion*' of Mary: that cloak whose folds were represented by her *fideles* in the act of the request for protection and rescue.

This lingering of Mary in the daily life of the countryside or the city was also explained within the possibilities of acculturation that the composite semiological system of her

cult had guaranteed, appropriate as it was, even in its progressive cultural updates, to link with archaic cultural rituals and depositories connected to the 'mysteries' of fertility. Nor had they scratched the submerged core of the long and contrasting dogmatic routes that had seen the Virgin become the subject of some of the most burning controversies in the slow theological definition of Christian churches. The need to better define it in common thought had mixed legends and devout traditions with the most sophisticated doctrinal speculation; thus the meagre narration of the Gospels and of the canonical texts of Scripture were integrated with the many details and anecdotes of apocryphal literature, especially that of childhood, generating those human and maternal traits of the Virgin Mary, more suited to iconographic transfer and devotional plots, characterised by the popular perception of Mary. Submissive at her feet, devotees of the Compagnia dei Laudesi would have sung the laments of a grieving mother, fervent flagellants would have torn their clothes under the lashes of "discipline" and merciful bourgeois would have taxed to give life to hospitals or associations of mutual assistance and solidarity.

The mid and late Middle Ages, which faced its fears at the uncertain threshold of a modern world terrified by death and disease more than it was in earlier eras, unanimously directed themselves towards the intercession of Mary for her maternal divine grace to her Son and alleviated the torments of the inhabitants of the valley of tears. Lady of faith sent by the Church, Mary would have also ensured the ephemeral anti-Turkish victory of Lepanto to the Christian arms, while piece by piece the oversea relics around which the devout practices of the 'pilgrims of Jerusalem' had gathered took – if they had not already done so – the route of the new shrines to the west. Nor is it a coincidence that just in the aftermath of the definitive settlement of the Turkish dominion in Levant, which coincided with the abandonment of residual hope of a Christian recovery of the holy places, the growth of Marian shrines in the west would have become exponential, reaching its peak in the sixteenth and seventeenth century.

### *2.1 The sacred objects of Palestine*

In the service of the construction of a sacred Marian topography in the West they had introduced many factors, beginning with the centuries-old translation of objects from Palestine that had allowed Europe to become 'the destination' of the legendary apostolic diaspora from the Holy Land. From the time of the first pilgrimages to the Byzantine basilicas, the effort of the oriental sovereigns to summarise the heritage of the most important Christian relics within the walls of the imperial city never wavered, and began with those of the Virgin (Bacci, 2004).

This sacred treasure had rooted a number of liturgical customs in the Constantinopolitan sanctuaries of Blachernae and Chalkoprateia that, despite the persistence of important ritual differentiations between the churches of the East and those of the West, had important repercussions in the development of the Marian cult in Europe, where legends and miracles of Byzantine origin had spread. Supported by this composite biographical background – both oral and written – Mary's body relics (like milk, which was easy to obtain in Bethlehem, hair, nails or various oils produced by thaumaturgical images) began to circulate more and more frequently in

Europe between the eleventh and twelfth centuries, becoming an opportunity for the promotion of designated Marian cult places (such as Oviedo or Chartres); but it would have been only with the Constantinopolitan robbery of 1204 that more significant objects, such as the belt, the ring or various garments, would have more or less legitimate translations from the treasure of the Vergine del Faro which the Crusaders raided.

The possession of relatively authentic relics or of dubious tradition – from the footwear of the Madonna to the cloths she wove to wrap the Child – was an occasion and a pretext for an ever more composite 'repeatability' of the holy places in the West: the same which would have been at the base, on the eve of the modern age, of topographic mimesis that were being carried out in various parts of Europe. It no longer involved just 'memorial objects' of the passion and evangelical characters, but of the entire sacred space they evoked, as in the symbolic assemblages of the Sacred Mountains (Benvenuti, Piatti, 2013), in turn a prelude to the more compact unfolding of the devotional practice of the Via Crucis or, to remain in a Marian context, of the repetitions of the 'Holy Houses' of Nazareth, such as the Italian house of Loreto or the English of Walsingham. This happened while the Turkish advance in the east took the legendary translations to a new climax that brought miraculous panels of the Virgin fleeing in front of the infidel violence to the west. Through adventurous and fictional paths, many relics that had been Byzantine heritage constituted the treasure of the churches of the west: as in Prato, the Belt of Mary, or in Chiusi (and from there to Perugia) the ring of her wedding with Joseph<sup>10</sup> (Fantozzi, 1916; Spicciani, 1970; Casagrande 1987; Duranti, 1992), contributing to the rooting and popular success of a cult that would end up engulfing the whole Marian family, from Joseph to Joachim and Anne, without neglecting Elizabeth and her husband and the other 'relatives' that the apocryphal tradition attributed to the Virgin.

Inscribed in the lunettes of churches, painted on the city gates, eternal in the endless images of the tabernacles and rural 'majesty' where she presided over the rural liturgies of rogations, the Virgin Mary began to 'reconquer' the countryside during the fifteenth century where, in the hardships induced by the recurring epidemics, by the mercenary bands that spread hunger and destruction, by the recurrent wars determined by the creation of territorial states, the permanent demons of insecurity and fear returned. In this period of uncertainty and anguish many images scattered along the sides of rural roads or painted on urban crossroads became seats of Marian epiphanies and around them, often detached from their ancient plasters and inserted within a designated shrine area, popular forms were of devotion gathered, sustained by the thaumaturgical and apotropaic request arising from the difficulty of the times.

## *2.2 Narrative tradition*

Generated by the reigniting of the pandemic cycle of the plague that from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century would devastate Europe, and generally supported by the biosafety crisis that upset the western social system in the early modern age, the proliferation of new or renewed Marian shrines on the path of a previous cultic custom represented the popular response to a crisis of certainties that

overwhelmed the trust in traditional ecclesiastical institutions, starting from the years of the great schism.

This development determined the consolidation of a narrative tradition that was one of the most singular spiritual events of western religious history, even repeating recurring characters, in the typological modules of the founding legends. During this period, the Virgin Mary's rediscovered by peasants during their work in fields and object of the prodigious 'recognition' by animals suddenly kneeling before the numinous; paintings or statues fell from the baggage of anonymous pilgrims, only to be miraculously found on trees then chosen for a future shrine, in a sort of 'transfer' in terms of the founding legend, the iconographic theme that represented the Madonna among the branches of the 'Verga di Jesse'. Images were found whose archaic and Byzantine features recognised the unmistakable hand of Saint Luke, author of many acheiropoieton icons already important to Orthodox tradition (Bacci, 1998; 2000); visions and apparitions would have favoured shepherds and girls, placing the image of a Virgin who defeated incredulity and dispensed graces in the sacred ancient contexts of the rural world, whether they were erratic boulders or springs.

'Innocents' and children would have been witnesses to her painful participation in the sad human events: tears, sweat, blood, would have accompanied both the misfortunes of the suffering humanity and the blasphemous gestures in which popular preaching recognised by the ancient coherence deicide of the people of Judah. To profane the effigy on the one hand could cost a life – as happened to the Jew who, in 1493, was accused of having travelled with an iron with the beautiful Madonna of the Rose bar that stood in the recess of the Speziali in the Florentine Orsanmichele – on the other it lent itself to becoming the 'founding myth' of a shrine, especially in the growth of anti-Jewish propaganda which was associated with the founding of the Monti di Pietà and in general with the 'Catholic' response to the problem of usury.

The widespread growth of places in which the Virgin had performed miracles and wonders with her presence of help generated real competition between shrines, increasing a form of 'sustainable' pilgrimage even for less affluent classes who could access a penitential custom made possible from the spatial proximity and relative investment of time: many of the buildings that arose in this period attest to, in the adoption of external eaves covered on three sides of the cultic hall, the possibility of a sort of 'incubation' that allowed one to spend the night in the shrine *resedi* awaiting the festive rites and events. Thus, real penitential paths were born not only towards the shrine, but also within the space in which it was found, such as in the case of the Sacred Mountains or the Calvari, in turn articulated in the *stationes* of the *vie crucis* or, as in Montaione (Gensini, 1989), in the Jerusalemite 'maquettes' of small chapels scattered in the shrine complex.

## Conclusion

It is evident there is much material still to "bring to light" and as well as how urgent it is to proceed towards a valorization directed towards a cultural dimension and the discovery of a spirituality that fits well into an increasingly laic society that questions

the future of religious Italian heritage which reaches a higher density on a global level. In the course of its construction of a list of tangible and intangible world heritage that began in 1972, UNESCO's recognition of the pronounced sustainability of religious heritage that today represents more than 60% of the whole recognised by the organisation is presented as a great challenge. The entity must consult the institutional and academic participants involved in a truly interdisciplinary approach, starting from a historical essay that still presents itself as a field to be cultivated, shared and valued in the actions of territorial organisation, according to a vision in which the spiritual component – whether laic or religious – can finally uncover its role.

Faced with the wealth of extraordinary documentation, and in any case still to be discovered, with thanks also to the spread of the Marian cult, knowledge and valorization must be able to respond together in a progressive inclusion.

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<sup>1</sup> "The Via Francigena is a route along a medieval itinerary trodden, throughout the centuries, by millions of pilgrims. It connects Canterbury (England) to Rome, passing through France and Switzerland and in the Middle Ages represented the most popular route of Christians walking to Rome". Via Francigena-UNESCO (accesso 17.10. 2017). The Via Francigena, on the other hand, is based on the journey of Sigeric which connects three European countries (Great Britain, France, Switzerland and Italy) supporting the European vision of the European Institute of Cultural Routes.

<sup>2</sup>[http://www.sacrimonti.net/User/index.php?PAGE=Sito\\_it/sacri\\_monti\\_del\\_piemonte\\_e\\_della\\_lombardia](http://www.sacrimonti.net/User/index.php?PAGE=Sito_it/sacri_monti_del_piemonte_e_della_lombardia)

<sup>3</sup> Landucci, Luca, (1985). *Diario fiorentino dal 1450 al 1516, continuato da un anonimo fino al 1542*, ris. an., Firenze, Sansoni Editore, pp. 41-42, 47-48.

<sup>4</sup> For the individual shrines referred to, see: <http://www.santuari cristiani.iccd.beniculturali.it/> (accessed 10/11/2017).

<sup>5</sup> *Ricordo del IV centenario del prodigio operato dalla Madonna delle lacrime in Arezzo: 1490-1890*. (1890). Arezzo, Magi. Built in 1439 near a hospital managed by the Confraternita della Santissima Annunziata, the oratory host to a statue of the Madonna which, according to legend, on the 26<sup>th</sup> February 1490, during a violent storm which damaged the structure of the building, was seen crying. Consequently, the ancient oratory was substituted in 1517 by a more elegant and majestic temple.

<sup>6</sup> This shrine was also originally a modest oratory built in the age of the great death toll of 1348 near a rock on which it was believed that the Virgin Mary appeared to a girl. In the following century (1444) new miracles expanded the fame of the place which became one of the most notable shrines of Casentino, a rest-stop of the pilgrimage to Verna, which justifies its radical architectural transformation. With the Predicatori Osservanti monks, to whom the care of the shrine was given, it was given the protection of the Medici.

<sup>7</sup> *Ragguaglio storico del Santuario di M. SS. di Vertighe presso la nobile terra del Monte San Savino*, (1840). Siena, Presso Onorato Porri; Dalle Balze, T., (1894). *Guida storica del santuario di Vertighe*, Monte San Savino, Tipogr. di Elia Savini; Gamurrini, G. F., (1920/1996). *Storia del Santuario di Vertighe*, nuova edizione Paturzo, F., (ed.), Cortona, Grafica L'Etruria.

<sup>8</sup> *Dabo tibi ubera mea: pietà popolare e universi simbolici: la Madonna del latte di Montevarchi attraverso i secoli*, Panzano in Chianti, Città Ideale. Reliquaries of the milk of Mary are venerated across Italy: Pavia, Venice, Padova, Assisi, Roma (in the churches of Santi Cosma and Damiano and of S. Crisogono), Fabriano, and Naples and in various parts of Sicily. This type of reliquary possesses much fortune also in France: in Paris, in the church of Notre Dame, in Avignon, Toulon, Aix-en-Provence, Chartres, Besancon, Puy en Valey, Reims, Rodez, Vivier, S. Omer. In Spain in Oviedo, Toledo, S. Emiliano. In Germany in Cologne, Trier and Munich. Reliquaries of milk can also be found in Holland, in Denmark and, in England, in the Marian shrine of Walsingham.

<sup>9</sup> in the print of Giuseppe Manni all'insegna di S. Giovanni di Dio; *Impruneta una pieve, un paese: cultura, parrocchia e società nella campagna toscana*, (1983). Firenze, Salimbeni; *L'Impruneta: una pieve, un santuario, un comune rurale*, (1988). Firenze, Papafava.

<sup>10</sup> In Perugia the ring was a particularly alive cult object in the context of the devotional network connected to the Forgiveness of Porziuncola.